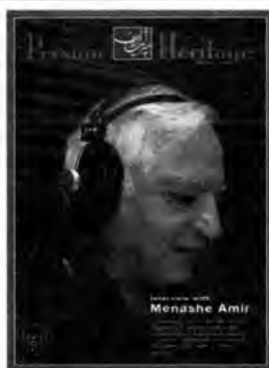


Persian Heritage

Vol. 10, No. 37

Spring 2005



Interview with Amir – p. 55



The Iranian Flag – p. 32



Character Sketches in Persia – p. 54



Interview with Dr. Eftekhari – p. 47

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK 6

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR 8

NEWS BRIEFS 10

COMMENTARY 12

Farvardin, First Month of Zarathushti Year 12

(Kayomarsh P. Mehta)

On "The Holy Emprire" by Susan Fayazmanesh 13

(David A. Yazdan)

Enough *(F. A. Sadeghpour)* 14

In Living Memory of Nima Sabouri 15

Let Us Hope for Peace *(Ali Eftekhari)* 16

Undoing Democracy Under the Pretext of Restoring It 18

(M. K. Sadigh)

Borrowed Ideas: Persian Roots of Christian Traditions 21

(Ramona Shashaani, Esq.)

How to Hold Her (Poem) *(Shahzad Kavoosi Farzad)* 23

Minorities in Diaspora *(Richard N. Frye)* 24

Contributions of Iran to World Civilization — Part II 25

(Prof. M. S. Tajar)

From Immigrant to the Ethnic *(Maboud Ansari)* 28

The Iranian Flag: A National Historical Perspective 32

(Maboud Ansari)

Think Globally, Act Locally *(Amil Imani)* 34

Avesta: An Introduction *(Ali A. Jafarey)* 36

Feeling (Poem) *(Mehran)* 39

A Touch of Persia (Poem) *(Farida Bamji)* 41

THE ARTS

Persian Piano Music in America *(Pejman Akbarzadeh)* 41

Thirty Birds (Poem) *(Pejman Akbarzadeh)* 42

YOUR PERSIAN HERITAGE

Identity of Croats in Ancient Iran *(Author Unknown)* 44

Interview with Dr. Ali Eftekhari *(Persian Heritage)* 47

Religion and Medicine *(Hushang M. Payan, MD)* 50

Character Sketches in Persia *(Harper's Magazine, 1873)* 54

FEATURE

INTERVIEW WITH MENASHE AMIR 55

Shohreh Nazar

BOOK REVIEWS 58

Do You Remember? (Poem) *(Mohsen Alizadeh)* 59

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

The Persian New Year's issue of *Persian Heritage* should always contain announcements of good news, happiness and joy for all our readers, whether they are first, second or third generation Iranians or no generation of Iranian at all. *Persian Heritage* now in its tenth year should be likened to the meaning of NoeRouz, the awakening of nature and the blossoming of trees. It should be a symbol of learning. It should provide our reader with an escape from the stress and fatigue of daily life and an escape from indifference. It should allow us to be readied for the social and emotional struggles that lie ahead and provide us with intellectual growth.

During the last nine months our small community outside of Iran has been a witness to a demonstration of detachment from our goal of unity and sincerity. Jealousy's ugly hand, using tricks and accusations, has caused inner fighting amongst us. Opposite to our financial, personal and professional gains we have significantly regressed in the social matters of our community.

A few days ago a friend of mine, who is a valuable asset in the Persian community and a contributing writer to the magazine, came to visit me. As usual any time he sees me he criticizes the magazine. This time he informed me that he believed that for the last two years the NoeRouz issues lacked good articles about the holiday. While I accepted his point, I also reminded him that on each occasion of NoeRouz I have always announced the staff's best wishes to our readers for a happy new year and also thanked them for their continued support as the magazine entered another year. I explained to him that I believed that repeating the history of NoeRouz for a handful of readers who have read about it in many magazines and have heard or watched it on television and listened on the radio was not necessary.

What is important to repeat each year is the pain and suffering I see as a result of our community's lack of "true commitment" to its own. Our diaspora in this country, instead of learning to coexist and coordinate as a group, has become a struggle for power and fame, a struggle where one will do anything to gain status. Why is it that we as a community refuse to learn from the democratic process in this country? During any election Presidential, senatorial, congressional, federal or state-level the candidates spend millions of dollars on campaigns in which they spread negative, positive and dirty propaganda. When the election is over however, the loser accepts graciously and his or her sword is withdrawn, both parties work together for the good of a nation, state or community. In our community, because of our sense of hatred and bitterness instead of coming together, for the good of our community, we look to destroy our opponent. In the last nine months our exposure to unethical movements has caused grave disturbances and anxieties and most importantly it has caused a giant step backward from our goal of unity. Last NoeRouz a few families (who have through the years earned the respect of our community such as the Assadis, Ghavamis, Ahkamis and thousands of other honorable Iranians hosted the first Persian Parade held in Manhattan on March 27, 2004. They came together and worked in harmony in order to share the Persian culture and traditions with their host country. The Parade proceeded down Madison Avenue, New York and by the end of the twenty-block march we were certain that the image Americans had of Iranians post September 11 was finally erased. We could tell by the warmth of the spectators — Iranian and non-Iranian — that our community was finally welcomed, trusted and accepted. We knew that, finally, Iranians were not looked at as terrorists any longer; finally we were looked upon as the warm and loving people that so clearly characterizes our people.

Last year on March 27, 2004 for the first time all Iranians regardless of religious or



Persian Heritage

www.persian-heritage.com

Persian Heritage, Inc.

110 Passaic Avenue
Passaic, NJ 07055

E-mail: mirassiran@aol.com

Telephone: (973) 471-4283

Fax: (973) 471-8534

or: (973) 574-8995

**EDITOR:
SHAHROKH AHKAMI**

EDITORIAL BOARD: Dr. Mehdi Abu-Saidi, Shirin Ahkami Raiszadeh, Dr. Mehvash Alavi Naini, Mohammad Sagher Alavi, Dr. Tahat Baezari, Mohammad Ali Dowlatshahi, Mohammad H. Hakami, Ardeshir Lofthali, K. B. Navi, Dr. Kamalud Raiszadeh, Farhang A. Sadeghpour, Mohammad K. Sadigh, Ghanremon Sulaymonpour, Dr. David Teagley.

**MANAGING EDITORS:
ADNAS HABIBIAN & LAURA HOLT**

**ADVERTISING:
LAURA HOLT, TERRY FAZIO AND HALLE HUI**

The contents of the articles and advertisements in this journal, with the exception of the editorial, are the sole works of each individual writers and contributors. This magazine does not have any confirmed knowledge as to the truth and veracity of those articles; all contributors agree to hold harmless and indemnify Persian Heritage (Mirassiran Inc.), Persian Heritage Inc., its editors, staff, board of directors, and all those individuals directly associated with the publishing of this magazine. The opinions expressed in these articles are the sole opinions of the writers and not the journal. No article or picture submitted will be returned to the writer or contributor. All articles submitted in English must be typed.

The appearance of advertising in this magazine does not constitute a guarantee or endorsement of the products by Persian Heritage. In addition, articles and letters published do not reflect the views of this publication.

Letters to the Editor should be mailed, typed or e-mailed to the above addresses and numbers. The journal reserves the right to edit some for space and clarity in an deemed appropriate.

All requests for permissions and reprints must be made in writing to the managing editor.

**PUBLISHED BY:
PERSIAN HERITAGE, INC.**

A corporation organized for cultural and literary purposes.

Cover Price: \$5.00

Subscriptions: \$20.00/year (domestic);
\$30.00 & \$40.00/year (other countries)

Typesetting & Layout: FARABI PUBLISHERS

political preference, geographical identity or financial status accepted an invitation to work together, and the end product was something spectacular. For two or three hours that day we all walked hand in hand to celebrate the arrival of the spring and our New Year. We shared our hearts and we shared our love. The message we sought to deliver was heard around the world.

Following the parade talks of its success continued and talks of our ability to unify and come together for one purpose remained a hot topic. We as a group believed we had finally turned the corner leaving our differences and personal agendas behind and preparations for a grander Parade 2005 were underway.

Unfortunately the personal agendas of some began to cast a shadow on our success. The first inclination of a movement for division in the original founders of the Parade came from an issue over a sixteen-page advertisement placed in *Persian Heritage* magazine. After the advertisement was printed questions were raised over its cost. In the end five out of seven organizing members approved payment. The advertisement that appeared in the summer 2004 issue contained colorful pictures from the Parade as well as other useful information such as expenses encountered and donations made. Listed in the expenses were payments made to all advertising venues including Bloomberg, 1010 Radio, Rang-a-Rang, Azadi TV, *Iran Times*, *The Iranian*, and *Persian Heritage*. Interestingly enough, at the time of print all but *Persian Heritage* had been paid.

Persian Heritage, like the other organizations, listed is a viable business whose existence depends on advertising revenue. Our inquiry into non-payment resulted in *Persian Heritage* becoming the victim of false rumors by two of the organizers. These rumors began to circulate widely in the community and the integrity of the magazine was at issue. *Persian Heritage* was falsely accused of being a sponsor of the Parade, exaggerating expenses and figures of donations.

My staff and I were unnerved by the accusations and disappointed by the behavior and reaction of these individuals. While our initial reaction was to take these accusations public, we decided for the good of the community and Parade 2005 to quietly try and settle the matter. Those efforts failed and resulted in more division amongst the original founders and general population.

The months that followed when we should have been concentrating on the organization of Parade 2005 were instead filled with a paper battle. The unified groups of Parade 2004 began to spin off into small groups. We reverted back to a community practicing individualism. The community that had come together despite political, religious, geographical and financial differences, was now falling apart for fear of becoming a victim of rumor.

This division caused pain and agony for me, and those who knew the truth; yet for some others, it brought a feeling of power and joy. The unification of our community was not nearly as important as the destruction of one individual and his family and the destruction of a magazine-founded for the good of the community and put together for so many years with the blood, sweat and tears of a few dedicated individuals. The destruction caused

some of the Iranian businessmen, who had pledged their financial and emotional support for Parade 2005, to pull their commitments. This kind of separation and dishonesty in our young community is unfortunate and unacceptable. The dishonorable acts by a few "honorable" Iranians have damaged the hope and the confidence of the Iranian immigrant. We have disappointed them and, what is worse, have caused them to separate from us.

These actions show the power of jealousy and the power of the need to control. While power and control can often produce positive effects, when it is joined with the inability to listen, judgment is usually clouded and progress compromised.

We all chant the word "unity" yet practice the word of "division." We want to come together but one will split away if challenged and with their departure try to divide those who remain or even worse they set out to find a new group to control. At parties we hug and kiss each other, praise each other and participate in good Persian *ta'arof*, but once the party is over hours, days and weeks later we gossip about each other. I ask you, how much of the *ta'arof* is genuine or is it "insincere politeness"? To be stabbed in the back by an outsider is expected but to be stabbed in the back by one of your own is unacceptable.

By the time you read this editorial, Parade 2005 will have gone on as scheduled on March 20, 2005. Since I write this to you prior to the event, I make the following predictions. I predict that despite all the struggles and doubts of the organizers and founders of the Persian Iranian Parade, along with many other active and generous people such as Sam Davoodi, Iraj Javid, Shahla Nikfal, Bahram and Kaveh Sadeghian, Javad Moshiri, Roshan Janati Atai, Maboud Ansari, Abbas Habibian, David Yazdan, Bagheri Majd, Jamshid Irani, Ali Sigari, Homa Pirouz, Massoud Khatamee, Melissa Keyghobadi, Davoud Rahni, (and I apologize if I have left out anyone), the 2005 Parade will be more elaborate and more elegant. I also predict that other banners from other Parade organizations will also appear that day.

I predict that if everyone who participated acted from their hearts and not their ego on that day, if everyone understood that this Parade's only purpose is to demonstrate Persian culture, customs and traditions and the beauty of the arrival of Spring and NoeRouz to our American hosts and to the world, that it was a very honorable and joyous day. If, however, anyone used the day to further divide the community then Parade 2005 — March 20, 2005 — will be a dark memory in the history of Iranian Americans. I pray that the tears of joy and pride flow from our eyes.

My dream as always for our community at this NoeRouz and at the beginning of *Persian Heritage's* tenth year is that we continue to seek peace, love and harmony. I pray that we continue to be a voice to educate the world on our people and the richness of our culture. I hope our future holds greater parades and most of all I hope that our *ta'arof* remains sincere.

From the entire staff, be happy and well!

Shahrokh Alesani

BORROWED IDEAS: PERSIAN ROOTS OF CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

Iranica Institute — Outreach Program

Ramona Shashaani, Esq.

Forwarded by Mr. Kamron Jabbari, (Mazda Publishers)

While ago, I was invited to give a talk at a Christmas party about the Persian tradition of celebrating the winter solstice on December 21st. In order to speak intelligently to a spiritually and psychologically keen audience, I set out to research the subject. I was scrambling to find resource material when my day was saved by our list co-moderator, Peter Bridge, who provided me with more references than I had hoped to find in my attempt to unravel the historical, symbolic and mythic bases behind the Persian people's celebration of this festive occasion.

What I did not expect to find, however, was a fascinating history of how Christmas may have its origins in the ancient Persian Mithraic tradition of worshipping Mithra or Mehr, the sun-god or god of love. With the approaching winter solstice, I thought it might be appropriate share this history with you.

While Christians around the world are preparing to celebrate Christmas on Dec. 25th, the Persians are getting ready to tribute one of their most festive celebrations on Dec. 21st, the eve of winter solstice, the longest night and shortest day of the year. In Iran this night is called SHAB-E YALDAA, also known as SHAB-E CHELLEH, which refers to the birthday or rebirth of the sun.

In the east more than in the west, lifestyles have often remained more in tune with nature. This integration of natural rhythms into life cycles is especially true in ancient Persia and has survived the ages. YALDAA, like other major Persian celebrations, is focused on the changing of the seasons. It is as ancient as the time that people organized their lives around the precession of equinoxes.

The most eminent festive affair is NOROOZ, the Iranian new year, which occurs with the spring equinox, around March 21st. It is no wonder that astrology was first inaugurated in ancient Babylonia,

a part of the Persian Empire. Yet YALDAA is chiefly related to MEHR YAZAT; it is the night of the birth of the unconquerable sun, Mehr or Mithra, meaning love and sun, and has been celebrated by the followers of Mithraism as early as 5000 B.C.

Is it a mere coincidence that Christmas and YALDAA are so close in time and similar in nature? I suggest that the origins of Christmas may be from ancient Persia.

According to the Bible, the man Jesus Christ was actually born on January 6, and the celebration of his birthday on December 25th, may in fact be born out of the Persian Mithraic influence. In the old Persian mythology, Mitra (Mithra, Mehr), the God of love, friendship, and light, the sun-god, was miraculously born from a rock by a river or stream on this longest night of the year.

In his fifth volume of the collected works, *Symbols of Transformation*, Carl Jung, the famous Swiss psychiatrist who broke away from Freud, has extensively discussed the influence of Mithraism on Christianity and has portrayed its images and symbols. He quotes Franz Cumont's *The Mysteries of Mithra*, p. 149, modified:

"Perhaps no other religion has ever offered to its votaries, in so high a degree as Mithraism, opportunities for prayer and motives for veneration. When the initiate betook himself in the evening to the sacred grotto concealed in the solitude of the forest, at every step new sensations awakened in his heart some mystical emotion. The stars that shone in the sky, the wind that whispered in the foliage, the spring or brook that hastened murmuring to the valley, even the earth which he trod under his feet, were in his eyes divine, and all surrounding nature evoked in him a worshipful fear of the infinite forces that swayed the universe (para. 109)."

In praise of the Mithraic sun-god, Jung states:

"The sun ... is the truly "rational" image of God, whether we adopt the standpoint of the primitive savage or of modern science. In either case Father-God from whom all living things draw life; he is the fructifier and the creator, the source of energy into our world. The discord into which the human soul has fallen can be harmoniously resolved through the sun as a natural object which knows no inner conflict.... It shines equally on the just and the unjust, and allows useful creatures to flourish as well as the harmful. Therefore the sun is perfectly suited to represent the visible God of this world, i.e., the creative power of our own soul, which we call libido, and whose nature it is to bring forth the useful and the harmful, the good and the bad. That this comparison is not just a matter of words can be seen from the teachings of the mystics: when they descend into the depths of their own being, they find "in their heart" the image of the sun, they find their own life-force which they call the "sun" for a legitimate and, I would say, a physical reason, because our source of energy and life actually is the sun. Our physiological life, regarded as an energy process, is entirely solar (para. 176)."

With the advent of regional battles between ancient Persians and Romans, a majority of the Roman soldiers who lamented their brutish ways, came to find reverence for the Mithraic devotion to nature and beauty. They exalted Mithra's illustrating of slaying the bull, representing sacrifice of the animal instinct in order to find the path to the divine. Soon, Mithraism spread its wings from Persia to the ancient-civilized world in Rome and many European countries. Consequently, in Europe as in Persia, the 21st of December was celebrated as Mithra's birthday.

Early Christians took this very ancient Persian celebration to Mithra, the sun-god, and linked it to Christ's birthday. But in the 4th century A.D., because of some errors in counting the leap year, the birthday of Mithra shifted to 25th of December and was established as such.

Hence, in 274 CE, the Roman emperor Aurelia declared December 25th as the birthday of the unconquered sun ("natAlis solis invicti"), which at the winter solstice begins to show an increase of light; he declared this day as a day of festivities. Later, the church of Rome established the commemoration of the birthday of Christ, the "sun of righteousness," on this same date. Until that time the birth-

day of Jesus Christ was celebrated on January 6th. But the religion of most of the Romans and many people of the European continent was still Mithraism. Pope Leo in the fourth century, after almost destroying the temple of Mithra in 376 A.D., in his campaign against Mithraism—and in the good old Christian tradition, “If you can’t claim it, imitate it” — proclaimed the 25th of December as Christ’s birthday instead of January 6th, a date, by the way, which is still celebrated by the Eastern Orthodox Church and Armenians.

It is also noteworthy that Epiphany, or the “Feast of the Three Holy Kings” on January 6, commemorates the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, the Magi. The Magi, who were known astrologers, saw a newborn bright star in the sky and predicted the birth of Christ. From the religious city of Qum in Iran, they set out to Jerusalem to greet the infant Christ as the newly born king of the Jews, offering him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Originally, the Magi had been disciples of Zoroaster, who spread his new religion in Persia long after Mithra. Their name is the Latinized form of Magoi [Herodotus I, 101]. They were a priestly caste during the Seleucid, Parthian and Sassanian periods in ancient Persia. Later, parts of the Avesta, the holy book of Zoroastrians, including the ritualistic sections of the Vendidad, probably derive from them. As a sacred and powerful caste, Zoroastrians ruled the Persian Empire in the 6th century B.C.; they continued to have a dominating religious influence on the subsequent kings of Persia and were still powerful at the time of the birth of Christ.

The connection of the Magi with astrology and their Persian origin is all that is known of the Magi (“wise men” in most English Bibles, “astrologers” in the new English Bible). In early Christian art the Magi usually wear Persian clothes (e.g., the Catacombs of Priscilla in Rome, 2nd century). In the Syriac tradition those names are Persian and they are connected with Persian religious history.

Zoroastrians, after refining and discarding some of the mythical and “heretical” aspects of Mithraism, retained YALDAA, a Soryani word meaning “the birth.” The ceremony is traced to the historical combat myth between the good forces of light against the evil forces of darkness. This longest night with evil as its zenith is considered ill-fated by this ancient Persian religion. From this day onward, the good forces of light triumph as the days

grow longer and give more light.

This celebration comes on the eve of the Persian month of “DAY,” the first month of winter, also the name of the pre-Zoroastrian creator god, more commonly known as “Saturn” in the west. In Persia, DAY was praised and revered as the most powerful God of creation and light, from which we have the English word “day” (the period of light in 24 hours). In the Roman world, the Saturnalia, from December 17 through December 24, became a time of merrymaking and exchange of presents, in honor of the Roman God Saturn.

Ancient Zoroastrians believed that AHURA MAZDA (the good God) created light, day and sunshine as representations of order and “the ahurAic,” or good. The day is a time of work, harvest and productivity. They also believed that AHRIMAN (an equally powerful, but evil god) created “the night”, a time of darkness, cold, hidden secrets and wild predators. Observing the cyclical changes in the length of days and nights, engendered a belief that light and darkness, or day and night are in continuous battle. The triumphant light brought about longer days, whereas the victory of darkness produced longer nights. It was believed that the greatest battle between the forces of good and evil was fought on SHAB-E YALDAA, the night before winter solstice. Since the first night of winter is the longest and from that night onwards, the days get longer while the warmth and light of the sun increases, the night of the winter solstice was recognized and celebrated as the time of the sun’s birth or rebirth by Aryan tribes in Iran, India and Europe.

Fires and lights, symbols of AHURA MAZDA, warmth and lasting life have always been associated with the winter festival. To remain safe from AHRIMAN’S harms, in the evening of SHAB-E YALDAA, bonfires are lit outside, while inside family and friends gather in a nightlong vigil around the KORSEE, a low, square table covered with a thick quilt overhanging on all sides. A brazier with hot coals is placed under the table, in the center. All night, families and friends sit on large cushions on the ground around the KORSEE with the quilt over their laps. They arrange a special sacred space wherein the elders tell stories and fairytales or read poetry to the younger generations. The oldest member of the family says prayers, asks sun “yazat” to bless them, thanks God for the previous year’s crops, and prays for the prosperity

of next year’s harvest. Then with a sharp knife, he or she cuts through a thick yogurt or watermelon, giving everyone a share. The cutting symbolizes the removal of sickness and pain from the family.

Snacks are passed around throughout the night. It is virtually obligatory to eat pomegranates with angelica powder (GOLPAR) and AJEEL-E SHAB-E YALDAA, a tasty mixture of nuts and dried fruits as a symbol for solving problems, translated as “opening one’s problems” or “knots.” Eating nuts is said to keep illness at bay until the spring. The fruits are meant to bring more fruits and prosperity in the coming spring and onwards. More substantial fare for the night’s feast include eggplant stew with plain saffron-flavored rice; or rice with chicken or fish; thick yogurt, as well as sweets made with carrots and saffron (HALVAA-E HAVEEJ).

The foods themselves symbolize the balance of the seasons; watermelons and yogurt are eaten as a remedy for the heat of the summer, since these fruits are considered cold or SARDEE; while HALVAA, the saffron and carrot sweets, is meant to overcome the cold temperatures of winter since they are considered hot or GARMEE. Throughout the night of festivities, the family keeps the fires burning and the lights glowing to “help” the sun in its battle against darkness.

Ancient Persians also decorated an evergreen tree called SARVE. The SARVE or “Rocket Juniper” — also known as the cypress tree, being straight, upright and resistant to the cold weather, was known as a symbol of enduring hardship, thus appropriate for celebrating Mithra. The younger ones had their “wishes” symbolically wrapped in colorful silk cloth and hung them on the tree along with lots of offerings for Mithra in the hopes that he would answer their prayers.

Again in the same tradition, Luther, the famous German reformer, in mid 18th century (1756), having learned of the YALDAA SARVE, introduced the Christmas tree to the Germans. As cypress trees were not widespread in Germany, as indeed in most of Europe, the chosen tree became a variety of pine which was abundant in Europe.

In summary, it is not just Mithra’s birth time which entered Christianity. There are many similarities between the Mithraic and Christian traditions. Nowadays all Christians who celebrate the birth of Jesus, light fireplaces and candles, decorate trees with lights, stay up all night.

sing and dance, eat special foods, pay visits, and celebrate this festive occasion with family and friends.

Christmas and YALDAA are just another example of the many common beliefs, customs, symbols, stories and myths that bind people of different nations and religions across the globe. Let us honor these manifestations of the collective unconscious, so that we may be the keepers of light, love, friendship and peace among the peoples of the world. Enjoy your Christmas holidays, in its true spirit of love, gratitude, compassion, giving and forgiving, knowing that it may have its origins in an ancient tradition which, as Carl Jung says, links us back to "the creative power of our own soul." As our teacher Rumi suggests, "Open up your hidden eyes and return to the root of the root of your own Self."

* Disclaimer: While every effort has been made to ensure the high quality and accuracy of this article, Iranica Institute makes no warranty, express or implied, concerning the contents of this article which are provided "as is." Iranica Institute expressly disclaims all warranties.

Persian Heritage received permission from Kamran Jabbari of Mazda Publishers to reprint this article.

HOW TO HOLD HER

Shahzad Kavooosi Farzad

I could see her everywhere

in the steam of my tea

in the eyes of a sparrow pecking

on seeds near my feet

I could see her swirling

through the drapes next to the window

I could find her in the huge silence

inside my house

sometimes I could see her shadow

on my bed sheets while she was sitting

on the moon

and I have been chasing her

from room to room

corner to corner

but I always end up

with empty hands.

A PET PEEVE

F. A. Sadeghpour

Let me share a pet peeve of mine with you. For the more than four decades that I have been in the US, I have heard so many times Italian-Americans referred to as "them Eyetalians" Whenever I have had the occasion to hear this phrase, it has always caused me a chuckle or two. I never thought there would come a day that I would be addressed as an "Eyerainian."

There are three countries in the Middle East that are constantly in the news, Iran, Iraq, and Israel. Two of the three are referred to thusly, "Eyeran" and "Eyerak." Israel seems to be immune to any mispronunciation. I have never heard any one refer to Israel as "Eyesrael"!

I am wondering which diacritical or diphthongal or triphthongal rule applies to these phonetic puzzlements. Let us assume that we thus spell "Eran" or "Erak" or "Etyal," do you suppose it would solve the problem once and for all? I think not. Since the Irish (Eyerish) have arrived in this country before us and these Middle-Eastern conflicts that we hear of daily, and the language that we speak is English, we have to put up with these mispronunciations. In other European languages including ours, Persian, "Eyerland" is pronounced "Earland"! Also, as long as the art of listening is desuetude, no amount of reminding is going to cure such a malady! A malady, which is more prevalent amongst my own countrymen, here in these United States of America.

PESSIMISM CONFIRMED

David. A. Yazdan

Reading part of your commentary on the English side and also comments on the Persian side has confirmed my old pessimism of the mentality of some of the Iranian people in this country. It appears that only very few of the Iranians who live in this country are team players. It is quite sad and tragic that we cannot get together as a group and have a strong voice. There is always some person or some group who tries to divide us and declare independence from the main group who are trying to do something for our history and our heritage. I for one cannot understand why anybody who is slightly intelligent has to do this. In fact they, either as an individual or as a group, would be more successful if they joined so that we can all walk together rather than trying to disrupt and create an individualistic situation, which is tantamount to failure.

Last year there was a parade that went nicely because we stuck together in spite of a lot of opposition concerning the fog and other matters. But it seems that you only need one individual to spoil a group and these individuals should put personal grievances and ambitions aside and join the team. Whether or not they like someone is not the issue. The issue is our heritage and our unity. We will never all agree but this should not stop progress. Therefore criticism must be put aside and we all must join.

FROM THE IMMIGRANT TO THE ETHNIC: THE IRANIAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Maboud Ansari, Ph.D.
William Paterson University

The Iranian experience in the United States has been a blend of ethnic pride and resourceful participation in American society. Few immigrant groups in American history have emigrated from their country of origin equipped with such significant economic and educational resources. Given the twenty-five years of hostile political relations between the US and Iran, and its negative outcome for the Iranian immigrants, the rate of success and Americanization in such a short period of time (less than 3 decades) is remarkable. Yet because of the continuing animosity and estrangement between the two governments, Iranians have not received their proper recognition. Focusing on the generational change, this paper examines the meaning of self-ethnic identification among the second generation of Iranians in the United States. It is argued that the dialectically interrelated anti-western action in Iran and the anti-Iranian sentiment in America not only transferred the already available marginal situation to a much larger group of post-revolutionary immigrants, but also reinforced the development of a new community of Iranian Americans.

THE PATTERN OF IRANIAN EMIGRATION

Iranian migration to the United States is a recent political phenomenon. The immigration from Iran occurred during two phases. The first phase started in the 1950s and lasted until 1977. During this period, Iranians often came as sojourners, with no intention of remaining in the United States. The number of immigrants (visitors, students, interns, etc.) increased drastically from an annual average of approximately 1,400 in the 1950s to 6,000 in the 1960s, reaching the highest figure of 98,018 in 1977. The

pattern of Iranian migration during this period was basically an individual migration. It was, in fact, a problem of a "brain drain" — the migration of highly intellectual and professional groups. The majority of these immigrant Iranian professionals had voluntarily chosen migration as a response to their political, social and professional marginality in their homeland (Ansari, 1988).

The second phase of Iranian migration began from 1978 and became significant in the early 1980s, during the period immediately before and after the Iranian Revolution. Insofar as the revolution ousted the Pahlavi dynasty, displaced the ruling class directly associated with it, and established itself as an Islamic Republic, it drastically changed the pattern and nature of Iranian migration. During the second phase, the arrival of the post-revolutionary political refugees and immigrants opened an entirely new chapter in the short history of Iranians in the United States. Never before in Iran's long history, have so many people involuntarily had to leave their country. What was once basically a problem of "brain drain" during the Pahlavi regime, is now predominantly an involuntary emigration of a relatively large number of middle and upper class families, including the movement of a considerable amount of capital. Post-revolutionary Iranian immigrants are a more heterogeneous group than earlier Iranian immigrants. They are highly diversified in terms of social class, education, occupation and age. As far as religious affiliation, this exodus includes higher proportions of such Iranian religious minorities as Sunnis, Zoroastrians, Christians (Armenian and Assyrian), Jews and Bahais.

The most striking feature of the Iranian post-revolutionary migration is that for the first time, it is comprised of an in-

creasing number of middle and upper class elderly. Unlike the immigrants that came between 1950 and 1978, a large number of new immigrants are elderly Iranians who can choose to settle in the United States or to travel back-and-forth between Iran and the United States. Most recent elderly immigrants are those whom arrived in America as parents to join their adult children or their brothers and sisters (American citizens) whom have filed for them to be admitted as permanent residents. Thus, the sharp demographic and social composition contrast between the first and second phase is the latent function of the revolution in 1979, which also added an un-estimated capital drain situation to an existing "brain drain" phenomenon.

POPULATION AND GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

The broadest definition of Iranian Americans includes all persons descended from the Iranian stock, immigrants from Iran or those born in America of fully Iranian or mixed ancestry. While the estimates of the size of the Iranian American community vary widely, a fair approximation is about half a million. However, the United States is today, the home of the second largest Persian-speaking community outside of Iran. It is ironic that while the tragedy of American Iranian relations was still unfolding and Iran's Islamization was underway, a new secular "Little Iran" was growing and establishing itself as a high status ethnic community in America. What is, perhaps, most significant about this ethnic community, is its continuing growth. In two decades, Iranians in the United States have grown from a scattered, marginal and ambivalent (*belataklif*) 123,000 (1980 Census) immigrant group into a new ethnic community of over 330,000 (2000 Census) Iranian Americans. Moreover, because of the increasing number of newcomers, the Iranian community in the United States will remain one of the fastest growing ethnic communities. According to the 2000 Census, over 50 percent of the total Iranian population resided in California, particularly in Los Angeles where they live within a spatially bounded area called "Irangeles." After California, the next largest concentration of Iranians is in New York followed by Texas. Despite their initial intention of being temporary immi-

grants and exiles, Iranians are today, American citizens and permanent citizens. Like most exiles, they have realized that they cannot go home. That is, there is no "home" to go back to, or it is changed beyond recognition.

NEW COMMUNITY STRUCTURE

The Iranian Revolution was both culturally and organizationally crucial to the making of the Iranian community in the United States. It is suggested that the dialectically interrelated Islamization of Iran and anti-Islamic and Iranian sentiment in America not only transferred the already available marginal situation to a much larger group of post-revolutionary immigrants including elderly Iranians, but also reinforced the development of a new community of Iranian Americans—a community based on nontraditional foundations found in an urban, bureaucratized America. This is a new non-territorial community that manifests peculiarities derived from the predominantly professional origin and business-class. Moreover, it is a community with a very strong literary and cultural heritage that is also characterized by a sense of defensiveness in its earlier phase caused by the hostage crisis. Therefore, the ethnic identity of this community, as modified by the American experience, is not simply Iranian but is something that is grounded more in Iranian nationalism and secular ideas.

Today, as the nation of Iran is passing through some crucial historical moments, Iranian Americans are making their own social history. Much of this history-making contains the best of both world adaptations. In doing so, they borrow heavily from their host society as well as from the resurrected imagery, symbolism and cultural heritage of ancient Persia. In this state, even as the Iranian American community continues to accommodate to the American context, it rummages the distant past to self-consciously maintain and/or recreate its ethnic identity. Particularly in the last fifteen years, the Iranian American community has witnessed a remarkable cultural flowering of an essentially Persian character as renovated cultural symbols and institutions provide channels for expressing their ethnic identity. This is best reflected in the large number of *Anjomans* (cultural and secular associations), the

celebration of Nowruz (the Persian New Year), Persian language programs, and Persian media, especially extensive TV and radio programming. In addition, *Shab-i-Shear* (Poetry reading night), Persian music, annual Persian Parades in several US cities, and Persian cuisine are all helping the Iranian community to maintain their strong sense of Iranian-ness. It seems that this resistance to assimilation is an ironic by-product of successful integration—assimilation breeds nostalgia. A telling sign of the growing cohesiveness among Iranians in the United States, is the number of new TV programming—most of them non-existent five years ago. These media outlets, particularly the satellite broadcasts (TV and radio) from Los Angeles, San Francisco and Washington D.C., are today an active component of the Iranian American community, whose power and influence cannot be overlooked. However, as a result of past U.S. interference in Iran's internal affairs—i.e. the restoration of Pahlavi's regime in 1953, the Iranian community seems to view these satellite programs with traditional Persian cynicism and suspicion. Nevertheless, the community owes much to the Persian media, which have helped Iranian Americans to preserve their cultural heritage and to remain in constant contact with Iranians in Iran and abroad. Since 1979, the *Iran Times*, the oldest bilingual (Persian/English) weekly publication published in Washington DC, has reached a growing number of the Iranian community and has become the most popular newspaper in the US among the Iranian American population. To date, there is no national Iranian American media that adequately reflects the interests of a very diverse and growing community.

IRANIAN CONTRIBUTIONS

From the very beginning, the Iranian immigrants differed from other arrivals by their high educational and professional achievements. They belong to a generation of upwardly mobile, secularized cosmopolitans. Unlike the "tired and poor," uneducated refugees of *Gemeinschaft*-type communities, Iranian immigrants are urban professionals, entrepreneurs and often bilingual immigrants.

The Iranian experience in the United States from the start, has been a blend of ethnic pride. However, their Iranian pride does not just come from what they were,

but rather from what they have been able to achieve here in the United States. Regarding educational achievements, over 98 percent of Iranian American high school graduates finish four years of college education. Currently, many of the best universities and colleges have a disproportionately large number of Iranian American students.

An occupational profile of the first wave of Iranian immigrants shows that they were the third most highly educated immigrant group in the United States. Among the professionals, most had achieved eminence in their own field before they had come to the United States. After the Asian American doctors, the Iranian American doctors constitute the largest group of foreign-born doctors in America. Today, American trained professionals such as physicians, college professors, scientists, dentists, nurses, engineers, and managers comprise the largest occupational segment of Iranian Americans. In the last ten years, an increasing number of Iranian Americans have become college presidents, college deans, CEOs in corporate America, top scientists in NASA, executives in Silicon Valley, and a deputy assistant to President. With a relatively high self-employment rate, Iranians are also one of the most entrepreneurial ethnic groups in the United States. Iranian businesses today are far beyond the traditional carpet, garment and jewelry outlets. A large number of Iranian immigrants with modest wealth have invested their money and entrepreneurial talents into businesses such as construction, consulting, manufacturing, insurance, travel agencies and restaurants. The level of Iranian American household income today exceeds any other ethnic group in the United States. A median income of over \$80,000 (NJ sample) makes Iranian Americans, certainly the highest status ethnic group in the United States.

Regarding those rich Iranians or "money refugees," there is no success like exile. They are today, most likely naturalized Americans and have established themselves as wealthy real estate developers, bankers, and top-notch businessmen in Corporate America. Whenever Iranian American entrepreneurs have concentrated, they have injected new dynamism into local economies. Particularly, in Los Angeles and New York City, their economic influences far outweigh their numbers.

In fact, Iranian emigration has not only been one of scientists, professionals, entrepreneurs, other talents and cultural traditions, but also one of a considerable amount of capital. Of all immigrant groups, Iranians perhaps have made the greatest investments in America. Herein lies the supreme irony of the closing decade of America's post-World War II imperial claim over Iran, Iran's loss of talent and capital turned out to be America's gain.

SECOND GENERATION IRANIANS

Generational differences provide another dimension to the Iranian American experience. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, generation in America is defined as: foreign-born are the first generation, native-born with one or both parents foreign-born, is the second generation, and native-born are the third. With regard to the Iranians in America, children born in America to Iranian or Iranian American parents, or those who are brought to America young enough to receive their early socialization here, may be considered second generation Iranian immigrants.

Currently a profound demographic change is taking place in the Iranian community in America. With regard to the generational change, according to a New Jersey sample of 2000, over 60 percent are second generation Iranians. In addition, there are about 10 percent who are considered one and a half generation Iranians. They are non-American born who came to America in their early teens. As a whole, the younger generation does not share the same historical and cultural context as the older generation. Regarding ethnic self-identification, NJ respondents were asked, "How do you think of your self?" Only 10 percent of the sample said that they were American and 25 percent said they were Iranian. The majority of the sample (70 percent) identified themselves as Iranian Americans, Persian Americans or American Iranians.

Obviously, these findings are suggestive of a significant degree of ethnic identification or Iranianness among the second generation Iranians. However, in my earlier study (in the 1980s), only about 50 percent of the same age group identified themselves as Iranian Americans. It seems that many of these respondents have come all the way from shame to pride. During

the hostage crisis, a large number of the second generation Iranians found themselves subjected to negative comments and reactions because of their ethnic background and were therefore less likely to assert themselves as Iranian Americans.

The main reason that a sense of Iranianness remains at the forefront of the second generation's collective consciousness, is that in the last ten years, through a process of reverse assimilation, they have become increasingly reintegrated into the Iranian communities in America. The respondents' expression of Iranianness is manifested in their voluntary participation in Nowruz parties, Charshanbeh Souri, Sizdahbedar, Mehregan, Persian parades, political demonstrations, willingness to visit and revisit Iran, attend Persian language classes, and greater appreciation for Persian music and cuisine.

Following the establishment of various cultural associations by the first generation Iranian immigrants, the second generation Iranians are creating their own cultural and political organizations. Their ethnic revivalism has already brought an increase in the number of cultural clubs and organizations at colleges and universities throughout the nation.

The second generation Iranians have not only come to reclaim their Iranianness, but also have come to create an ethnic identity, which is both Iranian and American. What is significant is that those who identify themselves as Iranian American, view their hyphenated identity as a positive one.

However, the Americanization that the post-revolutionary Iranian immigrants had feared is indeed well underway. Yet, what the Iranian parents had not foreseen was the changing nature of Iranianness. The change is from traditional Iranianness (being Iranian) to symbolic Iranianness (feeling Iranian), which is characteristic of American-born generations, though the distinctions are not absolute. The symbolic Iranians conceive of their hyphenated identity as a choice, expressed in terms of pride in their Persian heritage, and strong feelings toward people and things Iranian. However, for some of the second generation, their ethnic community does not exist in a fixed or identifiable location. For others, it is a form of consciousness, a widely variable set of loyalties and personal identities.

Language is one of the first elements of the immigrant culture to disappear over the generations. With regard to the unfold-

ing cultural changes within the Iranian community, Persian language has suffered the most by passing of generations. Among the second generation, particularly among the American-born group, the Persian language ceases to be the language spoken most frequently at home.

What is evident is that a new definition of Iranianness is emerging among the second generation Iranians. Proficiency in the Persian language is not necessarily the determining factor of their Iranianness. They are Iranian in their own terms. As one respondent stated, "For us, the Persian language, while very important, does not occupy a high place as it does for our parents." However, an overwhelming number of respondents said that they would insist their children to preserve their Persian heritage.

Unlike the second generation of the earlier immigrants in America, for whom assimilation and loss of ethnic identity was the goal, for second generation Iranians, the goal is to keep alive the consciousness of the Persian heritage in the process of integration. In other words, for the second generation Iranians, the process of assimilation and the maintenance of symbolic ethnicity go hand-in-hand. It seems that a more tolerant and pluralistic America as well as the emerging of a new era of globalization, notably the diffusion of personal computers around the world including in Iran, allow children of high status immigrants- the symbolic Iranians- to conceive of their ethnic identity including language proficiency as a choice, expressed in a variety of enjoyable cultural involvements.

ADDITIONAL CURRENTS OF CHANGE

Historically, Iranian immigrants as a group have lacked a united political front regarding politics in Iran. However, the political immigrants throughout these years have maintained a "mission" orientation- a national commitment towards eventual return to their native country. But having remained divided and disillusioned, the mission orientation has not yet functioned as an organizational element in the Iranian Diaspora. To a certain degree, the situation in the last few years has changed. Since 1999, as the student uprisings in Iran have received more international attention, Iranians in the United States, regardless of political orientation, have come together as a national group

and started to act as an outpost of the Iranian democratic movement. Among the oppositional groups, the royalist group are also helplessly divided and heavily burdened by the Pahlavi regime's past rule. However, the royalist group has also become more politically active. Currently, they are pushing Shah nostalgia hoping that history repeats itself, and that Reza Pahlavi, the son of the past Shah, will be able to reclaim his crown. Ironically, here in the United States, the royalist group, keep wishing for an Iran that no longer exists. Despite the lack of unity and effective political leadership, it is clear that politically, the Iranian community continues to remain an integral part of the democratic movement in Iran.

With regard to American politics, a new development in the degree of involvement of the Iranian Americans is taking place. After over two decades of largely abstaining from organized political activity, Iranian Americans are beginning to seek a voice in American political affairs. In the last ten years, Iranian branches of the two main political parties have been established. Moreover in 2003, two prominent Iranian Americans ran in the recall election for the governor of California. A few years earlier, another Iranian American was a GOP candidate for Maryland's senate seat. Currently, the first Iranian American is running for a seat in Congress from Oregon.

Among the most recent political developments is the establishment of the Iranian American Political Action Committee (IAPAC). The goal of the IAPAC is to insure that Iranian Americans have an influential voice and presence in the American electoral and legislative process. It seems likely that during the next decade, the bi-partisan nature of IAPAC will play a major role in the empowerment of the Iranian American community.

IRANIAN MASJID (MOSQUE)

Even though a majority of Iranian Americans are Shiites, they are a diverse mixture of a relatively secular and moderate Shiites, Iranian Muslims, unlike the Iranian minority religious groups such as Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians and Bahais, have maintained a secular, rather than religious outlook. Based on my observations of several Iranian communities, the Iranian American Shiites are mostly less religiously observant, or Masjedi (mosque goers), than other

Shiite groups in America. Therefore, among the cultural institutions that Iranian immigrants earlier reconstructed, the development of an Iranian mosque has been slow.

However, since the early 1980's, a remarkable religious cohesiveness has developed among a devout segment of the Iranian American Muslims. Yet, except in several states, the Iranian mosque is not yet a visible symbol of the Iranian Muslim presence at the community level.

The Iranian experience in the United States also has a dark side. In a manner reminiscent of the experience of Japanese Americans in the 1940s, Iranians during the Hostage Crisis of 1979 (lasting 444 days) became the immediate targets of American anger and frustration. Many Iranian Americans today remember those days, which were not a good time to be an Iranian in America. Paradoxically, Iranian immigrants and exiles that had chosen America as their home had felt that Americans had resented and unfairly blamed them for the Anti-Americanism of the Iranian government. Two decades later, much of this resentment and hostility can still be witnessed as the estrangement continues between the governments of the United States and Iran, clearly exemplified by President Bush's branding of Iran as an "Axis of Evil."

However, despite the hardships of living in exile in a sometimes-hostile environment, Iranian Americans, who are a relatively new and small ethnic component of American society, have made a profound and lasting contribution to their adopted country and continue to do so. Their professional, scholarly and capital contributions are only overshadowed by the rich and vibrant culture that they have brought with them to their host and now home country — America.

• This paper is a follow-up study of my earlier publication, *The Making of the Iranian Community in America* (Associated Faculty Press, 1990). The data used here are results from an intensive observational study and multi-year survey in New Jersey from 1995-2000. A portion of this paper was presented at "Iran Facing the New Century" conference at the University of Oxford in April 2004. The conference was sponsored by the University of Oxford and The Persian Cultural Foundation in New Jersey.

Advertise Your Business or Services in

Persian Heritage

CALL

(973)

471-4283

Fax:

(973) 471-8534

www.persian-heritage.com

PERSIAN PARADE

IRANIAN FLAG: A National Historical Perspective

Davood N. Rahni

— A **Flag** is said to symbolize the beliefs and aspirations of a nation through-out its life;

— A **Flag** is an icon that represents the cultural and historical identity and integrity of a nation;

— A **Flag** is the manifestation of a nation's independence, pride, and her unique lifestyles and norms;

The three colored (Green-White-Red) **Flag** of Iran with the archaeologically inscribed Lion, Sword and Sun emblem as present in *Persepolis* is historical in nature. Though others have existed and do exist, this **Flag** belongs to ALL Iranian peoples.

The mythological and symbolic meanings for this Flag are as follows:

— The Lion as inscribed in Persepolis (circa 555 BCE)

— **Color Green: Religions*, appreciation of natural esthetics. Green is a sacred color in Islam attributed to Mohammad's descendents; green is also denoted in Pire-Sabz (the green pontiff), the Zoroastrian Pilgrimage near Yazd.**

— **Color White:** Friendship, reconciliation, peace, purity, passage from the material world, Zoroaster's favorite sacred color

— **Color Red: Sacrifice, revolution, martyrdom, tinkering and dynamical thinking safeguarding the country's and nation's independent and integrity**

— Lion: Bravery, magnificence

— Sun and its twelve beams: warmth, source of energy and life, continuity

— Sword: Resistance, strength, triumph, resilience

**Pishdadian Era
(circa 750 BCE)**

The first legendary **Flag** of Iran is said to be the *Derafshe Kaviani*. It was made of a long rectangular leather apron as used by national hero Kaveh the ironsmith dur-

ing the reign of King Fereidoun. Ferdowsi the Persian "Homer" referred to this leather apron as the symbol of Iranian independence, resistance, resilience and the revolutionary momentum of the masses revolt against evil invaders. This **Flag** was decorated with yellow, magenta and scarlet silk string tassels. Kaveh was later pronounced *Kavak* in Sassanid Pahlavi language meaning "glorious", and so the *Derafshe Kaviani* was also called, the Glorious **Flag** of Iran.

**Achaemeniads Empire
(559-323 BCE)**

During the Archenemies, especially the Cyrus era, the Persian Empire **Flag** was made of up of a kinglike image, rectangular in shape, split into four equivalent triangles. Each two of these four train triangles had the same color. The national Iranian **Flag** was, however, the same as the *Derafshe Kaviani* as cited earlier.

**Sassanids Dynasty
(224-642 CE)**

The **Flag** at this historical juncture was again made of rectangular leather, covered with thin layer of silk ornamented with jewels, in the center of which there was a four cornered star, pointing to the four corners of the world. This is the same star referred to as Akhtare Kaviani (the Kaviani star) by Ferdowsi in the epics of *Shahnameh* (the Book of Kings). This **Flag** was larger than the original *Derafshe Kaviani* installed on a long javelin, the tip of which was shown above the flag. At the bottom of this flag there were woven strings of yellow, magenta and scarlet, hanging from them were large jewels.

**The Iranian Flag After
the Advent of Islam
(650-900 CE)**

Although there was no universally

accepted **flag** in Iran at the time, one should nonetheless cite the existence of two flags that ultimately became symbols of resistance against the Arabian Islamic invaders:

Moslem Khorasani who led the resistance struggle against the invaders, mostly in eastern Iran's Khorasan and central Asia, used a large rectangular **Flag** in solid black and with no other symbols on it.

Bobak Khorram Din, who primarily led the resistance struggle against the Arab invaders along the Caspian Sea in today's Mazandaran and Guilan, employed a large rectangular **Flag** in solid red with no other symbols on it.

It is believed that the two above plain **Flags** had no figurative or other expressive symbols on them, since Islam, denouncing the worship of idols, had strongly forbidden against such symbols.

**Ghaznavi Kings
(998-1052 CE)**

Sultan Mahmoud Ghanavi

Sultan Mahmoud Ghaznavi, the founder of the first Persian dynasty after the Arab invasion who reinstated the use of symbolic expressions on the Iranian **Flag**. This solid rectangular black **Flag** had in its center inscribed a golden moon.

Sultan Mahmoud Ghazavi is also credited as the first, whom inspired by Lion's inscription on the walls of Perspolis and silverware left from 2600 years ago, began using the lion as a national symbol. It was indeed during Sultan Mahmoud's rein when an archeological plate with a lion inscribed on it, a sun on its shoulders, and its right hand raised, was excavated in Rey. We now have historical evidence to conclude that although both the lion and the sun emerged on our **Flag** 700 years ago, the lion image alone had appeared on the Iranian **Flag** from at least 950 years ago. We must also emphasize that the Lion and the sun were inscribed on the walls of Persepolis 2500 years ago.

Many scholars believe Iranians used the sun to represent a reemergence of Mitra in their culture after the advent of Islam, as the use of figurative imagery of Mitra herself was prohibited by Islamic decree. In Mehrism/Mithraism's ascension to paradise, the fourth step is attributed to lion and the sixth one attributed to the sun.

**The Lion as Icon for
Iranians**

As eluded to earlier the lion symbol-

ized power, decisiveness, and strong leadership with justice and equity in mind since antiquity. Again with the advent of Islam and the adoption of Shiism in Iran, this lion was manifested with close association to Ali, the Prophet Mohammad's cousin, thus the Ali's lion (shire Morteza Ali) as known in the Medieval Iranian literature. Although the Atabakan-e Pars and Khawrizmshahan dynasties at times utilized Flags that were black or red, the lion, nonetheless, remained an integral component of their Flag. The sun for Iranians has remained a symbol of permanence, energy, life, light and illumination and enlightenment, cleanliness and absolution, the driving force behind the cycles of animals and plants. It has been regarded as the celestial body that plays a crucial role in human life since pre-historic antiquity. Sun as the symbol of Mithraism, Mazdaism, Monism and Mehr faiths in Persia preceded Christianity for almost 1400 years: Mithraism is said by some to be the precursor of Christianity, as evident by archeological ruins in the lower level of the Vatican.

The Safavid Dynasty (1502-1736 CE)

Shah Esmail killing Uzbek leader Mohammad Sheybani in a battle near Merv, 1510

The Safavids were the descendents of Sheik Joneid, who himself was one of Sheikh Safiuddin Ardebili's grandsons. There is evidence that the lion and sun symbol appeared on Sheikh Joneid's Flag. One can therefore recognize the regular and continuous use of the lion and the sun on Iranian Flag representing the national identity since 1400 CE, notwithstanding the inevitable dynastic changes in the government. Among the Safavid kings, Shah Esmail and Shah Tahmasb were the only ones who adopted Flags without the lion and the sun. Shah Esmail's Flag was triangular green with a moon on top, while Shah Tahmasb's was a green triangle with a sheep on top, since he was born in Farvardin (Capricorn zodiac).

The Afsharieh Dynasty (173-1805)

The Iranian Flag had one solid color: black, red or green since the Sassanids through the Safavids. Nader Shah Afshar removed the black and replaced it with

white while maintaining the other two, red and green. He still maintained the triangular geometry of the Flag with the lion and the sun but no sword in the lion's hand.

The Zandieh (1750-1794 CE)

This was a very short period in Iranian history and we do not know what their Flag looked like.

The Qajar Dynasty (1779-1924 CE)

The Iranian Flag became a four-cornered rectangle for the first time one during the reign of Agha Mohammad Khan. The triangular shaped Flag therefore, as "inspired" from the Tazian (Arab) invasion of nearly a millennium earlier, was finally put to oblivion. This king is the one who integrated in the two-edged "Ali" sword as it had appeared in certain Safavid era Flags with the lion and the sun, thus the lion, sun and sword as we still have it integral of the Flag today. The sword was always regarded as a symbol for power, justice and people's resistance, and thus had socio-cultural but equally significant religious meaning.

A royal crown appeared above the lion for a short period during the Qajar Fath-ali Shah.

It was during the Mohammad Shah reign that the three colored flag (horizontal equal stripes of green on top, white in the middle, and green on bottom) and a lion, sun and sword as inscribed or evolved in our history for at least over 2500 years, was officially chartered as the Flag representing the Nation of Iran (Persia) worldwide.

During Naseer-eddin Shah, the crown, as it had for a short period been accepted, was removed, presumably to differentiate the national Flag from the monarchy.

Mozaffar-eddin Shah officially endorsed the Mashrootiati (Monarchy system) as adopted in part from the French and Belgian systems of government and consistent with the unique cultural and religious traditions in the country. The new 1906 Constitution cites in its Fifth Amendment Article:

The Official Flag of Iran is the three striped colored green-white-red with a lion and sun in its center. No mention of the royal crown is cited herein.

The Pahlavi Dynasty (1925-1979)

This Flag remained the official Flag during the reign of Pahlavi.

During the Pahlavi reign, a royal light blue Flag with a royal emblem as below developed for the sole purpose of representing the Pahlavi family.

During the latter decades of the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the three-colored only Flag without the lion, sun and the sword was regarded as the National Flag (Melli) and employed by the retailers, private sectors and non-governmental organizations.

The Islamic Republic Era (1979-)

In 1979, the newly established Islamic republic of IRAN removed the lion and the sun, and replaced it with a calligraphic Arabic word design in the Flag center that could either be read as "Allah" (GOD) and or Laelaha Ellallah (there is no God but one almighty God). Then, the word *Allaho Akbar* (God is the greatest) was placed eleven times along the white stripe in both the green and the red sections, for a total of 22 times to signify the 22nd of Bahman, the day of the "Islamic Republic" founding.

For a short period in 1979-80, this was the sole flag of Iran. The same had also been regarded as the National flag of Iran during the Pahlavi rein.

Historiography

Achaemenian	533 – 330 BCE
Seleucidian	330 – 247 BCE
Parthian	247 BC – 224 AD
Sassanid	224 – 651 CE
Arab Invasion	645 CE
Omavian and Abbasian	749 – 932 CE
Saffarian	866 – 903 CE
Samanian	819 – 999 CE
Al Bouyeh	945 – 1055 CE
Qaznavian	977 – 1186 CE
Seljukian	1038 – 1194 CE
Kharazmshahian	1077 – 1231 CE
Mongol invasion of Iran	1220 CE
Eilkhanian	1256 – 1353 CE
Mozaffarian	1314 – 1393 CE
Teymurids	1370 – 1506 CE
Turkamens	1380 – 1468 CE
Safavid	1501 – 1732 CE
Afsharian	1734 – 1796 CE

Zandian	1750 – 1794 CE
Qajar	1779 – 1924 CE
Pahlavi	1924 – 1979 CE
The Islamic Revolution	1979 CE

Some Organizations such as the Persian Watch Council in the Iranian American Community of nearly 3/4 million strong have adopted the Flag below to represent their nostalgic cultural ties to their motherland of origin, while reaffirming their commitment to their adopted land.

Conclusions:

A Flag as it continues to evolve throughout the history of nation does belong to the nation as whole. For instance, the historical three-colored green-white-red Flag of Iran and the lion-sun-sword in its center belongs to ALL people of Iranian heritage. So, if this Flag is also adopted by political organizations as their symbols, this in and of itself would not exclude its continuous use and proprietorship by the Nation. The political establishment and specific forms of government come and go in history, but a nation's legacy, as exemplified by its values, norms, symbols and aspirations remains eternal.

* An earlier excerpt of this flag chronology was presented by Dr. Zia Ghavami at a recent Persian Parade Organizational Meeting.

THINK GLOBALLY, ACT LOCALLY

Amil Imani

We are living in a troubled time. This is the era of universal propaganda, lies, deceit, and the complete perversion of truth on all levels. Truth has become a dangerous ideology. We see so many inhumane, unjust and violent acts around the world, yet, only a handful of people take the time to condemn or even bother with these events. We are becoming a society of the nonchalant.

Many world governments purposely and deliberately misinform and endeavor to keep the masses misinformed and powerless. It is the responsibility of the people of the world to be alert and participate in a global cooperation to reveal the truth.

Our responsibility, as the citizens of the world, is to manage to build a bridge of truth over the sea of lies. George Orwell was not wrong in stating, "In an age of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act." Truth has become the ultimate revolutionary act for these brave citizens.

Acting in this awareness might challenge the established authority to avoid violating the integrity of our fellow humans, but our efforts do not end here. Activism is needed to re-humanize and re-universalize the humanity, which has been de-humanized and de-universalized by the coercive authority. Our goal should be to remove the obstacles that impede the improvements of our fellow humans.

The sense of responsibility for one's actions increase as one progresses from stage to stage upon the path of this noble universal action. In other words, as one becomes more alert to this deception, one more acutely feels the responsibility to take action. We must create love, which brings forth unity, and avoid separateness, which brings forth hatred and division.

I hope that our efforts impress upon people that the only way to save humanity is by constant vigilance, by becoming the citizens of the world, by never ending participation and the education of ourselves, we become alert. We live in a world of humans, and our lives are in constant contact with other human beings. Our task in life should be the divine task of everlasting service to our fellow men. We must sacrifice our own comfort in order to triumph in this vital act.

The current world situation provides numerous examples of factional conflict of the most divisive kinds. In the wake of the breakup of the old Soviet Union, the many changes in Eastern Europe, and velvet revolution elsewhere, we've had a brief glimpse of hope for a universal peace. However, the glimpse was all too brief, eclipsed by flaring conflicts all around the world, some new, some old.

We have been witnessing ethnic cleansing in some parts of the world and yet, very few people are willing to challenge the authorities and bring more awareness. Religious revivalism and fanaticism is another salient entity, which asserted itself, not only in the Islamic world, but in the Christian world as well. "The big brother is watching you!" At the beginning of the new millennium clashes and terrorist activities increased on an unprecedented scale.

Nationalism is on the rise and universalism is on the decline. The nationalists' close-mindedness sometimes restricts them from being a part of a bigger picture of globalization and thus, they become divisive in all aspect of humanity. They become the agents of isolationism, rather than humanism. They become chauvinists, epitomized in the motto: "my country, whether it is right or wrong."

To truly become human and become a member of a larger community, requires refusing to let distinctions of nationality, race, religion, class or creed blind us to our common human status. Once we enter this stage, we begin to think on the global level, which simply resonates what we all have been all along, minus the acquired distinctions of nationality, creed, race, class, or any other subcategory of humankind.

The Industrial and the rich parts of the world, which have already realized some of the dreams of the enlightenment, have greater onus on their shoulders to bring about democratic change while preserving indigenous cultures. They must be pioneers and teachers to those who have not been exposed to some of the comfort of the West.

To sum up what I have been saying, we must ask ourselves: who are we and how can we shape a new human community? How do we excel and become one race, the human race? Sad'i, one of Iran's greatest poets answers this beautifully:

"Human beings are members of one another,
They are all created from one substance.
When one member experiences pain,
The other members cannot be at ease.
For if the pain of another does not cause you disease
You are not worthy to be called a human being."

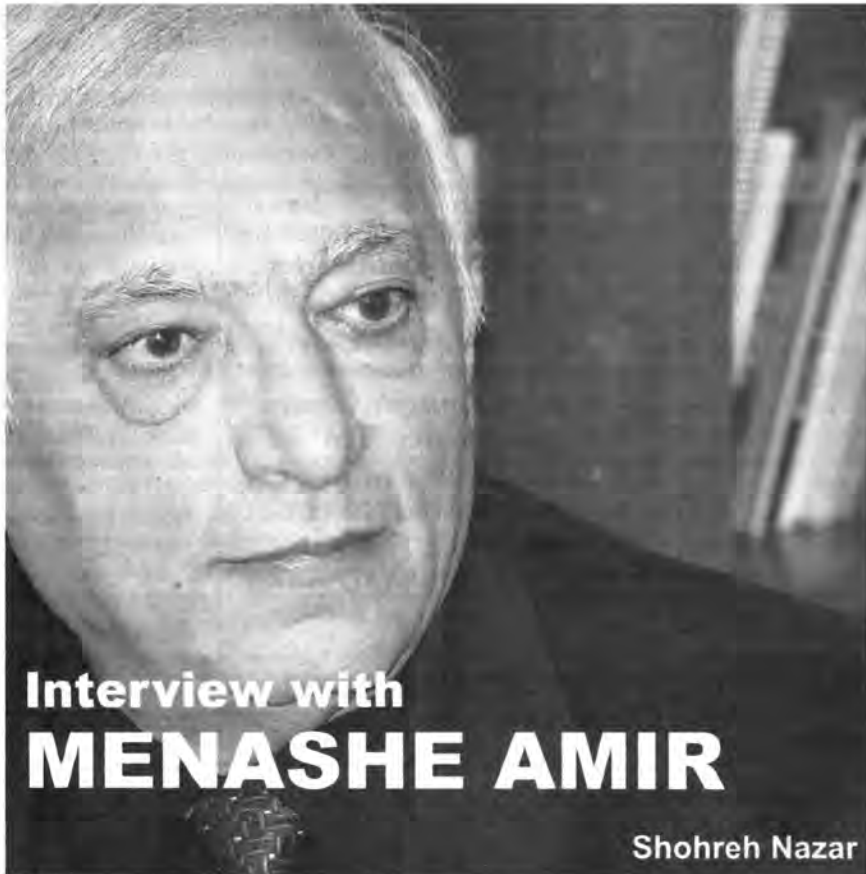
DON'T FORGET YOUR

Persian
Heritage

SUBSCRIBE!

(973) 471-4283

www.persian-heritage.com



Interview with **MENASHE AMIR**

Shohreh Nazar

Menashe Amir is a programmer, broadcaster, writer and famous political analyst of Iran and Israel. Though he has spent forty-five years away from his birthplace and now makes Israel his home, in his heart he remains an Iranian. He has not forgotten Iran, Iranians, Iranian culture, customs or traditions and has remained in love with his roots. This is the same love that is in the hearts and minds of most of Iranians that have immigrated and left Iran. Its flame becomes stronger each day. For most our respect, love and feelings for Iranian soil and culture seem to increase rather than subside with each passing year regardless of what soil we now walk be it, the United States, Israel, England or any other part of the world. We continue to live in Iran through the tireless work of Iranian personalities such as Mr. Menashe Amir and we thank Mrs. Shohreh Nazar for the following interview.

Can you please tell us a little of your childhood?

I was born in 1939 in Sarchal, Tehran. This area was considered a poor Jewish neighborhood. We all lived in one room. Each house had a courtyard with rooms around it where seven to eight other families lived. Later we moved to a better neighborhood called Tekieh Oladjan.

Where is this actually located in Teheran?

It is in the southern part but when I lived there it was considered the center of Tehran and the center of economy and business, actually not far from the bazaar.

Where were you educated?

I started school in Iran at Nour and Sedaghat (Light and Honesty). It was a Christian school where Jewish kids would study and where attempts were made to convert us to Christianity. Of course the attempts weren't obvious but on Sundays the school principal would always teach us about the life of Jesus Christ. His birth

in the stable was contained in a painting. Her teaching, however, had no effect on us. Christianity was not a big part of our life. My father was in the army and of course associated mostly with Moslems. My parents brought us up to be respectful to all religions. We were not aware of religious fanatics; everyone's beliefs were respected. It was a mutual respect that I discussed in a program Radio Israel. In that program I explained that in order for us to coexist in the world we must have mutual respect in faith.

Getting back to my education, after five years in Nour and Sedaghat I went to Ettehad School and from Tekieh Oladjan we moved to Avenue Heshmat-ol-clallah. I then transferred to Kourash School (a Jewish institution) and then went to Adab School, which was located near the newspaper company Keyhan Journal.

I chose Adab High-school because at the age of 16, I was interested in journalism and started to work in journalism. This all started when I decided to translate the life story of Rembrandt, the Dutch artist, from French to Persian. I loved doing this and when it was finished I took it to the Editor in Chief of *Roshanfekr* magazine, Mr. Nasser Khodayar. He read it, loved it and printed it in the magazine. At the same time I began translating articles for *Keyhan* newspaper. I have to admit here that I would cut classes to do this — something I do not recommend to the students reading this article.

I know you have a deep passion for Persian literature and Iran, why then did you leave?

At seventeen, while working for the newspaper and magazine, I was also attending functions at the Jewish center in the city called Koraush. There I learned about Israel and my interest was sparked. I studied Hebrew and then in 1952, I, along with a group of Iranian Jewish teachers, was invited to Israel by the Israeli government to visit and take a Hebrew language course. I was invited as a journalist, not a teacher.

There I saw a newly born nation that had nothing. Everyone was free and it was wonderful. It was then I made the decision to go back to Iran, complete my high school education and then return to Israel to go to college.

In 1959 you were invited to

work with Radio Israel, fill in the rest for our readers.

Yes, in January 1960 I began my career with Radio Israel while studying at the university. Professor Netser and Mr. Manouchehr Omidvar were very kind to me and helped me. I was not yet fluent in Hebrew, but I was able to translate books and articles from the French language and I used them in my radio programs. This program became very popular and the management was excited about it; so much so that I ended up forty-five years in radio.

Forty-five years is a long time — one, I am sure, filled with many memories, happy and sad. Can you share some with us?

The best and sweetest is the ability to have direct contact with my listeners for all of those years. It is interesting and invigorating to interact with your listeners on the subjects you bring them. I love the Saturday Political Analysis program, which also has a large following. The station receives so many calls during and after that program with words of admiration.

Yes, that is the best memory. Of course there are memories that are sad, for instance the eight-year war between Iraq and Iran was a very difficult emotional time for me. One day during one of the programs, I broke down as I was reading a letter from a young Iranian woman who had lost her fiancé in the war; what sadness and tragedy.

Another sad memory for me occurred as I was reading the news about an Israeli business that had been blown up by a Palestinian. A mother and her three children were burned to death in the explosion. This was very painful to me.

If I may, I would like to return to your private life and ask you about your family.

Before I got married I already planned not to marry an Iranian woman. This may be strange to you considering my attachment to Iran and the culture. My reasons were two fold: one, there weren't many Iranian women in Israel, at least that I knew of, and two, I wanted to experience other cultures, outside of my own. Interestingly enough I married an Argentine woman who has embraced the Per-

sian culture and customs and is more Persian in that respect than many Iranians I know. The fears I had about a "cultural gap" affecting a marriage thankfully did not materialize.

I have two sons, ages 38 and 37. They have an interest in the Persian culture and they are unhappy with me for never teaching them the Persian language. I am to blame because I was too busy and they spent most of their day with my wife and her mother, who are both Spanish. Accordingly they learned the Spanish language.

Recently my younger son invited me to speak at his office in front of thirty to forty people. There he proudly introduced himself as an Iranian. He is proud of this part of his culture as equally as he is proud of his mothers and Israeli ethnicity. He is married to a very attractive European woman and has a daughter, my granddaughter Shirin, who has beautiful Persian eyes.

You asked about my house. We live in the Arab quarter and reside in an Arab style house built of stone, which sits on top of a stone hill. When you enter the house, you are entering Iran; all the paintings and handcrafts, rugs, ornaments and decorations give you the feeling of Iran. My wife says it looks like an Iranian museum and we should sell tickets for people to come and look.

Did you ever become bored with your forty-five-year profession?

Never, every minute and every hour has been enjoyed. I believe it comes from this opportunity you have to communicate with millions of people and give them the news and to make them aware of what is going on in the world and the freedoms other experience, such as press and speech. I love to discuss democracy because it is my personal belief that where this exists peace, security and happiness will follow,

the non-democratic governments seem to bring hardship for its citizens. It is important to talk about this and that is why we have a weekly program with an open discussion called "Your Voice in the Voice of Israel." On this program we allow the

people to explain their point of views on a selected topic. We invite the supporters of the government to come and talk with us.

Unfortunately we have been criticized by some of our listeners who feel government should have their own media venues. They feel we should only allow the opposition to speak. I oppose this because it infringes on our very goal, which is democracy. In a democ-

racy both sides must be heard in order to make an informed decision.

What regrets, if any, do you have?

A. That I wasn't able to see all of Iran. Before the revolution I frequently visited the country but have missed Mashad, Tabriz, Kerman, Kashan, Yazd and many other places that have historical importance. I wish one day to Iran and have a direct contact with Iranians. I remember one NoeRouz when the listeners from Iran and the world were coming on the line and extending their wish of Happy New Year. One day a man from Sari, a city in northern Iran, came on the line and with his ethnic language "Guilaki" asked me if I ever intended to return to Iran. I told him I didn't have a plan but I was curious why he asked the question. When I posed this to him, he responded by telling me that when they have a Presidential election they wanted to vote for me. I was flattered, of course.

How do you relieve the pain you must have from missing Iran?

As I stated earlier my home is like an Iranian museum from pictures to musical

You asked about my house. We live in the Arab quarter and reside in an Arab style house built of stone, which sits on top of a stone hill. When you enter the house, you are entering Iran; all the paintings and handcrafts, rugs, ornaments and decorations give you the feeling of Iran. My wife says it looks like an Iranian museum and we should sell tickets for people to come and look.

CDs and speak often about Iran to my colleagues.

Of course I must ask this question in light of what most of us read in the daily papers, what is the true feeling of Iranians in Israel toward Iranians out of Israel?

I believe their feelings toward Iran and their love of Iranians is similar to mine. There are immigrants in Israel from 170 countries most with different cultures. Even the Jews who immigrated here have their own cultures. There is not a continent represented. Having said that however, it is the Iranian Jew in Israel who is the most attached and has the most sincere feelings toward Iran. Not only do they have a strong love and feeling for Iran, but their children who have been born in Israel also have love and affection toward Iran. I often see young Israelis, who were born in Israel of Iranian born parents, embrace Persian culture from music to food. They are all eager to know more about Iran. It is interesting to see so many pictures of Iranian scenery on their walls in their homes.

The President of Iran is from Yazd and we know that the President of Israel is from Yezd (Iran) — both are elected officials. What kind of feeling did this create in you and other Iranian Israelis?

We are very proud that Mr. Moshe Ketsav was elected president of Israel and is now in his fourth year. I have to tell you with certainty that he is one of the best presidents in the fifty-five years of Israel's independence. His special characteristics of ethics and politeness increased his popularity.

Therefore politeness and ethics belong to Iranians. It is not the norm for Iran to be so harsh and argumentative, it is simply not the nature of Iranians.

Radio Israel listeners' are increasing, what has caused this?

I think there are two reasons. One is the style of management and the other the content of the programming and the format. The style of management is very different from many other famous radio sta-

tions that are broadcasting in the Persian language abroad. Most radio stations receive their information from a central office that broadcasts to different languages and different nations; all the talk shows, their content and instructions come from central offices. Most are not Iranian and therefore they are unfamiliar with Iranian characters. Radio Israel on the other hand is an independent organization and has no connection with the government of Israel. We have complete freedom of choosing our news, how to write and broadcast it. This is the reason our management is very different from other radios.

The second reason is the kind of articles and subjects that we choose to inform our listeners. We seem to be a little more aware of their needs. Most of our programs are about Iran and life in Iran, while other radios are focused on international news and insert some news about Iran. We speak of Iran and inject some international news that has a connection to Iran and the future of Iran. We have a lot of news about Afghanistan, Iraq but mostly Iran. Because of this, most Iranians have more interest in our programming. There is another reason I believe the show has popularity and that is because of the way the broadcasters speak to their listeners. We speak the same language as our listeners. We can identify with the average persons plight in life.

I am sure most of the readers of Persian Heritage are aware of your retirement, you are still young and energetic what are your plans?

I have lots of plans and dreams, but at the moment I am not prepared to answer this question because most of my decisions are very preliminary.

Can you at least share your dreams with us?

That is easy. For the past few years I

have been writing a dictionary of Persian to Hebrew and English. At the moment it is about two thirds done so its completion and publication is one of my dreams.

Mr. Menashe Amir, is there anything else you would like to say to our readers?

I should thank *Persian Heritage* for allowing this interview. I do want to tell you that without exaggeration it is one of the most credible magazines printed outside of Iran. We receive at Radio Israel more than fifty weekly publications each week from all over the world but when I go through the pages of your magazine I have a feeling of pride. It is so obvious the love your readers, writers and staff have for the magazine, Iran and each other.

I would like to end the interview with my wish for all Iranians to once again receive their due recognition as a friend of and to the world.

The Iranian Jews in Israel ... not only do they have a strong love and feeling for Iran, but their children who have been born in Israel also have love and affection toward Iran. I often see young Israelis, who were born in Israel of Iranian born parents, embrace Persian culture from music to food. They are all eager to know more about Iran. It is interesting to see so many pictures of Iranian scenery on their walls in their homes.

If a stranger should venture to Iran, I am sure they would be shocked by their reception by the people; they would be welcome with open arms. I am happy to see that slowly but surely the world is beginning to be educated on the importance of Iran and its history in the world and the wonderful contributions the country has made to human society. It is

my dream to see Iran and the world without confrontation. This is my wish for Iran and I am sure it is the wish of Iranians.

And finally, as I stated earlier it is my belief that democracy is a guarantee for peace. I wish in the future that the government of Iran would direct its attention to liberty, freedom, happiness and the comfort of its people and to once again reach out their hand in friendship and cooperation with the world. To me the winner in Iran today is the one who does not dwell on the past and who was right or wrong. The winner is the side who first recognizes the best interest of his/her people and takes the course needed to insure their survival and dignity.■