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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

I woke up on September 11, to a beautiful day. The sun was shining, and there was not one cloud in the sky. The leaves were still. Thinking back, it was a very uncanny beautiful morning. As I made my way to the hospital to see my patients, a variety of thoughts occupied my mind. I passed a jogger and I thought about how behind I was in my training for this year's New York City Marathon. I saw a woman walking her baby and thought about my daughter and granddaughter who would be visiting in a few weeks. After parking the car I looked up into the sky. It was still blue and the leaves on the trees showed signs of autumn. Making my way up the stairs, I remember glancing over at the magnificent New York skyline. Little did I know that within a very short period of time the world, my world was about to change forever.

While the thoughts in my mind were joyful in nature up in the sky the passengers and crews of four commercial airlines, whose days also began with joy, were now looking into the eyes of a great evil. Their plans of the day had already taken a drastic change: their lives and innocent victims making their way to work at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were soon to end.

Shortly after I saw my patients, I realized that I still had time before I had to be at my office. It was about 8:40 A.M. I used the time by going to the record room and complete some charts. Within a few moments a colleague of mine tapped me on the shoulder and asked me if I heard about the plane that just flew into the World Trade Center. I said no, but shuttered. I thought to myself, bad weather? No, it was a beautiful morning! I quickly rushed to the next room where there was a television. I watched the burning tower with a number of people and then before our eyes a second plane flew into the second tower. Everyone in the room screamed and yet the room was quiet. We were stunned and shaken. It was incomprehensible.

After some time, when I regained enough composure and could feel my legs I headed for the office. I glanced once again over to the skyline of New York. The beautiful blue sky was now being covered by a grey smokey blanket of death. It was becoming a reality, a reality that I wanted to discard.

When I entered the office the patients and my employees were in the waiting room watching the television. They looked up at me for an answer and for comfort, but I had no words. We simply watched. Another employee came in and informed us that another plane had crashed into the Pentagon and then a news flash reported the crash of another flight in Pennsylvania. In record time the journalists were attributing these acts to Osama bin Laden, Afghanistan, Palestine and other Middle Eastern groups. The words "Middle East" again made my knees buckle and sparked reactions from my patients and employees. Were they still looking at me as a citizen, who, like them, was grieving, or did they see me as one of the terrorists?

One of my patients turned to me and asked me if I still had family in Iran. I told her that they are there along with 70 million innocent other Iranians. She suggested that I get them out. When I asked her why she stated that she was afraid the United States may have a knee jerk reaction to these events and begin to bomb the Middle East including Iran. She was fairly certain that these events were sure to wake up old hatreds against Iran over the hostage situation in 1979. I tried to calm my nerves, this was not something that I wanted to hear, but I knew that there might be some truth in what she had to say. I hoped that it would not become a reality.

Confusion was still the mood of the moment but this was out powered by our hope — the hope that the number of lives lost would be minimal. The tower then tumbled and with it went some of our hope. And then the second tower tumbled and there went some more of our hope. And then there was silence and that took away most of the hope remaining hope that anyone would make it out alive, sadly very few did.

Over the next several days we remained glued to our television sets and radios



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AMIR NADERI:

IMAGES BITTER AND SWEET

(Iranian Period
1971-1986)

Bahman Maghsoudlou

Iranian film director and writer Amir Naderi's rise to prominence has not only provided him with the recognition that his powerful cinema richly deserves, but it has also helped shed light for world audiences on an almost "closed society." His success has helped open new frontiers for other Iranian filmmakers inside and outside Iran.

Naderi is one of the major Iranian filmmakers whose work and contributions (along with a few others) to Iranian cinema in the '70s created the magnificent fundamental basis that blossomed and flourished in the '80s and has established itself in the '90s as one of the most realistic, humanistic and poetic cinemas to have emerged on the world scene.

Of the eleven feature films that Naderi has written and directed in Iran between 1971 and 1986 (he left Iran for New York in 1986), seven of them have been selected to compete in more than thirty international film festivals. Among the honors he has received: two Grand Prizes (one for *Davandeh* (*The Runner*) and one for *Ab, Bad, Khak* (*Water, Wind, Sand*); a First leading Actor prize, won by Behruz Vosoughi, the lead in *Tangsir*; a Golden Plaque for *Entezar* (*Waiting*) and a Gold Medal Special Jury Award for *Marsiyyeh* (*An Elegy*). He has been honored at the Pesaro Film Festival (1990) where a retrospective was presented of nine of his films. Two years later in 1992 the La Rochelle Film Festival in France had another "Homage to Naderi."

A. GENERAL BACKGROUND

Naderi was born in 1945 on the port city of Abadan, which is situated on a delta where the Shatt-ol-Arab waterway runs in to the Persian Gulf. The city surrounds the world's largest oil refinery.

When he was five-years-old, Naderi was orphaned by the death of his mother. He has very few memories of his mother and does not remember his father at all. Left a young street urchin struggling to survive in an impoverished society, Naderi began to tap his well of creativity by finding a variety of ways to support himself. He sold ice water to passersby, was a shoeshine boy and even gathered and sold empty beer bottles from the refuse dumped into the sea by passing ships.

In his early teens, Naderi left Abadan and traveled to the Iranian capital city of Tehran where he managed to obtain work as a still photographer on movie sets — a job that he performed into his early twenties. He loved the cinema and quickly understood that it was where he belonged.

When he was twenty-five, Naderi directed his first film, *Khoda Hafez, Rafiq* (*Goodbye, Friend*), and a year later made his second film, *Tangna* (*Impasse*). These two films were immediately recognized as the emergence of a major new talent in the world of Iranian cinema.

Goodbye, Friend reflects the influence of gangster movies such as *Rififi*, (1954) and *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950), and the works of directors such as Jules Dassin, Jean-Pierre Melville and Don Siegel. It tells the story of three young friends, Jalal, Naser and Khosrow, who rob a jewelry store. After the robbery, greed, betrayal and revenge turn them into mortal enemies. Naderi's talent for irony is revealed at this early point in his career, as in the final shot of the film where we see the suitcase of stolen loot abandoned in an overhead luggage rack in a train compartment, observed only by an innocent boy.

In *Impasse*, Naderi further develops the character of Khosrow, the best of the three friends from *Goodbye, Friend*. Khosrow unwittingly kills someone and must raise three hundred dollars to escape the city with his family. He appeals for money to friends, acquaintances and, as tension and desperation build, to anyone and everyone he can think of who might help him. In the end, his failure to raise the money costs him his life. This grim, unsentimental look at urban life, its atmosphere and complex relationships, with genuine directorial skill, immediately established Naderi as a major emerging talent.

In 1973 Naderi wrote and directed two more films: *Tangsir* and *Harmonica*. *Tangsir*, an epic drama, was his first color, cinematograph film. In creating the film, Naderi successfully combined the twelve-page short story of Zar Mohammed by Rasool Parvizi and *Tangsir*, a two hundred-page novel by Sadeq Chubak, a prominent Iranian novelist. Although the movie was made in the framework of Iran's popular commercial cinema, thematically and stylistically it is a powerful work. When you compare the film to the book, Naderi's contributions become obvious. He delivers the story with artistic integrity and an assured sense of timing.

On the set of *Tangsir*, in the port city of Bushehr, in the landscapes of his childhood Naderi found a way to personalize his work by relating incidents from his own life. Here Naderi comes into his own, for in depicting the frustration and repression that culminates in the brutal act of vengeance, he leaves the influences of Hollywood behind and finds his own unique expression of justice in the world of his childhood.

Tangsir's plot pivots on the practice, common in small towns, of Iranian peasants placing their meager savings with a consortium of men from the local wealthy, ruling class for investment. They are supposed to receive an occasional interest payment and may withdraw their money at any time. However when Zar Mohammed respectfully requests the return of his life savings from Bushehr's four prominent men — the mayor, the judge, the police chief and the leading merchant — they claim that his money was lost in an unfortunate trade. Zar Mohammed insists and pleads for the return of his money, but they laugh at him and throw him out. Since the men represent the law of the town, the only recourse available to Zar Mohammed is personal vengeance. In a masterful stroke, though, Naderi transforms the act of personal revenge into a universal expression of mass revenge. Selected for the International Delhi Film Festival in India in 1974, *Tangsir's* leading man, Behruz Vosoughi, received the Best Leading Actor award.

The film *Harmonica* (produced by the film center of the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults [IDCYA]) is the beginning of his departure from commercial cinema. Based on his own experience the film cleverly deals with a different type of suffering and a collective justice. It depicts the vulnerability to cruelty and exploitation that poverty brings — and in the end how a just society can collectively deal with it wisely.

After making four conventional films, particularly the two made back to back in 1973, *Tangsir* and *Harmonica*, two major factors affected Naderi's cinema. Hard times behind the scenes while making *Tangsir* caused his personal vision to become considerably darker in *Marsiyeh* and the editing of *Harmonica* by Sohrab Shahid Saless, another Iranian icon, encouraged Naderi to cut his ties to commercial cinema and leave behind concerns about his films' performance at the box office. He began to experiment artistically with poetic expression using a minimal approach.

The collaboration between the Naderi and Shahid Saless would affect the work of both men. This is probably due to the fact

Amir Naderi's Filmography

- 1971 Khoda Hafez, Rafiq (Goodbye, Friend)
 1972 Tangna (Impasse)
 1973 *Tangsir* Winner, Best Actor Award, New Delhi Film Festival, 1975.
 1973 Saz Dahani (Harmonica)
 1974 *Entezar (Waiting)* Winner, Jury Award, Meeting of Film and Youth Festival at Cannes, 1975; winner, Golden Plaque, Virgin Islands, 1975.
 1975 *Marsiyeh (Elegy)* Released in 1978. Winner, Special Jury Prize, San Remo Film Festival, Italy, 1978.
 1978 Sakht-e Iran, Sakht-e America (Made in Iran, Made in America)
 1979 *Barandeh (The Winner)* Short film that later served as the basis for *The Runner*. Not released.
 1980 *Josteju (The Search)* Documentary for Islamic Republic Radio & Television (IRTV) about missing persons before and after the Islamic Revolution.
 1981 *Josteju 2 (The Search 2)* Docu-drama about the Iran-Iraq war.
 1985 *Davandeh (The Runner)* Winner, Grand Prix, Tri-Continental Film Festival, Nantes, 1985. Official selection at festivals in Venice, London, Sydney, San Francisco, Istanbul, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Vancouver, Toronto and many others.
 1986 *Ab, Bad, Khak (Water, Wind, Sand)* Winner, Grand Prix, Tri-Continental Film Festival, Nantes, 1989. Released by the Iranian Govt. in 1989 and shown at film festivals in Locarno, Montreal, Toronto, Sydney and New Directors/New Films series at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
 1993 *Manhattan by Numbers* Official selection of New Directors/New Films, New York and international festivals in Venice, Toronto, Montreal, San Sebastian (competition), London, Houston, Cairo, India, Hong Kong and many more.
 1997 *A, B, C ... Manhattan*, Official selection of Cannes, uncertain regards and the Sundance Film Festival, USA.

Retrospectives

- 1990 Retrospective of Naderi films at Pesaro Film Festival, Italy.
 1992 "Homage to Naderi." La Rochelle Film Festival, France.
 2001 The Films of Amir Naderi, Walter Reade Theater, Film Society of Lincoln Center, New York

that they were the same age, had both experienced a tough childhood and had much in common including: sensitivity, untamed attitudes, individualism, resistance to compromise, and an energy filled with pessimism. The anti-story, anti-drama and unsentimental cinema of Saless caused Naderi to move beyond his early Hollywood-influenced cinema. This new independence, coupled with his great instinct and talent, refocused his directorial direction on color, form, framing and visual elements (*Waiting*, *The Runner* and *Water, Wind, Sand*). Similarly *Harmonica* had an effect on its editor. As for Shahid Saless, he left Iran for good the following year to begin making films in Germany. In the film *Coming of Age* (1976), he employed a bicycle as the object of a young boy's obsession as much as Naderi used a musical instrument in *Harmonica*.

Entezar (*Waiting*) (also produced by IDCYA) is a film almost totally without dialogue that romantically conveys experiences from Naderi's own childhood. Young, sensitive Amiro appears at the home of a rich neighbor. Through a crack in a door,

a beautiful pair of woman's hands offers him a portion of ice in a crystal bowl. Slowly, the boy develops an emotional attachment to the beautiful hands that borders upon obsession. In the final scene he goes to the door expecting to see the beautiful hands of the mystery woman, only to be offered a bowl of ice by hands that are old and gnarled. The daring *Waiting* was hailed by critics as one of the most visually striking films in the history of Iranian cinema. It received the

Grand Prix at the 11th International Meeting of Film and Youth at the 1975 Cannes Film Festival and the Golden Plaque at the Virgin Islands Festival the same year.

Naderi's next film, *Marsiye* (*Elegy*), was a contrast to *Waiting* — a plunge into bitter realism — a personal vision of his own society and its oppressive economic structure. The film was suppressed for political reasons, until 1977, a year before the Iranian Revolution. In 1977 it was shown at the San Remo Film Festival and received a gold Special Jury Award.

In 1975, Naderi received an offer to go to New York to direct *Sakht-e Iran, Sakht-e America* (*Made in Iran, Made in America*), a film about a boxer caught in a web of Mafia intrigue. Naderi had doubts about the undertaking, but he decided not to pass up the opportunity to go to the United States and direct a film in New York. He believed the chance to try and extend himself was well worth the effort. While it was a technically enriching learning experience for Naderi, he was out of his element. The film, released during the political turmoil of Iran's revolution, received little attention.

Returning to Iran, Naderi made two semi-documentary films for Islamic Republic Radio and Television (IRTV), *Josteju* (*The Search*) and *Josteju 2* (*The Search 2*). The first is about a missing person before and after the revolution (it was shown at the Nantes Film Festival); the second deals with the Iran-Iraq war.

Both films were banned by the Iranian government. Ironically, *Search Two* is an anti-war film.

From 1981 to 1984, Naderi experienced the greatest evolution in his style as a filmmaker in creating his masterpiece, *Davandeh* (*The Runner*). The film powerfully blends an exciting sense of visual dynamics with the philosophical themes of resistance, power and self-reliance in depicting a homeless boy's struggle for survival in an Iranian town (one not unlike Naderi's birth place).

The Runner was the first post-revolutionary film to come out of Iran and was a true turning point for Iranian Cinema after the Revolution. It was shown on the last day of the Venice Film Festival, where it received both critical and popular acclaim. It later shared the Grand Prix of the Tri-Continents Film Festival at Nantes and has been selected for such prestigious festivals as those in London, Tokyo, Hong Kong, San Francisco and Sydney. Its success at festivals prompted its commercial release in England, France, Germany, Japan and the United States.

Like *The Runner*, his next film *Water, Wind, Sand* is stylistically powerful and texturally rich. In approximately seventy, almost dialogue-less minutes, Naderi seeks to bridge the gap between realism and fantasy as young Amiro tries to survive the horror of almost certain death in an unrelenting, unending desert devoid of food and water. From the harsh elements and the inevitability of his own death, Amiro escapes into a dream world where he miracu-



ously digs into the sand and discovers life-saving water.

To create a harsh world of blowing sand and drought ending with a flood of water and life, Naderi brings to bear all of his skills as a still photographer and visual artist.

One of his finest moments of mastery is found in the breathtaking shot of the desert that Naderi so skillfully framed and lit that one immediately is reminded of photographs of the surface of the moon. And at once, the audience sees and understands the total hopelessness of Amiro's situation. In the final sequence Naderi frames a shot containing only a hammer, a pair of worn shoes and a small mound of sand. The camera hangs on the scene for a moment which has the beauty of a painting by Dutch Master, before, from off-camera, sand flies into the scene as Amiro escapes into a dream world where he digs into the sand and miraculously discovers an ocean flowing underneath. In the attempt to make the illusionary world believably real, Naderi succeeds, at the very least, to make it a believable dream.

When it was finally released by the government in 1988, *Water, Wind, Sand* was selected to be shown at the Fajr Film Festival in Tehran. In 1989 the first international screening of *Water, Wind, Sand* was at the Locarno Film Festival with almost eight thousand spectators attending. Unfortunately it was shown out of competition, a condition set by Iran before they would

send the film. Later however they changed their minds and allowed the film to be shown in competition whereupon it received the Grand Prix at Tri-Continental Festival at Nantes (1989) and was shown at prestigious festivals in Montreal, New York (New Directors/New Films), San Francisco and many more.

Although several of Naderi's films have been banned by the Iranian government, Naderi is not a political filmmaker. Any political statement is derived from his strong conscience, which does not allow him to compromise what he knows to be the truth of life in his native land. Hence, through his unique visionary style, he conveys his personal attitude toward injustice, misery and suppression — not just that of the society in which he grew up and from which he escaped, but of all humankind who live in such degrading circumstances.

B. INSIGHTS INTO NADERI'S FILMS

After viewing a Naderi film, it is impossible to believe that the film was made by a man who never got beyond the Fifth Grade. Naderi had to leave school at the age of twelve to go out onto the streets to support himself from day to day. As he sat shining other peoples' shoes, he had a lot of time to think about his life. He came to the realization — one far wiser than his years — that without knowledge and learning, he would always be tied to the ground and never be able to soar. So Amir Naderi began educating himself. He read every important novel he could find, short stories, anything that would add to his knowledge and understanding — he even translated from the Persian. He found a home in literature and through a love of art, taught himself about paintings. It was Naderi's personal understanding of the power of learning, of literacy that found expression in some of the most powerfully emotional scenes in *The Runner*, as Amiro comes to the realization that the strongest weapon he can have against the treadmill of poverty is literacy and education.

It is interesting, psychologically, to note how Naderi's early characters reflected his own early life in his dead-end situations devoid of hope; but just as his life changed, so did the lives of his characters: they became more optimistic, they found hope and they believed that their goals were attainable — and they were, if only in their dreams.

Naderi's cinema, emphasizing the personal struggles for survival of men, leaves little or no place for women. If women do have any presence, they are minor characters with no real role to play and no real impact on the story. Their function is either sexual (*Khoda Hafez Rafiq, Tangna, Tangsir*) or relegated to the role of mother or aunt. These two archetypes reach their peak of representation in the same film, *Waiting*. This attitude towards women likely comes from the fact that Naderi lost his mother very early in life and raised himself in the midst of a rough society without the nurturing influence of a caring female figure.

Naderi's films are almost plotless, like Michelangelo Antonioni's. He works with a minimum of events and characters in relation to an environment that shapes the narrative. His narratives are lean, direct, emotional, but not manipulative. Unlike Antonioni, who focuses on middle-class women, the central figure in Naderi's films is a poverty-stricken young man, or a boy on the verge of manhood struggling with survival in a ruthless, brutal world of economic and emotional deprivation.

Naderi's cinema is honest like John Ford's, poetic like Robert Flaherty's, masculine like Howard Hawks', mysterious as Alfred Hitchcock's, powerful as Orson Welles', humanistic like Jean Renoir's, bitter and realistic like Vittorio De Sica's and some-

times as dark and surrealistic as Luis Buñuel's.

His vision runs from dark pessimism in his early films (*Goodbye, Friend, Tangna and Elegy*) to bright optimism in his last films (*The Runner and Water, Wind, Sand*). In contrast to the heroes of his early films, in his later films, Naderi's heroes are shaped in a more idealistic mode. He endows them with the most positive human virtues: courage, honesty, fairness, persistency. They do not compromise their convictions; material goods and worldly flesh cannot seduce them; no force can break their will. They are not weak. In their harsh world, when they are betrayed, when their trust is violated, personal vengeance is required.

His oeuvre is a rich exploration of human concerns: friendship and betrayal (*Goodbye, Friend*); need and trust (*Impasse*); justice (*Tangsir*); exploitation (*Harmonica*); coming of age (*Waiting*); poverty and misery (*Elegy*); discovery and exploration of truth (*The Search*); devastation of war (*The Search 2*); the power of resistance and self-education to surmount life's most difficult obstacles (*The Runner*); and perseverance (*Water, Wind, Sand*).

Stylistically, Naderi uses the camera as restless eyes. It moves swiftly left and right; now, it pauses to observe something of significance, then, swiftly moves on to unfold its story, all adding to the realism and excitement of his work. Amir Naderi brings to bear the force of the experiences and observations of his youth. He masterfully depicts the dark, stark reality of a repressed and impoverished society. He hails the courage and strength (and sometimes the weakness) of those who struggle for survival and yet are able to retain their human dignity and personal integrity. Despite the horror and frustration in the struggle against overwhelming odds, Naderi's canvases are always filled with the sensitivity, vulnerability and poetic grace that endow the human spirit. ■

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Art Review

NIKZAD NODJOURI'S PAINTINGS

Artist Nicky Nodjoumi's exhibition in the reputable Stefan Stux Gallery, New York, NY, includes paintings spanning from 1998 until the present. Nodjoumi continues to paint in the style that emerged in his 1999 solo show at Pierogi 2000. However, his works at Stefan Stux, which were on view from October 11 through November 10, 2001, successfully takes his bleak, sobering style to the next level.

Nodjoumi's skillful manipulated composition depicts figures engaged in absurd, desperate, or in some cases frightening acts. In *A Distance Between* two suit-clad men are purposely and absurdly laying a coiled string in the middle of the desert. In *Falling Glass*, a well-dressed man is engaged in a futile attempt to reach for a drink that is both beyond his reach and falling off of the table, to be shattered. Other works are more overtly upsetting, such as his *Man of God*, which depicts an armed Muslim cleric standing on a glass cage, which holds a man on all fours in western dress.

Nodjoumi forces his viewers to confront his difficult subject matter by suspending his figures in desert scapes or other empty spaces. By isolating his figures in space, the artist highlights the absurd and disturbing acts of his subjects and in the cage of his desert scapes, allows his viewers to witness acts that otherwise go unseen and unheard. This technique also creates a sense of timelessness, universality and perpetuity of human struggle and desperation.

But if Nodjoumi's subject matter is challenging and confrontational, his painting style is muted earthy and literally toned down by his use of a limited color palette. Nodjoumi's lovely use of tonal variations of greens, grays, blues and sepias are also reminiscent of frescoes and newspaper photographs.

Nodjoumi's style also bears a relationship to contemporary artists like William Kentridge as well as several New York 80's artists. Like Kentridge, Nodjoumi often depicts male subjects clad in business suits, embodying the quintessential bureaucrat or corporate executive. In Nodjoumi's work, the suit also takes on the layer of meaning of the western man. But Nodjoumi depicts another politically -charged power suit: that of the robes and turbans of the Muslim theocrat. His works on paper depicting these symbols are painful indictments of the political realness of Iran. Thus, whole Nodjoumi is in many ways a western artist, forsaking the color palette of the Persian sensibility- his work bears the soul and mark of an Iranian experience.

The exhibition opened one month after the World trade center attack in the Chelsea gallery Project Room, which overlooks lower Manhattan. Viewing Nodjoumi's works in this context underscores the universality of his paintings. One cannot help but sense an eerie relevance to the current political landscape. As much as we would like to forget and escape, Nodjoumi reminds us of a world where there is no escape.

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In the summer of 2001, the Ancient Near Eastern division of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City invited me to offer the keynote lecture at a celebration to be held 20th September for friends of the museum, in celebration of the ancient Iranian feast of Mithrakana, revived by modern Iranians as *Jashn-e Mehregan*. Like all the Zoroastrian holidays, it is a joyous occasion; and it features the fruits of autumn and the hope of new life. Little did we know as we were planning the event that the evil terrorist attack on the United States of September 11th would plunge New York literally into darkness, the smoke of six thousand murdered innocents at the World Trade Center, and into mourning of a depth, intensity, and scale without precedent in the history of the City. But the Curators, Drs. Cruz and Wilder, determined to go ahead with the program, to show the world that criminal fanatics cannot frighten lovers of the arts or dim the light of learning. Many trains and buses after a dawn departure from Boston, I reached the Museum not long before the start of what turned out to be a charming and delightful evening that soothed and nourished all of us, including the Ambassador of Iran to the United Nations, His Excellence Mehdi Tabeshian; my old friend head of department at Columbia, Prof. Ehsan Yarshater; and many other distinguished guests (my mother in particular!).

It is a great pleasure to share the remarks I offered in my lecture with my brothers and sisters, the people of Iran. The lecture that follows was written in the days that followed September 11th.

This paper is about how the Zoroastrian divinity named Mithra, modern Persian Mehr, who has a distinct set of characteristics, came to be Mithras, the chief god of an important Roman mystery religion, many of whose aspects are not attested in the Zoroastrian context. I propose to find the missing link in the living epic literature of Armenia, which in the period of the Arsacid (Persian: Ashkanian) dynasty was precisely the Western Iranian region closest to the Roman domains. Then I consider a surprising and significant survival of Mithraic art and symbolism today.

Roman literary critics appreciated Homer for starting his narrative of the Trojan War halfway through, "in the middle of the action." Following his example, let's begin our investigation of Mithra at a state dinner at Rome during the reign of the Emperor Nero.

1. In medias res.

The Armenian Arsacid king Tiridates was arriving to receive his crown from Nero, and the Romans, jaded by dazzling displays, were still impressed. For a century they had been

waging intermittent war against the only other superpower of the known world, an Eastern empire whose horsemen, feigning retreat, could twist completely around at full gallop to deliver a salvo of parting shots; whose veiled Zoroastrian priests, called Magi (Persian: *mohadan*), clothed in white, prayed before sacred fires and were reputed to work such miracles that their name gave the West a new word, "magic." Though these Parthians, and their Arsacid royal house, came from what are now the countries of Central Asia, they ruled where their cousins, the Achaemenian Persian great kings, had held sway before Alexander.

The Parthian Empire lay athwart the Silk Road. Its fabrics and carpets, its domed buildings, even the fruits and herbs of its cooking the Romans called the chicken "the Parthian bird" would be familiar to an Iranian today. The Parthians wore felt hats, boots and trousers which are more like the present-day garb of an Iranian villager, or a Westerner for that matter, than the Roman toga. (Those lucky enough to have visited the Iran Bastan museum in Tehran recently will recall the "Salt Man" of Zanjan, who wears this Parthian clothing.)

Armenia, whose ruler had just come to Rome, overland, so as not to pollute the waters holy to the Zoroastrian divinity Anahita, was a vast and already ancient land in the Transcaucasus and Eastern Anatolia, was the westernmost princely appanage of the Arsacids. Tacitus remarked metaphorically that its main river, the Araxes, allows no bridges; as if to echo the point, Virgil placed the river at the rim of the shield of his hero, Aeneas, delimiting the Roman Empire. But if Rome was not to dominate Armenia as it did Carthage, or Judaea, the new terms of detente specified at least that Nero was to place the crown on the head of Armenia's new king Tiridates, the brother of Vologases, great king of the Parthian Arsacids.

Tiridates came with thousands of retainers and unbelievable wealth, the opulent tapestries included blue silks spangled with stars (like the corner of the American flag), and there were feasts at which Tiridates introduced his host into "Magian mysteries." Then the coronation, at which Tiridates declared he would serve Nero "as I do Mithras." Who is Mithras? It is probably best to assume Nero knew. But what can we know?

2. The beginnings

The hypothetical reconstruction of the Proto Indo-European language from whose dialects languages as diverse as English and Persian spring, allows us to derive the name that is attested as Mithra in the Avestan tongue of the Zoroastrian scriptures, and as Mitra in the Vedas of India, from a base *mei*, meaning "association." The early Indo-Europeans, and the Indo-Iranians in particular, tended to personify mental states and qualities. In the *Gathas*, the hymns recited by the great Iranian prophet Zarathustra, English Zoroaster, the word *mithra* appears as a common noun meaning "covenant." In Yasht 10, a Zoroastrian hymn addressed specifically to a personified supernatural being named Mithra and preserved in a form of Avestan somewhat more recent than that of the Prophet, Mithra is the guardian and witness of agreements between men, a judge of the living and the dead: he sweeps his mace thrice daily over

the maw of hell to ensure that the condemned receive no more than their just punishment. After death the human soul is met by a triumvirate consisting of Mithra, Rashnu ("Justice"), and Sraosha ("Hearkening": this divinity survives in modern Iranian belief as Soroush, a name of the archangel Gabriel).

On earth, Mithra beholds all things as well, even as the Sun sees, he has ten thousand eyes (Avestan: *baevarechashman*) that observe our deeds. At the beginning of time, Mithra was the witness and mediator when God, whom Zoroastrians call Ahura Mazda, the Lord Wisdom, agreed with the destructive spirit, Angra Mainyu, in Middle Persian, Ahreman, that the time of their contest should be a limited one. So at the end of that specified time, Mithra will manifest to enforce the cessation of the conflict and the victory, as Zoroastrians believe, of the forces of good over those of primordial evil. He has a salvific role in that respect, so the Turfan texts in Middle Persian hail him as a *hokhtar*, a savior.

Mithra possesses the qualities, then,

not only of an officer of the law, but of an enforcer of it, too. He is a martial figure who can raise armies (Avestan: *vindat-spadhā*), and he is beloved of the soldiers of just causes, warriors seated behind the tossing manes of their mounts, says Yasht 10, invoke him. And he himself has horses and a chariot. Mithra is accompanied by a host of other *yazatas*, or beings worthy of worship, perhaps the most notable of whom is Verethraghna, Middle Persian Bahram, a divinity whose name means

vanquisher of the evil snake-man tyrant Azhi Dahaka, Persian Zohhak.

The appearance of Mithra was unmistakable. For by the second century B.C. the iconography of the god was firmly established: he wore the curling felt hat called the "Phrygian" cap, and a rayed nimbus glowed behind it. We find it on the coinage of Bactria, a region corresponding to Balkh and its environs, in present-day Afghanistan, to the East; and in the bas-reliefs of the kings of the tiny realm of Commagene,

in what is now south-eastern Turkey, in the West. He is a popular divinity: the kings of the middle period of the Achaemenian Empire invoke him along with Ahura Mazda and Anahita, in their inscriptions, and there is a dialectal Old Persian form of his name attested, too, in the Elamite tongue spoken by ancient inhabitants of the Pars and Khuzestan regions: *Missa*, with a softening of the consonantal cluster *-thr-*, with the suffix *-haka*, that is, *baga*, "the god".

Zoroastrians associate Mithra closely with the Sun, the greatest of physical fires, and the two are invoked together thrice daily. In New Persian, *mīhr* becomes a word for the sun; whilst from the meaning of the name having to do with association and covenant, the same word has the other meaning in Persian of friendship and love. Love being a quality we tend culturally to associate with the fairer sex, Meher is often a girl's name amongst modern Parsi Zoroastrians. But Classical Persian poetry praises also *mehr giyah*, "Mithra's grass," the first downy peach-fuzz on the cheeks of a handsome boy. (In Sufi poetry, God is approached symbolically both as the male principle and as the paragon of love.) And *mīhrban*, literally "Mithra is protector," is still used as a defining epithet of compassion for God Himself.

Though the name of the god by itself is now found mostly amongst women, the corpus of Iranian theophoric names, that is, names in which the name of a god forms an element, is especially rich in appellations of Mithra. Mithridates,



J. R. Russel, Nemrut Dagl, Commagene, 1997

"smiter of opposition," who was in ancient times likened to the mighty Herakles of Greek mythology. The Zoroastrian month contains not weeks, but thirty named days: Ahura Mazda, Middle Persian Ohrmazd, presides over the first fifteen, holding the name of the first day. The sixteenth is named after Mithra, Middle Persian Mihr; thus he governs the second half, a position of signal honor. The sixteenth day of the seventh month, which is named after Mithra also, is the feast of Mithrakana, an autumn celebration: the ripening of crops then is regarded as a foretaste of the perfection of the earth and the resurrection. This was a popular feast under the Achaemenians: the Armenians brought 20,000 colts annually as a gift on the day of the festival; and in later, Sasanian times the king of kings wore a special crown with representations of rays shooting from it, in imitation of Mithra. And Mithra is himself hailed as a king, both the Turfan texts of two millennia ago and Parsi folk belief of the present day link him to the heroic and prototypical king Faredun, the

or Mehrdad, means "Mithra is Judge", and was popular in the Pontic kingdom, on the Anatolian shores of the Black Sea, and elsewhere. In Armenian there are very many such names, including Mehrevandak, "servant of Mithra", and Meruzhan, "powerful through Mithra". The very name of a pre-Christian Armenian place of worship was *mehean*, from **mithriyana*, "Mithra's place."

3. The Mithraic problem

At the time of the coronation of Tridates by Nero, in the first century A.D., the amazing, opulent state spectacle that impressed contemporary witnesses so greatly, Mithra was one of the most important and best-known divinities of the Zoroastrian pantheon, and the religion of ancient Iran enjoyed immense prestige: one need only recall here the Christian belief that Magi coming from the Mons Victoralis, the "Mountain of Victory", most likely the temple complex at Kuh-e Khwaja at lake Hamun-e Sistan, in eastern Iran, had paid homage to the infant Christ at Bethlehem. Jews believed the appearance of a Parthian horseman in the land of Israel would herald the coming of the Messiah. Given Mithra's association with the cavalry, it is likely that the hundreds of terracotta figurines of a mounted bowman from Parthia and Armenia were intended as images of him. And there are a number of synagogues with mosaic floors that show the Zodiac with a youthful figure at the center who has a rayed crown and drives a four-horsed chariot. Byzantine manuscripts portray the Sun the same way; and it appears that this is a depiction of nothing less than the divine throne of the Prophet Ezekiel's vision; the semblance of its occupant, derived from that of the Iranian divinity.

At the same time that Christianity was born and began to grow, or soon after, we find scattered references in Roman authors to a cult of Mithras amongst pirates, that is to say, sailors not subject to them, along the southern Anatolian coast and inland. The ending -s of this form is the Hellenization or Latinization as a masculine noun of Mithra's name; without it, the long -a looks like a feminine ending and in fact Herodotus thought Mithra was a goddess. There were Roman legions in the area, at one point as far east as the city of Vagharshapat, on the

outskirts of modern Erevan, the Armenian capital. In addition to this, we find terracotta figurines of Mithra kneeling on a bull he is slaying, from the northern littoral of the Black Sea, suggesting that some special form of reverence for the god amongst Anatolians had spread there also.

By the third century of the Christian era, the worship of Mithras had become very widespread in the Roman Empire, particularly amongst the legionnaires. The cult has left no documents, except for scattered, brief inscriptions and a fragment of one catechism of initiation. Descriptions of it are meager and emanate for the most part from hostile Christian polemicists. The abundance of the evidence consists of cultic art from the Mithraic temples, which were called *spelaea*, or "caves" in

tion, amongst which are the first, *corax*, "the raven", and the fourth and apparently most dramatic, *leo*, "the lion", represented by a fearsome statue wreathed with symbols of destructive time, when one underwent a ritual death and rebirth and entered fully into the mysteries. There are statues of Mithras being born from a rock, a Greek text on rivers (the *De Fluvii* of Ps.-Plutarchus) mentions a myth of Mithras having ejaculated upon one on the banks of the Araxes, that is, in Armenia!, to engender a giant. The principal image in the spelaeum was, however, that of the god slaying a bull, from whose entrails the bounty of the earth, attacked by a scorpion, emerge. He is flanked by twin torchbearers. Inscriptions call Mithras *sol invictus*, "the invincible Sun", *dikaioos*, "just", and *epēkoos*, "coming when prayed to". The first two are in agreement with Mithra's Avestan qualities, though they seem general. The third is common also, though again it corresponds to the god's Avestan epithet *vahmo-sendah*, "prayer-fulfilling". Another cult epithet, *nabarzes*, looks Iranian but its meaning is unknown: Avestan *na berezo*, "the great (warrior)man" is one possible explanation. At least the word *nama*, Iranian for "hail, praise" (compare modern Persian *namaz*) is understandable, and ubiquitous. There are no explanations of what the symbols and scenes in the bas-reliefs mean, though.

There is the evidence of Avestan scripture and later Zoroastrianism about Mithra, and then the Western Mithraic monuments, with many differences and few connectives. So for a long time the predicament of Mithraic studies was analogous to a hypothetical situation in which one might possess the Old Testament and even Dead Sea texts relative to the beginnings of Christianity on the one hand, and the richly-carven Gothic cathedrals of Europe on the other, but no Church literature. It might be plain that some relationship existed between the Middle East and mediaeval Christendom, but that is all, and on the basis of existing evidence scholars might find justification in arguing that most of Catholicism, whatever in fact it was, was entirely European in origin. We know of course, that this is not the case, that the story of Christ, His teachings, and the beliefs and liturgy of the faith that grew up



The tauroctony ('bull-slaying')
from a Roman Mithraic spelaeum ('cave-temple')

Latin. Wherever the legions marched, we find them from Dura-Europos on the Euphrates frontier in the East, where there is a fresco of Mithras in Parthian dress, hunting on horseback, to the valleys of the Rhine and the Danube in the North and Hadrian's Wall in the West. Most of the spelaea are in Rome itself.

The cult had seven degrees of initia-

around His followers took decisive shape in the Middle East, whatever subsequent local coloration we find elsewhere and later. But for a long time, these connecting bits of evidence for the evolution of Mithraism and the transmission of devotion to the god westward, were lacking.

At first, scholars of Mithraism tended to read into the Mithraic monuments explanations based upon the Zoroastrian texts, and sometimes, frankly, their own imaginative constructions. Franz Cumont's monumental work, *Texts and Monuments*, published at the turn of the twentieth century and incorporating all the material on the subject available at the time, typifies this approach. The inherent shortcomings of his methods doomed his work to searching criticism, especially from historians of the Greco-Roman mystery religions, but also from Iranists. The latter, while better equipped to recognize and appreciate the merits Cumont's approach did have, were no less aware of the points from which he had simply extrapolated. In recent years a revision of the problem of Mithraic origins has become possible, thanks to the provision of additional evidence. These data come, not from the Avesta or from central Iran, but from precisely those regions where Mithraism is most likely to have originated: Armenia and Kurdistan.

Much of the pre-Christian lore and belief of the Armenians, which combines ancient Anatolian and Zoroastrian features, is preserved in an oral epic from the Sasun region, southwest of Lake Van. It focusses on a band of preternaturally large heroes who lose their strength if they break their word. Their mother gives birth from a rock. The first sons are twins who resemble in some ways the twin Mithraic torchbearers. The son of the first of these is named Mher, an Armenian form of the name Mithra, and he experiences darkness and death shortly after slaying a lion, but when he dies the greatest of the heroes, David, is born. The lion marks a transition, as in the mysteries. David's son is

also called Mher, and with him the epic ends: guided by a raven (we recall the Mithraic *corax*), he enters a cave (compare the *spelaeum*), one of the ancient Urartean blind portals of the gods, at Van, called still by Armenians and Turks "Mithra's gate" (Arm. *Mheri durm*, Tk. *Meher kapisi*). He sits in the cave on his horse, compare again Mithra the rider, and holds the *charkh-e jalak*, the Zodiac (compare the Zodiac over the tauroctony scene) in his hands. When the time is right he will emerge and destroy the world or redeem it. In this epic, all the images in the Mithraic reliefs that are static and of course unexplained acquire life and movement, explanation and context.

Except for the bull slaying, Zoroastrians believe Ahreman killed the primeval bull, whose spilt seed then fertilized the earth. The scorpion who attacks the

people, the Kurds. We can thus fill in some of the blanks and account for some of the discrepancies between the Zoroastrian Mithra and the Roman Mithras by looking at the living culture of the country, Armenia, from which Tiridates embarked on his storied journey to Rome. A Mithraist at initiation, we are told, was offered a crown and refused it, saying "Mithras is my crown!" But the Arsacid king, whatever his religion, was also a statesman. He promised Caesar the same loyalty he bore Mithras. But he took the crown.

4. Conclusions

Mithraism as a full-fledged religion never existed in the Zoroastrian world because Ahura Mazda, not Mithra, is God, the Good Creator who is invoked before every act of worship. Mithra is a subordinate spiritual being, invoked by name and greatly loved and venerated, but never the focus of exclusive worship. From the Armenian and later evidence it seems likely, however, that Mithra enjoyed the kind of reverence and popularity that accretes in Christendom around great saints or archangels such as George and Sergius, or Michael; and that in the case of Mithra this devo-



Fresco of Mithras the Hunter
Mithraeum of Dura-Europos, Syria

bounty is perhaps that evil being, for a fifth-century Armenian cleric, Eznik, finds it necessary to mention that the Persians consider the Destructive Spirit a scorpion. At the end of time a bull will be sacrificed and partakers will gain immortality; and Mithrakana/Mihragan did involve such sacrifices. So perhaps the tauroctony telescopes several events into one.

As for the social context, the small, male band of dedicated warriors that is encoded into the very structure of the epic, as the four generations of the heroic line. But in the Armenian region there are still small secret societies whose sacrifices and other rites and devotions retain markedly Mithraic features, these are the Ahl-e Haqq, Yaresan, and other societies of a Western Iranian

tion was cultivated in the context of young men's and warriors' societies, some of which, as para-religious orders in Kurdish society (the Ahl-e Haqq and Yaresan), retain some tell-tale Mithraic features. In Armenia, the name of the *yazata*, and the symbolism surrounding his cult, were lost to religion as Christianity prevailed in the country, but found a place, and flourished, in oral epic literature, a genre of such great social weight and mythological wealth that it can serve as the repository of religious values displaced from other contexts. And as we have seen, the powerful image of Mithras as the Sun-god persists in Jewish art and the early Christian images derived from it or parallel to it. Mithra the mounted warrior may have a shadowy survival also

in the equestrian St. George the dragon-slayer, a figure from eastern Anatolia.

And there is another possible survival of the symbolism of the Iranian god that is not shadowy at all. Mithraists of low or high rank met on a level of equality in their temples; and the red Phrygian cap of the divinity became thus a symbol of manumission, and thereafter, an emblem not so much of liberation, but of the state of freedom itself. As such it becomes the liberty cap of the goddess personifying the French and American revolutions. Add the rayed nimbus, and there before you stands the great statue in New York harbor, the Statue of Liberty, called by the poet Emma Lazarus the New Colossus, who lifts her lamp before the golden door. And from there, I would like to conclude with some personal reflections, for the last, latest, and finest reflection of Mithra has brought us home.

I was born and raised in upper Manhattan, and, like most New York kids, I passed pleasurable hours in the Egyptian galleries, looking at mummies and hieroglyphics, shivering about the tomb of Tutankhamen and wondering whether Nefertiti really looked like that. In high school I spent many a Saturday studying the Rembrandts and Monets; and when I was in college, I found my attention pretty much equally divided between Van Gogh's "Cypresses", at which one stared with that mystical fixation beauty arouses in adolescence, which if you're lucky, never departs, and other college students who seemed equally distracted, though the fixation in that case was not precisely mystical. Later still it was Sasanian art. The Metropolitan Museum of Art was at first taken for granted, then cherished, then, gradually, appreciated for its own beauty. I suppose everyone knows the great black-and-white opening shots of Woody Allen's 1979 film "Manhattan", against the electrifying, sumptuous, jazzy soundtrack of Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue". One of those shots shows nighttime visitors drifting past the solemn, archaic majesty of the Temple of Dendur, all behind a glass wall, in a dreamy, pure luminescence. I have not actually lectured at the Met before this, so the invitation some weeks back to tonight's celebration of the feast of Mihragan excited me, living away from the city, I've always missed it more than I can say, and the opportunity to take part in the life of this Museum was thrilling and glamorous.

After the horrible events of 11 September 2001, I hoped this occasion would

not be cancelled, and it is good it has not been; because the Metropolitan Museum of Art has taken on a new meaning. The Russian President Vladimir Putin has compared the terrorist attack on our country to the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, and perhaps that is the best analogy, given the enormity of the deliberate cruelty and mass murder in lower Manhattan. So the steadfastness of the Met now evokes for me the heroism of a sister museum, the Hermitage, another great center of ancient and Islamic Iranian art and learning, and echoes



Mithras petrogenes/saxigenus
(Born of the Rock), Rome

the refusal of its director, the Armenian scholar Iosif Orbeli, to close its doors, even in the worst days of the German blockade. And it turns out that in our time of unimaginable loss, this city has another Fiorello La Guardia in our Mayor, Rudy Giuliani. I have never been so proud to be a New Yorker though my heart is broken. I could never imagine wanting to be anywhere else. I find I love the city, and our people, more than life itself.

On the 7th of December sixty years ago, a boy who was later to become my father, was at the movies on Coney Island when the house lights came on, a man walked on stage and announced the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Everybody, stunned to silence, got up and went home, and got ready for the various jobs they would have to do. If Mithra means anything, if our study of this beautiful being, born of mankind's spiritual striving, is to be more than an antiquarian exercise, then this is when one is most in need of the qualities and hope he embodies in solidarity with each other, in fighting bravely against the stealth and cruelty of evil until the victory of the good, in keeping light alive in our souls, and in having truth and justice guide our deliberations. **These are the gifts of the authentic heritage of Iran to human character, from Mithra to Mithras to Mher to now.**

The day after December 7th, my father and mother, who were not to meet for five years, heard on their big parlor radios in different homes in Brooklyn the speech to Congress of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. They have been echoing in my mind this past week: "No matter how long it may take us to overcome this act of premeditated aggression, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory."

My favorite view of the Statue of Liberty is at dusk, her torch ablaze, the Twin Towers before her aglow with the lights of offices and the reflected light of the setting Sun. They have fallen, but she stands, and this is the immortal poem Emma Lazarus, an American Jewish woman, wrote to our beautiful Mithraic lady:

The New Colossus

*Not like the frozen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

Jashn-e Mehregan-e shoma piruze bad! God bless the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the City of New York, and these United States of America. ■



THE TRAGEDY

OUR SHOCK

OUR THOUGHTS

OUR REACTION

On September 11, 2001, the unimaginable, the inconceivable, the unthinkable, and the UNBELIEVABLE incident occurred in the City of Love. How can I be so convivial when my mind is so far from here, when my mind circulates around profound pain and agony of devastation of human life? When my mind is extending its boundary, to another realm, beyond my understanding. Why and how did the Gods simply look the other way?

I have asked myself these past few days, who am I? How the blood in my veins, the flooded thoughts of this immense pain, all my major vital organs, simply function? Where was the divine compassion? How this journey and all its different ordeals are all emanating from the One Spirit that is manifesting everything in all dimensions? How every rung of the ladder we climb toward final awareness is made, going to help us understand? How can I be sure in what dimension I belong? How is the Divine Consciousness manifesting all things and acting in and as all things in various states of self-disguise throughout all the different levels and dimensions of the universe?

*Look at you, the shear limbs of Adam,
Look, at you how miserable and low
you've become,
Has love simply faded away?
The luminous clarity of compassion,
had left your sight?
This is the saddest time for the
children of God,
This the darkest hours of humanity.*

All these words are stammering attempts to put into words what can never be adequately expressed. All my thoughts are numb to expression. Millions of people throughout the world have found themselves in a state of oblivion. Millions of people around the world are asking: why? Why the screams of those innocents, never reached the skies? Why love just faded away?

I have learned from decades of pain amidst plenty that nothing will ever make me happy, but the love of people, the thrilling experience of humanity; and the ultimate feeling of ecstasy of oneness. I have learned when tragedy finally occurs, it is over in an instant. Then I return to my previous state of mind — whatever it was.

Statements and thoughts begin. I will ask, I will question, but to no avail. There are no answers that gratifies the mind. You are in a state of bewilderment. You have become numb, when awakening each morning, the thought that this was only a dream, ruminates my mind.

As I breathe, I breathe hope, *hope* that flows in through my breath.

I hope that someday the children of Adam breath love more than hate. That is my hope.

Now, let the healing begin, let us fathom to the state of oneness with all humans. Let us rise beyond the expectations of God. Let us unite our souls on earth and in the sky above. Let us find some common denominator and build on that. Let us restraint ourselves and avoid vengeance. Let us create love, breath love, endure love. Let us empower humanity with love. It is important to note that my empowerment

walked towards the car behind. Two young ladies were apologizing for hitting my car. It was a very dark night and the driver and the passenger of the car had worn black garments as well. I realized that my car was still in the middle highway and needed to be brought on the side. While I was walking towards my vehicle, an incredible noise impacted in the air. There was another car driving in such speed and ran into the two young women whom I was talking to moments ago.

By the time the crashing stopped, eight vehicles had piled on top of the smashed car that used to be my car. By the time I came to my conciseness, two women and my friend David were laying on the floor of the highway. Two girls were simply cut in half and my friend had a broken hip and he could not move. Many more people were injured in that accident. I walked away without a scratch.



What happened to the real me — my spirit? I had a personal experience of God's absolutely unconditional love. I understood that I had never done anything to merit being deprived of this love, and that the only tiny, temporary mistake I had ever made while on earth was to have spent

even a moment believing I didn't deserve love. I realized that love is the only real thing that exists in the world. And without a moment of doubt, all the self-imposed barriers in front of my own heart evaporated into nothing.

Then I was given a special kind of awareness about the nature of healing on earth. Before the crash, I had been thoroughly focused on the world outside me, and because of guilt feelings I had been terrified of being still and looking within. But now I feel that there is a reason for everything. We simply don't know all the answers. We can sit here and ask why? Why those two innocent girls had to die? Why did I have to be in an accident to witness that? Why so many innocent lives were lost on September 11, 2001?

These healing experiences must come from within. We must repeat love often enough that we develop a sense of being part of the great round of nature, where joy and sorrow, youth, maturity, decline, death, and rebirth all have their part. One of the many advantages of living is that we are still alive. We can make a difference. We can change.

I would like to share a true story of an accident that brought awakening in my life. One rainy September evening in 1992, as I drove down the highway with my friend David in my car. In an instant moment, everything changed. My car was hit from behind while simultaneously I felt my spirit had exited from the window of my car. David and I jumped out from my car and

Why's that simply have no answer. Hence, I believe that what's in front of us is not nearly as important as what's within us — and what's within us is a healing power that has automatically been instilled into our genes before our existence, by a power beyond our comprehension. Let us utilize this power and go on. ■



A SIMPLE REFLECTION ON AN INCOMPREHENSIBLE TRAGEDY

We all know what it is to experience the death of a loved one. Most of the time these incidents come singularly. The death that we have experienced as the result of the swift hands of an unknown evil has magnified the pain and suffering felt by the death of one.

We all now suffer from an unexplainable feeling of emptiness. We believe at times there is no longer a reason to go on living, because life as we knew it has been voided.

We all know that life does go on and honoring those who have fallen is the reason that will push us forward.

We all suffered on September 11, 2001, as we watched the horrors of those running for their lives, but it was not yet personal.

We all cried when we heard their voices screaming on the phones saying goodbye to those they loved or begging for help, it began to get personal. The story began unfold before our eyes.

We all watched now with the knowledge that the planes that flew into the World Trade Center the Pentagon and the soil in Pittsburgh were commercial aircraft. It became personal.

We all tried to hold onto the belief that these were just coincidences and not a deliberate act. We all waited in anticipation, waiting to hear from our loved ones.... As the day drew to a close, we began knowing who was lost, family, friends and co-workers. It was now personal.

The tears we have cried along with the world can fill an ocean.

The pain we feel, along with the rest of the world has a force behind it than could destroy a universe.

The emptiness we feel, along with the rest of the world is greater than the baroness that fills the deserts.

We all question how it is we will get through this.

We all know that in honor of all those who have perished that we must find a way, we will find a way, and we will emerge stronger, closer and even more United.

We will grieve,

We will wake to an alarm,

We will go through our day,

We will come home,

We will discuss this event,

And we will sleep.

And we will do this over and over again until life slowly returns to a new normalcy.

Our sadness and fear will subside but I hope, complacency never returns.

Those who have been taken from us will now be our guide, teaching us how to love again, live again and especially how to laugh again. They will make us understand that their precious lives, so untimely taken did not die in vain. Their deaths have an unknown and valuable purpose and in time our fallen comrades will show us that purpose.

May we all go on in peace, love and harmony.

