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# Persian Heritage

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

It was a warm summer day when I received a call from my daughter granting her mother and I an audience with her. Funny, I thought, how things change. As a young man, growing up in Iran it was my parents who made arrangements to see me and not the reverse. But, that was then and this is now. Of course, parents are always happy when our children include us in their lives. We tend to savour those moments.

At the suggestion of a friend I made a reservation at a restaurant in Manhattan. Having arrived a few hours early we took advantage of the beautiful summer day and walked around New York. By the time dinner came, I was hungry and a bit irritable.

We entered the restaurant and just as we were seated a very tall, handsome, young man, our waiter, approached our table. He asked if we had decided what we wanted. I abruptly responded to his question by telling him to give us a minute to sit and read the menu. He walked away. My daughter then began to lecture me, telling me that my behavior was rude. I said nothing to her but knew she was right and I knew I needed to apologize to him. This was the first of many lectures I, the adult, would be receiving from my daughter that evening.

The second lecture came when our conversation became somewhat heated. As my voice adjusted to the temperature of the argument, she then told me to lower my voice so the other patrons would not be disturbed. Our waiter returned a few minutes later and after taking our order asked if we were Iranian. Of course, I gave a proud yes. He then informed us that he too was Iranian. My daughter, like most of our Iranian youth born outside of Iran, was surprised that this young man was in fact Iranian because he had such a light complexion and other non-Iranian features. Hearing these words from her mouth, in front of this young man, I protested her statement. "Did you know that Iranians are Aryans and that you can find Iranians with any hair, eye and skin color?" And did you know that you can also find them in every shape and size? Do you think all Iranian men have beards and that the women are covered in a chador?"

Once again I received an annoyed look from my daughter and I knew I should say no more. The waiter left the table and we continued our dinner. Towards the end of dinner, he returned to the table and I seized the opportunity to somehow try and make up for my earlier "bad behavior." I told him I wanted to give him a gift. He asked me what it was, and I answered by telling him it would be copies of *Persian Heritage* magazine. His response shocked me. "Sir," he said in an angry voice, "thank you, but I have no interest in reading *Persian Heritage* or any other Iranian magazine." Then he walked away.

My daughter again looked at me annoyed, "Daddy, leave him alone." But of course I could not do that. His words sparked an insatiable curiosity. I excused myself from the table and headed to my car which is a portable *Persian Heritage* library. When I returned I placed copies of the magazine in his hand. I then informed him that one of the copies was almost out of print so rather than toss them in the garbage, I would appreciate it if he returned them to me. He stood firm in his position and again told me to take them back because he was not going to read them. My eyes met those of my daughters who were pleading with me to leave the young man alone.

I don't know why but something inside of me said not to give up. So, against my daughter judgement I addressed him again. "Please sir, tell me if you hate Iran and Iranians so much why did you ask us if we were Iranian? How long have you been carrying this burden and what are your reasons? What has the denial of your culture and your heritage gotten for you other than an obvious deep wound."

The young man's face once taut now softened as he began to give his reasons for



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his anger. "Sir, Iran and Iranians had everything, they were a country going forward, its people were respected by the world, why then did this revolution have to happen? Why did it come and destroy a country and its people. This revolution did the same thing as Alexander and his lover did in Persepolis, burning it to the ground." He then signed deeply and continued, "this war between Iraq and Iran, what was this all about? I don't understand why two Muslim countries who share a border and blood, fight? Why did they allow Iran to be pulled back into an era where the women are forced to cover their heads and the media silenced?" His words were strong. I stared at him as he told the story about his life in exile. "I was 19 years old when I came to America as a fugitive. My father was put in jail by the Shah and I was allowed to see him only on scheduled visits. I was only a child. Despite the actions by that government however, I never could understand the philosophy that was behind the revolution, which led to the oppression of Iranians. I still remain in exile not only by force but also by choice.

I have cut all my ties with Iran and Iranians and live in my own world where I am free to write poetry, help the homeless people of New York, and develop my knowledge in mysticism and sufism.

After these words there was nothing left for us to say and silenced followed. His focus then turned to my daughter. She was now going to be on the receiving end of a lecture, not by me as a parent, but from someone who was her peer. "Remember the advice of your parents and always appreciate their words because it is the best gift a child could receive. The help of two parents is far greater than the help of one, as I was denied. During those few short visits that I had with my father, while he was in prison, I took in his every word. God has given you a gift to have a parent's wisdom come more frequently than from a few short visits. Listen to them because despite the way you feel today in their words lies the truth of life."

To say the least the evening was very memorable. As we left the restaurant I again extended the magazines to him. "Read them in your quiet moments. Per-

haps we will have another opportunity to meet again and perhaps you will consider sending me some of your poems for publication." My heart was beating and sweat was forming on my forehead and palms. I knew it was time for me to leave before I experienced anymore emotion. Moments later I still wanted to return to get his name and address. When I suggested this I did not look for approval from my daughter for I knew on my own that things were best left as they were. After all, he did have my name and address and could find me if he wanted to.

Making my way back to the car my thoughts remained on this young man. For whatever reason we met today, the effects our conversation has on one another is yet to be discovered. I leave you to draw your own conclusion.

*Shahrokh Ghasseini*

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By: Shahrokh Ahkami



AN INTERVIEW WITH  
**Mohammad Reza  
SHAJARIAN**

*Mohammad Reza Shajarian, a great Iranian treasure, is the master of Persian music and is considered as important as Mr. Pavarotti. Persian Heritage wanted to interview him for a long time and finally was given the opportunity.*

*The night I interviewed him I will always remember — the night I had dinner with a great Iranian treasure Mr. Mohammad Reza Shajarian and his talented son, and Kayhan Kalhor and Alizadeh. During dinner I witnessed his love for his son, how he cared and nourished his son who was not feeling well. Though the two are consummate professional partners, what I was a father and son relationship and not a Master and his student.*

*Because of the birth of my first grandchild, I was not able to attend his concert. Regretfully a few weeks later I found out that he was ill and has since returned to Iran. As you read this interview, you will find a man who is more than a master of music, he is a man who has a deep love and respect for all things and one who is filled with love, affection pride and patriotism.*

**PH:** *Mr. Shajarian, your concerts in San Diego were well received by your audience and the press. American newspapers such as the New York Times and Wall Street Journal have written lengthy articles about you. Please introduce yourself to us, especially to our young readers born out of Iran and our non-Iranian readers who are not familiar with your voice and music.*

**Shajarian:** I was five or six years old when I started to sing. By the time I was twelve everybody in my hometown of Mashad, Iran knew me. My father was a Master of song and singing; and gradually I started to learn more and more about Persian music. When I finished high school I was eighteen. I left home to teach. It was at this time that I started to seriously learn music and began to occasionally sing on Mashad Radio. So it was forty to forty three years ago that I had my first

radio program (at that time we had to perform live on radio). I arrived in Tehran at the age of twenty-five and started to sing on Radio Tehran. There I attended singing and music classes taught by masters of classical music and song. I worked with this group of master musicians, even after the Revolution.

**PH:** *What is the difference between now and then?*

**Shajarian:** The participation of master musician Mr. Alizadeh. He had a special style of influence in my music and singing that you can hear in my new song "Winter." It is a new work with a special message. I mean to say that even if an entire collection of music lacks a message at least part of it will have a message. I carry that message...

This kind of music, however, is very different from the typical classic music. Audiences are not accustomed to it and may create a question for them but within a few times of listening you get used to it and enjoy it.

**PH:** *Prior to coming to see you, some of my colleagues were asking who is this Persian musician that you want to interview? I told them I wanted to interview the Iranian Pavarotti or Placido Domingo. You are not only a great singer with a beautiful voice, you have a great role in the revival of Persian classical music. Was this your destiny?*

**Shajarian:** Perhaps. My father forbid music and was against me becoming a musician because of the improprieties found in the music world. I'm not saying all musicians at that time were not bad and "unclean," but for the most part the music world was corrupt. For this reason many Iranian families, including my father, forbid their children to become musicians and would angrily tell them that they could not become the fiddler of a dancer!! Despite the fact that dance and music are great arts and professions, they had been suppressed in Iran for 1400 years because of the way music was interpreted. Young music lov-

ers like myself were afraid to be blamed so, quietly without my father's knowledge, I learned the music. I had a great respect for him and didn't want to hurt his feelings.

Since the age of eighteen I knew that this was a sacred profession and that I could make a living in it and be respected. So despite my fears of being accused a bad person I pursued this career. I did so with love and inner spirituality. In the beginning my father was very unhappy that I left Mashad. All the blame for my departure to Tehran fell on him. Later, when he saw how serious I was and how hard I worked and studied, he calmed down.

**PH:** *What was your goal?*



*Homayoon Shajarian, Kayhan Kalhor, Hossein Alizadeh and Mohammad Reza Shajarian*

**Shajarian:** Unlike many artists, I did not desire or expect to reach fame and money overnight! I was poor and there were times when I wasn't able to pay the rent on my house. I did receive many invitations to play at house parties, bars and nightclubs. In fact one invitation would have paid an amount equal to five years of my salary that I was receiving from the radio. But these invitations were not what I wanted and often considered shameful. But, for those who accepted such invitations, fortune and fame came quickly. Mine took longer, not one-night stands, but one to two years. I knew I had to avoid immoral situations to reach my goal. I knew I had to remain uncorrupt. Perhaps the fact that I avoided the dark side of the profession has encouraged families in Iran to persuade their children to play some sort of musical instrument and know some kind of art. As an artist I have always tried to bring prestige to the profession.

Even today people dressed in religious robes, when they meet me, tell me they want their children to learn to play a

musical instrument. Today in the streets of Iran you will see young girls carrying their musical instruments to music classes. In the University music students eagerly learn music and their parents are proud to listen to their children playing piano, violin, etc. It is so wonderful to compare these times to those when I was a young man. A time when music was a sin and musicians were sinners.

Anyway, I hope I was a small element in this change of atmosphere for the arts. I continue to follow these principles so when you see my programs and hear my music you will see humanitarian love and mysticism, not dance or finger snapping. Of course there is music for dance. All kinds of music should be available. My

strong religious beliefs he later stopped singing, but when I was growing up my father would sometimes sing them on his own. I would listen to him and learn his gestures and style of singing. Because my ear was used to this Kurdish style of singing and music I decided to follow it. When these people would gather for music festivals I would go to see them perform. That period of my youth, the land, the people and the compassion for those lives, so deprived were images that repeated in my mind like a film. So in short this was the history of my acquaintance and knowledge with this kind of music.

I always believed that a person need not start a job, but when one does start a job he or she should do it well and strive

music is not the only kind of music that should exist. There must be joyful music, music for mourning, music for youth, music for all generations and all kinds of taste and style.

**PH:** *If I'm not mistaken in your recent work you connected the rustic (paysan) music to classical music, how can you connect these together?*

**Shajarian:** First of all I am from the State of Khorassan. I taught for five years in the villages of Ghouchan and Mashad (Khorassan). Every day I listened to Kurdish songs and from them I have a lot of memories. There were children in classrooms singing songs and I would encourage them. My father was from the same region where his father was a farmer. They knew a lot of Kurdish peasants and used to sing songs in their dialect. Because he was a skilled singer, he could mimic them perfectly. Unfortunately, because of his

for perfection. Often I have found that many of my favorite musicians have spoiled this rustic music because they did not strive for perfection. Their interpretations mock these songs and destroyed them. Their interpretations made me uncomfortable and unhappy and caused me to wonder why they would have done such a poor job. This rustic music belongs to its creators. Their style of music should be respected and kept as pure as possible. Therefore, instruments used in its reproduction must be genuine, from the area. And, the music itself must maintain the same quality and character of the original music. I am very critical of famous artists when they change and spoil the natural beauty of this music. Thankfully I am not the only artist who feels this way.

In the case of Kayhan Kalhor, I recognized the great job he has done in his music. He has kept the message of the music true. For that reason I accepted to collaborate with him. It was about five years ago that we went to a studio together to record a song. At first it sounded good,

but when I listened to it later, I found that it lacked the message I wanted. It lacked the atmosphere found in the original music of this region. For over two years I thought about this. I knew that in order to make this a great piece of music I had to maintain its original atmosphere. So, I tried a lot to get the dialect of those villagers. I needed to have their same tone of voice. In order to obtain my perfection in this project I knew it was time that I revive all the memories of my childhood and youth. I practiced and finally I felt comfortable. I sang over the music we previously recorded in Iran.

We went back to the studio and fortunately the emotional atmosphere I sought appeared in my mind. I was taken back to the village where I spent some of my youth. Though it took time we finally accomplished our goal. The value of the original music was not spoiled. I must state that Mr. Kalhor's efforts were valuable and admirable both in this project and in his efforts in America. He has assembled a group of musicians and musical instruments that give the same message heard in the villages of Khorassan (near Ghuchan and Mashad). His use of local instruments allows his music to duplicate its perfume and atmosphere.

**PH:** *It is admirable that after reaching such a high level of success as a master in music, you are still ready to take*

*chances and risks. This is shown in this new style of work. Can you address this?*

**Shajarian:** Anything one does in life has risks. If you don't have the guts to take the risk you will never reach the next level. I am not saying that you should suddenly jump from one step to another step with-

**Unlike many artists, I did not desire or expect to reach fame and money overnight! I was poor and there were times when I wasn't able to pay the rent on my house. I did receive many invitations to play at house parties, bars and nightclubs. In fact one invitation would have paid an amount equal to five years of my salary that I was receiving from the radio. But these invitations were not what I wanted and often considered them shameful.**

out preparation. What I am saying is that you should take the risk fully aware of its consequences. You should never do anything haphazardly. For example, before I took on this project, or risk, I had thought about it for years. When the time was

**I believe that creativity for the most part comes from one's roots and the soil that nurtures it. If you do not physically have your roots in that soil you cannot get proper nutrition.... When I stay more than five or six months away from Iran, I find myself losing my connection.... For example, twelve years ago I was out of Iran for ten months on tour.... I suddenly felt that I could not sing. I was not the same Shajarian that created those masterpieces. I suddenly felt empty....**

right to take the risk, I took it. All of the conditions were met. Fortunately, all the projects and situations that I have approached in this manner have been successful and have reached a successful conclusion.

It is interesting that despite all the time I spend with the masters I still desire to work with young people. They work hard when they are encouraged and have more sense of responsibility. In working with them, after awhile I can

**PH:** *After the Revolution, you*

*traveled to the U.S. and Europe. I have seen you in three concerts. I feel that you have opened a different door for many artists living in Iran and those abroad, who have no hope to return back to Iran. How does this affect you?*

**Shajarian:** When you are acquainted with people you are naturally influenced. It becomes a part of you. Artists who were influenced or touched by society can easily move forward and take these influences with them. When an artist is in touch with his/her society, they move with it, because they know they are part of it. These artists in this circumstance, if they know their job well, can be a leader of that society in music, cinema, painting, poetry or literature or other professions. But, if they do not stay in touch with their people and their roots they will have turmoil. We have tried not to be separated from our people. This will prevent us from falling behind. We need to feel their pain and be ready to do what we can to ease that pain.

**PH:** *When I interview talents like you I like to get their opinion on a subject that continues to puzzle me. In Iran there is limited opportunity to excel. In contrast, the U.S. and Europe provides us with great freedom and choice. But it has been twenty years since the Revolution and we still have not been able to have artists like you, Alizadeh, Kalhor as a household name in music or the cinema, in USA, why?*

**Shajarian:** I believe that creativity for the most part comes from one's roots and the soil that nurtures it. If you do not physically have your roots in that soil you cannot get proper nutrition. I feel that some of my songs are like mourning songs. They present the pain and miseries of a society. Some people, when they listen to my music, cry others do not. When I stay more than five or six months away from Iran, I find myself losing my connection. For example, twelve years ago I was out of Iran for ten months on tour. One month before my return to Iran, the mayor of Barcelona (Spain) invited me for a concert and festival in Barcelona. Twenty

days before the festival, I suddenly felt that I could not sing. I was not the same Shajarian that created those masterpieces. I suddenly felt empty. After ten months away from my problems, I felt I had nothing from that soil. I couldn't feel my environment any longer. I couldn't feel the pain and I couldn't touch them anymore. I called my wife and told her I was coming home. She reminded me that I had a concert in twenty days and thought I was crazy. She told me not to come, not to go through unnecessary expenses. For me the price of a round trip ticket is a lot of money, but I really felt I would not be able to perform. I told her I had to return.

When I returned to Iran, I once again came in touch with my problems. My pain and suffering became visible again; I was able to touch them. I was able to return to Spain and give the concert.

Some of our good artists who have lived for many years abroad, cannot influence an Iranian audience, because

they cannot transfer their feeling and create that atmosphere of the natural soil. Those who can identify with this problem and return to Iran will better transfer this atmosphere to their audience. It is as if we get slapped back to reality. Our roots get nutrients from that soil. We are then able to offer our Iranian art and get back in touch with the people. This is true, it is not in our imagination.

As I stated that trip of twelve years ago left me empty. I thought I couldn't sing. It wasn't that I forgot how to sing or that my voice was harmed, I had just lost the stimulus and atmosphere to sing.

This explains the deficiency of Iranians in music and the cinema. The battery of these artists who have lived abroad is empty. They must come back home and allow their roots to be watered and charged with events that are going on in Iran today. Without seeing it first hand, they cannot understand this. I am not saying that they do not experience pain living abroad, but it is a different pain, it is the

pain of being away from home, not the same pain felt by the people living in Iran.

**PH:** *In concluding this interview, can you tell us about your most and least favorite memories?*

**Shajarian:** I have many memories. One of my worse, however, deals with the confrontations I have had with Iranians abroad. Too often they believe that anyone who comes from Iran is connected to the Islamic Republic, and is their agent. They treat them unfairly. They become victims and are punished for something they never did or said. All they have done

was to try and protect the arts. I believe this labeling is unfair and I don't know why these people think this way? This is very sad. This automatic labeling is not right. To attach us to one political party or another, when all we desire is to preserve our art, is very unfair.

As for a favorite memory, it comes from inside Iran. It is related to the pressures that were put on me, and the efforts that I had to make to eliminate them.

**PH:** *When did this occur?*

**Shajarian:** I think it was seven years ago. We had a concert, and my brother was the manager of the program. One hour before the concert, my brother came with a tape of the Islamic Republic National Anthem. He told me that we must play it before the concert. I told him I would not allow it. An officer heard my response and came in to the rehearsal room. He told me that this was an order and that he was in charge to carry out the order. He threatened my arrest if I did not do this. I was angered by his words and I told him he was in charge of himself, but not in charge of my concert. I told him that I was the musician and I would indicate what was played at this concert and if he wanted to arrest me to do it then and not to wait till

after the concert. He told me "No, I will not arrest you NOW!" This time another agent came. I told him there would be no national anthem at this concert. He allowed us to start the concert without the national anthem.

At the end of the concert he came to me and asked my why I objected to the national anthem? I asked him to name one place in the world where they play the national anthem before a concert. "You do remember that the Shah had the national anthem play in the movie theaters and that proved to be a big mistake. It is an insult to the national anthem."

The national anthem has a great respect and value and is not suitable for concerts and movie theaters. They play the anthem at international games, when they want to give a gold medal to a champion."

After my explanation, he told me that he was sorry and that I was right. After this incident we became good friends. This was both a good and bad memory for me. Bad, because he made us nervous but good because I convinced him that you cannot play the National Anthem at a concert.

**PH:** *My last question is about the future of Iranian music?*

**Shajarian:** The Iranian people never should be worried about their music. You cannot stop a weed from growing on a farm. And in that sense you cannot stop music. Who can stop a nation's music? You can cut the flowers, but these flowers are cultivated inside the soil. Whatever is inside a nation, you cannot cut and eliminate. Music and art are inside of Iranians and the country. Every day it gets stronger. It is spreading and bringing up new artists. The quality of their work is also improving. In the next ten to fifteen years you will see many young artists emerge.

**PH:** *And now I ask if you have a closing comment?*

**Shajarian:** No, I wish the best to all people in the world. I hope that Iranian hearts continue to beat for Iran and for all of humanity. They must know that the gifts of our heritage cannot be taken away. ■



## DICHOTOMY OF STATE AND RELIGION IN IRAN

BY: Karim Mansouri, M.D. (Maryland)

The demise of the monarchy and the establishment of a Shi'a Theocracy in Iran must undoubtedly be recognized as unique and one of the greatest phenomena in the turbulent history of Iran. Now, more than two decades after the Shi'a hierarchy's ascent to power manifested in the concept of the Supreme Jurisprudence (Velayat-e-Faghih), a debate is raging within the confines of the Islamic Republic of Iran and in the Diaspora as to the compatibility of a theocratic form of government with the complexities of the modern world. Issues are being raised as to the source of its legitimacy as well as its ability to initiate and implement democratic reforms in the face of rigid, religious doctrines dating back to the Seventh Century.

Many have dismissed the relevancy of religion in the daily affairs of State, and many have assigned the blame on a myriad of problems facing Iran and Iranians today squarely on the mixing of religion and government. It has been said that the majority of people have a negative view of religion in general and of the clergy in particular. There is prima-facie evidence that from time immortal, religion has played a pivotal role in shaping the course of Iranian history. Time and again, and often in critical moments, the power of religion has superseded the authority of the central government forcing it to change or modify the course of its actions. No one can deny the fact that it was the power of religious beliefs of ordinary Iranians and the guidance and exhortation of their resolute and charismatic leader, the late Ayatollah Khomeini, that made the demise of the monarchy and the triumph of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 possible. From the inception of the Persian Empire twenty-five centuries ago, until the very recent past, the duality of State and religion has been one of the pillars of its foundations. This dichotomy has manifested itself in many forms — from symbiosis and coexistence to coercive cooperation — to benign tolerance and to hegemonic

suppression just short of obliteration.

From a historical point of view, the present theocratic government in Iran is an aberration from the norm and stands in stark contrast to the Shi'a tradition of the past 500 years — when believers present quiescent but unyielding opposition to the temporal governments in power in the absence of the hidden Imam. Even the learned jurists in the Shi'a Theological School of Qom, Mashhad and elsewhere are debating what the Iranian Revolution really envisaged in the form of government and the concept of a supreme jurisprudence, and whether the Islamic Republic is drawing its authority from the basic tenets of Shi'a Islam or is another usurper of power in a long line of authoritarian governments in the twisted and tortuous pattern of Iranian history.

As of this writing it appears that a schism has been created among the conservative clergy as how to interpret the holy Koran and the laws of Islam, and that there is a new religious thinking among some of the conservatives who are accepting the concept of a modern Islamic democratic state; and the debate continues. Based upon the aforementioned viewpoints in this essay, I am presenting a brief overview of the relationship that existed between the State and religion in ancient Persia. From the establishment of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great in the 6th Century B.C. to the conquest of Persia by marauding Arabs and the conversion to Islam in the 7th Century A.D.

Most of our information about ancient Persia comes to us from archeologist's finds — the carved inscriptions of the Kings of Persia and the Greek writers and historians. The former are generally formal. Most commonly they are records of palace construction or undertaking the likes of cutting the Suez Canal or bridging of the Bosphorus and occasionally monuments to the triumphs of the kings and the lands that they conquered. Among Greek historians, the most noteworthy are Hecataeus of

Miletus, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, and Ctesias who was a physician trained in the famous medical school of Knidos. He spent 17 years as Court Physician in Persia; and finally Strabo, who tells us much about Alexander's conquests. Cyrus the Great (Kurash) son of Cambyses, grandson of Cyrus, great-grandson of Teispes, Great king, King of Anshan, established the Achaemenid Dynasty after defeating Astyrages, the last King of Medes around 559 B.C. This ruling Persian dynasty in Persis (Fars) claimed descent from an ancestor called Achaemenes (Hakhamanish) who according to a late Greek source, was reportedly nurtured by an eagle. By persuasion and accommodation, Cyrus incorporated the land of Medes to the Persian Empire and granted the captured King Astyrages all reverences due his position and left intact media's existing military and administrative organization. He therefore created a partnership rather than an adversary in the expansion of the Persian Empire. This conservative policy which involved the minimum change in the condition of rules, made the transition to provincial status in the Persian Empire relatively easy.

Few great rulers have left so great an impression with posterity as Cyrus. Herodotus tells us that the Persians themselves spoke of him as a father who was kind and contrived everything good for them. Regarding Cyrus' personal religious beliefs, he may very well have been a worshipper of Ahura-Mazda, the Supreme God of Zoroastrian religion, which was prevalent among the Persians. His history of religious tolerance allowed him to figure as the ruler selected by Marduk and Yahweh and no doubt Baal and Appolo, the Gods of other nations.

After the fall of Babylon and the liberation from the unjust rule of Nabonidus, all the inhabitants of Babylon rejoiced and greeted Cyrus as a master through whose help they had come to life from death and had been spared damage and disaster. They worshipped his very name. The Book of Ezra tells us without doubt that in 538 B.C. Cyrus gave instructions for the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem and the return of the sacred utensils that Nebuchadnezzar had removed fifty years earlier; and he gave permission to the freed Jews to return to their homeland. Many availed themselves of it, and many migrated to Persia. For these reasons Cyrus is figured in later Jewish tradition as "The Anointed" chosen by God to give freedom



to His chosen people. Underlying the tolerance and the ability to understand and appreciate different cultures were Cyrus' belief that the Supreme God defined by Zoroastrianism had entrusted him with the task of uniting the people of the Earth in one kingdom of justice and peace, so as the King of the Persian Empire Cyrus exercised the Zoroastrian concept of the "Just Rule."

The prophet Zarathustra, founder of Zoroastrianism was probably born around 640 B.C. according to some historians. He created a religious, philosophical and ethical system designed to bring man and the world to salvation. It ordained belief in a single God, Ahura-Mazda, the one founder and guide of the Universe, the good spirit from whom six abstract entities emanate: the truth, good will and holy piety, chosen sovereignty, meekness, integrity, and immortality. They fight by Ahura-Mazda's side against the anti-God, or evil spirit Ahriman. This enemy was aided by the Daeva: evil thought, lies, misgovernment, rebellion, infirmity, and death. The ultimate goal of this hard struggle was the triumph of the good with rewards for virtues and punishments for the wicked.

In embracing and strengthening the existing religious beliefs, Zoroastrianism increased the expectations of leadership by speaking forcefully to the moral conduct of government and politics. Based upon these principles, S. Mackey tells us that, "...the Persian king's virtues depended not only on the release of his subjects from the ravages of poverty, anguish, need, illness and disorder, but cosmic matters such as the expected course of spring and fall, rain and sun on which the fertility of land depended. Only by presiding over the order of a just society could the king maintain the 'Farr,' the sign of divine favor, which confirmed his inherent right to rule. This was the sacred principle of kingship which linked monarchy and religion as the dual forces of power, the symbolic manifestation of God's will."

Darius I, the successor to the throne, regarded himself as being under the special protection of Ahura-Mazda. Everything that he ever said or did he attributed to Ahura-Mazda's favor. It is implicit in Darius' thought that in the world-wide struggle between good and evil, Ahura-Mazda is the upholder of justice- So this is why Darius is triumphant over the "Lie." On a baked brick found in Susa, Darius says, "of me is Ahura-Mazda." So one could be justified in speaking of the God

of Darius the way that we speak of the God of Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad.

The Persians of Achaemenide's times were also notable in worshipping the triad of deities: Ahura-Mazda, Anahita, and Mithra, who were to be the principles in the Avesta, in worshipping fire as divine and in having the Magi as their priest. The origin of The Magi is debatable. Herodotus, speaks of them as a clan of Medes, and Starbo postulates that they were a Persian tribe from Northwest Iran. From what is known according to J. M. Cook, the Magi don't appear to act as theologians. They function as officiating clergy and were essential above all to the fire cult. It is said that they have worn white robes and lived a life of privation. The king had Magi in attendance. They led march-outs and processions, they sacrificed, poured libations, chanted their theogonies and lisped incantations. Presumably the Persian grandees also kept Magi at their court. The tomb of Cyrus had its guardian Magi who sacrificed a horse monthly and received a generous meal allowance.

The special virtue of Ahura-Mazda in Darius' eyes was that with his persecution of "the Lie" he formed the perfect heavenly counterpart for a Great King who looked for justification in enforcing universal rules on Earth.

In Avesta, a work drawn up by Magi, we find a later phase of Zoroastrianism adapted by Darius I and his successors: Mazdaism. In this new form a number of figures from the old polytheistic pantheon reappear by the side of Ahura-Mazda, and as already mentioned, they were the venerable good spirits like the Sun-God Mithra, the spirit of fertility Anahita, the heavenly bodies "Sun, Moon, and Sirius," the elements "Water and Wind", and the protecting spirits of ancestors. "Travasi" or they are Daeva, evil spirits like "Indra, Saurva, or Nanhaithya."

The religious policies of Achaemenid kings sometimes underwent sharp changes, such as the time Xerxes, son of Darius I, in his anger against the revolt in Babylonia, forbade the cult of Marduk, but it tended in the main to religious tolerance. They allowed Zervanism of the Magi, the Mithraic mysteries, the Anahita cult, and the use of sacred images to be practiced. The attitude of the Persians toward the Jews was one of protection and benevolence, as Xerxes bestowed upon them further privileges and favors just as Cyrus the Great has done before him.

After the reign of Darius I, who had given the Persian Empire its greatest extension and glory, his successors could not find a way to prevent the deterioration and decline. Indeed they often accelerated their empire's fall by their own behavior. By making themselves into absolute rulers they became estranged from their subjects; they were kept aloof in their palaces by a rigorous system of etiquette, making it difficult for anyone to see them, except when the people prostrated themselves before them at great ceremonies. This state of affairs fostered court intrigues, conspiracies, and outbreaks of violence, for example:

Upon the death of Artaxerxes, his son, Darius II had to get rid of two of his brothers before securing the throne. Artaxerxes II had to eliminate his own brother, his wife, and three of his sons because they were aspiring to the succession. The next king, Artaxerxes III had to do away with all the possible contenders, to the throne, and his harsh treatment of Asiatic Greeks began to attract the attention of Philip II of Macedonia, but he was murdered before taking any hostile action against Persia. The last king of Achaemenid, Darius III was defeated by Alexander the Great, son of Philip II, first at the battle of Graneikos, then at Issos, and finally in a pitched battle at Gangamela, near Arbela. After capturing the capitol, Persepolis, Alexander looted the royal treasuries and set fire to the royal palaces. With this dastardly act he earned the eternal damnation of the Persians.

The Achaemenids gave Western Asia 200 years of peace, but overall, they were unable to overcome the irresistible dualism which divided the Iranian and Zoroastrian portion of their empire from the rest. They could not quell it by religious intolerance along the lines dictated by the Persian policy of theocracy favored by Magi, which increased the discontent of their subjects.

From the time of Xerxes there were many periods of intolerance accompanied by great harshness toward subjects either guilty or suspected of treachery, i.e., Egyptians and Babylonians.

J. M. Cook tells us that, "the Achaemenids showed remarkably little interest in intellectual or scientific achievements or in unifying the culture of their empire." Although from Cyrus' rise to the death of Xerxes the Persians had introduced a religion that replaced idols and blood rites with a just God, a moral system, and a philosophy based on ethics,

tolerance, and justice. From these concepts the Persian culture and traditions took form that constituted the potent components of Iranian identity.

In philosophy, the influence of Greece on Persia and vice versa is apparent from the time of Plato, who had Persian students among the pupils in his school. The Greco-Persian religious syncretisms were at their fullest development when Alexander and his successors were ruling Iran. Alexander attempted to build on the foundation of Greek culture, even when he was learning and incorporating the Achaemenids methods for his own system of government. This Hellenization, however, did not take root deeply in Persia because Achaemenid traditions and institutions were too strong; furthermore, there was resistance from the Zoroastrian religion and the Magi.

Alexander's Hellenistic vision pursued by his successor Selucids did not take hold in Iran mainly because the Greeks and Persians were from two different molds. The Greeks had city-state form of governments and the Persians had an absolute monarchy, thus in their 160 years of rule they were unable to subdue the culture and traditions of Persians. The influence of the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy in this regard cannot be over emphasized.

The Selucids rule was lifted from Persia by a tribe of nomadic Aryans, the Parthians. They became the heir to the Persian Empire. During their 400 years of rule, they were not only a barrier against nomad attacks, but were a formidable enemy of the resurgent Rome. The Parthian kings, like the Achaemenids claimed legitimacy from the Supreme Deity, although they did not pursue the Zoroastrian religious policy of an exclusive kind. They were inclined toward tolerance and allowed syncretistic ideas to flourish in contrast to intolerance and exclusiveness of the Magi. Many Christians took refuge in Persia to escape the Roman persecution.

In the latter part of the Parthian's rule their empire plunged into tribal wars, and the quarrels between the kings, princes, and nobles of Parthia were great aids to Roman hegemony, which took strenuous action to intensify these conflicts and make use of them in the interests of Rome.

The Sassanid Dynasty rose from the cradle of the national tradition and culture of Iran and Zoroastrian faith, Persia (Fars). From there came Ardashir, the founder of the new dynasty. The word came from Sassan, the half mythical ancestor of his house. Ardashir defeated the

last king of Parthian, Artabanus V in a pitched battle in Susiana. After capturing Ctesiphon in 226 A.D., he became master, king of kings of all of Arsacids (Parthians) territories.

This new dynasty at once secured support from the Persian people and the priestly class. Ardashir recognized that religious conformity served his need to centralize authority within his kingdom and that the Zoroastrian faith could provide a rallying point against the encroachment of the Roman Empire eastward. The interest of the king and priesthood represented two dimensions of the same desire — power. So the king and the Zoroastrian hierarchy hand in hand organized the religion into a coherent force for the control of Persia's spiritual and temporal life. Through this dichotomy the priest gave legitimacy and authority to the king, and the king in turn insured the prosperity and survival of the priests.

Nationalism became the characteristic of the Sassanid dynasty, which was both political and cultural alike. It was imbued with fervor for the Zoroastrian creed which became the state religion and was intolerant of all attempts to import foreign ideas and beliefs. Having asserted himself as the God's regent on Earth, the king surrounded himself with the trappings of divine authority.

During the four centuries of rule, the Sassanid kings were often preoccupied with struggles against the Roman Empire. Shahpur I captured the Roman Emperor, Valerian, depicted in a giant stone carving at Naghsh-e Rostam near Persepolis. He also lent support to the preaching of Mani, the founder of a new syncretistic religion called, "Manichaeism," which combined the doctrines of Christ, Zoroaster, and Buddha. He was born in 215 A.D., and it was said that his mission had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. He claimed to be the last of the Apostles after Adam, Buddha, and Christ. Mani's religion was to be universal and adaptable to the need of every nation, and it was to be spread by missionary's work and was to be established in writing so as to prevent distortion or alteration; to this end Mani wrote seven books, the first being Shabbhuran, dedicated to King Shahpur I.

During the reign of Bahram I, the Zoroastrian priests gained acceptance of their views that all religions which threaten the religious unity of the Empire must be stamped out. Mani was imprisoned and brutally murdered.

During the last part of Sassanid's rule, Zoroastrianism which was the official state religion, became the main principle of the government; intolerance toward other faiths set the stage for persecution of Christians. Under the long reign of Shahpur II, the persecution of Christians had political reasons. Since Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman Empire, therefore, its adherents were seen as supporters of a power that was Persia's mortal enemy, Rome.

It could be said that by rigorous adaptation of a modernized Zoroastrianism as the official state religion, other faiths were regarded as potential elements of separatism, and no tolerance was shown to them. Moreover, by granting an exclusive position to the Zoroastrian faith, the king was assured of the loyalty of the priesthood, which also carried out important functions of a social and cultural nature. Besides this, the priesthood had judicial duties, since the basis of legal tradition came from the interpretation of sacred scriptures.

In 560 A.D., Khosrow I sat on the Sassanid throne. Even though he has been called "The Just" his power was anchored in the bedrock of absolute monarchy. He moved his capitol to Ctseisiphon in Mesopotamia, and his opulence and extravaganza became an exercise in the glorification of the monarchy. At his side, exercising the rite of orthodoxy and having the favor of King of Kings stood the Zoroastrian priests: A symbiotic dichotomy.

The alliance of religion and monarchy allowed the state to exercise its will over the lives and affairs of the masses and the religion to concur and protect its position. The state offices also were arranged in a hierarchy beginning with the viceroys, down from royal princes and vassal kings. They were followed by high positions at court filled by members of seven powerful families; furthermore, the king relied on a number of lesser potentates such as: Vazurkan (grandees) and Azatan (nobles).

In the latter phase of their rule, the Sassanids were in perpetual struggles against the Byzantium Empire. Initially their efforts met with some successes, but by 622 A.D., the Byzantium reversing the setbacks of previous two decades struck back at the heart of the Sassanid Empire. Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Mesopotamia were captured. Ctseisiphon fell into a panic, the king fled, and in less than a decade the Sassanid dynasty was delegated to the dust-bin of history.

# Shojaeddin Shafa



*In  
His  
Own  
Words*

Part V

**I have read this portion of Mr. Shafa's memoirs four times. At the end of the fourth reading, my initial feeling was the same as it was after the first reading: there is little doubt that this article will offend some readers.**

**For this reason, I originally thought that I should edit out its politically offensive parts. My conscience, however, prevented me from doing so since it could be against the principle of "Freedom of Speech and Press," that constitutes the very foundation of the journalism in the United States.**

**Therefore, I chose to print this piece in its original "uncensored" form. I do hope, however, that the readers will understand that the printing of this article in no way implies an endorsement of Mr. Shafa's views on the subject; nor does it reflect my personal views or those of the magazine. Rather, this article solely represents the views of its author and anyone who agrees with Mr. Shafa's version of history.**

*Shahrokh Ahkami*

Shortly after writing *In Struggle with the Devil*, which was more than 700 pages, I published my third book, *Towzih al-Massa'el* with a subtitle of "Response to Thousand Year Old Questions From Koleini to Khomeini," with more pages on the subject of religion. I took the name of this book from the theses by the religious scholars of the Safavid period. To identify it more clearly, after its publication in Iran I called it *From Koleini to Khomeini*.

*Towzih al-Massa'el* was the first Persian book of its kind. It was published in Paris in 1993, and in spite of its high cost (it was over 1,000 pages), 3,000 copies of its first printing quickly sold. Its second and third print editions (in pocketbook) were published at a more affordable price in Frankfurt, Germany. A revised edition was published recently by my publisher due to the readers' positive response during the past few years.

I would like to tell the story of writing this book and some of the events that followed its publication. From the moment I began preparing this book, I realized that the essential requirement for writing it was to study the basic teachings of religious scholars, especially the vast collection of the Hadiths (narrations) written during the past several centuries. Fortunately, more than 2.5 million of them were collected in Majlessi's book, *Bahar al-Anvar*. There were other credible books such as Koleini's *Kafi*, considered the 2nd Koran

of the Shiite world, as well as three other books. I must confess that before reading these books I had no experience in religious research and my field of work mainly covered the areas of culture, literature and history, with some research about Iran. After the revolution, instead of literature and cultural research about Iran, my desk became covered with books like Koleini's *Kafi*, Ameli's *Jame Abbasi*, Majlessi's *Helliat ul-Mottaghin* and *Zad ul-Mo'ad*, Abbass Ghomi's *Mafatih ul-Janan* and Dastgheib Shirazi's *Mo'ad va Towhid*.

These books constitute the foundations of the religious teachings of the past 1,000 years, and studying them was a novel and new experience for me. I was, however, unable to figure out who were the messengers of the Hadiths that were attributed to the Imams. Nor was I able to identify the source of many of these Hadiths (a question that was also raised in the minds of thousands of readers of my book, *Towzih al-Massa'el*). The truth, as I see it, is that these statements did not correspond to the reality and facts of life.

My book was written on the basis of these documents and shows how the Hadiths were written and later became the basis for the power of the Safavid kings, religious leaders and the Special Guards (the Ghezelbash). Through the years, the 17 original Hadiths left by Prophet Mohammad (narrated originally by Abu Hanifeh), increased to 1,000, then 10,000, 100,000, 600,000, later to 1,000,000 and 2,000,000, and finally in *Bahar al-Anvar* to more than 2,400,000. Majlessi insisted they were inspired to him by the Imams themselves. There are 300,000 Hadiths narrated from Imam Ja'afar Sadegh. Some of which are contradictory to each other. If Majlessi spent only ten minutes on each Hadith, he would need eighty years of round the clock, uninterrupted time to finish them all.

But, it would be wrong to think that making Hadiths ended with Majlessi. An example of the continuation of this tradition is in a speech given by one of the members of the Iranian Parliament (also a member of the Parliament's Defense Subcommittee) in July 1982. It was during the Iran-Iraq war, and was printed by the *Jomhuri Eslami* newspaper.

Publication of the one thousand-page book of *Towzih al-Massa'el* in my own name was, at that time, like a suicide attempt, because of the wave of political terror inside and outside of Iran at that

time. A number of terrorist attempts were made every few days. Not only my family, but also even my close friends believed that putting my name on the cover of the book would secure the order for my death. My response to them was that, "you cannot have a real fight in the darkness. A writer who believes in his work and defends a definite goal should either accept the consequences or not start the battle at all."

In spite of all these publications and the strong reaction to my book, the agents of the Islamic Republic never bothered me. This was, and still is, an unsolved puzzle to all of us. As far as I know, immediately after the book's publication, the government of the Islamic Republic and their diplomatic and religious offices

abroad bought many copies of the book and sent them to Tehran. I know that Mr. Bazargan read this book when he was no longer the Prime Minister. He sent a copy to Ayatollah Khomeini through the latter's brother, Ayatollah Passandideh. Later, a diplomat friend of mine told me that even though Khomeini did not read too many books, he carefully read this one. Other staff members of the government also read it and were very unhappy. For example, Mr. Hadi Ghaffari, a militant clergyman and Member of Parliament, said in a private session of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Parliament that "now these royalists write *Towzih ul-Massa'el* for us! I don't know why the officials don't take care of them so that nobody would dare to do anything like this in the future."

In spite of all these attempts, no order for my killing was issued. Perhaps they thought that by killing me, more people would purchase and read this book. However, I found out that Khomeini had ordered a committee be assigned to answer my book. A commission was formed that was headed by Ibrahim Yazdi, the future foreign minister. He had no knowledge of Arabic language or the Hadith books and spoke Persian with a foreign accent. This mission was never followed through. Maybe they found out that they would not be able to neutralize the book because the

subjects were taken from definite sources that were distinctly referenced. So any attempt would be more fruitless.

Along with the internal opposition to my book was an external opposition. An article was written by Mr. Mehdi Rohani, who calls himself the leader of leaders of the Shiite residents in Europe, in which he protested the contents of the book. His article was printed in *Iran va Jahan* weekly paper in Paris, and I responded in the same paper. The defeat of Mr. Rohani in this debate made him so angry that he requested a death order for me from Ayatollah Khoii in Najaf (Iraq). The request was denied.

Following the publication of these three historical, literary and religious books, the fourth was published. It was in four volumes with a total of 2,500 pages, and is the largest and most detailed Persian language book ever printed outside Iran in the last 20 years. *Crime and Punishment*, its title is one of the most complex works of the past two decades. I wrote this book in 1986, in a situation where I thought our community outside of Iran was in a great need of awareness about a religion that had

smashed the political and social life of our country and had pushed it back to the medieval period. Our community needed this awareness for the continuation of its national struggles. There were a lot of resources on this subject, but they were not available to everyone, because inside Iran, the regime's publicity apparatus, the radio, television and newspapers, and 180,000 clergymen left by the Shah were ready to work for them, were able to alter, cover up and hide the truth from the people's eyes.

Outside of Iran, the difficulties and struggles of the people in their daily life and the tension between different groups (in spite of their financial ability) who were not ready to step out of their closed circuits (some having obligations toward those who were paying them) had blocked all paths to the recognition of realities of the revolution. This left only a few weak voices, which, through books, magazines and newspapers, continued their struggle against the regime.

It was under these circumstances that my well documented book, *Crime and Punishment*, (the name of which was taken from Dostoyevsky's masterpiece), was published. In all of its 2,500 pages, you cannot find a subject without its references to more than 500 books and articles in Persian, English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Dutch, Arabic and Turkish. This meticulous documentation was the reason for its success. In spite of the high price of this four-volume set, it was repeatedly reprinted in France, Germany and the United States. Today, you cannot find this book in any bookstore. I have delayed another reprint, however due to the shortage of time I have to revise it, and a revision has become essential due to new world developments. Such a revision was not necessary for my other three historical, literary and religious books, or my most recent book, *Another Birth* as it relates to *Crime and Punishment*. It is a fact that in the last decade, the Communist Empire (Soviet) was broken down; the Cold War ended; many dictatorships vanished and have been replaced with new democratic governments. The PLO signed the Oslo agreement. The inglorious Iran-Iraq war ended. Now there is only one super power is left. The 190 countries of the world, with the exception of the governments of Iran and Afghanistan, have either entered or are entering the 21st century. In these conditions, my new edition of *Crime and Punishment*, instead of 2,500 pages in one volume and another 1,000 pages in an additional volume is ready for publication.

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**In spite of all these publications and the strong reaction to my book, the agents of the Islamic Republic never bothered me. This was, and still is, an unsolved puzzle to all of us.... However, I found out that Khomeini had ordered a committee be assigned to answer my book.**

My attention in this book is focused on the young generation who must build the Iran of tomorrow. They must know the realities about the Iran of yesterday, and not the one that has been presented in the propaganda of the regime during the past 20 years.

\* \* \*

My interview with Mr. Beerhouse Sour Seraphim in *Kayhan* of London pushed me to write a series of articles in that newspaper. The series lasted for a few years. After *Crime and Punishment*, I thought I should write something periodic about the evaluations of events to inform the readers. These writings were printed as letters to the editor. They emphasized the need and importance of strong constructive leadership to mobilize the groups scattered outside of Iran. It also discussed the necessity of a plan to rescue the country on the basis of all national and international opportunities. In spite of all the opportunities we had, we were never able to get any results due to the absence of qualified leadership. We were missing one chance after another. So in these letters that in the present social condition of the Iranian community, not one of the opposition groups in place had the credibility and legitimacy needed to single-handedly lead. And, for both these reasons, the Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, as the inheritor of the Crown and the throne sworn in on November 21, 1980 in Cairo, was accepted as the King by many Iranian nationalists.

I would like to mention that I was invited and attended these ceremonies, which were held in Qaubah Palace in Cairo, Egypt. On that day, I talked in detail to the young King about his responsibilities. He was expected in the eighties and nineties to act responsibly to the duties assigned to his job and in his swearing in ceremony that he did. It was in those days that many Persian suffered. They were being killed. Many families became mourners. Every day another damaging blow was delivered to our broken economy, which harmed and defeated our culture and international prestige. If this inheritor of our Crown and Throne, which according to our destiny, our national identity, custom and culture was selected to the throne, had accepted the responsibility at that time, as he does today, many of the disasters that happened to our people would never have occurred. There would

not have been so much blood spilled and the changes that harmed our blossoming economy would have been kept at bay.

During my twenty years in exile I have concluded that our defeat or slow down in progress was decided on one fact. Our fundamental difficulty, despite our victorious struggle for national freedom and return to a monarchy or a republican system, cause our problems to run much deeper than these simple political or economic problems. It is a chronic cancerous problem that has penetrated our nation's skin, flesh and bones since the Safavid dynasty. It has systematically gotten deeper and more organized with each passing generation. It is a religious root that was founded during the Safavid dynasty for economic and military reasons, willingly or unwillingly that spoils the very nation and country that they tried to build on it. Perhaps the best way to describe this situation is with a statement made by Dr. Ali Shariati, a famous Shiite scholar, in his book *Alavi Shiism and Safavid Shiism*:

"The stupefaction (estehmar) of the people by clergy's hand, from the blood made opium, from manhood made inferiority and suffering, from Shiism and purity made religious hypocrisy, from accepting responsibility made indifference and laziness, from understanding and creativity made copycat and imitation, from bravery made complaint and cry. Whatever it was, it wasn't belief; it was the business of belief. The sole goal of the clergy was for the person who has the fear of sin, to depend on him. Thus, in this fashion he made religion a tool for backwardness and dogma and prevention of any change, progress and new achievements. It prevented any progress and changes. And it condemned any new thing and new saying whether it was in religion or in the way of life and thought and science and society.

The consequences of this chronic illness, with an authoritarian Middle-Age style governments, (especially before the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, part of which was related to the religious leaders who were looking for power and self interest), made our social structure so unorganized that no treatment could help. We now must look for "another birth." Such a birth requires some type of miracle similar to what happened to the Christian world two centuries ago and rescued the West from the same chronic illness.

It was with this thought and intention

that, once again, I wrote another book, and called it *Another Birth* (a name taken from one of the books of famous Iranian Poet, Forough Farrokhzad). The condensed contents of the book included a selection of opinions by famous Western thinkers, such as Voltaire, Newton, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, as well as Nietzsche, Freud, Einstein, Bertrand Russel and many more — nearly 300 of them. My goal for this book was to open the eyes of Iranian society. Iranian society from Safavid till Pahlavi dynasties was a prisoner of darkness for the shopkeepers of religion. With the freedom of speech that Iranians living in exile have (in the West) we could get rid of this 200 years of unawareness and get the people acquainted with the great world intellectuals. They then would be able to freely choose, with knowledge, their future direction. The unexpected success of "Another Birth," in the Iranian community both abroad and in Iran, made it the best selling book of the past twenty years. To me, this showed how much our society needed to get out of darkness and see the light.

In this constructive life building effort, without a doubt, there are many traps and dangers for intellectuals just as it was earlier for the leaders and pioneers of today's advanced world. But, this is a risk that was worth taking in the past and is worth taking in the future. All the people who choose this road have chosen it willingly, and I was and am one of them. From the first day after the revolution that I picked up and used the pen for the enlightenment, not one day has passed where I haven't felt danger next to me.

I haven't found it necessary to write my memoirs in this series of articles. I would however, like to write about only one of my memories — one that has left a very bitter and unforgettable impact on me. It is about an unsuccessful attempt on my life. Timely warnings given to me by my friends saved me from being trapped. Another friend of mine, Kourosh Aria Menesh was not as lucky. So many years after his death, I still feel responsible.

In spite of all this, no threats or actions can stop the intellectuals of today and tomorrow. For they seek truth which is the greater and bigger path.

For, as Hafez said,

"If my heart broke, let it be a sacrifice for her drunken eyes.

If the glass of wine broke, the jar of wine is still intact" ■

## INTERVIEW WITH DR. PARVIZ KAMBIN

By: Dr. Kamshad Raiszadeh

*Dr. Parviz Kambin is a pioneer in the field of spinal surgery. He was the first to introduce the term "minimally invasive" and the first to use the endoscope in removing discs where they pinch on the spinal nerve. He has defined the anatomic landmarks for use of minimally invasive techniques, which bear his name; the "Kambin Triangle." He has paved the way for use of the endoscope for performance of spinal disc procedures by training over 300 surgeons. He has authored numerous articles and has presented his findings and techniques at meetings nationally and internationally.*

*Dr. Kambin was born in Tehran where he attended Dar-ol-Fonun High School. Upon graduating, he entered Tehran University and received his medical degree in 1956. That same year in December, Dr. Kambin came to the United States where he completed his internship and residency in Orthopedic surgery. A few months ago he retired from medical practice. The last 25 years of his practice was dedicated to the advancement of spinal surgery procedures.*



### *What made you become interested in endoscopic spinal surgery?*

I became interested in this procedure because of the post-operative complications of invasive surgery. In fact, there was a famous case that I was involved in regarding this procedure that went to the Supreme Court. I worked with a physician who was an excellent surgeon. On this particular patient, he had performed a spinal fusion in a conventional manner. Traditional spinal fusion is performed through an extensive incision, with dissection of muscles off of the spine. The patient got into trouble because an infection developed around the grafts and implants, and the grafts ended up backing up into the spinal canal. The patient became paralyzed and his kidneys were failing. He was almost dying. I became involved in this case because I was covering for the surgeon when the infection occurred. I had to re-operate on the patient and drain the infection. Of course as the judicial system would have it, a lawsuit ensued and I was named as a party in the suit. Fortunately, I was dismissed from the action, but this case, as I stated, continued right up to the State Superior Court. I think it lasted 20 years. Eventually, the physician sued

his lawyer for misrepresentation. It was a mess. So anyway, that is what made me become interested in minimally invasive spinal surgery. This case started me thinking that there must be a better way to do these procedures without opening up the patient.

The history of minimally invasive disc procedures began with the use of Chymopapain. Chymopapain is an enzyme that was used in patients in late 1964. Actually before this, researchers working on rabbits and rats discovered that by using this enzyme, the ear of the rabbit would drop. This led them to believe that Chymopapain might be useful in disc injuries because the disc was also cartilage. Thus by injecting Chymopapain into the disc, the disc would dissolve. In 1964, Chymopapain was used in the treatment of disc herniation. Soon courses were given on how to do this procedure. I attended the courses and then began using this technique on my patients. Some patients improved but others complained of severe lower back pain.

It was then that I thought that if I was able to remove the nucleus, the center of the disc, with this enzyme, why couldn't I put a small tube down to the disc and grab it with forceps and mechanically remove the disc. In the early '70s, we did the first mechanical disc

removal. This gradually evolved into the use of cannulas and the scope to assist in performance of the procedure.

### *Endoscopic surgery, for the benefit of our readers, is a less, or rather, "minimally invasive" surgical procedure, is it not? Can you explain the term minimally invasive and where it came from?*

The term minimally invasive was a term coined by two colleagues and I. Until the 1980s, no one used this expression in medical publications. I wrote a book in the 1990s on minimally invasive surgery, and soon after, people used the term when writing about eye surgery, gynecologic surgery, etc.

### *How did you go about developing the endoscopic technique?*

As I stated, I began with using Chymopapain to dissolve the disc. Since we noted that many of the patients were experiencing severe back pain after this procedure, we decided to pursue mechanical disc removal techniques. Of course, no instruments were available at the time. We started by using large bore needles called Craig needles, but found

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that we could not remove enough disc through them. We increased the diameter of the canola to 5mm. We developed forceps that could reach up and grab the disc. We were still not getting the results we desired.

In the late 1980's we began to do some anatomic studies at the University of Pennsylvania. As a result of this research, I decided where the instruments should be placed for this procedure. I developed the triangular working zone, which is a "safe" zone between the neural structures. We began to get closer to the spinal canal. Next we had to develop a scope that was small enough to use in this area; we used a small diameter arthroscopy to allow us to see what we were doing. In the early stages, we used the scope to look inside of the disc, and then we had to remove the scope to get the forceps in, to blindly remove the disc. Next came the stage of developing a working channel scope so that we could see what we were doing. We were then able to look into the disc while removing the disc herniation.

I must give credit to other surgeons, Hijikata from Japan and Prof. Schreiber in Europe, who also used canulas to approach the disc. Shreiber used a scope to look inside the disc. Literature, I believe, has given me the credit for using the scope to visualize the neural structures and the area around the spinal canal.

With new advancements, today pretty much anything that was accomplished invasively can now be done arthroscopically. Fusion and instrumentation also have been developed, but it will take some time for both patients and physicians to warm up to this technique.

***Medicine in general, and spinal surgery in particular, is known for having much advancement. Often, however, there is a very fast growth in a technology, and an equally fast withdrawal. You have been methodical about your progress with endoscopic surgery, but many other fads have come and gone. How has endoscopic surgery not fallen by the wayside?***

The speed in which a procedure is introduced should be calculated. It can-

not go into the hands of everyone. When you develop a technique, it is important that you remain in control, and I did. I was the one who decided who would have the ability to purchase and sell the instruments. You had to attend a two-day course with me where I made the determination of your capability and whether or not you could receive the instrument. I would see your hands and how they worked.

If you left these decisions to the manufacturer, they would sell it to anyone willing to buy it and if it failed, so what? An example of this 'so what' attitude has been seen in other medical equipment such as cages, screws, etc. Fortunately, this has caused the manufacturers to become a bit more careful of whom they sell the equipment to. The bottom line, however is always to remember that in anything you do in life, if your name is

**Anytime you bring something new into the field of medicine or for that matter in any field, you will meet resistance. In order to overcome this resistance, you must continually talk about your new techniques, and publish articles to educate your colleagues and the public.**



going to be on it, you must always remain in control.

***But isn't the distribution of the instrument and the use of the technology what will promote it or hinder it?***

The shortfall, maybe, of how I was doing it was that it would take a long time for adoption. Now there are those who are pushing endoscopic surgery more than I ever did. I guess it is a good balance ... but I would stress that it is important to follow principles.

***What do you believe to be the cause of delay in accepting these new techniques in comparison to others?***

I believe that there are several reasons. Anytime you bring something new into the field of medicine or for that mat-

ter in any field, you will meet resistance. In order to overcome this resistance, you must continually talk about your new techniques, and publish articles to educate your colleagues and the public. Also remember that people get used to doing a procedure and become comfortable. The laminectomy, for instance, is a very uncomplicated procedure to perform, and many can do it and usually do it in a very quick and effective manner. With the best of techniques, however, there are significant problems with neural scarring and chronic pain.

On the other hand, using the scope takes time and practice. You really have to know what you are doing. People do not want to take that kind of time. It is the same as knee arthroscopy. For the longest time, people stated that they could do a faster job through the open procedure rather than using the scope.

We now know that we get far better results with knee arthroscopy than the open procedure.

Eventually, just like the knee, we were able to show that the morbidity and complications of an open spinal disc procedure exceeded those when the scope was used. Basically, you can just see more with the scope than you can with the naked eye.

I also think that the procedure did not take off fast because of the fear of being sued. Surgeons felt that until the procedure was more accepted, other surgeons would not support them if something went wrong and litigation ensued.

And finally, which is more unfortunate, is that people were reluctant to do the procedure for economic reasons. Scope procedures do not pay as well as open procedures. I can guarantee you that if payments were equal, that endoscopic discectomy would be the accepted procedure.





Dr. Kambin with members of Persian Heritage Editorial Board, Shirin and Dr. Kamshad Raiszadeh

***If we can now, I would like to get a bit more personal with you. Describe your transition to the United States.***

During my training, I met and married a wonderful woman and have three children, all grown. One is a doctor, one a political science professor, and one a computer whiz. I am retired. I still travel around the world and lecture. I still teach at Hahneman Medical School in Philadelphia and still do research with working on the artificial disc.

***You married an American girl. Did you encounter any cultural differences?***

You know, I really believe that there is not much difference in people regardless of where they are from. There is good and bad in all societies, whether it is American, Iranian, etc. We have a wonderful and harmonious marriage. I am, however, very proud of my Persian background, and of course I am sure that certain Persian characteristics remain in me.

***Please describe what you think remains in you from your Persian Heritage.***

Persians are very loving and caring people. Families are close and that has rubbed off in my family and practice of medicine. I am very close to my patients. In fact, I see my patients as family members. I never met any resistance in the United States because of

my Persian heritage. Of course I cannot deny that some have been the subject of discrimination, but it has never applied to me. And if I had the chance to do it all over again, I would do it the same way.

***Isn't it difficult to tell a patient, whom you say that you see as a family member, that you will be performing a new or exploratory surgery on them?***

This makes it easier. I think that this

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closeness between patient and doctor is seriously lacking in this country. There is a distance set up by either the patient and/or the doctor. This distance may create a resistance on the part of the patient to do a procedure. You as a physician must be ready to explain everything to your patient – you must have patience for your patient as well as with your surgical procedure. You have to be close enough to tell your patient what you are

going to do, that there may be complications. While developing these new techniques, I have met no resistance due to being close with the patients.

***What advice do you have for the individual who is seeking to develop a new procedure, especially in this litigious society?***

I strongly believe that you should try to do whatever you want. Don't be afraid of failure – but have a well thought out plan. Just remember if you do not try, you will never get ahead. This is my general feeling. Now in the field of medicine, one must be a little more careful. Most hospitals now have an internal review board that oversees new procedures to avoid injury. You must also do your homework, meaning lab work and anatomy. You just cannot and should not expect to try out your idea on a patient without some sort of research. You can also try to get FDA approval.

Earlier we touched the topic of economics in medicine and the importance of the creation of the relationship with your patients. How do you balance these elements when the medical profession seems either to expect or require you to produce volume?

The balance between economics and ethics is prevalent in all professions. You



must learn to weigh the importance of what you are doing with the economics. If you really do believe in what you are doing and do not like the rules that are dictated to you, you may be forced to put your own money into the research to reach your goal. I did. But today, there is certainly money out there for research from the private sector to the corporation and institutions. I should also add that while this funding exists, it does not come easy.

You must have a well-documented and researched presentation.

***How do you keep such a positive attitude about medicine when so many of us are disillusioned by the profession?***

I think that I learned this from my family – specifically my mother, and my culture. I believe that the direction of litigation in medicine in this country will change and ease the burden on physicians. But, I also believe that you should never allow the fear of being sued to stop you from doing what you want. You and your conscience have the final say. You must think of the good you do and weigh it against the bad. Believe me you will see that if you are practicing solid medicine the good in fact will prevail.

***So what is your philosophy?***

To do good, to do my best, to help my patients. As in every aspect of life, we will have ups and downs. You must remember everyday to find something that is rewarding, for it gives you a reason to go on.

***Is there a legacy you would like to leave?***

Of course! I would like to be remembered for my work in minimally invasive surgery as the one who planted the seed for endoscopic surgery. I hope that my work in this field will continue to stimulate more research. We have already published a diagnostic arthroscopy book. We are also investigating the true source of pain... and of course, I would like to be remembered as a "nice guy" who thought about how he could help his patients.

***Besides the practice of medicine and research, you also have a passion for teaching. What inspired you to teach?***

I'm not really sure, perhaps my Persian background. There is a group of Persians who believe a portion of the wealth gained by the student should go back to the hands of those who taught them. I have always enjoyed teaching and love

being around students. They are an inspiration. Not only do you teach them, you learn from them. Without having them around, I believe we become stagnant because when one deals with the same issues all of the time, it is usually a dead end result. Students keep you on your toes and their questions will force you to do more research before providing them with an answer.

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***What personal characteristics that you learned have been the most valuable in helping you achieve your goals?***

Honesty. Honesty with yourself, your patients, your colleagues. I needed to tell the truth about the procedure that I was going to do with the patient ... the complications. Also, operate only when necessary, if you would do it to yourself or a member of your family, then you will have good results. Also remove the conflict of interest.

***With all of your achievements and success, how do you maintain a sense of "ground"? How do you avoid your ego from taking over?***

Again honesty and I add to this gratitude. I will explain...currently I have about 12-14 US patents with companies. Part of the deal with these companies was my receipt of royalties from sales of instruments, books, etc. I never took a penny of the proceeds for myself. I established a fund to use the money for further research, and the rest I donated to Hahnemann University, where I was honored with the chair of Spinal Surgery. I needed to show the world that I was not developing these instruments for profit but rather to improve the services

to our patients. Also, I wanted to convince people that they should not purchase these instruments or do these procedures just because I said they were good, but because there is value in this procedure.

I wanted people to know what Parviz thought about a procedure and that money was not doing the talking. I therefore set up a foundation called the



Kambin Spine Foundation to fund additional work of this kind.

***Your greatest triumph?***

I helped a lot of people.

\* \* \*

***That concluded our interview with Dr. Kambin. But I would also like to mention that he was heard giving violin concerts on Tehran radio during his high school days at Dar-ol-Fonun. I found Dr. Kambin to be a humble man who spoke of his accomplishments matter-of-factly. He had the same attitude about his ethics, which I sensed were far from ordinary or matter-of-fact. He is a man who does not think of limitations, only opportunities. He spoke of spine surgery and its advancement as if he has his whole career yet ahead of him. I realized that this quality was probably the same force that allowed him to forge his new path, on his terms.***

\* The interviewer, Dr. Kamshad Raiszadeh, is a member of the Editorial Board of Persian Heritage and practices spinal surgery in San Diego, California.