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Editor:

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It Is Time to Meet The Man Behind The Name



On November 7, 1999 Dr. Shahrokh Ahkami, our editor, completed his 24th New York City Marathon, his 28th in total. He had no idea we were going to write this article. But, having completed 28 marathons and sixty years of age, we believe our readers have a need and right to know more about this man, our hero, and your editor, Shahrokh Ahkami.

As most, his reason for taking up running was to get in shape. When he takes on a project it is never half way; he goes beyond the limit. He is constantly challenging himself and has more often than not, succeeded. (I am sure if he had been able to edit this article he would be quick to say that he could never have accomplished anything without the support and love of those around him.). He never takes sole credit. He is quick to give up the spotlight and equally fast to sacrifice his happiness, success and comfort for the happiness, success and comfort of others. Often he has aided a distressed runner along the way, giving up a personal best, just to help them reach the end. He has completed them with training and without training. He has done them sick, tired, in the wind, the rain, the heat and the snow. He lives the motto of Nike, "Just Do It."

His energy level and drive are infectious. Many of you reading this article who know him, understand what we mean. He has this way of making you reach deep inside, to go the distance and reach your star, whatever that star may be.

I know that he would have liked us to mention close friends and family who also participated in this year's marathon. We, his assistant editors and friends, insisted that this be only about him. He is a legend in his own time.

He is a giver but not just financially (THAT IS EASY). Tougher and more important is the man or person who gives of himself. Many of us have a little piece of him and should treasure forever.

In closing, Dr. Ahkami, we want to say you have made us proud to be your friend and co-worker. From our hearts, we wish you continued good health, love, success and the opportunity to run the marathon forever.

THANK YOU FOR ALLOWING US TO BE PART OF YOUR LIFE.

THE FIRST STEP TO VICTORY

As the moon's strength lessens
to the dawn of a new day, he ties his shoes.

Today it is not to
Bring a child into the world
or chauffeur someone.

Today he ties them
for himself ...

Today he takes
the first step in his
dream to complete
the MARATHON.

The morning is lonely,
and cold

Yet, it provides him with
the warmth of the bed
he left.

He starts.
He feels
his heart pound.

Inside
he feels life
has changed,
in just these few steps.

What?, he thinks
How?, he questions,
Will he feel if
he can go the distance?
Can he go the
distance?

As the moonlight
fades

He sees others
in the distance.

He joins them
and he knows
his life has changed forever.

From the Editor's Desk

This past fall I was on vacation in Europe. The last five days were spent in Paris. As usual, I was excited to be in Paris to look up my old friends. It is always fun to catch up on our lives. Our hours engaged in conversation passed by like minutes. After seeing them I am always content and happy. This time, however, I was left with a feeling of sadness. All the conversations ended with warnings to me to be leery about other friends; do not trust him, watch out for her, this one is in that organization, that one is working for them- my head was spinning. Initially I believed these warnings. You see my first visit was with a learned man who was strong in his convictions and always seemed to be well informed. I began to doubt his words when the next friend said the same thing about another and another and so on and so on. With my sadness also came fear and confusion. I thought, "What is going on with us and what kind of identity and recognition are we attaining with such talks?"

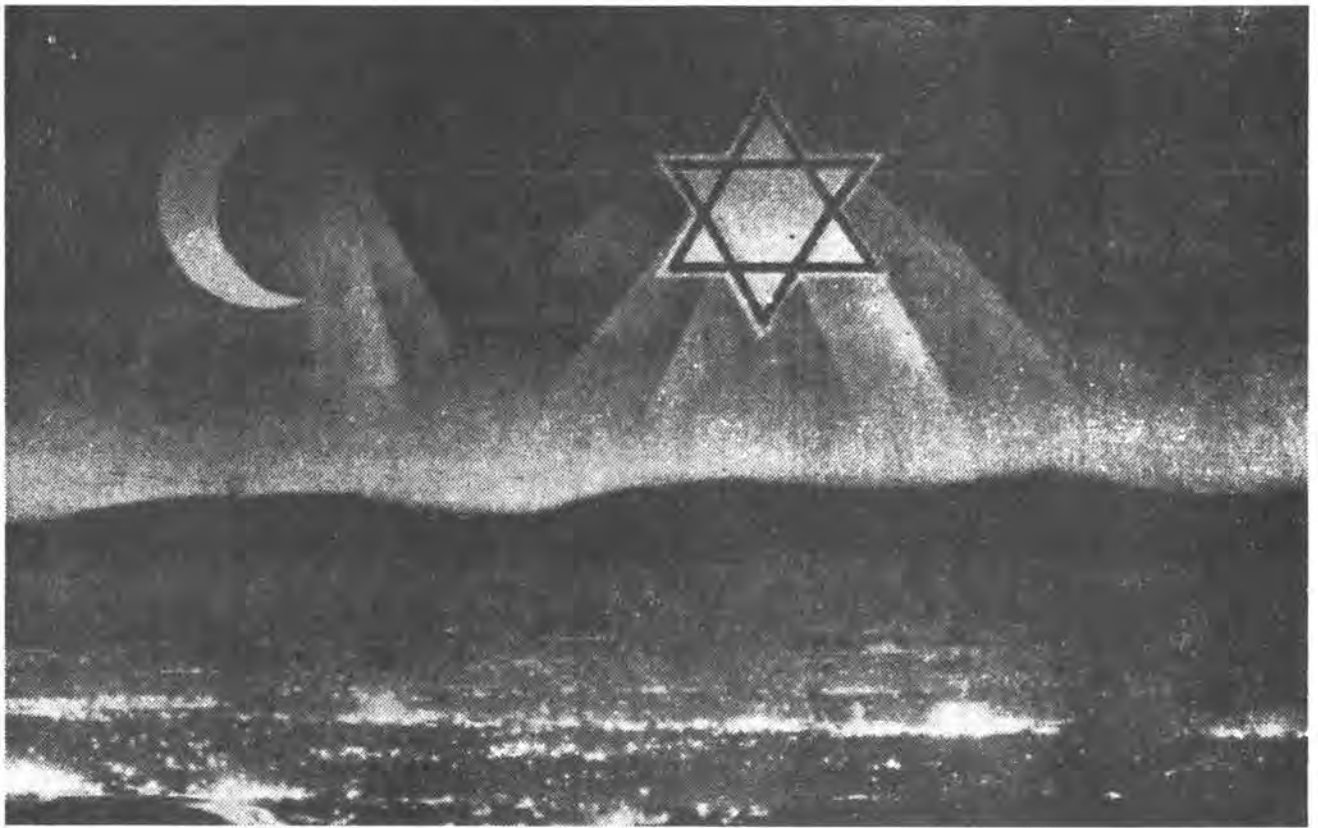
Walking back to my hotel, I reflected on a conversation I had when I was eighteen years old and in medical school. An older hospital employee and I needed to drive to downtown Teheran. During the two-hour drive I was engaged in conversations with this gentleman. He advised me on life. His talks were mixed with poetry, his philosophies and personal life experiences. I listened intently, absorbing every word. Though I forgot most of what he said there are words, so powerful, they remain branded in my mind. He advised me, "My dear boy don't trust your friends and watch them carefully." When I asked him why, he responded sarcastically, "Even in a room with closed doors a fight between a father and son or mother or daughter has the British or

Intelligence Agency behind it." I looked at him perplexed and asked, "What possible relationship could there be between the British and the Intelligence Agency with a fight between parent and child? With a fatherly smile and the shake of his head, he said, "You are still a child and very naive. While you are book smart you do not understand that such a thing is possible and probable. In fact it could be possible that they are behind this very conversation."

Until now, though I tried, I could not understand the meaning behind this gentleman's words. After spending an evening with friends, I would often think about these words and silently laugh. Because of the recent conversations with my friends, I now understand. It was not the words themselves, but rather the meaning between the lines that he wanted me to comprehend. He was trying to show me that even in the strongest relationships, someone or something will always try to test the strength of the bond. There will always be outside sources, that because of their jealousy and hate will attempt to prevent unification. Of course without unity and trust, nothing and no relationship can survive." Divide and Conquer", this was the philosophy of, I believe, Winston Churchill. Historically, this tactic has been successful in war, politics, families and friendships. Our relationships can continue but they will not be the same. Without trust and unity and no nucleus to hold us together all that remains is a weak empty shell. I asked myself, "Is there any benefit from the statements of my friends? Is there any benefit to anyone of us to accuse the other of this and that?" The only benefit I see is negative. It will only keep us from achieving a unity and strength and prevent us from showing the world

who we are, what we are, what we were and what we want to become. We cannot all agree on all matters, whether they be religion, politics, a football team, a color, a song or where to eat dinner. Such agreements, however, should never have the power to divide us. They should teach us, rather to understand each other and help us to work toward's a better tomorrow. Perhaps, though older I am still naive.

Shahrokh Alavi



Zoroaster And The Jews

An Unfamiliar Footnote in Persian History

By: *Dr. David A. Yeagley*
Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma City

A peculiar element in the relation between the religion of Zoroaster and the ancient Hebrew faith may involve a missing page in Persian history simply because there is so much vital information about Zoroaster himself that is uncertain, untold, or unknown. Never was there such a significant figure in history about whom so little is certain, from the time and place of his birth to that of his death; nor has there ever been such diversity of scholarly opinion regarding the same.¹ The literary and archeological facts available are widely interpreted, and the most certain element, the gathas

(hymns), the oldest part of the Avesta, are merely *ascribed* to Zoroaster, and these sources of the religion themselves were not committed to writing before the fifth century B.C.² Yet, Masani³ indulges in the standard, late nineteenth-early twentieth century argument that Judaism was clearly *borrowed*, in this case from Zoroastrianism, despite the fact that the "torah" was rediscovered in 621 B.C., and the "Tetrateuch," "Deuteronomistic history," and "The Chronicler" sections of Hebrew themselves, in canon, have been generally dated 586 B.C.,⁴ and other parts, such as the Dialogue portion of Job, as early as the seventh century B.C.⁵

That Zoroaster is to be considered a remarkable influence in history is nevertheless indisputable.⁶ For any scholars interested in undermining the authenticity of the Hebrew scriptures, Zoroaster can easily be recognized as the father of all *offenbarungsreligion*, or, "revealed" religion, that is, religion born of a specific vision *divinely* given to a specific man. (This is distinguished from organic, pantheistic, or animistic religion found among all primitive peoples of the world.) With the flexible dating available, Zoroaster can indeed be placed at the first of the line, before Judaism, and obviously before Christianity or Islam. It is because of this flexibility that there arises a

possibly critical issue of who influenced whom? Who borrowed from whom? Who owes what to whom?

While there is scarce evidence that the original, pre-Zoroastrian religions of Iran contained some Indian influence,* a brilliant scholar like Eliade simply deals with the known material in a juxtaposed, comparative fashion, evading the issue of chronology. In a section on Hindu eschatology, he carefully discounts the idea that "the eschatological myth" is necessarily a creation of Hinduism by simply citing the Zoroastrian tradition and Ohrmazd's seizure of Ahriman, together with the battle of Ragnarok of the ancient Germans, and the triumph of the good god, Baldr. He does note that the eschatological myth is not documented in the Vedic period, but says "this did not prove that it did not exist."

The issue is in fact chronology, however. The importance of who derived what from whom is quickly politicized into a matter of authority. In modern tradition, most scholars have attempted to steer clear of any such association (excepting the matter of anti-Semitic German scholarship) and have professed objectivity; nevertheless, historical, scientific, and even psychological research are inevitably directional, therefore, potentially if not immediately political in nature. It is precisely at this point that a certain, obscure passage in Hebrew scripture may shed some light on this matter of who influenced whom.

In the Book of II Kings 17:6, there is a very specific note about the presence of Jews in Media.

In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

The date of the Assyrian defeat of Samaria, the capital city of Israel (the northern Jewish kingdom), is certain: 722 B.C.¹⁰ What is not certain, however, are the cities. The present author's sources are quite limited, and there is no way of verifying which cities are referenced.¹¹ The fact is,

there are no written documents from the ancient Median empire at all. The Medes don't appear in anyone else's documents until the Assyrian Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.) mentions them, as the peoples of "Mada."

Adding to this dearth of information, there is the legitimate question of Zoroaster's personal origins. The language of the gathas, however, has been found to belong to northwestern Iran. The fact that Vishtaspa was converted to Zoroaster's religion indicates that Zoroaster lived, at a later point in his life, in eastern Iran, since this is where Vishtaspa ruled.¹² Eliade simply says he lived somewhere in eastern central Iran, between 1200 and 500 B.C. Some sources say he was born in poverty, others in nobility. Tradition says that he was born of the Spitama warrior clan, "probably at Rhages (now Rayy, a suburb of Tehran), a town in Media."¹³ Some say that this great vision from Vohu Manah came at the age of thirty, but others say he was seeking it as early as fifteen. Masani says Zoroaster spent his youthful years in severe isolation, in desert places, and after the vision came, he commenced his mission to the public, but struggled for ten more years for acceptance.¹⁴ The point here is simple: there is an abundance of titillating ambiguity regarding the prophets times and whereabouts, such that seems to invite, if not urgently demand, a synthesis of information.

As it is, then, indeed important to know origins, there are three specific elements which, in the case of Zoroaster, certain or uncertain, are useful in organizing a theory, or synthesis: 1) the time of his birth; 2) the place, area, or circumstances of his upbringing; 3) the sources of his knowledge. If the former two are vague, the latter deserves equal conjecture. The following proposition is simply a theoretical synthesis:

1. Zoroaster was born not before the mid-eighth century B.C., ca.750 B.C. or perhaps in the first half of the 6th century, or possibly around 590 or 580 B.C.

2. Zoroaster was a Mede, born in western Iran, of perhaps a religious family, even of the Magi, one of the magushu (Behistun inscription of Darius, ca.520 B.C.)

3. Zoroaster was recipient of inherited, cumulative knowledge of world religion, with the special, critical addition of Judaism

To expand on each of these propositions will yield a new theory of the origins and nature of Zoroastrianism, but not a radical, politicized position.

1.) The new synthesis requires that Zoroaster be born after, or shortly before, the Assyrian defeat and eviction of the Jews to "the cities of the Medes," or, 722 B.C. He was either a mature thinking man by that date, capable of comprehending something of Judaism, or else he grew up in an environment in which Judaism was an available subject of inquiry, i.e., it was somehow practiced by the captives.¹⁵

2.) According to Herodotus (b.ca.490-485 B.C.), i. 101 the Magi were a priestly caste numerous enough to be considered one of the six tribes of the Medes, and sustained their identity beyond the later Persian dominance. The Medes, as well as the Persians, employed no visual images of their deities, as the disappointed imperial looters of 6th century B.C. Assyria discovered.¹⁶ They had a special regard for fire (light?), and special attire, e.g., white robes and a tall, felt cap with lappets coming down on the sides of the face. According to G.Vetter, these men actually traveled to other countries, accumulating a sort of international reservoir of supernatural knowledge and practice.¹⁷ He regards them as international magicians. (Cook simply calls them "a puzzle.")

3.) The thought here is that, if Zoroaster was born a Magus of the Medes, he would have a significant disposition toward religious power, and would actively seek it. It could be that he actually learned elements of Judaism from the captives in "the

cities of the Medes," and this tradition is actually what prompted the 1st Century A.D. visit of the Magi to Bethlehem of Judaea.

Thus the matter of comparative study regarding the origins and relations of Judaism and Zoroastrianism are informed by the precedence of Judaism. A detailed comparative study of each individual element, e.g., deity, morality, life, death, eternity, judgment, etc., is the subject of a future essay. Suffice it now to say that Zoroastrian scholars must be divided into two categories: 1) those that believe he was born and active before 750 B.C., and 2) those that believe he was born after 750 B.C. All comparative study of Zoroastrianism and Judaism for purposes of determining origins is completely directed by the pre- or post- 750 B.C. date.

There is no dispute over the genius of Zoroaster, and his remarkable synthesis of vast, complex polytheism into a manageable, monotheistic system. The salient element of "dualism," or, the division of reality into Good and Evil, at war, is perhaps the secret of Zoroaster's success. This abstraction allows the reduction of complexity, and emphasis on higher, or, personal values. It also allows management of the presence of theodicy. It would seem, however, considering the above propositions regarding Zoroaster's origins, that these peculiar elements were actually assumed or taken on from Judaism, and provided Zoroaster with the power to transcend the complexity of his polytheistic religious environment. It was, in fact, another case of the "eclecticism" of the ancient Persian way, that is, the method of taking the best of the best in world culture, and fashioning an integration, a synthesis, of all, for all. Religion for everyone, so to speak.¹ Spiritual democracy by synthesis. It would seem quite appropriate for Zoroaster to be thought of in this way. This is but another, perhaps the very greatest example, even pre-imperial example, of the Persian universalism. This is spiritual management, in fact the necessary

precursor of political, imperial cultural management. This matter of political, imperial cultural management was later manifest in Cyrus and Darius, as pointed out in the previous essay, "The Persian-Americans."² Moreover, the Zionist disposition to send the Babylonian captive Jews back to Palestine to rebuild the temple of "the God of heaven"³ would strongly suggest that Zoroaster's "Ahura Mazda" found his ultimate origin and actual validation in the God of the Hebrews.

It is interesting to note that the later Moslem phase of Iranian history also involves obvious principles of universalism, (which is, no doubt, the basis of its appeal to the people of Persia). However, the Arabic intolerance for anything Jewish indicates an antithesis of Achaemenidism, and something less than universalism, indeed. That this disposition should be manifest politically seems to suggest an incompleteness somewhere in the religion itself. Though it obviously does have massive, universal appeal, the Moslem faith obfuscates, to a degree, the purity of the ancient Persian genius of universalism, and modern Iranian Moslem religion does eclipse, somewhat, the greater vision of the ancient Persian heritage. Probably, the confusing diversity and discontent in modern Iran is a great deal due to the fact that the ancient heritage comprises actually a larger frame of reference than the robe of Islam can cover. The fit is simply too tight. Islam would control by submission; Zoroaster would unite through transcendence. Islam shapes, or molds; Zoroaster synthesizes. The Islamic mind is politically architectural; the Persian mind is poetic. One seeks to operate through political power; the other appeals to the soul, or spiritual, eternal concerns. Islam prescribes; Zoroaster inspires.

PH

1 "There is no consensus among scholars of Zoroastrianism," says Dorraj, although most place his birth about 1000 B.C. Manochehr Dorraj. From Zarathustra to Khomeini: Populism and Dissent in Iran (London: Lynne Rienner

Publishers, 1990), p.29. Dorraj relies on Malandra for the details of history of the scholarship, and cites authorities who place Zoroaster's life and times between 1700 and 1500 B.C., and as late as mid-sixth century B.C. See, William W. Malandra, An Introduction to Ancient Iranian Religion (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

2 According to the recent (1998) work of Shahriar Shahriari, however, the "traditional" (i.e., most widely accepted) dates for Zoroaster's times are between 660 and 588 B.C., although there are numerous sources that suggest times as early as the tenth century B.C. and even as late as 100 B.C. See,

<http://www.zarathushtra.com/life/time.htm>. This site displays a very useful chart. Even an authority as renowned as Eliade suggests the times "between 1200 and 500 B.C." Mircea Eliade, *The Eliade Guide to World Religions* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), p.247. Nielson says that most scholars today accept the opinion of R. C. Zaehner of Oxford University, who suggests Zoroaster's dates are 628 to 551 B.C. See, *Religions of the World*, 2nd Ed., Neils C. Nielson, Jr., et al (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), p. 62.

3 J. Shearman questions whether Zoroaster existed at all. See, John Shearman, *The Land and People of Iran* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1962), p.20.

2 See, Eliade, op.cit., p.247. (Other sources say the gathas actually originated in the 6th century, B.C.) The archeological evidence is chiefly that of inscriptions on monuments of Achaemenid emperors, such as Darius I (522- 486 B.C.), Xerxes (486-465 B.C.), and Artaxerxes II (402-359 B.C.), et al. This evidence, however, is only by inference. That Darius, e.g., would refer to Auramazda (Ahura Mazda, "the greatest god," a nomenclature and concept peculiar to Zoroaster's religious ideology, is regarded as evidence that such ideology surely existed at the time of the Achaemenids, if not significantly prior. See, Eliade, op.cit., p.248; Encyclopaedia Britannica (Chicago, 1995), [Macro] v.12.p.1083.

3 Rustom Masani, *Zoroastrianism: The Religion of the God Life* (1938; rpt.New York: Macmillan,1968), pp.18-21. Most of Masani's sources are, of course, antiquated.

4 This is the date of the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians, i.e., the beginning of the Exilic period. Obviously, portions existed much, much earlier. The Pentateuch itself, e.g., "the book of the law," "the torah," was rediscovered during the reign of Josiah, 621 B.C.. See, G.W.Anderson, "Canonical and Non-canonical," in the *Cambridge History of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 113, f. esp. p.120, 122. Cf. E. A. Speiser, "The Biblical Idea of History in Its Common Near Eastern Setting," in *The Jewish Expression*, ed. Judah Goldin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 7,8; LeRoy E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, D.C. Review & Herald, 1950), v.1, pp.63-66.

As in the case of many bodies of ancient, sacred literature, however, the Torah itself asserts a much earlier time of its own origin, namely, the time of the Exodus, or, approximately 1500 to 1300 B.C. See, e.g., Ex.34:27,28; Deut.28:58; esp. Deut.31:26.

5 See, Marvin H. Pope, Job, in *The Anchor Bible Commentary* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1973), p.XL.

Zoroaster And The Jews

6 German scholars tend even to idolize the ancient prophet. R. Steiner, e.g., appraises Zarathustra as the original of his kind, the archetype of the consciously religious personality. See, Rudolf Steiner, *Wendepunkte des Geisteslebens* (Basel: Zbinden Druck & Verlag Ag, 1974), pp.7-10. Hasenfratz says Zarathustra "ist der erste Prophet in der Religionsgeschichte, der uns dokumentarisch bekannt ist, und er ist der Stifter der ältesten prophetischen Offenbarungsreligion." Hans-Peter Hasenfratz, "Zarathustra," in *Grosse Religionsstifter* (München: Verlag C.H.Beck, 1992), p.9.

One must hold these scholarly remarks in historical context, of course. It is no doubt due to Friedrich Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (1883-1891), as well as Richard Strauss' orchestral tone poem of the same title, (1895), that the prophet's name is still esteemed in modern Germany. This is so, again, because of the socio-historical context. Although one must consider Dr. Martin Luther a Zionist, anti-Semitism had festered in a "hysterical" Germany for nearly four hundred years. "It was the people living to the East who were the main objects of German mass hatred and hysteria, a legacy of hate which has bedevilled Germany's relations with her eastern neighbours down to our own times." Friedrich Heer, *The Medieval World*, trans. Janet Sondheimer (New York: New American Library, 1961), p.358. The trend of German scholarship and theology, indeed much of European scholarship, certainly since the 19th century, has been to undermine any authenticity naively placed in the Hebrew scriptures, Old and New Testaments. God was something beyond the cultural trappings of Judaism. It was a wonderful boon to German nationalism to think that the original "prophet" was found, and that he was not Jewish at all, but Aryan. Nietzsche's biased attitudes against anything Jewish were expressed in language which itself "exhorts," rather than "Persuades," as Golfing suggests. See, Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy & The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golfing (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), p.viii. Yet, this apologetic interpretation is somewhat dissembling. Nietzsche's language is obviously brutal, and, more obviously, meant to be so. And thus, the grand lionizing of Zarathustra in the land of his Teutonic descendants.

7 It is fairly certain that, in matters of dating the ancient texts, or at least the attempts to place them in some chronological order, one cannot infer that any text understood to be written subsequently to another text is necessarily derived therefrom. The obvious matter of significant oral tradition disallows such a naive notion. That the relation between oral tradition and written tradition is not understood in this critical juxtaposition is indicative of the pestilential myopia often the plague of academicians.

J. Miller notes the great genealogies of Genesis. See, J. Maxwell Miller, *The Old Testament and the Historian* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p.71; however, he does not observe the fact that these suggest profound authentication of oral tradition, if taken at face value. Noah's father, Lamech, e.g., could speak directly with Adam, at least for the first half-century (56 years) of Lamech's life. The argument would follow that, not just Abraham, but any number of other patriarchs might have inherited knowledge from the first man. The question of borrowing then becomes secondary, if not moot.

8 Similarities such as the cult of fire and sacred liquor (Indian soma and Iranian haoma), and even the names Mitra (Indian) and Mithra (Iranian), have long been noted. The Zoroastrian Avesta texts and the Indian Vedic literature contain other similar names. However, an early document, ca. 1380 B.C., a treaty between the Hittite emperor and the king of Mitanni, lists Aryan gods Mitra, Varuna, Indra, and the two Nasatyas. These gods are found in the Vedas, but only the first one in the Avesta. Moreover, Indra and Nanhaihya are Avestic demons. See, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago, 1995), [Macro] v., p.1083.

9 Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), II, p.235.

10 The city had fallen before the death of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V, but the next ruler, Sargon II, made several inscriptions of the event, attributing the victory to himself. See, *Israelite and Judaean History*, ed. John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), P.433; cf. *Oxford Bible Atlas*, ed. Herbert G. May (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.18. According to Sargon II's inscriptions, he evicted and deported 27,290 Jews from Samaria. Sennacherib claimed to have exiled 200,150 Jewish persons (ca.701 B.C.). Therefore, the "Ten Lost Tribes" tradition was established before Nebuchadnezzar's invasions. "Information concerning these exiles is very scant and occasional and mostly based only on assumptions." *Israelite and Judaean History*, op.cit., p.481.

11 J.M.Cook marks a precious few ancient Median cities: Agbatana, the ancient capital (modern Hamadan), Nush-i Jan, nad Behistun. See, J.M. Cook, *The Persian Empire* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1993), p.5. Gilbert lists Niniveh, Resen Calah and Ashur, but these are all just on the east side of the Tigris. He also notes Ecbatana and Nehavend, as did Cook. See, Martin Gilbert, *Atlas of Jewish History* (New York: Dorset Press, 1984), p.7. The issue then becomes the territory of the Medes. Grant is less informative. Michael Grant, *Atlas of Ancient History* (New York: Dorset Press, 1983), p.21.

12 See, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1967), v.8, p.380.

13 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [Micro], v.12, p.934. Mackey says that Zoroaster was born "sometimes between the tenth and seventh centuries B.C. in the Azerbaijan area," which, of course, would be the extreme northwestern tip of modern Iran. See, Sandra Mackey, *The Iranians* (New York: Penguin/Dutton, 1996), p.15. Mackey's place and date are typically variant, but nevertheless support the Median origins of

Zoroaster. The latter portions of the Avesta (ca.5th to 3rd centuries B.C.), however, seem to indicate that Raga is a district which should be looked for in eastern Afghanistan.

14 Masani, op.cit., pp.27-29. The significant conversion of King Vishtaspa of Chorasmia (to the east of modern Iran) allegedly took place when the prophet was just past forty. This is an issue regarding the identity of Vishtaspa. There is Vishtaspa, King of Aryana Vaejah, found in the writings of Hecataeus of Abdera (ca. late 4th century B.C.), and Vishtaspa (Hystaspes), father of Darius I the Achaemenid emperor. The Aryan deposed by Cyrus (r.559- 529 B.C.) was not the convert, but Hystaspes, presumably.

15 The Hebrew scriptures record interesting attitudes of non-Jewish cultures toward the Hebrew people. There is everything from respect, fear, to hatred. In the case of the Assyrian defeat of 722 B.C. and the eviction of the northern Jews, there developed a problem in Palestine. The Assyrians had repopulated the land with people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, or, peoples from outside Palestine, geographically and culturally. See, II Kings 17: 24-41. Apparently there was a serious environmental management problem, attributed to the absence of Jewish management, and therefore, Sargon II (presumably) commanded that some captive Jewish priests be taken back to Palestine, and thither instruct the gentile immigrants on how to conduct themselves, the point being that, even when at least temporarily demonstrably superior to Jews, gentile potentates acknowledged some special power within the Jew.

16 Cook, op.cit., p.149.

17 George B. Vetter, *Magic and Religion* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1973), p.146. This statement is obviously based on an interpretation of Matthew 2:1, involving "wise men," (fr.Greek, uayoq [magos], sorcerer or wise man). No previous evidence of such journeys is offered, however. Apparently Pliny (23-79 A.D.) attributed the Magi's practice to Zoroaster himself! Vetter describes the Magi: "These fellows were equipped with a considerable 'bag of tricks,' a combination of medical and practical knowledge, with an impressive ritualism bolstered by an imposing array of devices for deceiving the eye," p.146.

18 Cook refers to a "catholic Zoroastrianism" in the Avesta, and says it "seems from its geographical horizon to have been working itself out in North-eastern Iran but... the religion that evolved was that of the Magi." Cook, op.cit., pp.154,155. This statement, of course, would support the second proposition of this present essay.

19 *Persian Heritage*, Spring 1999, v.4, No.13.

20 Ezra 1:1-3; 6:1-12.

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Sander Vanocur

An Interview with



Photo: Tess Steinkolk

By: Persian Heritage

Sander Vanocur has forty years of experience in journalism behind him including print, radio and television. He has covered wars, presidential campaigns and the White House. Recently, he completed a video series on the post-war Congress and the Media and Television and the Presidency. He is also the host for *Movies In Time*, on the History Channel. Now I would like you to meet a man who I have admired for many years as a journalist and now admire him as a human being.

PH You have had quite a career in journalism. It had to start somewhere, how did yours begin?

SV. I was born in Cleveland, Ohio and completed my undergraduate work at Northwestern University, with a B.A. in Political Science. I went on to the London School of Economics. This was 1950-51. While there I took objection to a thesis which I read in the *London Sunday Observer*. I explained my objections to my tutor, and he suggested that I write an answer. I did and then saw my byline. From that point I was hooked on journalism.

I should mention that prior to this, I was a devoted CBS radio listener. I would listen to Edward R. Murrow and all the people he brought in, especially Howard K. Smith, the London Bureau Chief. While at Northwestern from 1946- 50, I would listen to their symphony program. During intermission, H.K. Smith would have a commentary. When I went to London, he very graciously allowed me to follow me around.

PH Do you remember your first job in journalism?

SV. Of course. I was on the London staff of the *Manchester Guardian*. At the same time, I was a commentator for the North American service of the BBC and stringer for CBS News. I then became a general assignment reporter for *The New York Times*, New York in 1956, and then in 1957 joined NBC News.

PH What is a stringer?

SV. It is someone who is not a full time reporter, but who is paid by the article or by the broadcast.

PH You were with NBC, I believe, for fourteen years. Can you tell us about your experience while with them?

SV. I was a White House correspondent for three years, and then was named National Political Correspondent. I was also the Washington Correspondent for the "Today" show, as well as a contributing editor to the "Huntley-Brinkley Report" and host of "First Tuesday", a monthly two-hour magazine program.

PH After NBC where did your career take you?

SV. In 1971, I became the Senior Correspondent for the National Public Affairs Center Television of PBS; and two years later, I became a consultant to the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, and Lecturer in Communications at Duke University, and joined ABC in 1977.

PH You also covered political campaigns.

SV. Yes, all of them from 1960 until I stopped covering politics in 1986. In 1986 to 1991, I anchored ABC News' "Business World", where I had the opportunity to interview many prominent figures in the business and political world. I also had the wonderful experience of covering the 1989 Economic Summit in Paris, the 1988 Economic Summit in Toronto, the 1987 Tokyo Forum and the 1987 Economic Forum in Venice.

PH Your career has taken you on many assignments; if you can say, what was your most memorable?

SV. I think I would say covering the Civil Rights movement in the South, from 1958-60. Most of the time covering the battle of school segregation in Little Rock, Arkansas. I also covered Martin Luther King Jr. I believe was the most significant individual I ever covered.

PH And your most difficult assignment?

SV. Covering the Vietnam War. In 1965 I went to Vietnam twice. Earlier on as a reporter at the *Manchester Guardian*, London in 1954, I watched as the French came to terms with the reality that they had to get out of Indo China. They finally agreed to this at the Geneva Conference in 1954. Having had the benefit of the London experience, I believed the escalation of our involvement under Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon to be the wrong course for the United States. When I came back from Vietnam the second time in 1956, I felt gloomier than the first time. My feelings remained the same throughout the Nixon Administration. In fact, I was told by one member of Nixon's Administration that my negative views on the war put me on the Nixon's enemies list. He did not like my coverage, nor for that matter did Johnson.

PH Do you think on the "enemy list" affected the progress of your career?

SV. I believe that it did.

PH You were a reporter and TV anchor to name a few of your journalistic positions, what was the most rewarding and most difficult position?

SV. Being a reporter. In the beginning, it was not as difficult as it was later.

PH Why was that?

SV. In the beginning of my career, young reporters like me were trained by people who knew how to edit our copy. Though they did not always edit to our wishes, they edited with a stern discipline, and distilled in the young apprentice, what was right, what was wrong and what should or should not be left out. Today, though I am not active any longer, I find it difficult to understand how much questionable writing gets through. It would not have gotten through in my time. I am truly sympathetic towards today's reporters and editors because of the twenty four hour news cycle. Not only

is it twenty-four hours, it comes from various sources: newspaper, internet, etc. I call it the twenty-four hour electronic tapeworm, and it is very difficult for a reporter to deal with it.

PH You named Martin Luther King as your most significant figure, what about a female figure?

SV. I was a great admirer of Mrs. Roosevelt, even though I did not cover her. She did not like John Kennedy because of his father Joe, who was the Ambassador to the Court of St. James during the Appeasement Period. She also believed that JFK, took the easy way out by not voting for the censure of Joe McCarthy in the Senate.

PH What about an international figure, male or female today?

SV. My, I cannot believe that I am unable to spontaneously answer that question, I do not have a candidate. You don't have a Churchill, DeGaulle or Roosevelt. Presently, people just don't stand out. It may be because we are just too familiar with them. But go down the ranks, who can you now name? I correct myself, they may be important, but are they as important and useful as the names I gave you? Again, I think it may be because we are too familiar. You know, DeGaulle always talked about maintaining a distance from everyone else, and he did. He was a great man.

PH You and I recently discussed the impact John Kennedy, Jr.'s death had on this country. Is there any one else that you can name whose death would have an equal impact?

SV. Ronald Reagan. When he passes I believe you will see an immense out pouring of emotion and grief. I am a devoted admirer of President Reagan.

PH Why so? I am sure that many will disagree.

SV. I believe he restored confidence in us as a nation.

PH What about Jimmy Carter?

SV. Jimmy Carter, I do not think so. I admire him a great deal for what he has done after he left office. While in office, however, he induced in this

country a feeling of impotence regarding the management of our affairs at home and abroad. Perhaps what happened in Iran during the last eighteen months he was in office doomed his administration. But just as people get credit for the good things that happen on their watch, they also get discredited for the bad things. Those are the breaks of the game.

PH Anyone else?

SV. Yes, I also think that we will eventually realize that this country owes a great deal of gratitude to President Ford for his management of this country after Nixon's resignations.

PH Do you think that we as a nation will ever come to understand the position President Ford was put in? It seemed that most of us were too wrapped up in the issue of Watergate to see clearer.

SV. Yes, I do, especially if people reflect back to what I believe to be his strongest message: "Our long national nightmare has come to an end." This showed his strength, although I am sure he suffered from pardoning Nixon.

PH But wouldn't anyone have pardoned him?

SV. Yes, but Ford was the one who did it. That, unfortunately would overshadow the way he took the reigns after Nixon's resignation. All Americans should be very grateful for what President Ford did..

PH What makes a good journalist?

SV. Curiosity and the attention span of a two year old. A reporter can't wait to go on to the next story.

PH As a reporter, how hard is it, and should one keep their personal opinions outside of their reporting?

SV. Yes, you should try to keep your personal views out of your reporting. There is a book by Bill Kovach, curator of the Nieman Foundation, and Tom Rosensteel, the head of the Committee on Excellence in Journalism, it is a book called **Worp Speed**. It is an interesting book

because they talk about the politics of assertion, where people pronounce judgements rather than report. If you look at TV, you have talk show hosts and other people, especially lawyers, constantly asserting something. What would happen if somebody said they did not know the answer to a question, rather than asserting "something" or "anything? You just can't say "I don't know"; therefore they assert something. Now I must add that while we were covering Mr. King and what he was doing, we all knew and felt that it was right; but we tried to be careful to play our reporting down the middle.

PH Do you have to be aggressive?

SV. I don't like the word aggressive. I like dogged, determined and POLITE. There is a gentleman that comes to mind, out of the Chicago School of Journalism in the 1920's, Eddie Lahey. He said every good general assignment reporter ought to have the depth of a one pound box of candy. What he meant by this was that one should not become too philosophical about it, just go and do your job. Today as a reporter you have to go to seminars and meetings. I remember we use to just go out and do our job. If we didn't do it right, we would soon learn about it from the people we worked for. I think the best description of what we do is given by a dear friend of mine Martin F. Nolen of the *Boston Globe*. A student at Duke University asked him why he was a journalist; Martin replied, "If you came from where I did in Boston, it was inside work and there was no heavy lifting."

PH Are there any other negatives you can think of that are present in today's journalism?

SV. One thing people are asking today is "Where is the news?" We are glad the Cold War is over but the news media misses the certainty of the Cold War, of the black and white of it, and the good against the evil. Now, we are in a new era and it is hard to define the news. The late Harold Ross who founded the *New Yorker* once

said "It's what makes anyone say, 'Gee Whiz!'"

PH Besides the twenty four hour access to news, are there any other changes that you see in reporting today?

SV. Yes, the editor's function has diminished. Mistakes, not just spelling and punctuation, but historical facts, are passed by. We have these big computers to check accuracy, but if wrong information is fed into the computer, it goes on and on and eventually becomes a reality.

PH Do you have any pointers for a young journalist?

SV. Take your job seriously, but don't take yourself too seriously.

PH In your opinion, who are the most impressive journalists today?

SV. That is hard to define. David Halberstam, who is a terrific journalist. One of the greatest journalists in my eyes was Russel Baker of *The New York Times*. His column, I believe, was the longest running column, lasting 36 years. People thought that his column was one of humor, but it was also a very penetrating column about human frailty and the insanity we have to go through.

PH And a woman?

SV. I am very high on Christiane Amanpour. She does an absolutely first class job reporting. She takes great risks in reporting and when you're finished listening to her, you know a little bit more.

PH Is the term "dirty politics" a true reflection of our political system?

SV. When someone asks me about dirty politics, I am reminded of a scene in a Woody Allen film, **Take the Money and Run**. He is being examined by a psychiatrist, who asks him if he finds sex dirty, he replies: "Only when it's done right." I grew up as a politician's son in Cleveland. I love politics and politicians. I love our political institutions. They are either

or should be the envy of the world, and I hate when people talk about politics in a pejorative sense. Politicians are the mediators of real conflicts and interests. Note that I have not used the words "special interest", because all interests are special, especially when people are trying to thwart or push them through. Politicians sort out and compromise the differences, if it is done right. So, whenever I hear the blasting of Congress for grid lock, I become infuriated. Why don't they call it Checks and Balances, that's what our founding father's called it? What other country can boast of the political stability we have had, especially through the last century? What country could have gone through what we have since the death of Kennedy and turn out the way we have? So no, I do not consider politics dirty. I did a project for the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center in Arlington, Va. It was on the *Post-War Congress and the Media*. My old friend Pat Moynihan said "We used to talk on the Senate floor and in conference committees. Now we talk to each other through the weekend talk shows." But do the weekend talk shows pass legislation? No, they just talk about what people have done passing legislation or not passing it. So I am very high on politicians and loathe those who criticize them all the time.

PH *Do today's younger politicians have the integrity of a Moynihan or are they a different breed?*

SV. I can't make a generalization about them, and I don't believe age has anything to do with it. You have both old and young hacks. What I do worry about is if the revelations of politician's personal life will deter future political aspirants from going into politics, and I think that is deplorable.

PH *Can it be stopped?*

SV. I don't think so, unless the public makes a statement to the media that they have had enough. I do see signs of this.

PH *Do you think the next Presidential election will be interesting?*

SV. Don't know. It depends on how the press reports the campaign. I believe we have some major issues; our educational, health and pension systems and what role do we want the government to play in our lives. It seems that we are against every government program except those that benefit each and everyone of us. I would like to see a debate on that. Unfortunately, we have politicians that are poll driven, so I don't know what kind of a debate you'll get. Look back at the campaign of the 60's. There was one issue, the Catholicism of the Kennedys. It was what drove the campaign.

PH *This country was founded on immigrants. Unlike the older generation, today's young immigrants are not learning English nor a second language. Is it because they are not as committed to this country as earlier immigrants?*

SV. People come to this country for many reasons. It reminds me of a line by Carl Sandburg "Nothing like us ever was." This is a very alluring place and it is not diminishing despite our problems. People come here because it is America. But, language will be important only where the issue arises; I don't see it as a national issue. I will, however, be frank with you. When the earlier immigrants came to this country, they continued to speak their mother tongue at home, but outside the home and in the classroom only English was spoken. It was an assimilation process. I don't think it helps for Hispanics or other immigrants to be taught in two languages because we are a country of the English language; and if we do not go along with that premise, we will have a balkanized country. We have evidence of this effect in Canada. So I believe that the educational system should be taught in English. It is what has gotten us to where we are today. You can't have hyphenated Americans.

PH *Now I would like to have your thoughts on a few subjects. The Euro*

SV. I don't know enough about it to make a statement other than it seems to be having trouble getting started. It goes to the heart of the question of whether England is a part of Europe, or is to remain a part of Europe or is part of the Anglo American alliance?

PH *Space missions?*

SV. Go forward.

PH *The computer age?*

SV. I think that it runs the danger of giving us too much information and too little judgement.

PH *The future of this country?*

SV. I am very optimistic. I am concerned on three issues: 1) the role our government will play in our live's 2) the challenges we take on, and what foreign conflicts we enter. Though we may get involved with the best intentions, it may look like we are bullying them. Our future role in international politics is important and there are no easy answers.

PH *Iran?*

SV. Our relationship with Iran is very important. From what I have read, the new administration is doing a good job. But I believe that the restoration of our relations should be a slow, calculated process.

PH *Will there be a woman or minority President?*

SV. Yes it will happen and should happen. There is too much talent that must be recognized.

PH *Do you have a closing statement for our readers?*

SV. Yes, SMILE; don't make life tougher than it is.

PH *Thank you.*

SV. No, thank you.

PH



An Interview with

Jalali

It is said, that Jalali Soussan-Abadi's miniatures are magical and join the traditional elements of the Persian miniature with "modern sensibility." Born in Arak, Iran in 1934, he moved to Teheran where he became Professor of the Miniature, at the School of Fine Arts, in Teheran. He now resides in the United States. After speaking with him, I realized why he is considered the best in the art of the miniature and why he is so accomplished as an artist. He has dedicated his entire life to perfecting his talent. Every line he places, every color he picks and every subject used are intensely researched and studied. Perhaps, those are the reasons that his miniatures have a sense of the perspective found in the early miniature.

PH. Who is Soussan-Abadi and what does he stand for?

A. I am an artist and more specifically a miniaturist, I paint Persian miniatures.

PH. At what age did your interest in art begin?

A. Very young, actually around age



Soussan

seven or eight; at that time it was a hobby. Between the ages of ten and twelve I began to be very serious about my art and took lessons. I studied and worked under many teachers. Not only was I interested in their work, but I wanted to know how and why they became artists. After these years I separated myself from them, but their influence on my work was easily identifiable. It took about another seven to eight years for me to completely lose their influence and develop my own theory on how I wanted to create.

One of my teachers was Hossein Liltafi, who was from Tabriz, but lived in Teheran. His specialty was painting flowers and paisley patterns, and followed Fath-Ali-Shahi's style. While under their influence I discovered the works of Master Hossein Behzad. I then made the acquaintance of Master Moghimi Tabrizi and studied under him for three to four years. After that I began to formulate my own style. I



Abadi

began sketching and experimenting with colors. Slowly my work was beginning to be known around for its own uniqueness and style. For the next seventeen to eighteen years, I sketched for fifteen to sixteen hours a day.

PH. And what would you call your style?

A. A texture of composition, color and design (the sketch). I also found that it was important to have a message in what I drew. I would try to make these messages come through the sketch in a bold and clear manner.

PH. How does an artist perfect his subject?

A. In order to paint or sketch it is imperative that the artist take classes and study the design of their subject. For instance, in order to paint the body of an animal or human it is

necessary to study its anatomy. It is hard enough to paint them on a large scale. To put them correctly into a Persian miniature is much more difficult. Remember in painting the miniature you are shrinking the subject in size and giving them colors. You simply cannot just paint them on the material, they must be precise. That is why the Persian miniature is truly a delight. The ancient miniaturists dealt with perspective in a different way. Old miniatures were two dimensional. This type of line was developed during the Savafid Period. We now put the subject within the lines and confine them to the lines, regardless of the geometric shape that the lines form.

PH. But how does color come into play in your work?

A. It is not just the color, in fact I wish I did not have to use color. What I have strived to achieve through the use of the lines and the subject within, is to create light and darkness and closeness and distance. I try hard not to use shading since I believe that shading does not represent the truth. Depending on where the sun is located, it will produce a different form of shading and therefore prevent the full dimension of the subject. So, for example, I, in order to increase the distance of the miniature between the lines, I give strong character to the subject.

PH. Do you have a certain exercise, before you begin to draw or paint?

A. Most definitely. Before I start drawing I mix colors and create colors. I then start to draw and create the designs. This is often a five to six month painful process. Suddenly, when the time is right the subject moves to the painting. It becomes alive. It must give an appearance that it is palpable. If you want to be a good artist you must be a perfectionist. Practicing your strokes, seven to eight hours a day is not unusual for a good artist to practice their stroke and design. It is also not unusual for it to take twenty to thirty years to perfect your talent and allow you the luxury of creating your own style. But even then the good dedicated artist will not stop



practicing, you should continue to practice two to three hours a day. The artist who is serious, must quickly learn to live and desire less, they must go in one, not multiple directions.

PH. When you paint is there a means to the end, a goal?

A. Yes, I always hope that my sketch alone will be enough to leave a lasting impression on the viewer. I always strive to not have to add color to perfect it. I wish that the remainder of my life as a painter could be dedicated to the design alone, because a sketch is easier to understand. It is pure. I strive to give life to all these lines, designs and styles. If I achieve this, I know I am painting well, because I will completely lose myself in the painting and in my thoughts. Hopefully the viewer will be able to

view my work in the same way. I hope that they become part of the work. For any one to enjoy a piece of art work, they must be in touch with the artist, understand the artist become part of the work and feel it the same way as its creator.

PH. Is it difficult to give life to a painting?

A. It is the goal of every artist, and yes, the most difficult of tasks and it is the skill that once achieved is painful to lose.

PH. How does one lose this skill?

A. Any number of reasons. For me I have been stricken with arthritis. It is therefore a struggle for me to continue to paint. Yet, I know that to continue to be good at what I am doing I must put up with the pain. So I still continue to practice my strokes. If



I were to completely lose this ability I am not sure I could live with myself. But I am an artist who needs to put what he feels onto the paper immediately and therefore have learned to deal with the pain. Often, I get so involved that I forget the pain. I believe if I do not suffer through this pain and put the thoughts down immediately, that they will lose their meaning.

PH. But if the pain is too severe?

A. If the pain is too severe on one day and causes me to lose hours in creating, I will pray for a better next day and find the hours I lost in that day.

PH. It seems as that many sacrifices must be made in order to reach a level of success. Is it fame and fortune that attracts the artist to art or the reverse?

A. That is an interesting statement. It depends I believe it depends on what you seek out of your profession. No one is responsible for an artist. If you are a true artist you paint for yourself and hope that you are accepted, admired and purchased by the outside world. If, however, you paint what pleases the viewer and not yourself, then you may become wealthy, but may not be a true artist. For the past 50-60 years of my life I have closed off the outside world. I have given my life to art and am

completely satisfied by what my paintings give to me. There is nothing that I regret or that I would trade for the moments I shared with my work. Every spare moment of my life is spent in drawing. Yet, I say, though I love this, it has not always been easy.

PH. You must truly love your profession?

A. Those who love what they do, whatever it is can understand what I am saying. If you truly love what you are doing, it brings you the satisfaction necessary to go on. If you are happy in what you do, it is felt by those around you. As an artist, what you try to do is deliver the satisfaction you have received from the painting back over to the viewer.

PH. From where do you get your inspirations?

A. This is a very broad question. I am inspired by many avenues, from what I hear, see and read. One of my most valuable inspirations is living.

PH. Do you see a difference in your work since you moved from Iran to the United States?

A. Of course ones surroundings, both spiritual and physical, affects the way they perform. I believe, if I stayed in Iran my life would have gone in another direction. My designs and the work of my students, would probably have continued to reflect the turmoil that was erupting. After awhile, I

realized that this is not the direction I wanted to be going. I was not receiving any satisfaction, my work was horrific, disturbing and I knew that no one would want to purchase something like this. It could not. But, in actuality the west has not impacted my work. This was and is because I have shut the outside world out. When I paint, which consumes the best part of my day, I continue, in my mind, to live in Iran. I become westernized only when I leave the world of art.

PH. Did European painting styles have any affect on Iranian art?

A. No, not at all. As a matter of fact I believe it was the reverse. The Europeans had their own style. Remember we have used miniatures since the time of Tambourine and Mani. Mani went to Turkistan and when he returned he came back with the Mongols and brought the miniature back to Iran. When you see the bird and dragons in paintings, it is from their times. Also, if you look back in history our work of arts were found underneath the ground many years back, maybe, 5,000 years ago. So to say we were influenced by the Europeans is somewhat silly. You must remember, that for a certain time we lost touch with art because of the attacks by the Mongols. Mani then came and brought back the miniature. The princes and princesses of that

period for some reason loved miniature art. During the Safavid Period, art perspectives became mixed up and we saw the beginning of basic painting, but it was also during this period that the creation and use of lines and geographic impressions came into style.

PH. One thing that has always bothered and disturbed me is why Persian artists do not have world wide recognition?

A. It is societies fault and lack of money and wealth. One of the most successful ways of becoming world renown (especially while you are alive) is by having sponsors and exhibitions. In order to do this you need financial support. Most artists, however, are just not business oriented. We do not know how or for that matter want to sell our works if it means prostituting ourselves.

PH. Did you ever have an exhibition?

A. Yes, one in Las Vegas. It was interesting to see how Americans viewed my work. I kept hearing how different my work was and how they had never seen this work before. Fortunately, I had the support of some fellow Iranians at this exhibition who helped me explain my work to the Americans. But that is OK, people do have different opinions.

PH. What is your current art work called?

A. The *Embrace*, which reflects the feelings of those individuals who live in a crowded society yet are still lonely.

PH. If I could go back to the attacks of the Mongols for a second. In the Persian miniature the facial structure found is often the face of a Mongol. Why did the Persian miniature painter continue to paint this style?

A. It is just the practice of repetition. If you look at my eyes and compare them to your eyes you see that they are purely Iranian eyes. Others, however, have just copied from the original miniature. I always use the Persian face, though my lip styles change. It is precisely one of the reasons that my miniature are

distinguishable from others.

PH. Why and how do you choose colors and what is their significance?

A. I use mostly green, turquoise, orange and purple. The turquoise color is always derived from the color of the stone.

PH. Why did you work so hard at carving out your own style, rather than following the styles of your teacher?

A. It is very natural for artists to want to develop their own style. It is like writing. But, I knew that it would be impossible to duplicate the work of the artists that came out of the Tamorian times. I, therefore, knew that my survival and acknowledgment as an artist depended on my ability to carve out my own style. So, I painted things smaller and larger and mixed up colors and facial images, creating my lines in a new and beautiful way.

PH. When you look at the writings of Hafez, you see a different world in each of his poems, but when you look at Iranian artists and their works you see a lot of repetition and similarity, why is that?

A. It depends on the commitment the artist has to the work. If they work hard they will add something to differentiate their style. But there are certain things in Iranian art that must remain the same, those being the nose and the lips.

PH. Today, you have shown me your beautiful works. One thing that interests me, is your use of the lithograph to memorialize your work. When did you start doing lithographs?

A. I started publishing my work through Dr. Boback three to four years ago, about seven to ten pieces. A few years ago I did a few pieces through the lithograph.

PH. How many works do you produce in a given year?

A. One, the maximum two pieces. Remember each piece I do, is pre worked for about three months and then it takes seven to eight months to finish the work. I am a perfectionist and it therefore takes a lot of time for



me to satisfy myself. I only hope that over the next two to three hundred years, my work will become popular and significant to Iranian heritage and history.

PH. What message do you have for young Iranian Americans?

A. One of their problems is that they are not familiar with the heritage of their ethnicity. It is our duty to introduce them to this and their duty to preserve their heritage. I am a person who has chosen to shut myself out of the world. I, on the other hand, suggest that if they desire to become a world renown artist that they expose themselves to galleries, without selling themselves. They need to introduce themselves to their peers. I further recommend that they seek out museums and exhibitions that show Persian/Iranian art and compare the various art produced in different dynasties to those of other cultures. In short, seek as much knowledge as you can, from as many sources as you can and learn about the artists of your ethnicity. From that you will better understand yourself.

PH. What do you recommend to the aspiring artists?

A. The harder you work, the better you will get. You must constantly practice your drawing, calligraphy, design and study. You should never be without a pencil and paper. And you must study the various forms of designs, colors and composition as well as the styles of other artists.

PH. What do you expect from society?

A. I have no expectations from others, I am not their responsibility. I only expect from myself. I believe I owe society something, and that is to transmit the gift I have been given, to others.

PH