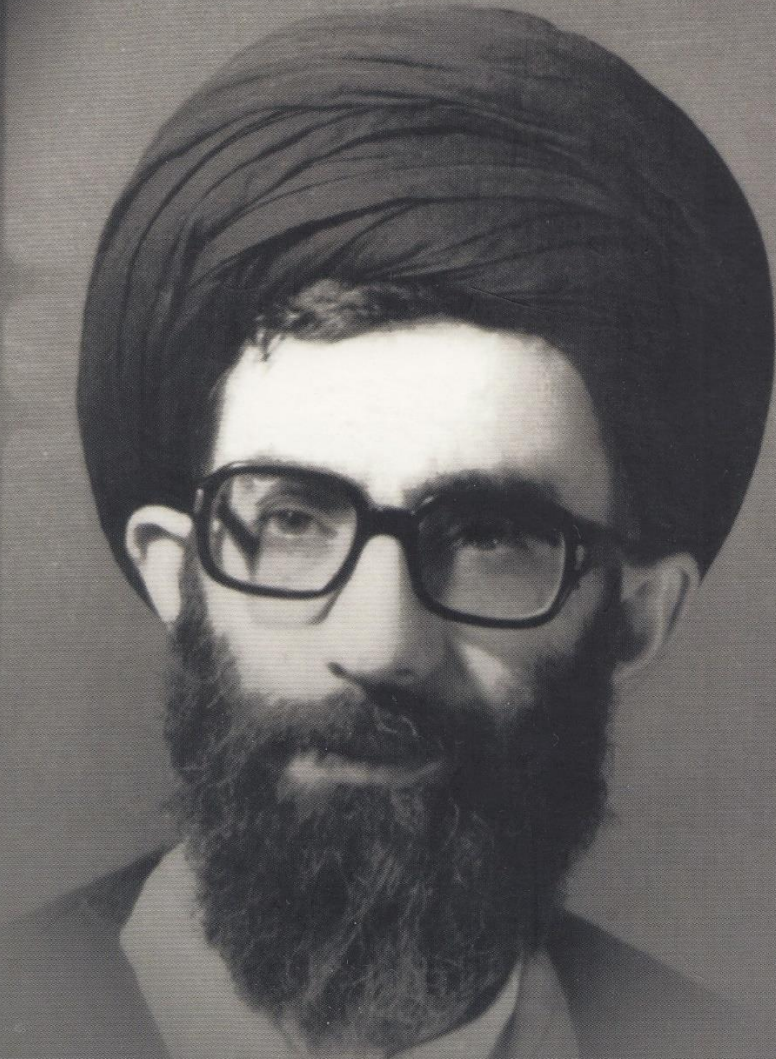


# Cell No. 14



Sayyed Ali  
Khamenei



CELL No. 14



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## GLOSSARY

- Ahlul-Bayt: Arabic, literally ‘People of the House’. Designation in Islam for the family of the Prophet Muhammad, particularly his daughter Fatima, her husband Ali, and their descendants. Shi‘as closely identify this family with the Imams, whom they regard as the legitimate holders of authority in the Muslim community and the infallible bearers of sacred knowledge.
- Adhan: The Islamic call to prayer, recited by the mu‘azzin at prescribed times during the day.
- Ayatullah: Honorific title in Twelver Shi‘i Islam, assigned to outstanding legal scholars.
- Fada’iyan-e Islam: “Self-Sacrificers of Islam”, an Iranian Shi‘a group with a strong political orientation, founded by Sayyid Navvab Safavi in 1945.
- Hadith: Record of the traditions or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, revered and received as a major source of religious law and moral guidance, second only to the authority of the Qur’an.
- Hawza ‘Ilmiyya: ‘Enclave of Knowledge’, the religious institution where Shi‘a clerics are trained.
- Ijtihad: An Islamic legal term derived from “*jahd*”, an Arabic word which denotes the exertion of effort. The term *ijtihad* refers to the exercising of discretionary judgment by qualified clergymen for the purpose of deducing a law or rule.
- Juz’: In Arabic, a *juz’* literally means “part”. It is used to refer to one of thirty parts of varying lengths into which the Qur’an is divided. *Juz’ ‘Amma*, the thirtieth and final *juz’* of the Qur’an, consists mainly of short surahs (chapters), It is the most commonly memorized *juz’* and is taught to children due to the brevity of its *surahs*.

- **Kuttab:** In most Muslim countries, traditional educational systems consisted of, first, the *kuttab* (center of writing), equivalent to the primary or basic stage of education, and, second, the *madrasah* (school) equivalent to secondary or post-basic education.
- **Mihrab:** Ornamental arched niche constructed in the wall of a mosque to indicate the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca, toward the Sacred Mosque which Muslims are required to face during prayer.
- **Mujtahid:** Learned individual who exercises independent reasoning in the interpretation of Islamic law. Qualifications include training in recognized seminaries of Islamic Law and extensive knowledge in the Qur'an and Hadith.
- **SAVAK:** National Organization for Security and Intelligence, the brutal Secret police organization established by the Shah with the aid of the CIA.
- **Sayyid:** Arabic, 'master,' or 'lord'. An honorific title denoting the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter, Fatima, and her husband, Ali. Individuals who trace their descent to the Prophet and have completed their religious training wear black turbans to indicate their lineage.
- **Shah:** The title of the past rulers of Iran, the last of whom was ousted during the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

# FOREWORD

Regardless of differing opinions, the Islamic Revolution of Iran remains a pivotal event in history. Half a century ago, the two world powers—America and the Soviet Union—strove to dominate the globe. Exhibiting a particular interest in Islamic countries, these two powers led a cultural, economic and military invasion in the hope of imposing influence and establishing hegemony over the region. The United States of America directed its attention towards Iran, in large part due to the country's strategic location and wealth of natural resources, particularly oil. For Washington, Iran became the cornerstone of America's security plan for implementing and safeguarding Western interests across the region.

In 1962, Imam Khomeini emerged as the most powerful Iranian voice of opposition, denouncing the Shah's repressive domestic policies and brutal tactics. He was the first religious leader to openly condemn the Shah's Westernization program, and was imprisoned for a brief period of time before being exiled. Years passed during which Islamic activists suffered from persecution, imprisonment and torture. As discontent grew, the Shah became more repressive, and support for Imam Khomeini grew. In 1978, massive anti-shah demonstrations broke out in Iran's major cities and Imam Khomeini called for the Shah's immediate overthrow. In January 1979, the Shah fled from Iran and on February 1, 1979, Imam Khomeini arrived in Tehran in triumph.

The narrator of these memoirs is none other than Sayyid Ali Hussein Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran. A staunch supporter and faithful adherent of Imam Khomeini, Sayyid Ali Khamenei actively engaged in anti-regime activities and was imprisoned numerous times. These memoirs which Sayyid Ali Khamenei chose to narrate in Arabic are an oral firsthand description of an important phase in Iranian history whose long-term implications continue to affect the world until this very day.

Why did the Supreme Leader recount the details of his struggle in Arabic and not Persian? The answer lies in the fondness Sayyid Ali Khamenei holds for the Arabic language. This affection can be traced back to the days of his early childhood, during the moments he sat near his mother listening raptly to her recitation of the Qur'an. As he grew, his love for Arabic intensified and he was drawn to the Qur'an and Arabic poetry.

Two decades ago, Sayyid Ali Khamenei conducted weekly sessions in which he made a point of speaking in Arabic on various issues, sometimes reminiscing on his memories. A suggestion was made from the audience to publish these memoirs. Sayyid Ali Khamenei responded and proceeded to recount the details of his life. This book, whose Arabic version has been dedicated to the Arab youth, mainly concentrates on the time Sayyid Ali Khamenei spent in prison and is the first formal memoir published by the Office of the Supreme Leader of Iran.



**FLASHES FROM THE PAST**

## The Upstairs Room

I was born in the Iranian city of Mashhad<sup>1</sup> which is located in the province of Khorasan and is widely renowned for encompassing the shrine of the eighth Imam of *Ahlul-Bayt*, Ali bin Musa al-Rida.<sup>2</sup> It was on the 28<sup>th</sup> of Safar of the year 1358 AH<sup>3</sup>, corresponding to the 16<sup>th</sup> of July 1939 according to the Gregorian Calendar, that my eyes first opened to the world.

The house where I was born in was small and humble and consisted only of two rooms; one was situated on the upper floor and was designated for my parents and their young children, whereas the downstairs room was allocated for my stepsisters whose mother had passed away before my father married my mother. When our house was renovated after thirty years, the upstairs room was divided

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- 1 Mashhad is the capital of the province of Khorasan-e Razavi, which lies in northeastern Iran, and is the second-largest city in the country. Mashhad is home to the second largest population in Iran after Tehran, the national capital. Its full original name was Mashhad-e Rida (the Place of Rida's Martyrdom), indicating that it is the locality where the eighth Shi'a Imam, Ali bin Musa al-Rida, was poisoned in 818 by al-Ma'mun (r. 813-833), the Abbasid caliph. Ali al-Rida's shrine is the most important center of pilgrimage in Iran, annually attracting millions of Shi'a pilgrims from all over the nation and from many countries mm the world who travel to pay their respects to the Imam.
  - 2 Imam Ali bin Musa al-Rida (born either 765/768/770 — martyred 818). The Eighth Imam of Ahlul-Bayt and a descendant of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his Household). The phase of his Imamate commenced after the martyrdom of his father Musa ibn Ja'far in prison during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph Harun. After the death of Harun, the new Caliph Al-Ma'mun forced Imam Ali al-Rida to travel from his home in Medina to Khorasan and forcibly appointed him as his successor with the purpose of damaging the reputation of Ahlul Bayt and preventing Muslims from adhering to his leadership. Despite al-Ma'mun's measures, he failed in undermining the venerable status of the Imam in the eyes of Muslims. Imam Ali al-Rida died after a brief illness at Tus. Shi'a historians attribute his death to poisoning, possibly administered by the caliph himself. His shrine at Tus became a pilgrimage place and gave its name to the city of Mashhad—which literally means "Place of Martyrdom"—in Iran.
  - 3 The term hijra (migration) is used by Muslims specifically to refer to the Prophet Muhammad's departure from his native city, Mecca, to Medina to escape persecution in A.D. 622. He and a small group of his followers moved to Yathrib, some 280 miles (450 kilometers) to the north-east. To mark his arrival in Yathrib, the place was renamed Madina-tu-nabi (City of the Prophet), a phrase subsequently shortened to Medina, the name by which it is still known. The date of the hijra, which presumably took place on the 8th day of the Islamic month of Rabi' I (which corresponds to September 622 CE), represents the starting point of the Islamic Hejiran Calendar. The Hejiran Calendar is a lunar calendar in which the year is divided into twelve months based upon the orbits of the moon around the earth and the observations of the phases of the moon as seen from the earth. In the early days of Islam, physical sightings of the new moon determined the start of another month.

into two separate chambers. I am the second-born male in my family; I have an older brother named Mohammad, two younger brothers, and four sisters.

A year after I was born, our entire family moved into the house of my maternal grandfather, Sayyid Hashem Mirdamadi Najaf Abadi<sup>4</sup>. My grandfather was a cleric reputed for his erudition, asceticism and extensive knowledge in the exegesis of the Qur'an. Reza Shah Pahlavi<sup>5</sup> had banished him from Mashhad along with dozens of other scholars several years before my birth in the aftermath of the Goharshad Uprising,<sup>6</sup> and his home had remained empty. His house was relatively spacious, but when he returned from his imposed exile we moved back to our small home.

Our house was located in a poor neighborhood in Mashhad and was sixty to seventy square meters large. When I was around five years old, some of my father's devotees embarked upon enlarging our living quarters, and for this purpose, they purchased the abandoned adjoining land and reconstructed our residence. After the building process, we came into possession of a newly

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- 4 Sayyid Hashem Mirdamadi Najaf Abadi (1886-1960) received his education in Islamic jurisprudence and principles of Islamic jurisprudence in Najaf under the tutelage of the most prominent clerics of his time. He was inclined toward Islamic mysticism ('Irfan) and maintained contact with great mystic figures such as Sayyid Ahmad Karbala'i and Sayyid Murtada Kashmiri. After his migration to Mashhad, he vigorously opposed Reza Shah Pahlavi and strongly objected the formal governmental plan aiming to ban the Islamic hijab for women and enforce the wearing of Western hats for men. Sayyid Mirdamadi was among the ulama who participated in the revolt of Goharshad Mosque after which he was arrested and sent into exile for six years.
  - 5 Reza Shah Pahlavi (1878-1944): The founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, an army officer who rose through the military ranks established by the Russians during the Qajar Period to become Shah of Iran. Despite the fact that he was one of the commanders of the Cossack Brigade, he was assigned by officers in the British Intelligence service with the task of plotting for a military coup against the last Qajar king, Ahmad Shah. Reza Shah fulfilled this feat in March 1921 and was elected prime minister of Iran under British pressure. In 1925, he declared the end of the Qajar dynasty and was elected Shah by a constituent assembly. Reza Shah offered countless services to the British but was himself deposed by a British coup. His era was one of the most bitter monarchical periods in Iran; under his rule, Persian men were ordered to don European attire and headgear, and Persian women were encouraged to discard the veil.
  - 6 Goharshad Mosque lies near the shrine of Imam Ali al-Rida (peace be upon him), and was constructed by order of Empress Goharshad the wife of Shah Rukh (r. 1405-1445) of the Timurid Dynasty. In July 1935, the people of Mashhad gathered at Goharshad Mosque under the leadership of a prominent scholar in order to oppose the law Reza Shah enforced which banned all veils for women and imposed Western dress upon men. This gathering was suppressed by the government forces under the order of Reza Shah which resulted in a great number of casualties. This incident left a deep mark on modern political developments in Iran.

enlarged house and the area of the two combined dwellings became equivalent to 200 square meters. We now had three rooms.

Our house only contained a few simple furnishings. On the day of my father's death, 45 years after the time period I have referred to, our furniture was estimated to cost only around 40,000 tomans,<sup>7</sup> excluding the price of my father's books. Our home was later transformed into a *husseiniyya*, a public quarter dedicated for religious assemblies.

## Generational Legacy

My father, Sayyid Javad Khamenei, hailed from a renowned clerical family from Tabriz. He was born in Najaf in the year 1895. His father, Sayyid Hussein Khamenei, was the imam<sup>8</sup> of the main mosque in Tabriz. My paternal grandfather received his formal education in Najaf and his religious training extended for a period of twenty years. Sayyid Hussein Khamenei returned to Tabriz in 1897, three years after the death of Mirza Shirazi<sup>9</sup>.

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7 Toman is a unit of currency of Iran. Although rial is the official currency of Iran, Iranians employ the term toman, which amounts to 10 rials.

8 Imam: The word is associated with the Arabic preposition *amam*, meaning 'in front of'. It can also suggest precedence, leadership and authority. The general term is not to be mistaken with the more specific one granted by Shi'as to the twelve successors of Prophet Muhammad.

In the general sense, a person known as an imam exercises leadership among his local co-religionists. At the local level, the imam is chosen to serve in the mosque as leader during the five daily times of public prayer and worship because his exemplary life as a Muslim marks him out as someone who is entitled such a leadership role on behalf of the community. To do this, he stands literally 'in front' of the group of worshippers in a mosque, directing the course and the tempo of the successive stages of the prayer ritual. The role of the imam is not limited to the coordination of public prayer. He is involved in all the rites of passage which feature in the lives of Muslims, from performing a marriage ceremony and finally to conducting the funeral ceremony and committing the body of the deceased to the grave.

The word carries an additional meaning for Shi'a Muslims who regard their Imams not just as individuals whose lives uniquely exemplify the life of a faithful Muslim, but as venerated figures credited with superhuman wisdom and leaders of the Islamic society at the cultural, political and economic level.

9 Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Hussein (1815-1895), known as Mirza Shirazi, was one of the most prominent mujtahids and Shi'a leaders of his time. He assumed the religious leadership of Shi'as following the death of his teacher, Sheikh Mortada Ansari. Mirza Shirazi is well-known for having issued a verdict prohibiting the use of tobacco after the Persian Qajar monarch, Nasir al-Din Shah, had awarded a British company the concession of planting and trading in tobacco, an authorization which was in itself a means of enforcing British economic and political hegemony over Iran. The people of Iran collectively abided with Mirza Shirazi's

My father recounted that it was my grandfather's habit to go to sleep in the early evening after supper while his children were still immersed in play. He would awaken two hours before dawn to offer worship and read, concluding most of his reading prior to dawn. My grandfather was a prominent scholar; many clerics from Tabriz received their education under his tutelage during his abode in Najaf. The imam of the main mosque in Tabriz, a cleric from the well-known Mujtahid family, ceded the leadership of prayers at the mosque to his mentor, Sayyid Hussein, when the latter returned to the city.

My grandfather passed away in 1907, several months after the commencement of the Constitutional Movement.<sup>10</sup> His funeral ceremony was conducted in Tabriz and his corpse was transferred to Najaf where he was buried in the Wadi al-Salam. It is worth mentioning that the famous revolutionary, Sheikh Mohammad Khiabani,<sup>11</sup> was his son in law.

My uncle, Sayyid Mohammad Khamenei, was known in Najaf as Sayyid Mohammad Peyghambar and was highly regarded for providing aid to people. He was one of the close adherents of Akhund Khorasani<sup>12</sup> and Sayyid Abul -

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verdict, forcing the Shah to annul the transaction. Mirza Shirazi has become a symbol of struggle against colonial influence on Islamic countries, especially Iran.

10 The Iranian Constitutional Movement (1905-1907): A socio-political movement launched in Iran under the leadership of the *ulama* with the aim of curbing the tyranny of the monarchy, establishing justice and ensuring public interests. The movement assumed a constitutional and monarchical character after the interference of Britain and British agents in the country, an intervention which marked the outset of dilemmas and bloodshed in Iran. Britain feared the influence of the *ulama* after the tobacco insurgency and thus strove to stir problems in the country, notably attempting to isolate influential *ulama*, promote figures loyal to Britain and to weaken the religious and national movement in Iran.

11 Mohammad Khiabani (1880-1920): Cleric, orator and husband of Sayyid Khamenei's paternal aunt. Sheikh Khiabani called for freedom during a popular Iranian uprising against the tyrannical rule of the Qajars. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, Khiabani reestablished the Democrat Party of Tabriz, which had been banned for five years, and published the Tujaddod newspaper, the official outlet of the party. Later, in a protest to the 1919 Treaty between Iran and the United Kingdom which exclusively transferred the rights to decide upon almost all military, financial, and customs affairs to the British, he revolted and took over Tabriz and the surrounding areas, calling it Azadistan ("Land of Liberty"). Forces were sent to crush the rebellion, and, after the fall of the city of Tabriz, Khiabani was murdered by henchmen loyal to the Qajar dynasty. Even though he had served as a representative in the Majlis, the Iranian Consultative Assembly, Sheikh Khiabani is mostly known for his revolt. He was buried in the courtyard adjoining the shrine of Sayyid Abdel-Azim al-Hasani in Tehran.

12 Mohammad Kadhim Khorasani (1839-1911): Known as Akhund Khorasani, a renowned marja' taglid and author of the book Kifayat al-Usul. He received his religious instruction under the

Hasan Isfahani.<sup>13</sup> I recall that I met the youngest son of Akhund Khorasani, Sheikh Hussein Agha, when I traveled to Najaf in 1957. He recognized me and praised my uncle profusely, informing me that he had been one of the four trustees in charge of administrating my uncle's affairs.

As for my father, Sayyid Javad Khamenei was known for his elevation of character, extensive erudition and attainment of the rank of *ijtihad*. He completed his studies under the instruction of great scholars such as Mirza Na'ini and Sayyid Abul-Hasan Isfahani. He was abstemious, spurning money and worldly conveniences. Even though he was the imam of a mosque located in the center of the marketplace of Mashhad—where wage earners, merchants and wealthy individuals presided—he refrained from scrutinizing other people's merchandise or making personal estimations of their possessions. He achieved the highest point in restraint, a result of rigorous abstinence from self-indulgence.

My father preferred isolation but I was not inclined to that particular trait; as a matter of fact, his introversion drove me to adopt the opposite quality. He used to enter the mosque with his head lowered and his gaze firmly fixed on the ground, striding purposefully toward the *mihrab* and preferring not to converse with any of the worshippers. Once there, he would remove his eyeglasses, untie the edge of his turban and lower it below his jaw as Islamic custom recommends. After leading the faithful in prayer, he would exit in the very same manner he entered. During assemblies, he would remain silent unless someone posed a question to him. He only conversed with his close friends among the clergy and refrained from participating in discussions not pertaining to scholarly topics.

The consequence of this seclusion was extreme poverty. My father's destitution sometimes compelled him to sell some of his books despite the fact that he cherished them. His attachment to his books was so intense that he always felt ill at ease if he saw any of his children cradling a book from his personal library and leafing through its pages. Upon witnessing such a scene, he would say

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tutelage of Sheikh Mortada Ansari and Mirza Shirazi, and was a staunch supporter of the Constitutional Movement in Iran.

13 Sayyid Abul-Hasan Isfahani (1860-1946): A grand *marja'* *taqlid* in Najaf who gained the degree of *ijtihad* after attending the classes of Akhund Khorasani and went on to teach a considerable number of students who rose to prominence. His authority was widely recognized in countries with Shi'a populations.

in a wistful tone permeated with keenness on preserving his book: “What is this I see? Please, return it back to its place!”

This made it particularly difficult for him to select some books for the purpose of selling them and collecting a sufficient sum to allay our hunger. In times of need, he would hesitatingly advance toward his bookcase to choose a book, but would find it unbearably difficult to do so and would return it to its place. Then he would pull out a second book, and a third, and so on until he was forced to choose some books. Handing the selected pile to one of his children, he would say: “Take these books to Sheikh Hadi and sell them.”

Sheikh Hadi was known for buying any book offered to him for sale. He would place it in his store but would only sell it afterwards at a high price. He often declared: “I am known for the expensive prices of my books. Only people who are in dire need of a certain book seek my store. A person who urgently wants a book will buy it regardless of its expensive price!” Such was the manner Sheikh Hadi employed in performing his transactions.

I remember that we often visited our maternal grandfather’s house as children. Sayyid Mirdamadi would hand us a riyal or half a riyal, abiding by the custom of grandparents and parents in conferring money upon their offspring. The amount was trifle but my mother was once compelled to take this paltry sum to buy us food to satisfy our hunger at suppertime due to the lack of subsistence at home.

I witnessed a level of poverty at my father’s house which was rarely to be noticed in the homes of clergymen during that time period. My childhood was marked by extreme hardship, especially since my early years coincided with World War II. Even though Mashhad was located outside the borders of the global conflict and all necessary items were more available in the city—as opposed to other regions in Iran—and sold for cheaper prices, our financial status rarely allowed us to buy bread made from wheat so we generally opted for barley bread instead. I remember some nights during my childhood when we had no dinner at home. Sometimes my mother would use the change my grandmother had given me or one of my brothers or sisters, and she would buy milk or raisins to eat with bread.

My father never mentioned his destitution and deprivation to anyone. People actually thought that he was wealthy because he refrained from receiving monetary aid and paid special attention to his outer appearance. He only wore a

khachiyeh mantle in the summer, the most expensive type which was followed in price respectively by mantles spun with blended textiles and machine woven mantles. In wintertime, he donned the *na'in* mantle which was more valuable than the familiar *mahut* cloak clerics were accustomed to wearing during the more frigid months. Unbeknownst to others, the inner garments that he wore concealed beneath his mantle were sometimes patched.

My father enveloped me with special affection. He enjoyed my company during his trips, and after I reached the age of maturity, he never traveled with any of my other siblings and preferred that I escort him instead. He was afflicted with temporary loss of vision and was compelled to undergo medical treatment in Tehran. He traveled three times for that purpose, and insisted each time that I personally accompany him.

I still recall that I was in Qom<sup>14</sup> in 1964 when I received a letter from my father, requesting that I travel to Mashhad in order to escort him to Tehran. I was late in departing to my hometown on account of a mission I needed to fulfill in Zahedan,<sup>15</sup> but was subsequently arrested in that city for engaging in activities pertaining to the Islamic movement.

As soon as I was taken into custody, I was plagued with worry for my father who never traveled without me. I was forced to board a plane conveying me to Tehran, and as I sat waiting to be transferred from Zahedan to the capital, my thoughts inevitably drifted to my father. My heart wrenched with sorrow and a wave of anxiety engulfed me. I thought to myself: *If this is my state of mind while*

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14 Qom: A large city in Iran and capital of Qom province, it lies 125 km south of Tehran. In the 8th century, Qom became one of the centers of Shi'a Islam. In 816 CE, Fatima, the sister of the eighth Imam Ali al-Rida (peace be upon him) died in the town on her way to see her brother and was buried there. It became a place of pilgrimage in the 17th century, when the Safavid rulers built a golden-domed shrine over Fatima's tomb. The modern city has the largest seminary in the country, where students can specialize in Islamic law, philosophy, theology, and logic, and boasts many research institutions. Qom is considered the largest center for Shi'a learning in the world, and is inhabited by large numbers of seminary students from different countries. It was at Qom that the Iranian army surrendered to Islamic revolutionary forces in 1979.

15 Zahedan: City and capital of Sistan and Baluchestan province, it lies in southeastern Iran near the borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The city was transformed after the Islamic Revolution into a strategic center and has become one of the main areas of trade in Iran. The population comprises Farsi-speaking Shi'as and Baluchi Sunnis.

*I'm still on board the plane, what feelings shall overwhelm me once I enter prison?*

I entreated God and beseeched him to calm my heart. I was distracted for a few minutes, but when my mind drifted once more to my father my agitation had somewhat abated. My heart was still filled with yearning and compassion for him, but it had become infused with a feeling of tranquility so tender that I can still sense it clearly to this very day. I expressed my gratitude to God for answering my prayers and granting me serenity, a blessing which can only be appreciated by those who suffer from worry and inner turmoil.

### **A Sweet, Euphonious Voice**

My mother was born and raised in the Iraqi city of Najaf, and spoke Arabic in her early youth with the accent peculiar to the inhabitants of that city. She was knowledgeable in the Qur'an and recited its verses in a melodious tone, tenderly pronouncing the holy words. Her voice became hoarse towards the end of her life and I constantly expressed my longing for her pleasant recitations, reminding her of how beautiful her voice had been in bygone days.

My mother committed herself daily to reciting the Qur'an from a copy her father had given to her as a gift. The way she recited the Qur'an attracted us as young children; we would gather around her and listen raptly to the beautiful flow of the verses. She grasped the opportunity to translate the meanings of some Qur'anic verses for us into Persian and to narrate the anecdotes of the Prophets. She was especially enraptured with the life of the great prophet Moses, a fact which drove her to recount the narrative of his life in detail for us. She spoke of Moses with such deep admiration, fueling our eagerness to hear more tales about him.

My mother derived pleasure from reading the poetry of Hafez.<sup>16</sup> She knew some of his stanzas by heart and sought good omens by opening a random page

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16 Hafez Shirazi (1315-1390): Mohammad Shams al-Din Hafez Shirazi, one of the finest lyric poets of Persia. It is assumed that the title "Hafez" (The Memorizer) is attributed to his knowledge of the various modes of recitation of the Holy Qur'an, or his knowledge of the Qur'an by heart. Hafez received a classical religious education, lectured on Qur'anic and other theological subjects, and wrote commentaries on religious classics. As a court poet, he enjoyed the patronage of several rulers of Shiraz. Around 1368-69, Hafez fell out of favor at court and did not regain his position until 20 years later, just before his death. In his poetry, there are many echoes of historical events as well as biographical descriptions and details of

from his volume of poetry and contemplating the poetic verse she encountered. She was also acquainted with Islamic hadiths and would sometimes mention a certain hadith in my father's presence which would drive him to object: "I have never come upon such a hadith before!" whereby she would mention its source.

My mother led an austere life, a quality she shared with my father. She refrained from mentioning our poverty in front of anyone and strove to conceal her suffering in a variety of ways. She inculcated the spirit of courage and resistance in the depths of my existence. My mother endured great distress as a consequence of my recurrent detentions and the frequent raids of the SAVAK<sup>17</sup> operatives on our home, but she nonetheless faced the assailants with steadfastness and determination, never failing to respond to their verbal abuse. She never faltered or lost heart, and unceasingly encouraged me to pursue the thorny path which I had chosen to tread.

## The Strict Instructor

My mother taught me the basic rules of Qur'anic recitation and Arabic grammar before I enrolled in a kuttab where I received my primary schooling. I

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life in Shiraz. One of the guiding principles of his life was Sufism, the Islamic mystical movement that demanded complete devotion to the pursuit of union with the ultimate reality. Hafez is one the most prominent Persian poets and is known for his sensuous rhyming couplets which have traditionally been interpreted allegorically by Islamic mystics. His sonnets are considered among the most beautiful in Persian poetry.

- 17 SAVAK: National security and secret intelligence organization of the Pahlavi regime. The Shah's brutal secret police force was established in the year 1956 with American financial aid, guidance and technical assistance but was subsequently disbanded in the year 1979 after the victory of the Islamic Revolution. The SAVAK was considered an important instrument which worked at the behest of the CIA and the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency. The SAVAK played a central role during the 1960's and 1970's in countering freedom fighters and strugglers against the Pahlavi regime. Many revolutionaries were tortured and murdered in the prisons of the SAVAK while others met their fate outside of prison by planned assassinations conducted in various methods. Many revolutionaries are still tormented by the torture they suffered in SAVAK prisons. Some of the peculiarities of the SAVAK were the creation of an atmosphere of terror in the country, spreading rumors, fabricating security accusations against innocent individuals, conducting unrestrained detentions, and torturing prisoners with the most advanced methods. SAVAK personnel underwent training during the late 1960's and early 1970's in Israel where they were taught methods of torture. A result of these training courses was the establishment of the Joint Committee for Preventing Sabotage which created difficulties for revolutionaries and opponents of the Pahlavi regime.

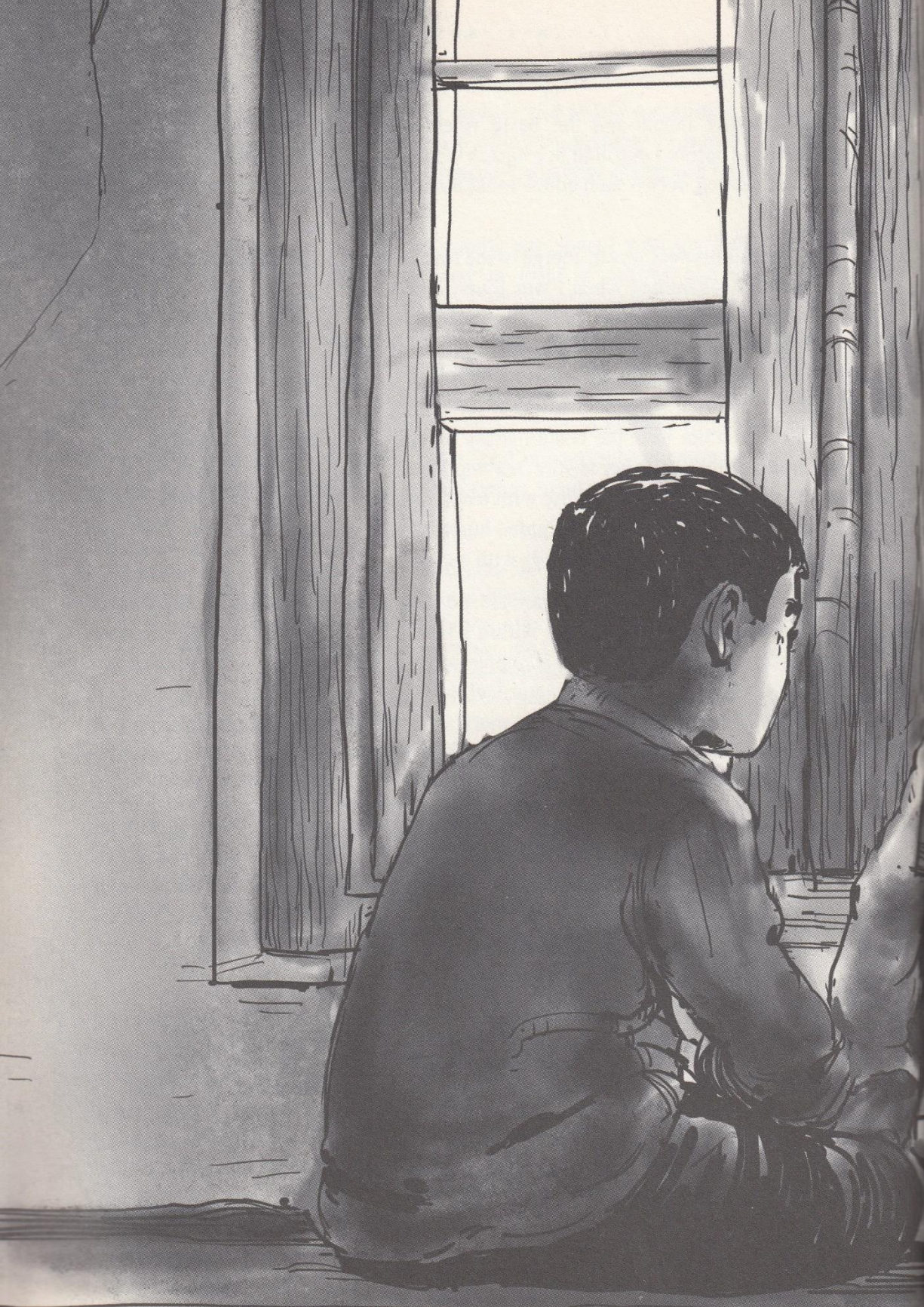
was tutored in two such educational institutions before attending elementary school.

A headmistress was in charge of the first kuttab which I joined with my older brother Mohammad when I was four years of age. I was inclined to solitude and took no pleasure in the lessons, probably as a result of my impaired vision. When I reminisce upon that time, I most vividly recall the negative educational methods. This kuttab was marked by a lack of proper teaching methodology, and unjustified harshness towards the young students was quite common. I still remember how the headmistress would depart from the schoolroom on certain occasions at her leisure, leaving her neighbor, Rubab, in charge. Rubab specialized in filling our time with trivialities. She sometimes lined the pupils in a row and led us to her crippled husband who proceeded to strike each one of us on the palms of our hands with a cane.

In 1943, when I was four years old, my father transferred us to another kuttab which was located in a room within a mosque. I remember that the chamber was dimly lit, but perhaps this impression also comes as a consequence of my partial vision loss. The instructor welcomed my brother and me cordially and granted us special attention. The method of instruction he employed involved commencement with teaching his students the Arabic alphabet followed by the thirtieth juz' of the Qur'an.

At the same time, the instructor treated the other students harshly. Among the recollections I have of my past experiences in this kuttab, the severity of the teacher, the frigid temperature and the feeble light within the schoolroom especially stand out. I used to cross the distance from home to school on foot, wearing tattered shoes perforated with holes, Mud seeped through these punctures during wintertime staining my feet.

The instructor had a strange habit, He used to line us up on Thursdays before dismissing us and say: "I intend to place a mark under your tongues which will linger if you perform prayer on Friday." He would proceed to douse a stamp in ink and place a mark under each student's tongue. On Saturday morning, our classroom would plunge into a state of commotion. The pupils would stand in line, sticking their tongues out for inspection, and some of them would receive Severe chastisement if the mark was no longer visible, I used to stand in line with the other students and weep, not in fear of being beaten by the instructor because





he always refrained from striking either my brother or myself—but due to the tense atmosphere in class.

## That Radiant Day

Reza Khan was forced to abdicate from the throne in 1943, and ten years later, Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh<sup>18</sup> was overthrown in a coup orchestrated by the United States. The dangers of Communism heightened during this decade, especially after the separatist movement in Iranian Azerbaijan.<sup>19</sup> For the purpose of countering this threat, the Pahlavi regime made a concession and allowed people to freely practice certain religious activities. :

The first modern school in Mashhad, *Dar-u Ta'lim-e Diyanati* (Center for Religious Education), was founded at the time by a group of religious patrons. Among them was Sheikh Ghulam Hussein Tabrizi, a prominent preacher and previous colleague of Sheikh Khiabani with whom he had engaged in scholarly discussions while in Tabriz. Mirza Hussein Tadayyun, who originally hailed from Kerman but lived in Mashhad, was appointed principal of the school. Many years later, he would honor me with a visit after I became president of Tran.

*Dar-u Ta'lim-e Diyanati* only provided elementary schooling, covering classes from the first grade to the sixth grade. I was six years old when my father

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18 Mohammad Mossadegh (1879-1966), was an Iranian nationalist politician who was able—as representative of the Nationalist Movement and ally of Ayatullah Abul-Ghasem Kashani—to become prime minister of Iran. His most important undertaking was the nationalization of Iranian oil. He considered the Pahlavi regime as a product of British policy, and in order to confront British ambitions, he shifted towards the United States. However, British and American secret services engineered his downfall through a coup d'état on 19 August 1953. The Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was reinstated in the primary position of power. In Iran, Mossadegh is considered as an example of the consequence of erroneously trusting the United States. The coup fanned the flames of anti-Western sentiment, which reached a crescendo in 1979 with the final overthrow of the Shah and the creation of the Islamic Republic.

19 Iranian Azerbaijan Crisis (1946-1947): In the year 1946, a group of individuals affiliated with the Soviet Union and provided with political and military aid from that state, declared the independence of Iranian Azerbaijan which lies in northwestern Iran, a step which meant the partition of Iran. This national crisis came to an end in the following year due to the diligent efforts of patriotic Iranians from Azerbaijan and Zanjan and with the assistance of the Iranian Armed Forces. Some dissidents who demanded the separation of Iranian Azerbaijan were killed while others sought shelter in the Soviet Union.

first enrolled me at this school; I was assigned to the first grade while my ten-year-old brother Mohammad joined the fourth grade.

I fell behind in class during my first three years at school but in contrast achieved the highest grade in class during the fourth, fifth and sixth grade, The cause of this transformation defied me at the time, but the truth dawned on me years later. It had to do with changing seats. In the fourth grade, my seat arrangement was altered and I sat at the front of the class. I suddenly noticed that I was able to read what the teacher was writing on the blackboard and consequently started to understand his lectures. During the previous years, I had sat at a far distance from the blackboard and was incapable—due to my visual impairment—of seeing the board and therefore failed to comprehend his lessons.

I still remember that radiant day when I first began to understand my school lessons. The first session was mathematics, and I received great encouragement from my teacher who noticed my active participation. Years later, during my term as president of Iran, I took special care to place great emphasis on teacher motivation during an interview marking the new academic year.

I gained prominence in school for my beautiful recitation of the Qur'an and was chosen to recite selected Qur'anic verses at school ceremonies and during the reception of prominent visitors. I once recited Qur'anic verses in the presence of Ayatullah Kashani<sup>20</sup> who visited Mashhad in the early 1950's when I was about twelve years old. I still remember that Ayatullah Kashani was seated with a group of scholars, but their features are blurred in my memory as I had not been wearing glasses at the time.

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20 Sayyid Abul-Ghasem Kashani (1885-1961): An Iranian cleric and leading political figure. Born in Tehran, Kashani traveled to Najaf when he was 15 years old to receive his religious education under the tutelage of the most prominent scholars in the city. Kashani was a man of political insight and enjoyed deep awareness of contemporary issues. He joined the scholarly opposition movement in Najaf against the British invasion of Iraq during World War I. This led to the issuing of a warrant for his arrest after the British occupation of Iraq. He returned to Iran where he was welcomed warmly by people and was subsequently elected as a Speaker of the people in the Majles, the Iranian Parliament. He supported Mossadegh in the movement for the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry which led to mass public support for the latter. However, this alliance did not endure due to attempts aiming to cause dispute between the two men on one hand, and Mossadegh not keeping to his word on the other. This subsequently led to the collapse of Mossadegh's government. It is worth noting that Ayatullah Kashani was one of the most prominent defenders of Navvab Safavi and the movement of Fada'iyān-e Islam.

I also recited the Qur'an in front of Sayyid Hasan Qomi<sup>21</sup> when he first came to Mashhad after the death of his father. Some of the founders of the school had followed his father's religious rulings and, for that purpose, Sayyid Qomi had chosen to visit our school. The students stood in a row and I stepped forward with one of my peers to recite the Qur'an and some Islamic source material. As a gift, Sayyid Qomi presented me with a book entitled *Religious Instructions* by Sayyid Husam al-Din Fal Asiri Shirazi whom I was to meet at a later time during his exile in Mashhad as he became a frequent visitor of my father.

## Qur'anic Instruction

After learning the basics of the Qur'an during my early childhood at the hands of my mother, my father entrusted Mohammad and I to a man named Haji Ramazan Ali who was proficient in Qur'anic recitation and tutored the Qur'an at homes. Haji Ramazan Ali held us in high esteem and walked respectfully behind us whenever we exited a room despite the fact that he was fifty years old. He sat in the middle and carefully listened to our recitation of the Qur'an, correcting our mistakes when necessary.

One day, Haji Ramazan declared: "You have both reached a phase where I can no longer teach you." He advised us to refer to his instructor, Mullah Abbasi, who taught in the courtyard of Imam Ali al-Rida's shrine despite the fact that he was seventy years old. My brother and I sought Mulla Abbasi and joined his lessons. It was his custom to rely on the Indian edition of the Holy Qur'an despite the complexity of its script. It was also his habit to offer the full Islamic greeting

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21 Sayyid Hasan Tabataba'i Qomi (1911-2007): The son of Ayatullah Sayyid Hussein Tabataba'i Qomi. Sayyid Tabataba'i was born in Najaf and moved during his childhood to Mashhad where he commenced his religious studies. After the events at Goharshad Mosque, he was exiled to Karbala with his father and returned to Mashhad during the 1940's after the latter's death. Sayyid Tabataba'i Qomi joined the political movement which accompanied Imam Khomeini's uprising in 1963 against the Shah and was arrested during the uprising of the of May 1963. He remained confined in Tehran for several months after which he to Mashhad. A year later, he was exiled to the city of Khash and then to Karaj after another year due to his opposition to the Pahlavi regime. Sayyid Tabataba'i Qomi remained in exile until a few months prior to the victory of the Islamic Revolution. During the first few years? After the Islamic Revolution, and at the onset of the Imposed War, Sayyid Tabataba'i Qomi took a few stances regarding the Revolution and Imam Khomeini which led to his seclusion and alienation from the Iranian revolutionaries. He died in Mashhad in the year 2007.

of *assalumu alaikum*<sup>22</sup> when meeting others or bidding them farewell, even though the custom in Iran involved offering the Islamic greeting only when encountering others and using other Persian terms during leave-taking, Mullah Abbasi taught us from a book entitled *al-Tajwid* (Art of Qur’anic Recitation) written in the Persian language by Sayyid Mohammad Arab Za‘farani, a man of Arab ethnicity who had dwelt in Mashhad and Directly tutored Mullah Abbasi.

## Secularization Campaign

I wore a turban during my early youth while I was still a student in the second grade. The reason I wore a turban at such a young age owed to the general Iranian custom of wearing headgear. The head turban, traditionally worn in Iran by instructors, students, or preachers engaged in Islamic studies, has long stood as a sign of distinction for clergymen. The clerical class shouldered the responsibility of calling people to religion and confronting the enemies of Islam, and for this purpose, agents of tyrannical world powers and advocates of secularism actively sought to discourage the practice of wearing turbans.

The pro-Western Reza Shah issued an order banning Iranian men from wearing turbans and required their replacement with new, Pahlavi hats. His son, Mohammad Reza Shah,<sup>23</sup> later revoked this ban but this did not prevent my father

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22 Literally meaning: “Peace be upon you.”

23 Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1919-1980): The second monarch of the House of Pahlavi and the last Shah of Iran. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi ascended the throne on September 16, 1941 after the deposition of his father by the United Kingdom. His reign proved to be a continuation of the oppression and corruption which had marked his father’s term, and he increasingly subordinated Iran to the hegemony of the World Powers. In the early 1950s a struggle for control of the Iranian government developed between the Shah and Mohammad Mossadegh, a zealous Iranian nationalist. In March 1951 Mosaddegh secured passage of a bill in the Majles (parliament) to nationalize the vast British petroleum interests in Iran. Mosaddegh’s power grew rapidly, and by the end of April Mohammad Reza had been forced to appoint Mosaddegh premier. A two-year period of tension and conflict followed. In August 1953, the Shah tried to dismiss Mosaddegh but was himself forced to leave the country by Mosaddeq’s supporters. Several days later, however, Mosaddegh’s opponents, with the covert support and assistance of the United States and the United Kingdom, restored Mohammad Reza to power. The overthrow of the Iranian government led to the concession of privilege to various Western companies and placed the wealth of Iran under their disposal. The security and intelligence agency, SAVAK, was established during his reign—an agency known for its brutal and repressive tactics. Under his rule, Iran was the most important headquarters of the governing body from plotting to create a public atmosphere of ridicule toward turbaned men. The United States in the Middle East. He granted judicial immunity to Americans in Iran and

vehemently refused the idea of his children wearing Pahlavi hats, and so the only remaining choice was to wear a turban. My mother used to wrap our turbans on our heads but would mistakenly dangle the edges to our right rather than our left, contrary to custom, forgetting that from her standing point her left side was also our left.

We faced public derision from a young age. We heard so many mocking remarks to the extent that the general practice of directing contemptuous language toward turbaned males became quite ordinary. I never reflected upon this phenomenon during my early youth and took it as a commonplace occurrence, but after I became older, I carefully reconsidered previous incidents and marveled at the fact that no turbaned male was spared from ridicule, regardless of his age.

### “Why You, Sayyid?”

The habit of mocking clerics and turbans became widespread in Iran. It was deliberately employed through various means and spread across all sectors of society. As a young boy, I unheedingly participated in this public habit even though I wore a turban myself. The following incident serves as a clear example.

Sheikh Faeghi was a respectable man who lived in our community and recited lamentations for Imam Hussein in mourning assemblies. He had a light beard, wore a large turban, and rode a small swift-footed donkey. His house was located in the neighborhood adjacent to ours, and it was his habit to pass rapidly by our house every day on his donkey.

I was playing volleyball with my friends one day, a sport which I particularly enjoyed. I had removed my turban and set it aside but remained in my scholarly attire. While we were playing, we caught a glimpse of Sheikh Faeghi approaching briskly from afar on his donkey. The boys quickly agreed among themselves to taunt him, and when he reached a short distance away from us, we all began to shout: “*Asheikh, asheikh!*” The word in itself was not a derogatory remark since it was the shortened form of “*Agha Sheikh*”, meaning “Chief Sheikh”, but it

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maintained close ties with the state of Israel, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was overthrown after a popular revolution which lasted for 15 years and he fled Iran on 16 January 1979 marking the end of Iranian monarchical rule.

served as a taunting remark when shouted out by a group of laughing, mischievous boys.

Sheikh Faeghi angrily spurred his donkey in our direction, driving the boys to flee while I chose to stand my ground. When he drew near, he immediately recognized me since he was personally acquainted with my father. He dismounted from his donkey and strode toward me. With a perplexed smile on his face, he gently reproached me, saying: “Why you, my dear Sayyid?”

### Circulation of Rumors

Such a hostile stance towards religious symbols in Iran—which was a result of a deliberate plot aiming to isolate the *ulama* from society—was reinforced by the circulation of rumors. I still remember a fabricated story about a group of clerics who had gathered at night in the outskirts of Mashhad drinking alcohol from a samovar. The rumor stated that the scholars had become drunk and engaged in boisterous festivity.

Oddly enough, some people declared they had witnessed the scene with their very own eyes, while others claimed they had heard the story from someone who had been present. It was clear that the story was invented, for why would a group of clerics drink alcohol from a samovar under public scrutiny? Every detail served as additional proof of the falsehood of the account, yet it had circulated far and wide. I heard the rumor from different people; some of them claimed they were direct witnesses to the scene while others asserted that they had heard of it from an eyewitness.

This brings me to state—contrary to what local despotic powers want people to believe—that the *ulama* carry the responsibility of defending Islam from every deviation in society. The *ulama* firmly believe that their duty involves active confrontation of all oppressors and foreign powers that strive to dominate the Islamic society. In conformity with this formidable task, the *ulama* have long adopted steadfast stances throughout modern Iranian history against invaders, tyrants and despots.

Some instances especially stand out. Mirza Qomi<sup>24</sup> opposed the Russians and issued a famous edict in the letter he sent to Abbas Mirza, the son of Fath Ali

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24 Mirza Abul-Ghasem Mohammad Hasan al-Gilani (1738-1815): Known as Mirza Qomi due to his residence in Qom, was a prominent Usuli scholar and a Shi'a marja'. Mirza Qomi penned

Shah Qajar, who went to war against the Russians during the Russo-Persian Wars. Another example is the binding religious edict issued by Mirza Shirazi during the Tobacco Protest Movement,<sup>25</sup> and the active role the *ulama* played during the Constitutional Movement.

Sayyid Hasan Modarres<sup>26</sup> also adopted an unwavering stance. He was elected as representative of Isfahan in the Majles, the Iranian Parliament, earning the overwhelming majority of votes and becoming one of the five clerics who had the right to revoke any governmental legislation nonconforming with Islamic Law. He ran again for a second term, this time as representative of Tehran, and gained the highest percentage of votes. He served in the Majles for a third time and for an additional fourth term which coincided with Reza Shah Pahlavi seizing power from the Qajars. Throughout this period, Modarres opposed Reza Shah and publicly voiced his dissent. But when it was time to estimate the total number of votes after the new elections, Modarres—who was running for a fifth term—

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the book *Qawanin al-Usul* (The Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence) and was greatly respected in society during his time. He is held in veneration for issuing, along with a group of Shi'a scholars during his time, a book entitled *Masa'el-e Jihadiyya* (Jihad Issues) which called upon Persians to resist the Tsarist Russian attack on Iran which subsequently imposed a defeat on the invading Russians.

- 25 The Tobacco Protest Movement (1890): Backed by the British government, a British merchant concluded an agreement with the Qajar monarch Nasir al-Din Shah which involved granting a British company full monopoly over the production, sale and export of tobacco in exchange for a stipulated sum. This agreement entailed British hegemony over a part of Iranian resources which drove Mirza Hasan Shirazi to issue an edict prohibiting the use of tobacco. This edict had a major impact in Iran and in parts of Iraq as well. People avoided smoking tobacco even at Nasir al-Din's court in adherence to the religious edict. Due to this national resistance movement, the Shah and the British company were forced to break their agreement, and the British government became aware of the power that the Religious Authority exerts over the Iranian society.
- 26 Sayyid Hasan Modarres (1870-1937): Sayyid Modarres received his education in Najaf at the hands of prominent clerics specialized in philosophy and the principles of jurisprudence. The *maraji'* of Najaf chose him as one of the five scholars to supervise the decrees of the State Council, and he therefore moved to Tehran where he gave lessons and later became 4 representative in the State Council. He was steadfast in his advocacy of Islamic and national identity, and he stood in opposition against Reza Shah, an enforcer of foreign policy, and resisted every oppression and corruption and countered foreign agents. He was chosen for 4 second term in the National State Council, and then a third and a fourth time. He survived an assassination attempt and was imprisoned by order of Reza Khan in the year 1927. Modarres was exiled for nine years and was poisoned by the agents of Reza Shah in 1937.

did not earn a single vote. He objected and vociferously declared: “I voted for myself; tell me then, where is my vote?”

These instances stand out as a clear example of the considerable social influence the *ulama* exerted. They proceeded according to principles held sacred and worthy of sacrifice in Islam; they rejected oppression, condemned the plunder of national resources and refused to submit to foreign powers. For this reason, tyrants have long striven to isolate the *ulama* from society and to exclude them from all aspects of life, and especially from political affairs. To accomplish this goal, despots have taken recourse to every measure against clergymen, even if it involved murder, incarceration or banishment. Separation of religion and society was a principle of the Pahlavi regime. The memoirs of Hussein Fardoust<sup>27</sup> illustrate this policy clearly.

In 1935, a tragedy occurred at Goharshad Mosque which resulted in many fatalities and the subsequent arrest of a large number of *ulama*. Among those scholars was my grandfather, Sayyid Hashem Mirdamadi, and Haji Agha Hussein Qomi who had traveled to Iran to offer advice to Reza Shah but was captured and exiled abroad.

My father was on his way to the mosque but had unexpectedly met an acquaintance along the way who warned him of the ongoing incidents at the mosque and dissuaded him from heading there. Twenty scholars were apprehended in the aftermath of the Goharshad uprising. After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, I requested the personal photographs which the regime had placed in each scholar’s security file. Once I obtained the pictures, I found the following phrase written beneath each one: “Offense: Involvement in Political Affairs.”

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27 Hussein Fardoust (1917-1987) was a childhood friend of the Shah. He was one of the most prominent political and intelligence figures during the Pahlavi regime and among the most influential. Fardoust established the Intelligence Office of the Shah and held positions such as deputy chief of the SAVAK and chief of monarchical inspection. He remained loyal to the Shah throughout the entire period of the latter’s rule. He was arrested after the victory of the Islamic Revolution. His memoirs are considered an important source on contemporary history.



**UNDER THE TUTELAGE  
OF EMINENT SCHOLARS**

## Stages of Education

After the completion of our elementary schooling, my brother and I pursued our education at the *hawza*. Our father had refused to enroll us at public schools for fear that it would lead us to abandon our scholarly attire, and from that point on we focused our attention on religious studies.

Seminary students traditionally commenced their formal education by studying the basics of the Arabic language: grammar, morphology, semantics, modes of expression and linguistic eloquence. My mother had begun teaching me from the book *al-Amthila* (Linguistic Exemplifications) which I later completed under the instruction of a tutor, while my father had taught me from the book *Sarf-e Mir* (Mir's Morphology). I had also studied some parts of the book *Jami' al-Moqaddamat* (Compendium of Fundamentals) while I was still a student at primary school.

At the school of Suleiman Khan,<sup>28</sup> directed by Sheikh Hussein Bajistani an eminent scholar and friend of my father—I completed the preliminary and intermediate stages of my religious education. Sheikh Bajistani appointed a personal tutor to teach me *al-Fawa'ed al-Samadiyya*, but he consequently left his job as an instructor and enrolled at medical school, eventually becoming a doctor. Thereafter, Sheikh Bajistani appointed, Sheikh Mas'udi to teach me *al-Mughni*.

In 1953, I transferred to Madreseh Navvab.<sup>29</sup> During this period, my mental capacities erupted with full power. I developed an insatiable urge for learning and displayed an extraordinary potential for comprehending lessons. After studying *al-Mughni*, I moved on to *al-Mutawwal*. I find it necessary to emphasize the importance of these two books; the first one focuses on linguistic eloquence but requires a long period of study time, while the latter is unparalleled in terms of its presentation of Arabic grammar.

In jurisprudence, my father commenced with teaching me the book *al-Shara'e* (Islamic Laws). We progressed through the chapters until we reached the unit on pilgrimage. Simultaneously, my father was teaching my older brother

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28 Suleiman Khan School (Suleimaniyya) is a famous school located in Mashhad and dating back to the Qajar times.

29 Madreseh Navvab, also known as Madreseh Salihiyya, was established in the year 1086 AH which corresponds to the year 1675 according to the Gregorian calendar. It is a distinguished seminary in Mashhad which the author attended as a teenager.

from the book *Sharh al-Lum'a* and had also reached the chapter on pilgrimage from that book, so I joined their lessons and became my brother's classmate after being his student during certain lessons. I studied most of this book with my father and the final quarter under the instruction of Sayyid Ahmad Modarres Yazdi.

Prior to that, I had studied *Ma'alem al-'Usul* with Sayyid Jalil Husseini, a friend of my father, and subsequently studied *al-Rasa'el* and *al-Makaseb* under the instruction of my father and Sheikh Hashem Ghazvini, a competent instructor with matchless teaching methodology skills.

Sheikh Fesharaki had taught Arabic in Mashhad before moving to Qom where he continued offering lessons on the subject. He used to come to Mashhad for two months during summertime, so in compliance with my father's advice, I asked him to teach me *al-Mutawwal* when he arrived in the city one summer. He accepted my request and gave me an extensive course which extended over two summers. We spent many hours studying each day, and I completed the section on *bayan* (Usage of Figures of Speech), and part of the sections on *ma'ani* (clear expression) and *badi'* (linguistic embellishment). Sheikh Fesharaki later discovered that I was also studying *al-Makaseb*—a book which he was teaching in Qom—and expressed his praise at my rapid advancement in jurisprudence.

I completed my study of *al-Rasa'el* and *al-Makaseb* when I was seventeen years old. I attended the lectures of *bahth-e kharej*<sup>30</sup> in the year 1956, and in the following year journeyed to Iraq where I remained for several months. Throughout this period, I attended the lectures of the prominent scholars of Najaf and compared their lessons with the lectures delivered at the seminary of

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30 Bahth-e Kharej: Graduate or literally 'outside research'. The education system at this stage differs completely from the previous stages. Instead of tutorials, the student chooses to attend the public lectures of the most prominent mujtahids who conduct their discussions as lectures over a period of months or years. The classes, depending on the prominence of the teacher, can be heavily attended even by other mujtahids. Discussion is free in class, but the lectures are generally intricate, and sometimes result in books being compiled by the students and eventually published.

Mashhad. I attended the lessons of Sayyid Khu'i<sup>31</sup>, Sayyid Hakim<sup>32</sup>, Sayyid Bujnardi<sup>33</sup>, Sayyid Shahroudi<sup>34</sup>, and Mirza Baqer Zanjani<sup>35</sup>. Even though I had also studied *bahth-e kharej* with my father while in Mashhad, yet such lessons required painstaking preparation and the revision of numerous works of scholarship. My father was not capable of exerting such an effort, and for this reason his lessons lacked academic rigor. I was accustomed to writing my lessons in the Arabic language, and strove to be innovative in my method of presentation and organization.

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- 31 Sayyid Abul-Ghasem Mousavi Khu'i (1899-1992): Khu'i was a grand Shi'a Ayatullah who assumed the leadership of Shi'as generally and Iraq especially after the death of Sayyid Mohsen Hakim. Khu'i authored important books in jurisprudence and the principles of jurisprudence, and taught a great number of Shi'a scholars for many years and became worthy of the title Ustadh (The Teacher). He was known for distancing himself from political issues, but in the final days of his life he led a revolutionary movement in 1991 against Saddam Hussein in Iraq which came to be known as the Sha'ban Intifada. His adherents gained control of parts of Iraq but the revolutionaries faced brutal suppression from the military forces of Saddam Hussein. Many people were martyred and the revolution was crushed but it nonetheless left a great impact on the national movement after the downfall of Saddam Hussein. After Khu'i's death in 1992, Sayyid Khamenei issued a detailed proclamation in which he praised his achievements throughout his blessed life and conducted a mourning assembly for his soul at Imam Khomeini Mosque in Tehran.
- 32 Sayyid Mohsen Tabataba'i Hakim (1889-1970): Hakim was a Shi'a marja' who assumed religious authority after the death of Ayatullah Burujerdi and became a reference for the majority of Shi'as. Hakim played a critical role in uniting the Shi'as of Iraq during the Baathist Regime. A large number of his sons and grandsons were murdered at the order of Saddam Hussein. After Saddam's downfall, his son became a symbol for revolution and opposition to the Baathist regime in Iraq.
- 33 Sayyid Hasan Mousavi Bujnardi (1897-1975): A prominent instructor at the seminary of Najaf and an author of various books on the principles of Islamic jurisprudence. In his youth, he received his education under the auspices of renowned scholars such as Mirza Na'ini Sheikh Iraqi, and Muhaqqeq Isfahani.
- 34 Sayyid Mahmoud Husseini Shahroudi (1883-1974): Shahroudi was a contemporary Shia marja' and one of the pupils of Mirza Na'ini and Sheikh Iraqi. He established the first delegation for pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, and is responsible for initiating the pilgrimage to Karbala on foot.
- 35 Mirza Mohammad Baqer Zanjani (1894-1974): A prominent clergyman and instructor in the Seminary of Najaf who had received his education under the tutelage of distinguished *ulama* such as Mirza Mohammad Taqi Shirazi, Sayyid Isfahani, and Mirza Na'ini.

I returned to Mashhad, and with my father's encouragement attended the lessons of Sayyid Milani<sup>36</sup>, and concluded my study of *al-Kifaya*. Sayyid Milani had moved to Mashhad in 1954 and began teaching jurisprudence from the chapter on the lease of personal property. I had not attended those lectures which were conducted for two successive years, but I joined his lessons when he began teaching the chapter on prayer rulings. I attended his lectures until mid-1958, the year I moved to Qom. I lived in Qom until 1964, but subsequently returned to Mashhad where I remained until the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

### My Father, My Mentor

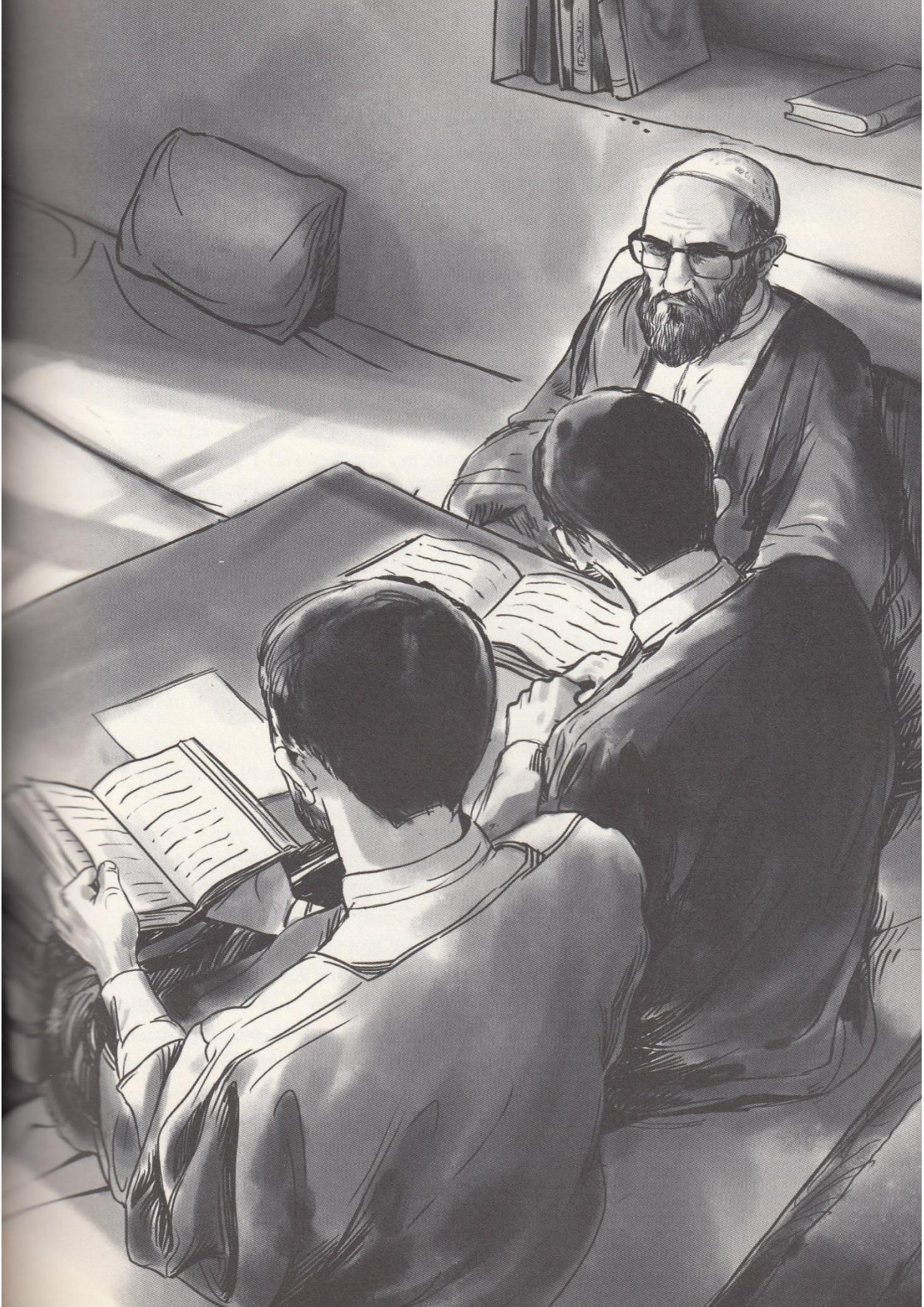
My father accustomed us to seize every opportunity and not to waste a single day without exploiting it in study and discussion. He took full advantage of the seminary breaks during the month of Muharram and throughout the summer. He used to teach me during the first seven days of Muharram, and would participate in mourning assemblies for Imam Hussein during the following three days. He adamantly rejected the term 'summer break'. He used to say: "In Najaf, we pursued our lessons during the summer months despite the harsh climate and high temperature! Why should we suspend our lessons here in Mashhad?"

My father supervised our lessons and urged us to unceasingly pursue our education, sometimes through lenient encouragement and other times through strictness. I obediently complied with my father's wishes and adhered to his educational approach. It was a source of pleasure for him to hear my opinions on his lessons, and before I turned fifteen, he used to tell me: "You have become a mujtahid and have to acquire the capacity to deduce the religious laws from their original sources." I used to discuss my lessons with my brother, and after

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36 Sayyid Mohammad Hadi Husseini Milani (1895-1975): A Shi'a marja' and a social, political and scholarly figure. He received his education under the charge of prominent scholars such as Mirza Na'ini and Sheikh Iraqi. He lived most of his life in Najaf and Karbala, but he moved to Mashhad in the year 1953 where he became involved in Iranian politics. Sayyid Milani had political ties and was also involved in some decrees which were issued against the Pahlavi regime. Sayyid Khamenei studied under his charge for long years and gained his formal authorization to transmit hadiths. Sayyid Milani supported Imam Khomeini's uprising during its early days, but his support waned in later years. Sayyid Milani is known for issuing an edict calling for the elimination of the Shah's Prime Minister Hasan Ali Mansour who ratified the governmental decision which granted judicial immunity to Americans in Iran.





terminating our discussion, our father would summon us to his room and clarify what we still found unclear.

After our house was rebuilt, as I have previously mentioned, it encompassed three rooms. Two chambers were singled out for my father; one was relatively spacious and designated for his guests while the other one was dedicated for his reading and consumption of food. The rest of the family—four sons, four daughters, and a mother—confined themselves to a single room. If my father had any guests or was hosting a special assembly, we were obliged to remain away from home.

Our father's room contained a *korsi*<sup>37</sup>, a low table with a brazier placed beneath it for warmth during the winter months. Our father used to sit cross-legged at the narrow side of the table while my brother and I sat along its length, competing for the position farthest away from my father in awe of his dignified bearing and solemnity during the lessons.

Despite the drawbacks resulting from my father's strictness, the positive aspects of his sternness are not to be denied. His solemnity served in disciplining and safeguarding us from the deviations which some clergymen's children slipped into as a result of their carelessness towards moral restraints. If it were not for my father's sternness, I would not have completed my studies in the Arabic language and the principles of jurisprudence during a period which did not exceed five and a half years.

### An Avid Reader

My mind is filled with memories which extend back to the six years I spent studying at the seminary of Mashhad. My father had a large library which I substantially benefitted from, but I possessed my own books as well. There was a small public library which bordered our home and from which I borrowed novels. During the initial phase of my education, at a time when I was 15 or 16, I made frequent visits to the library associated with the shrine of Imam al-Rida (as). I sometimes went to this library during the day and became fully engrossed

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37 A traditional item of furniture in Iranian culture, a *korsi* is a type of low table with a source of heat placed underneath it and blankets or a thick cloth draped over it to preserve the heat and keep the lower body parts of the occupants warm. A family or other individuals sit on the floor around the *korsi* during meals and special events.

in reading that I would not hear the *adhan* which was broadcast through loudspeakers in the reading room. I borrowed Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* from this library. I would say that *Les Misérables* is miraculous among all other novels. I have recommended this novel repeatedly to all young individuals. *Les Misérables* is in a way a sociological work of art, a record of history. It is a significant book; a book about divinity, kindness, compassion, and love.

I was an avid reader during my youth and read history books, works of literature, and novels in addition to my textbooks, ! developed a passion for reading popular international literature and Iranian novels. I read most of Michel Zevaco's novels during my youth, and the novels of Alexandre Dumas père and Alexandre Dumas fils. I also read most Iranian novels, if not all. Reading novels has a significant effect on one's mental capacity and writing style.

When I traveled to Iraq in 1957, I packed some of my most cherished books and took them with me. While in Najaf, I visited the Shushtari Library which contained a large collection of my uncle's books which had been donated to the library. I photocopied some books before returning with my family members to Iran. We crossed the Iran-Iraq border at Basra and proceeded to Khorramshahr where we boarded a train heading to Tehran. When we reached Tehran, I somehow lost my books as well as some personal documents. I was greatly agitated and searched far and wide for my parcel but to no avail. I decided to head to the warehouse of the train station where I searched for a long period of time but did not succeed in finding my books. I returned to Mashhad with a heart burdened with sorrow.

Two years later, I received a letter from a taxi driver. It read as follows:

“I found an abandoned package in my car. When I opened it in an attempt to discover the identity of the owner, I found some books and a few official documents. I noticed a photo on a document depicting a turbaned young man, so I asked some clergymen from Tehran if they knew him. One of them gave me the address of the main mosque at Mashhad...”

And thus my books were returned to me.



**ON THE BANKS OF  
THE TIGRIS**

## My Fondness for the Arabic Language

As I mentioned previously, my mother was reared in a home where Arabic was the spoken language. Her grandfather hailed from the Mirdamadi family which dwelt in the province of Isfahan but had later migrated to the Iraqi city of Najaf and settled there. My mother returned to Iran with her family as a young girl and spoke the vernacular tongue of the inhabitants of Najaf.

This sparked my fondness for the Arabic language.

I first learned Arabic grammar at elementary school under the instruction of several *ulama*, but when I turned twelve, I commenced my Arabic studies in a serious and continuous manner. All of my siblings shared my love for the Arabic language, but I was particularly captivated with the language. A special emotion overwhelms me whenever I listen to the Arabic language, and I am shaken from the depths of my soul. Due to my tremendous love of Arabic, I always regretted not having lived a part of my childhood in an Arabic-speaking region, whether in Iran or abroad. The truth is that Iranians in general, and the devout among them in particular, harbor a fondness for Arabic.

Iraqis used to travel to Iran to visit Mashhad in processions and they would gather in the courtyard of Imam al-Rida's shrine to recite poetry. I grasped this opportunity whenever it arose, and stood for long hours listening attentively to their recitation and deriving pleasure from their poetic language.

## Language Dilemmas

When I traveled to Iraq in 1957, I strove to communicate only in the Arabic language, but I sometimes faced difficulty in differentiating between formal and colloquial Arabic. The following instance stands out as an example. My mother, who had accompanied me on my trip, sent me on one occasion to buy her some rice from the local grocery store. Once there, I encountered a woman selling the wares and asked her: "Do you have *ruzz*?"

"*Ruzz*?" she asked in perplexity. "What do you mean by *ruzz*?"

"*Ruzz*," I reiterated, striving in vain to make her understand though hand gestures,

"We have no *ruzz*," she answered, her terse reply indicative of her desire to get rid of her unintelligible customer.

I had no choice but to return and inform my mother of my unsuccessful endeavor.

“You shouldn’t have said *ruzz!*” she laughingly answered. “Rice is known as *timman* here.”

And she went to buy the *timman* herself.

Due to the fact that many people in the holy cities of Iraq spoke fluent Persian, I made a special effort during my brief stay in the country to linger in areas where people only spoke Arabic. This is why I frequently traveled from Kadhimiyya to Baghdad to gain the opportunity of conversing in an exclusively Arabic-speaking environment.

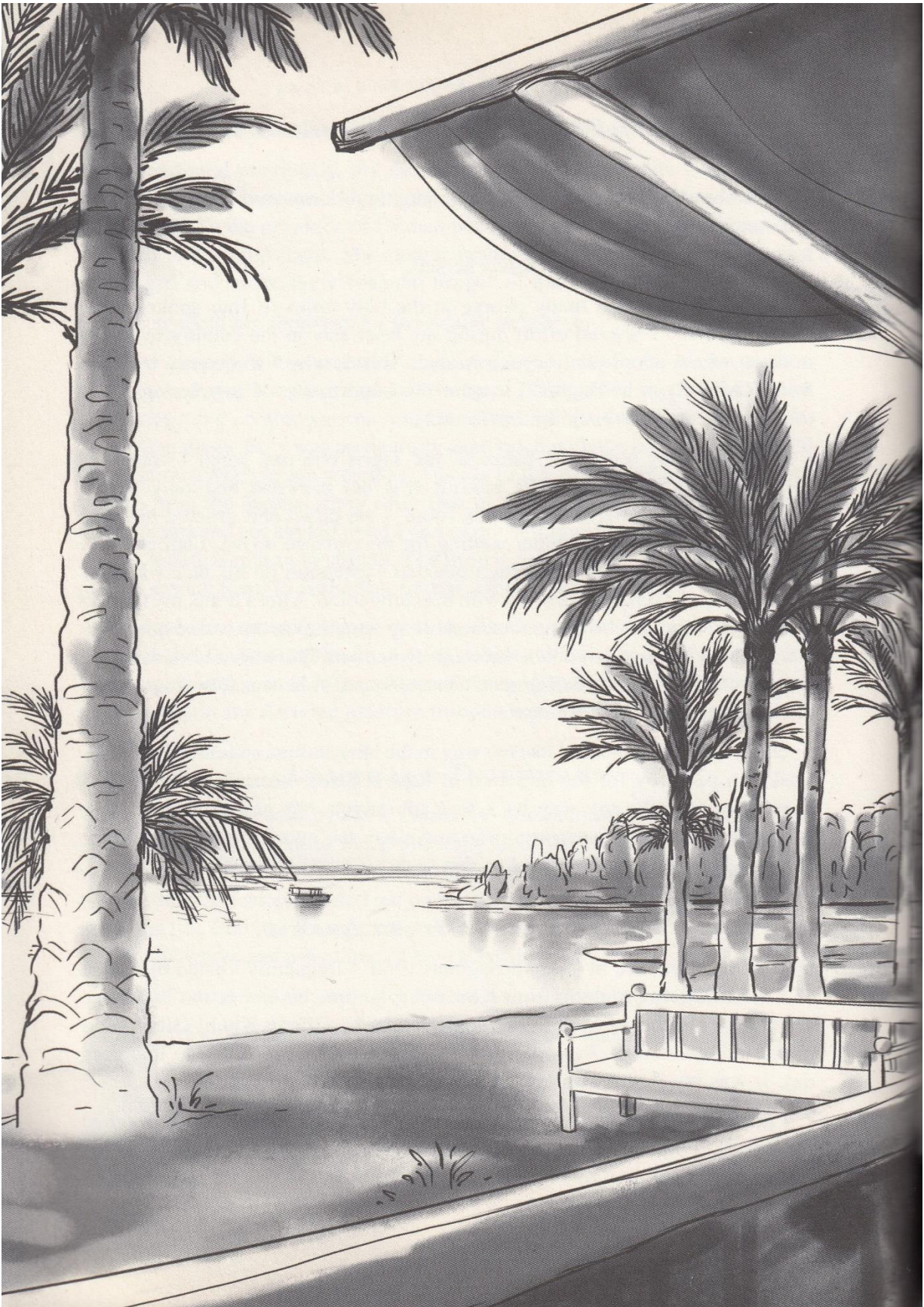
I was strolling along the banks of the Tigris one day when I noticed a coffeehouse off the road. The interior was not crowded and only a few customers were scattered around the room. I sat down and ordered tea, and proceeded to open a newspaper waiting for my order to arrive. I noticed that the waiter was staring at me with a puzzled expression on his face while he poured tea and exchanged a word with his companion. After I drank my tea and was about to pay the bill, I noticed a painting hanging on the wall depicting a Christian theme. I realized that the shop-owner was Christian and understood the cause of the waiter’s bafflement, unaccustomed as he was to seeing a Shi’a cleric sitting in his coffeehouse.

On a separate occasion, I lost my way in the labyrinthine streets of Baghdad. I asked a passerby for the direction of Rashid Street because, once there, I knew how to make my way back to Kadhimiyya. My accent betrayed my nationality. Instead of answering me in Arabic, the man inquired in Persian: “*Share’ Rashid ra mikhahi?*” (Are you seeking Rashid Street?)

## Translation from Arabic

During my residence in Qom throughout 1960, I frequently visited the home of Sheikh Karami, a cleric from Khuzestan, to read his collection of Arabic books. During that period, I read some books by Gibran Khalil Gibran and translated his work *A Tear and A Smile* which I have preserved to this very day. It was my first translation of a book from Arabic to Persian.

I grasped the opportunity to translate some books in prison as I will relate further on. I translated a large portion of *Misconceptions about Islam* by





Muhammad Qutb, but forsook my endeavor when I discovered that the book had been previously published in Persian. I translated *The Future Belongs to This Religion* by Sayyid Qutb, a work which sparked in my mind many reflections that I added in the translator's footnotes and which aggravated the SAVAK. I also translated *Islam and the Dilemmas of Civilization* by the same author and provided the book with an important foreword.

I translated the sixth edition of the first volume of *In the Shade of the Qur'an* to Persian. Even though Ahmad Aram had translated the entire first edition into Persian, Sayyid Qutb had revised and updated the sixth edition extensively, I was presented with an offer to translate this book for a sum of 2,500 tomans during a period in which I was burdened with difficult financial circumstances, This commission proved to be a pleasurable experience; I actively interacted with the book and translated it from the depths of my being. Some phrases, especially in the introduction, affected me deeply and stirred a deep emotional response that sent chills down my skin.

I read the contents of large Arabic encyclopedias on history and literature, and made a point of jotting down notes on the inside of the cover-pages. I did not take pleasure in reading modern Arabic poetry and actually found some of it to be insulting to the Arabic language and poetic taste, especially poems which displayed a European influence in stylistics and content. I found such poetry to be non-Arabic and non-European, but an unsavory hybrid deformation of the two. This drove me to seek literature which conformed with the Arabic works I had taken pleasure in during my youth and was distinguished with literary originality.

I read the works of prominent Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi writers and poets but found my refuge in the works of the Iraqi poet Mohammad Mahdi Al-Jawahiri. Born into a prominent family known for its religiosity and literary skill, and raised in Najaf, Mohammad Mahdi Al-Jawahiri displayed literary distinction. In his poetry, he demonstrated deep empathy with the pains of the masses and courageously expressed his viewpoints against despots, a matter which resulted in his imprisonment. My admiration for Al-Jawahiri increased when my Lebanese friend and writer, Sayyid Mohammad Jawad Fadlallah, spoke to me of Al-Jawahiri's revolutionary spirit and his firm stances.

I admit that I shed tears when I first read some poems written by Al Jawahiri, among which was "Lullaby for the Hungry." Whenever I yearned to read modern Arabic poetry, I would open Al-Jawahiri's book and read the rhyme schemes

alone or with a companion who enjoyed Arabic literature. During those moments, I remembered Al-Jawahiri's presence away from home and wished for him to return to Iraq to find the darkness which had enveloped his country finally dispelled.

In 1992, thirteen years after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, I read Al-Jawahiri's autobiography, *My Memoirs*, with great enthusiasm and finished the book in a few days despite my busy schedule, jotting down notes in the margin and referring to his volume of poetry whenever I learned of a certain incident in his life in order to see how he translated it into poetry.

When I later heard that Mohammad Mahdi Al-Jawahiri wished to visit the shrine of Imam Ali al-Rida with his wife, I asked officials to facilitate the trip but Al-Jawahiri's wife died before her wish could come true. I thereby requested that a memorial service in honor of his wife be conducted at the shrine of Imam Ali al-Rida as a tribute to the Jawahiri family. An emissary from my office traveled to Iraq with a formal invitation to Al-Jawahiri, asking him to visit the Islamic Republic of Iran. Al-Jawahiri accepted without delay. I wanted him to see what his soul had long yearned for: a strong and noble nation which had risen against oppression. But how could the restless soul of a poet become serene after 80 years of constant struggle? Mohammad Mahdi Al-Jawahiri remained for a short period of time in Iran during which I met him personally. He expressed his admiration for the Islamic Republic of Iran and gave me his book, *My Memoirs*, as a gift along with stanzas he had specially composed for me.





**THE FIRST SPARK**

During my youth, I witnessed an important phase of the Islamic revivalist movement which swept through Iran, starting from Navvab Safavi's activism and culminating with Imam Khomeini's Islamic Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Navvab Safavi ignited the first spark that illuminated the dynamic dimension of Islam for me. Navvab Safavi shook the Iranian society to the core, awakening consciences, reinforcing determination and creating a Sen, of protectiveness over Islam and all it holds sacred. His influence was not merely limited to Iran but transcended the borders of the Arab world as well he inspired Islamist activists with enthusiasm and warned some Arab rulers not to fall prey to the treachery of imperialist powers.

Navvab Safavi arrived in Mashhad in 1953 and temporarily resided at al-Mahdiyya, a semi-seminary dedicated for reviving Mahdism. Navvab Safavi had refrained from staying at any home in the city and had chosen to reside at this religious institution. I was 14 years old at the time, and still a student at the school of Suleiman Khan. Upon hearing the news of Navvab's arrival in the city, I burned with excitement to see him but my father did not grant me permission to go to al-Mahdiyya.

After a short period of time, I heard that Navvab Safavi had decided to pay a visit to our school in honor of the students who had gone to see him. I was overjoyed at hearing the news. In our eyes, Navvab Safavi was a symbol of heroism and Islamic resistance. As students, we always felt proud upon hearing the details of his struggle against the regime and of the assassination of General Ali Razmara—the Prime Minister of Iran, an agent of imperialist powers and a perpetrator of many injustices—by Khalil Tahmasebi, a member of Fada'iyan-e Islam. We heard that Sayyid Kashani had approved of Tahmasebi's operation, and we knew that Navvab Safavi was the leader of an organization which had cast fear in the ruling class.

Our school contained a large chamber which we swept and prepared for our prominent guest and his companions, before retiring and waiting for the much-anticipated moment. When the school-gate was finally opened for our awaited guest, a group of men entered. I had never seen a picture of Navvab Safavi before, and had imagined him as a tall man graced with muscular build. But the man who made his appearance with a smiling countenance was lean and short, with a black turban on his head. From the very moment I set eyes upon him, I was enchanted

with his personality and felt a deep affection for him in my heart. He greeted whomever he met, and upon seeing any Sayyid he would say: “*Salam, cousin!*” I couldn’t help but wonder: *Was this truly Navvab Safavi who had humbled the Shah’s regime?*

Navvab Safavi was accompanied by members of Fada’iyan-e Islam. Most of them were young men who wore special fur hats, while only three wore turbans, Navvab stood in front of the crowd and delivered a speech in which he clarified his political goals and urged those present not to hesitate in offering their souls for Islam. His words surged in my soul; they forcefully stirred my emotions and drew me towards the glory of Islam.

Two days later, I heard that Navvab intended to visit *Madreseh Navvab*. Even though my movement was restricted to certain places, I decided to grasp the opportunity to go to that school and see Navvab for a second time.

Carpets had been placed on the floor of the lecture hall and the adjoining pavilion in preparation for Navvab’s arrival and people were waiting for him to make his entrance. I joined the crowd and waited for a short while but my excitement hindered me from sitting idly; so, I rose to my feet and headed outside in anticipation of his appearance. I stood at the road leading to *al-Mahdiyya*, Navvab’s temporary residence, until I saw him approaching from the distance followed by a throng of people. Navvab was turning his head in both directions, greeting the crowd and addressing them cordially. Even while proceeding on foot, he spoke with those who surrounded him, enforcing their determination with his words and offering them advice. One man was profoundly affected by Navvab’s criticism of the adoption of Western dress. I saw him take off his hat before folding it and stuffing it into his pocket.

I hurried back to the school to take a seat in the front row. I still remember the details of that day vividly, as if I am currently reliving it. Navvab stood on a pulpit overlooking the pavilion and courtyard of the school while I sat before him, my eyes transfixed upon his every move and listening intently to every word he spoke. He offered counsel to the students and urged them to be pious. His voice still resonates in my ear, and I can still hear him uttering the following narration: “Son of Adam, prepare your provisions for the road is long, and reconstruct your ship for the ocean is deep.” In truth, Navvab Safavi ignited a blazing spark in the depths of my soul which drove me to display the utmost concern for Islam and society and to contemplate the future of Islam.





Two years later, Navvab Safavi was martyred. It was in 1955 and I was a student at *Madreseh Navvab*. After Navvab Safavi's execution, an atmosphere of terror gripped the entire country in general and seminaries in particular. My instructor at the time, Sheikh Hashem Ghazvini, was the only clergyman in Mashhad who dared to break the fear barrier and eulogize Navvab at the beginning of his class. He expressed his intense objection to the execution of Navvab and said with a voice inspiring emotion: "Is this how the descendant, of the Messenger of God are to be treated?!"

From then on, we decided as students to conduct sessions in memory of Navvab and his slain companions, extolling their praises and expressing admiration for their strategy and objectives. In the year which followed Navvab Safavi's martyrdom, we met Ghalleh-Zari. An instructor and member of Fada'iyan-e Islam who had evaded pursuit for lack of a formal document condemning him, Ghalleh-Zari had come to Mashhad to spend the summer break. Together, we formed a group of like-minded students and forged deep ties with Ghalleh-Zari who was 10 years older than us. He related to us details of Navvab Safavi's life and his intellectual and political vision, and this served in increasing my love for Navvab and faith in his sincerity, dedication, and goals.

## Political Activism

Our group was brimming with enthusiasm and all we needed was to transform our excitement into action. The opportunity presented itself in Muharram of the year 1955. Cinemas, which frequently exhibited morally depraved movies, generally closed in Mashhad during the month of Muharram, but the governor of the city issued a new order to limit the shutdown from the 1 to the 12<sup>o</sup> of Muharram. This decision was an impetus for us to act. We gathered and composed a proclamation condemning the decision, calling upon the *ulama* and the Islamic Ummah to enjoin good and forbid evil, and cautioning against silence in the face of moral corruption.

We had no access to printing machines so we produced the copies by painstakingly writing them down. Each proclamation was four pages long and required two hours of manual copying. I still have one of those copies in my possession.

This was my first step into the world of political activism.

**THE SEEDS OF  
REVOLUTION**

I first heard of a man named Sayyid Khomeini when I was in Mashhad. He was known as Hajj Agha Ruhullah then, and was reputed among seminarians for imparting knowledge to his students in a serious manner, a fact which motivated pupils to eagerly join his classes at the seminary of Qom.

I moved to Qom in 1958, at a time when concepts of social change were surging through my mind. Due to the fact that I was a student at the *hawza*, the idea of renovating the seminary seized my interest. From that year on, I began attending Sayyid Khomeini's lessons on the principles of jurisprudence in a learning experience which would extend for six years. I also attended his lessons on jurisprudence but transferred to Sheikh Morteza Haeri's class because it was much less crowded. The students who attended Sheikh Haeri's class, a clergyman of high esteem, were few but their numbers dwindled because they were not attracted to his teaching methodology. Eventually, I found myself alone. The class proceeded as normal but this time with only one student.

Prior to the year 1962, Imam Khomeini refrained from outwardly displaying any revolutionary inclinations. He was a serious instructor and his clerical garb was always neat and spotless. He would enter the class hall with his head bowed and refrained from looking at any of the students. He taught in a formal manner and provided answers to all the students' questions and discussions with full concentration. Once the lesson would come to an end, he would exit without directing special attention to any certain individual. Nonetheless, all the students of the seminary—even those who did not attend his classes—held him in deep affection.

When I reminisce back upon those days, I marvel at how Imam Khomeini managed to remain silent before the announcement of his uprising. The statements which he issued after publicly declaring his opposition clearly indicate that he had been extremely indignant but had chosen to refrain from issuing any public statements. I have always said to myself: Imam Khomeini's exertion of effort to remain silent requires great determination.

Sayyid Khomeini was a friend of my father's. Whenever I intended to travel to Mashhad, I always made a point of bidding him farewell. "Give my greetings to your father," he would say. On my return, Sayyid Khomeini would ask me how my father was faring.

When Imam Khomeini rose in revolt, I was completely prepared to join his movement. In the Islamic Revolution, I found everything I yearned for. I

remember that I was passing one day through an alley in Qom after Imam Khomeini's uprising was publicly declared, and I noticed a manifesto hung on the entrance-gate of the Hujjatiyya Seminary. I approached to read the contents and discovered that it was a formal statement from Imam Khomeini addressed to Asadullah Alam. I devoured the words which expressed my innermost emotions and aspirations, and felt the need to prostrate in gratitude to God. I realized that Imam Khomeini would forever adhere to the Truth, no matter what might arise.

The Grand Ayatullah Sayyid Boroujerdi had recently died, and the seminarians of Qom felt bereaved after his loss. Under such conditions, Imam Khomeini emerged with full strength and addressed the regime with courage. It was not surprising for one who held the glory of Islam and Muslims at heart to adopt such stance.

## The Beginning

Imam Khomeini launched his movement in autumn of 1962 when he first expressed his opposition to governmental decrees which were contradictory to the Islamic Law and aimed to undermine the influence of Islam in Iran and to affront the *ulama*. The Shah's regime had revoked a constitutional article which required individuals to swear an oath on the Holy Qur'an during formal occasions and had settled for any other holy book instead. But after two months of widespread public discontent throughout Iran, the government rescinded its decree and resorted to another plot.

One month after the annulment, the Shah proposed a series of laws that were known as "the reform bills" but which were actually prepared by the Americans. Imam Khomeini expressed his strong disapproval of those laws, and when the Shah announced that he would arrange for a referendum to ratify those plans, Imam Khomeini declared his refusal once again.

As the confrontations intensified, the Shah decided to openly challenge Imam Khomeini and all the *ulama*. He traveled to Qom, the bastion of the *ulama*, and stood in the central square of the city and launched a hostile Onslaught against the *ulama*. It was a risky venture. The Shah was nervous and agitated throughout his speech.

This, however, did not put an end to Imam Khomeini's efforts and he proceeded to issue anti-regime proclamations almost on a daily basis. In 1963, the regime conducted the intended referendum and claimed that the six million

citizens had cast their votes. Sayyid Milani had sent me with my brother, Sayyid Mohammad, and someone else from Mashhad with a Message to Imam Khomeini. We arrived in Tehran on the exact day of the referendum and, contrary to the regime's allegations, I personally witnessed the low public turnout in various polling stations, even in the crowded heart of the city.

Imam Khomeini intensified his criticism of the regime after the referendum and cast doubts on the process and the results. During this escalation, the first Signs appeared of a conflict in opinions between Imam Khomeini and the other *maraji'* (sources of emulation).

### No Festivities This Year

The Iranian New Year was fast approaching, a time of year traditionally marked by celebrations with the advent of spring. But in that year, Imam Khomeini announced that the country was in a state of mourning and that there would be no festivities. Governmental forces had assaulted a peaceful demonstration in Tehran in which Ayatullah Sayyid Ahmad Khansari—a *marja'*—had participated. It was unusual for a religious authority to take part in public demonstrations, and it was even stranger for governmental forces to attack a demonstration in which a grand figure was participating. The demonstrators were beaten and Sayyid Khansari himself was not spared and received multiple blows. After Imam Khomeini's declaration, all seminary students donned black clothing as a sign of mourning. I still remember that I went to a tailor and requested that he sew me a black shirt.

The first day of the Iranian New Year coincided with the Hijri date marking the day before Imam Ja'far al-Sadeq's death. The high religious authorities of Qom traditionally conducted mourning assemblies on this occasion. Imam Khomeini hosted a mourning ceremony in his home while Sayyid Shari'atmadari and Sayyid Golpaygani conducted ceremonies at the Hujjatiyya Seminary and the Feyziyya Seminary respectively.

The regime was determined to take revenge against the *ulama* of Qom on this day and formulated a plot for that purpose. On 22 March, 1963, a squad of Imperial Guards made their way to Qom to cause strife in the mourning ceremonies and to exploit the ensuing confusion to display their authority and crush seminarians. They initially intended to cause trouble at Imam Khomeini's assembly but his home was located in a narrow alleyway and their plot could

never have succeeded in such a place. They directed their attention to Sayyid Shari‘atmadari’s assembly, but a sturdy individual, noted for his courage and loyalty to Sayyid Shari‘atmadari, stood in front of the audience and declared that he would deal a strong blow to anyone who strove to cause trouble at the assembly.

At the Feyziyya Seminary, the plot was not foiled, and the Imperial Guards succeeded in viciously assaulting the seminarians. Students were beaten, some were thrown from the rooftops of the seminary to the courtyard below, and others were shot to death. The guards even removed the students’ humble furniture from their rooms and burned it. Recounting the incidents of that fateful day would require a long explanation.

In the aftermath of the events at the Feyziyya Seminary, Imam Khomeini emphatically expressed his protest. His followers intensified their efforts to expose the atrocities the regime had committed at the seminary and to inform the masses of the plot to suppress the *ulama*. Imam Khomeini turned his attention to plan for the upcoming month of Muharram. Every year in Muharram, the *hawza* dispatched seminarians to various Iranian cities and villages to preach during the mourning ceremonies that were widely conducted during this month. Imam Khomeini devised a plan which urged preachers to expose the brutal actions of the regime from their pulpits starting from the seventh of Muharram, and assigned the same duty to public mourning committees as of the ninth of Muharram.

This plan was secretly conveyed to the *ulama* and *maraji*<sup>38</sup>, and I was chosen amongst other individuals to make it publicly known. Imam Khomeini initially sent me to Mashhad to inform Ayatullah Milani and Ayatullah Qomi of his decision, and after fulfilling my duty there, I subsequently traveled to Birjand where I was imprisoned for the first time as I will later relate.<sup>38</sup>

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38 Sayyid Khomeini: “I find it necessary to mention an important point relating to the Islamic Revolution of Iran. Two aspects interacted with one another to form the general inclination of the Iranian people toward Islam. The first one was religious opposition against the regime, and the second was intellectual enlightenment and the presentation of a comprehensive Islamic plan using a new discourse. The latter aspect may be summed up in the following phrase: Renovation of religious thought.

Some individuals had expressed their opposition against the regime but carried no advanced concepts on Islam and lacked intellectual flexibility. Their devotion to their religion simply compelled them to resist the regime. In contrast, other individuals were blessed with qualified knowledge on Islam and strove to present Islamic concepts to society in a contemporary language and to combat misconceptions, but they chose not to confront the regime.

Imam Khomeini's plan succeeded in rousing the public, and mourning assemblies were transformed into fiery gatherings against the Shah and his entourage. In this charged atmosphere, marked by an intense revolutionary spirit, it was announced that Imam Khomeini was to deliver a speech on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Muharram, the day commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. All attention was directed to Qom to hear what the Imam had to say, by no one in Iran had expected what was to come. Imam Khomeini delivered a historic scathing speech at the Feyziyya Seminary against the Shah, and condemned him openly and harshly.

“Israel has suppressed the Feyziyya Seminary with the aid of its disgraced agents. Israel crushes us and crushes our people, and

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At the onset of Imam Khomeini's uprising, opposition to the regime was clearly manifest despite the fact that Imam Khomeini was a pioneer in intellectual enlightenment as well. The initial focus was to confront the regime, and after the spirit of resistance became firmly established in society and a system of Islamic thought was presented, individuals endowed with keen insight remained steadfast while narrow-minded individuals forsook the movement. Many prominent figures in the Islamic Revolution like Sheikh Motahhari, Sayyid Beheshti, and Sheikh Bahonar, chose to participate in intellectual enlightenment, especially from 1966 until 1977. This time phase was the most difficult period as the Shah embarked on eliminating all opposing political factions.

I was among the few who combined the two aspects together throughout the uprising, and I believe I merged both of them fully. I was keen on understanding religion and presenting it as God wished—a method of conduct and a continuous progress toward perfection. I always focused in my scholarly publications and in my lectures on this approach. This inclination to gain an open-minded knowledge of Islam motivated me to read the works of Islamic intellectuals regardless of their nationalities. Alongside my intellectual efforts, I strove to carry out any activity which would aid in mobilizing the masses against the regime or forming the foundation of a leadership that would guide the public towards the establishment of an Islamic government.

Some individuals merged the two aspects as well, and one of them was Sheikh Hashemi Rafsanjani. I once said to him after the victory of the Islamic Revolution: “Throughout the past 15 years of my life, I haven't spent a single day without confronting the regime. I have never slept without worry. My nights were spent either in prison, or in exile, or in expectation of prison or exile.” Sheikh Rafsanjani agreed.

We received the support of the brothers who were immersed in intellectual enlightenment. Sheikh Morteza Motahhari was 18 years older than I, but we were close friends. Ali Shariati also began with public opposition of the regime, but later focused his efforts on enlightenment, though I have some remarks on his ideas. I believe that intellectual activity devoid of opposition lacks spirit, and confrontation uncoupled with discernment will be plagued with backwardness. Merging opposition with intellectual enlightenment forms the basis of the Islamic Revolution.”

aims to dominate our economy and destroy our agriculture and trade. Shah! I advise you to cease these actions. I hope a day won't come in which you will be forced to leave Iran while the people express their gratitude to God for your departure! Don't manipulate the sustenance of this people. Don't stand in the face of the *ulama*. I offer you counsel! 45 years of your life have passed, So heed my advice and contemplate your fate. Take an example from those who have preceded you. Take an example from your father! Heed the counsel of the *ulama*. Are they reactionary? Is Islam reactionary? Is it a black reactionary?<sup>39</sup> You have declared a White Revolution?<sup>40</sup> What White Revolution?! Why are you lying? Why are you deceiving people? I swear to God, Israel will not benefit you. News has reached me today that the SAVAK has imprisoned a group of preachers and derived a pledge from them to avoid criticizing the Shah and Israel, and to avoid saying that religion is in danger! What is the connection between the Shah and Israel? Is the Shah from Israel? Does the SAVAK consider the Shah to be Jewish?"

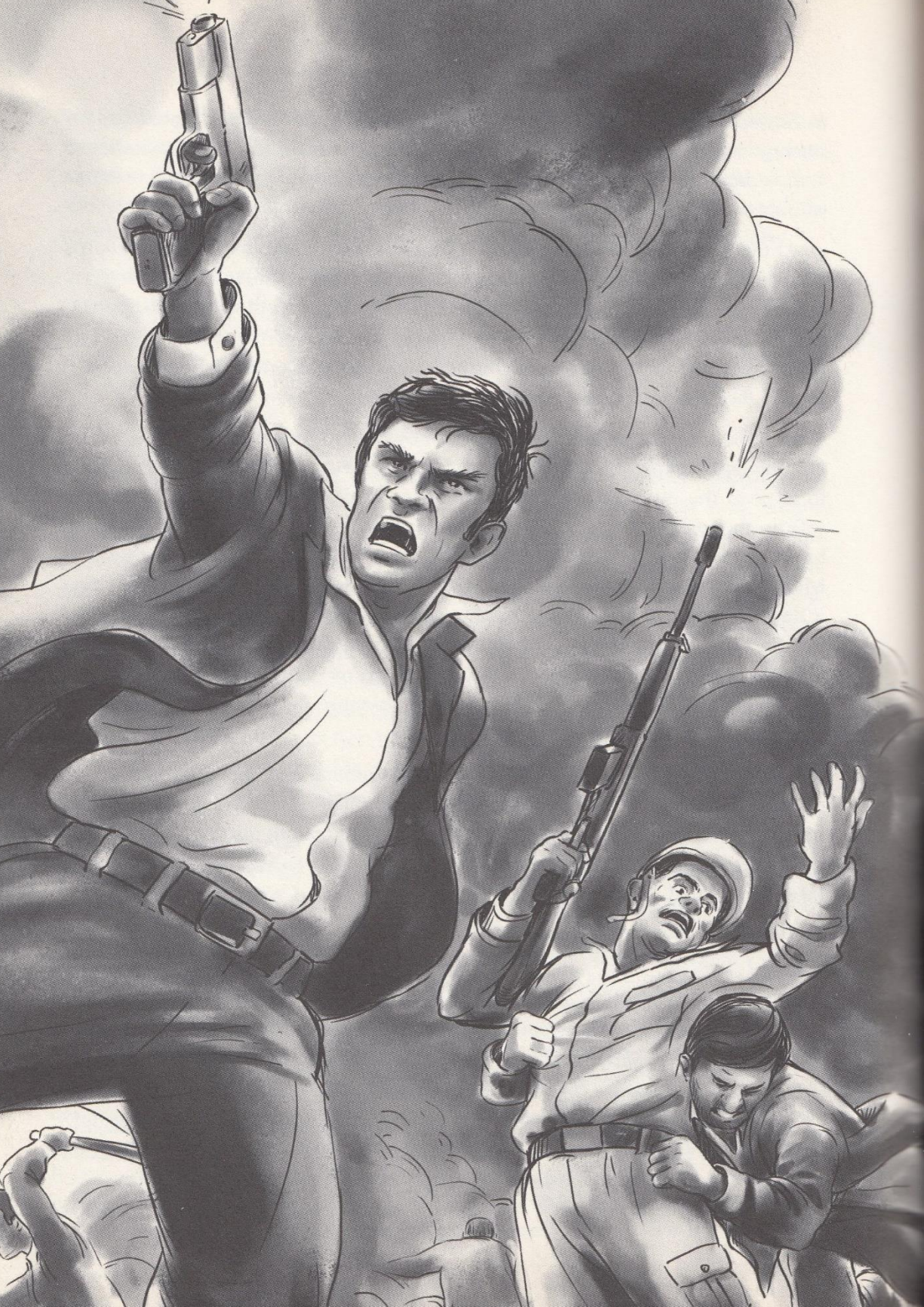
That very night, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 1963, Imam Khomeini was secretly imprisoned and taken to Tehran. He was initially confined in the Officers' Club in the city, but was later transferred to a small cell where he could not offer his prayers while standing erect due to its small size. As soon as news of his arrest reached the public, people expressed their strong resistance and took to the streets, but the demonstrations were violently crushed by the security forces and a hideous massacre was committed.

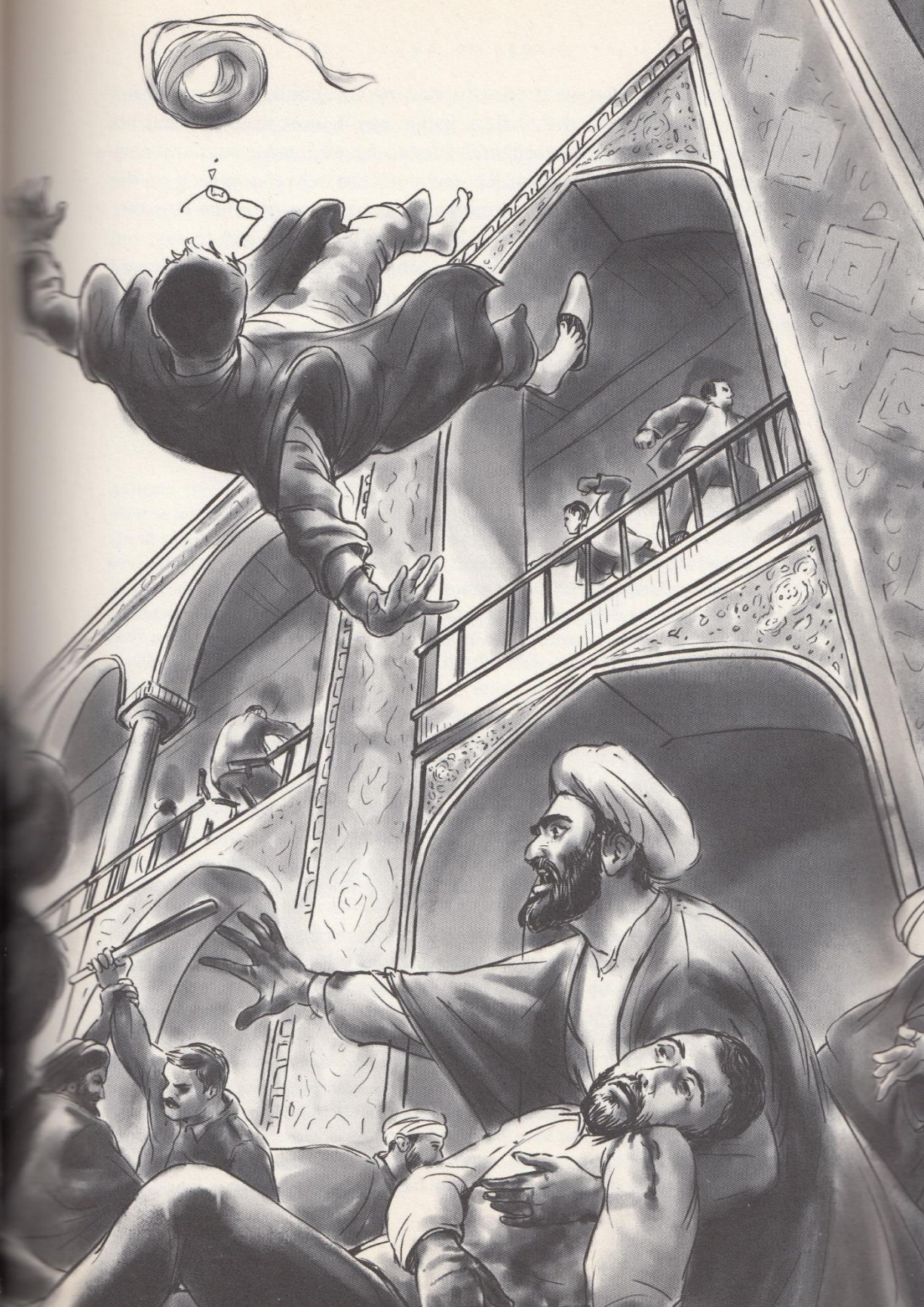
Imam Khomeini remained in his cell for two days before being removed to a prison where he was detained for two months. He was suddenly released and stayed in a house in Tehran, but when people heard of his release, they flocked to see him and all the streets of the neighborhood soon overflowed with devotees,

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39 The Shah had previously denounced the clergy as *erteja' e siyah* (black reactionaries).

40 The Shah had dismissed the parliament and launched a White Revolution—an aggressive modernization program that upended the wealth and influence of landowners and clerics, disrupted rural economies, led to rapid urbanization and Westernization, and prompted concerns over democracy and human rights.





The regime feared this public display of affection and decided to place Imam Khomeini under house arrest in northern Tehran where he remained for eight months. Imam Khomeini returned to Qom after his release in early 1964 where he enjoyed freedom until October the 21<sup>st</sup>, the date of his exile to Turkey.



**THE SUN'S SHADOW**

After Imam Khomeini's uprising, Qom simmered with activities, but there was no established organization. Islamic activists worked as they saw fit but no one thought of organizing the functions, not even Imam Khomeini, remember that seminarians were divided into groups; one focused on copying Imam Khomeini's proclamations by use of a Roneo machine, while another, distributed those proclamations. A third group established connections with Imam Khomeini to propose various matters; individuals from that group informed the Imam of recent political and social events or formed a liaison, between the Imam and other *ulama*. Some found comfort in Imam Khomeini's home which teemed with students even in the absence of the Imam. Seminarians engaged in discussions revolving around different religious and political affairs and were sometimes joined by Sayyid Mostafa, Imam Khomeini's son. I was a close friend of Sayyid Mostafa Khomeini; he was aware of Imam Khomeini's regard for me and my role in the Islamic uprising. This close relationship served in furthering my movement during the uprising,

The homes of other *maraji'* who had participated in the uprising, like Sayyid Golpayegani, Sayyid Mar'ashi Najafi, and Sayyid Shari'atmadari, witnessed a similar atmosphere, but Imam Khomeini was the prominent figure on the scene of opposition while the others were followers.

From my part, I fulfilled various duties: with the collaboration of some brothers, I copied Imam Khomeini's notices by using a Roneo machine before handing the leaflets to another group for distribution. We also copied other notices prepared by political sides, and whenever we came upon an announcement worth publishing, we made a point of copying and distributing it as well. We also composed leaflets which we signed with the name "A Group of *Ulama*" or "A Group of Seminary Students" using harsh anti-regime rhetoric because our identities were concealed. We also gave counsel to Imam Khomeini during various occasions. I once went with my brother, Sayyid Mohammad, and Sheikh Ali Heydari and Sheikh Hussein Ibrahimi to Imam Khomeini's home and suggested that he issue a proclamation to be distributed during the pilgrimage season. I remember that Imam Khomeini's face lit up with joy and said: "I have already prepared one." I sometimes acted as a liaison between Imam Khomeini and the other *ulama*. Imam Khomeini once sent me to Sayyid Milani and Sayyid Qomi in Mashhad to deliver an oral message composed of three important points. There was a general message of the *ulama*: "*Israel dominates all governance and wealth in Iran, and strive to eliminate religion and clergymen in Iran*", while the

private message to the two Sayyids involved informing them of the necessity to carry out the planned public denouncement of the regime's crimes at the Feyziyya Seminary by preachers as of the 7<sup>th</sup> of Muharram and by mourning committees on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

I remember that Sheikh Hashemi Rafsanjani was entrusted with the task of gathering information. Imam Khomeini gave him a sum of money and Sheikh Rafsanjani purchased a large radio to listen to the news and then convey it to Imam Khomeini. I believe the radio is still preserved to this very day.

My friends and I established the first organizational body in Qom among the *ulama* and recorded its governing rules. I participated with my brother Sayyid Mohammad, who had a special talent in these matters, in composing the regulations. From the onset of the uprising until my departure from Qom, a period which extended for a year and a half, we established various organizational bodies simultaneously or in succession. Among these bodies was an association which included a large number of *ulama* from Qom and later became known as the Union of Seminary Instructors in Qom. Many members of the union were not aware of my role in founding the organizational body. We also formed an eleven-member group which included myself, Hashemi Rafsanjani, Mesbah Yazdi, Amini, Meshkini, Montazeri, Ghoddousi, Azari Qomi, Rabbani Shirazi, and Mahdi Ha'eri Tehrani. Sheikh Mesbah Yazdi used to record the proceedings of our meetings in a symbolic language he had invented which looked similar to occult languages. He wrote on the first page the following phrase in Persian: "I've found a book on occult sciences and manually copied it."

Another body included some members of the aforementioned group in addition to Sheikh Rabbani Amlashi and Sheikh Ali Asghar Morvarid whose responsibility was to take decisions concerning preaching activities. Among his duties was the task of assigning clergymen to various cities to deliver sermons during the month of Ramadan which directly followed the uprising of Khordad for the purpose of exposing the regime's crimes in Qom.









**DRENCHED IN TEARS**

## The Stronghold of Alam

In June 1963, the Shah's regime massacred thousands of protestors who he been demonstrating in Tehran and other Iranian cities. I headed to Birjand in concordance with a detailed plan aiming to expose the atrocities of the regime to protest against the mistreatment of the clergy in Qom in general and the Feyziyya Seminary in particular, and to uncover further state-sponsored ploy directed at obliterating the Islamic identity of the Iranian nation.

I intentionally chose to travel to Birjand, the stronghold of Amir Asadullah Alam, the Shah's court minister. Alam's influence exceeded that which his rank entailed, and he exercised great power in Iran. The second volume of the Memoirs of Hossein Fardoust sufficiently exposes his rank of authority. The Alam family acquired political power in return for the faithful services its members had provided the British government. In addition to its long history of collaboration with foreign powers, the Alam family had played a significant role in promoting opium use among citizens in the province of Khorasan.

I had hitherto traveled to Birjand twice and personally witnessed the hegemony Amir Asadullah Alam exerted over the city. Orators were obliged during religious occasions to open their sermons and lectures in honor of the Alam family, and all *ulama* were required to attend the assemblies under threat of punishment. One previous Muharram in Birjand, I had heard an orator extolling the virtues of Alam in Arabic, modulating his voice and reiterating with an impassioned tone: "The Master of Sword and Pen...Amir Asadullah Alam!"

Most dignitaries and prominent figures in Birjand were, directly or indirectly, unscrupulous supporters of the Alam family. Notable individuals such as the mayor of the island of Kish were adherent subordinates of Asadullah Alam. The Shah frequently resided at one of Alam's orchards in Birjand, which were famed for their special vines and masterfully prepared dishes, whenever he needed a period of rest from work.

I arrived in Birjand on the third day of Muharram, a relatively late date for any preacher who intended to deliver sermons in a certain region. The customary practice was for preachers to arrive a short while before Muharram to prepare for the upcoming assemblies. I had made the acquaintance of some individuals in Birjand during my two previous trips, and they now undertook the task of composing a program and assigning dates so that I could deliver sermons in several mosques.

The seventh day of Muharram, which Imam Khomeini had specified as the fixed date for preachers to expose the cruelty of the regime, happened to be a Friday. I had arranged my schedule to preach in front of a large assembly at Musalla Mosque, but the opportunity only arose a short while before sunset because another preacher who was assigned to deliver his lecture before mine had unusually lengthened his sermon. I feared that the precious opportunity of addressing the attendees would be lost, but luckily, the preacher concluded his sermon twenty minutes before the time for evening prayer.

I ascended the pulpit, and once there, facing the large crowd, I poured out everything from my heart and divulged all the details that I had planned to make known. I began my speech by speaking of a plot hatched by foreign governments aiming to detach religion from everyday life, and then moved on to exposing the regime's scheme against Islam and Muslims at large and clergymen in particular. I also offered an account of the tragic events at the Feyziyya Seminary, and recounted the tragic details of that day.

A wave of commotion swept throughout the mosque, and the sounds of loud weeping could be heard all over the assembly. I concluded my sermon with the customary reference to the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (as), but the tears the audience shed for Imam Hussein (as) did not exceed those they shed for the victims of the Feyziyya Seminary.

## **My First Incarceration**

I delivered sermons for two additional days, but on the ninth of Muharram I was arrested and led to the local police station in what would be my first experience with police investigation units. I had never as much as seen a police station prior to that day. I was escorted into the presence of a young lieutenant who berated me with a sharp tone, his jugular veins distended in anger. I decided to reply with utmost calmness. "The most you can do is execute me, but I'm aware that you don't possess that authority. Do whatever you want. I have already prepared myself. When I stepped out of my home, I braced myself to face death so I advise you to refrain from exhausting your energy!"

The officer was taken by surprise as he had not expected such a reaction, My words had a calming effect though, and his tone changed. "What shall I say?" he repeated, dumbfounded. He remained silent for a while before posing his second question. "Are your parents alive? Do you have a wife?"

“My parents are alive, but I am not married.”

“What shall I do with you?” he murmured, clearly baffled.

“I have been entrusted with a duty, and you have been entrusted with one. Fulfill your duty, and I will mine.”

I remained at the police station until noontime on the tenth of Muharram. I had been oblivious of the events occurring outside the prison walls, but I learned of the major incidents which had swept throughout Iran at a later date Ayatullah Tehami, a man of letters and a distinguished and courageous cleric from Birjand, informed me some time later that the situation in Birjand had been on the brink of explosion during my confinement. “The citizens were prepared to encircle the police station and release you from prison even if it involved clashing with the police. Numerous religious committees contacted me to discuss the matter.”

Government officials apparently learned of this plan and feared that the massive public demonstrations which had taken place in Tehran and other Iranian cities would spread to Birjand as well. The Security Council of Birjand held an urgent meeting and issued an order demanding my expulsion to Mashhad. It seems that the officials intended to pacify the citizens before my eviction, so they released me under the condition that I refrain from ascending pulpits and delivering any sermons. I was pleased to find out that the citizens of the city, despite their fear of the powerful Alam family, expressed compassion toward my plight and looked at me sympathetically when I was released.

On the tenth of Muharram, Imam Khomeini delivered his exceptional historical speech in Qom against the Shah’s regime as I have previously mentioned, a public address which marked the beginning of the end of the Shah’s autocratic rule. Two days later, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of Muharram-the celebrated 15<sup>th</sup> of Khordad, Imam Khomeini was arrested. During the time I spent in Birjand from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of Muharram, the situation in Iran boiled with a fervent intensity against the regime. Mourning assemblies in Tehran, conducted in commemoration of Imam Hussein’s martyrdom, transformed into revolutionary gatherings that greatly alarmed the Shah’s despotic government.

While I was in Birjand awaiting my expulsion, a military inspector with the rank of colonel arrived from Mashhad and demanded to see me. I was completely unaware of his mission. He addressed me, saying: “We are going to send you to Mashhad, but the city is in a state of tumult. Many dissidents have been arrested, and the prisons of Mashhad are full of prisoners.” He elaborated on the turbulent

conditions in the city in an attempt to cast fear in my heart and then advised me to remain for a few more days in Birjand until the situation calmed down.

I never understood why such a high-ranking officer was dispatched from Mashhad for the purpose of delivering such a message, whilst any military serviceman from Birjand could have carried out such a duty. It seems that the colonel's mission was solely restricted to delivering the communication, a possible sign that the government had been greatly shaken and recognized the need to deal with all developments.

## The Military Garrison

I was sent to Mashhad on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Muharram guarded by three police officers. The military vehicle that transported us traversed the 540 kilometers distance between Birjand and Mashhad at full speed, and the driver refrained from stopping at any town. We passed Qain, Gonabad<sup>41</sup> and Torbat-e Heydariya, but only made a brief stop at an old coffeehouse at the side of the road where we had a quick meal.

My military escorts were paralyzed with fear, and upon our arrival in Mashhad they deposited me at a police station. I was placed in a room where I could hear the sound of police officers patrolling the main streets and alleys of the city on horseback. At night, the courtyard of the police station teemed with servicemen who availed themselves of the brief respite to enjoy a few hours of much-needed sleep. There was no place for me to lie down, so I was led to a narrow chamber to spend the night. I was taken to the SAVAK headquarters in the morning before being transferred to the prison at the military barracks in Mashhad.

Most of the prisoners were young men who had been detained for participating in anti-regime demonstrations and distributing formal proclamations. There were also rhetoricians, seminarians, and university students in prison. I still remember some prisoners who later became involved in political

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41 City in Razavi Khorasan Province with roots in antiquity. Gonabad is mostly well-known for its qanats which are the underground channels constructed for the purpose of transporting water from aquifers or water wells to the surface for irrigation and drinking. Some of the longest and oldest qanats of the world are located in Gonabad, and a few of them have been registered as world heritage sites by UNESCO.

struggle and anti-regime activities such as Parviz Pooyan who would later lead the leftist armed guerrilla movement against the Shah's regime during the late 1960's and would meet his fate in a military operation. Another prisoner was Sheikh Faker<sup>42</sup>, a future member of the Islamic Consultative Assembly.

I was taken to a small cell which bore no resemblance to the prison cells that I would later be incarcerated in. I was overwhelmed with loneliness during the first few hours. I was unaware of the identities of the prisoners in the adjoining cells or their numbers, and despite their closeness I felt completely estranged from them. Moments passed before a sound from the adjacent cell drifted into my room, a voice reciting a poetic verse by Rumi from the Masnavi. The voice, melody, and meaning of the verse cast tranquility into my soul and empowered me with determination to face my current state.

*“We do not complain of what God has ordained,  
No lion in chains has ever complained.”*

I recognized the voice. It belonged to a famous orator from Mashhad. So he had been imprisoned too. Finding out who he was and listening to his poetic recitation calmed my spirit and I did not feel alone.

The facility where we were imprisoned was not part of the prison barracks designated for military inmates. It was not actually a detention facility but a warehouse which had been hastily transformed into a prison as a consequence of the tumultuous situation in the country. The prevalent conditions had driven the regime to create makeshift prisons and detainment centers, and the cells lacked proper living conditions. The prison cell which I had been initially placed in was damp and water droplets had formed a puddle on the floor, so the guards were compelled to transfer me to another cell after a few hours.

Every single morning, we were ordered out of our cells to carry out forced labor which involved removing weeds and uprooting plants from the courtyard of the garrison. The field was filled with vegetation, and to pass the time, I murmured the following lines while working:

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42 Mohammad Reza Faker (1945-2009): A scholar from Mashhad who received his preliminary studies in the city before moving to Qom to resume his religious learning. Sheikh Faker was among the scholars who joined Imam Khomeini's uprising. He was arrested numerous times in addition to being incarcerated along with Sayyid Khamenei in 1963. Imam Khomeini entrusted him with various duties, and he served for two terms in the Islamic Consultative Assembly.

*“Tending to roses, such is my toil.  
While the Mentor of Persia labors with clay!”<sup>43</sup>*

We were also forced to mend the surfaces of the corridors and passageways inside the garrison. After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, I visited the location and delivered a speech in which I addressed the military personnel and informed them of the fact that I once partook in repairing the tiles of most of the hallways of the garrison.

I was incarcerated at the garrison for more than a week. During this time my beard was compulsorily shaved. It was the first time in my life that I was subjected to facial hair removal. I had previously heard that inmates’ beards were shaved in prison with sharp razors and without the application of soap or water to the face, a terribly painful process. Thus, on the way from Birjand to Mashhad, I had mentally prepared myself for the horrid moment and suffering abrasions on my chin.

When it was time to have my beard shaved, I stared at the barber nervously. He opened his briefcase and removed an electric razor. Upon seeing the appliance, I sighed in relief because I realized that the process was not as I had imagined. After the barber finished his work, I was granted permission to visit the bathroom to perform ablution, accompanied by two soldiers. On my way to the lavatory, an officer known for his rudeness saw me and called out mockingly from afar: “Sheikh! You have become beardless!”

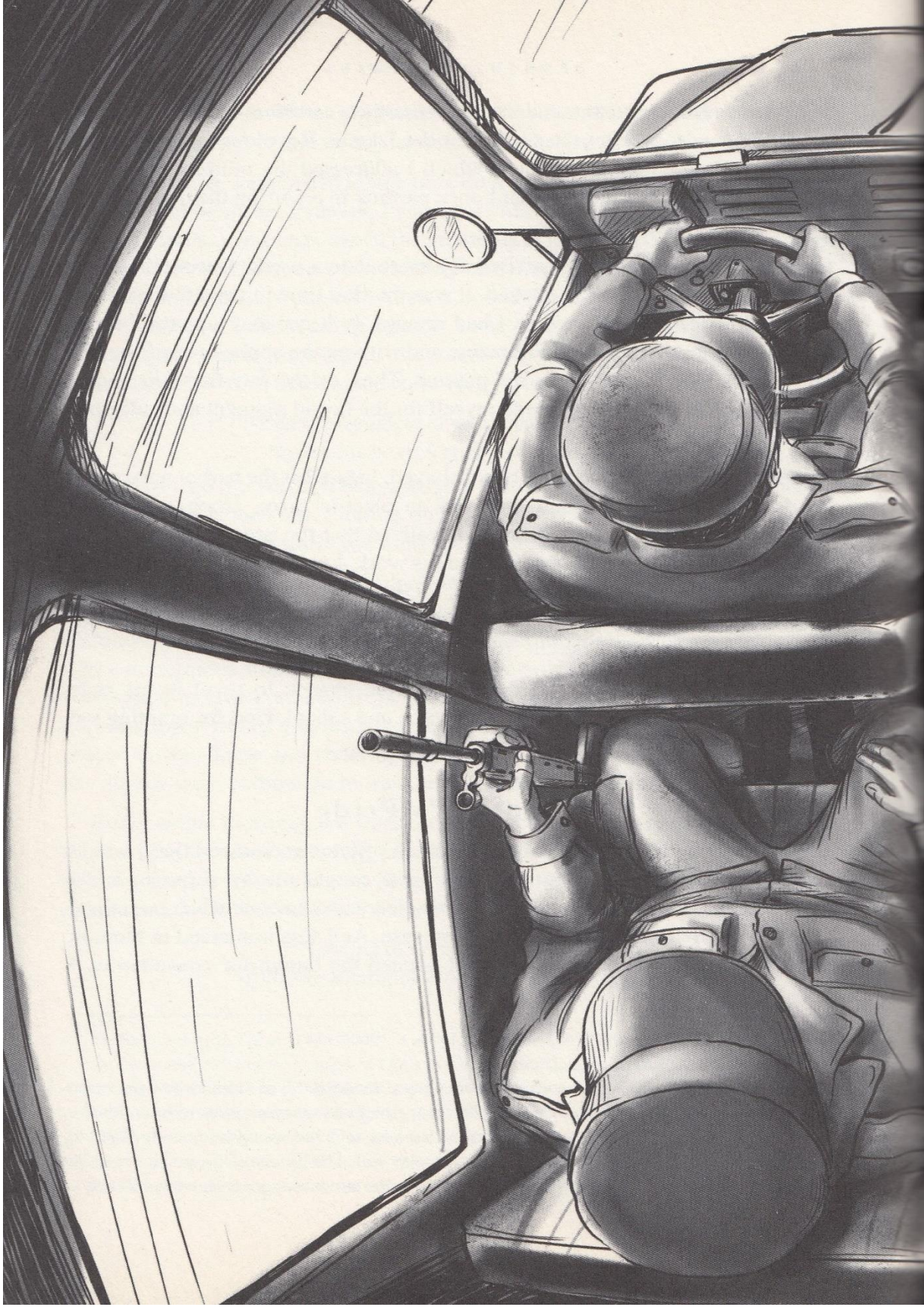
I immediately retorted and denied him the chance to revel in his rude mockery: “I haven’t seen my chin for years, and I thank God for granting me the opportunity now.”

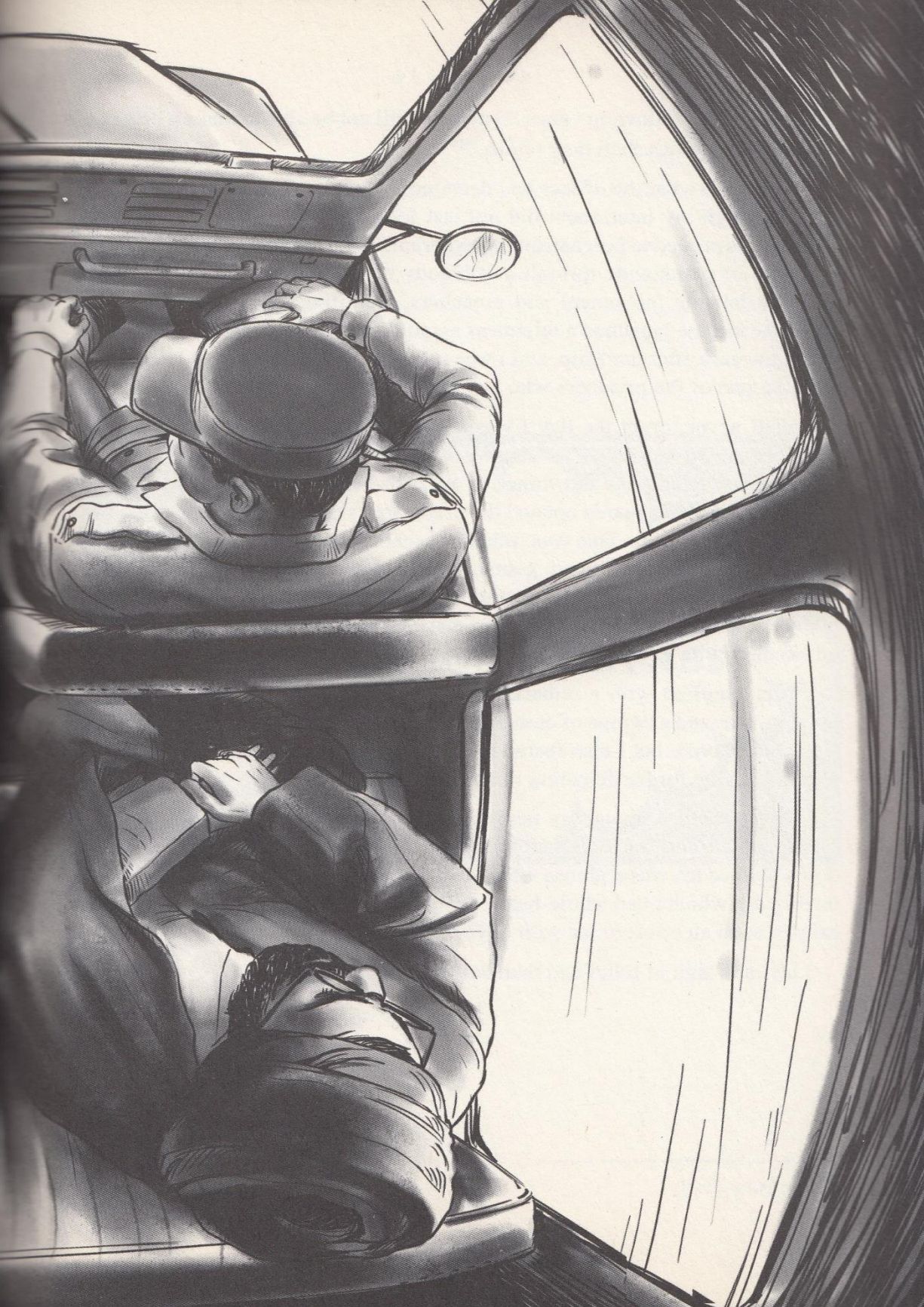
## A Mother’s Pride

Three days after my arrest, one of the prison officers announced that I would be set free on the following day. The news caught me by surprise, and I supposed

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43 The literal translation of the lines is: “I have been forced to tend to roses, but the Mentor of Persia has been imposed with the task of working with clay.” The “Mentor of Persia” refers to the renowned poet, Sheikh Sa’di of Shiraz who lived in the seventh century Hijri (died ca. 1291 CE). His story might be summarized as follows: Sheikh Sa’di was imprisoned in Palestine during a Crusader raid and was subsequently taken to Byzantium where he was forced to work with clay soil. The beauty of the poetic verse, in the original Persian, lies in the alliteration between the two words *gol* (rose) and *gel* (clay).





that one of my friends had interceded with someone who maintained ties with the regime and requested my release. As I was immersed in thought and reflected on this twist in events, I opened the Qur'an for consultation. I encountered the following verse: "And they will not be able to make a bequest nor to their families shall they return."<sup>44</sup>

Contrary to what the officer had declared, I was not released the following day. Although my internment did not last for an extended period of time, it nonetheless proved to be a harrowing experience. It was my first imprisonment, at a time of nationwide turmoil and bloody confrontations. Threats looming over the Islamic movement and preachers, engulfing them from all sides. While the regime launched a relentless assault on dissidents. It was God's will to bestow ease after hardship, and I was released eight or nine days later along with the rest of the prisoners who had been confined at the prison.

I shall never forget the day I was set free. On an afternoon in late June, a prison officer informed us that we were to be released. We packed our insignificant belongings and waited in our cells before being ordered to gather in the hallway. The guards opened the prison gates and simply commanded us to leave the premises. This was rather unusual as we were not asked to fill in the official forms which were generally considered a requisite during prison release procedures. We bid each other farewell and I hurriedly made my way to my home which was located a short distance away from the prison, my pace quickening with every step.

I was engulfed with a remarkable emotion along the road; a mixture of longing, fear and a twinge of embarrassment. I felt uncomfortable as my beard had been shaved, but I also feared my parents' discontent and expected them to reproach me for participating in activities which had led to my detainment.

When I reached home, my family members offered me a warm welcome, brimming with joy and delight. The first thing my mother said to me as we sat down to have tea was a phrase which had a great impact on my later activities on the path which I had whole-heartedly chosen: "I am proud of a son who has exerted such an effort in the path of God!"

I let out a sigh of relief and thanked God.

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44 The Qur'an 36:50.

# **THE CRIMSON FORTRESS**

## Organizational Activities

After my first imprisonment in late spring of 1963, I was apprehended once again in the very same year. I find it pertinent at this point to concisely mention some facts relating to the organizational activities we undertook as part of Imam Khomeini's uprising and which are closely linked to my imprisonment.

In the course of the uprising, from its outbreak until my departure from Qom (a period which lasted a year and half) we managed to establish four organizations; some of these were formed consecutively and others in tandem. One formation, the assembly of scholars from Qom, included many clergymen and later adopted the name *Society of Theology Instructors of Qom*. Another organization became known as *The Eleven*; it included Hashemi Rafsanjani, my brother Sayyid Mohammad, Mesbah Yazdi, the group's secretary; Amini, Meshkini, Montazeri, Ghoddousi, Azari Qomi, Rabbani Shirazi, Ha'eri Tehrani, and myself.

All the aforementioned individuals are still alive<sup>45</sup> and currently enjoy an eminent scholarly status and assume high political positions in the Islamic Republic of Iran with the exception of two figures: Sheikh Ghoddousi who was assassinated in 1982 by the criminal band known in Iran as the *Monafeqin*<sup>46</sup> and

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45 At the time when Sayyid Ali Khamenei (ha) narrated this autobiography.

46 The Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization, or MEK, is a controversial Iranian armed group which has been dubbed in post-revolution Iran as the *Monafeqin*, which means Hypocrites. It was founded in 1965 by four religious nationalist young men in opposition to the Pahlavi regime and its supporters in the West. The members of this organization broke with the clerics in their religious interpretations, and thus they built upon external ideas and inclined towards Marxism. Most of the members of this group were imprisoned by the SAVAK in September 1971. Four years later, the Marxists within the organization staged a "coup" and began a bloody purge. Thereafter, the Marxists issued a formal proclamation declaring their complete conversion to Marxism and abandonment of their Islamic roots.

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the group demonstrated its outward support for the uprising but it gradually began opposing Islam and nationalism. Starting from June 1981, the Mujahedin-e Khalq waged a military confrontation against the Iranian nation. Masoud Rajavi, the leader of the organization, escaped to France and later joined the Iraqi regime under Saddam Hussein in its war against Iran. According to the U.S. State Department, the MEK was then welcomed into Iraq, where it supported Saddam Hussein's war against Iraq (1980-88). Saddam armed the MEK near the end of the Iran conflict "with heavy military equipment and deployed thousands of MEK fighters in suicidal, mass wave attacks against Iranian forces." The MEK's campaign against the Islamic Republic, including multiple targeted attacks on high-ranking officials, continued throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.

The organization assumes the responsibility for murdering thousands of individuals, spying for the enemies of Iran, and collaborating with the Baathist Party of Iraq in suppressing Kurds

Sheikh Rabbani who passed away in the same year.<sup>47</sup> This group represented the most important active cluster in Qom at the time. It placed objectives to be accomplished on the long term and maintained its dynamism for a number of years.

Another separate formation included some members of the previous group, such as Sheikh Rabbani Amlashi, in addition to Sheikh Ali-Asghar Morvarid whose mission was to take practical decisions regarding preaching activities. This involved preparing a plan to send competent individuals to various cities and towns during the month of Ramadan which directly followed the uprising of the 15<sup>th</sup> of Khordad. The purpose was to reveal the crimes which the Shah's regime had committed in Qom. To fulfill this mission, I was assigned to head to the city of Zahedan where I was arrested and imprisoned for the second time.

### On the Path to Zahedan

After I made the decision to travel to Zahedan, I consulted God by opening the Holy Qur'an and encountered the following verse: "Indeed they had sought to stir up mischief before this and had upset matters for you until truth arrived and the ordinance of God prevailed while they were averse."<sup>48</sup> I realized that my mission to Zahedan would be burdened with difficulty but that it would end in success by the grace of God. And such was the case.

I was not acquainted with anyone from Zahedan, but I had heard of a prominent scholar in the city by the name of Sheikh Kaf'ami. I wrote to Ayatullah Milani, who resided in Mashhad, and asked him to send a letter of introduction to Sheikh Kaf'ami and to request his aid in case of any problems that I might face. Ayatullah Milani was one of the grand *ulama* in Iran, a *marja'* whose religious edicts were followed by a large sector of the population. He was deeply affectionate and profusely lavished his kindness upon me. He was also fully aware that I was travelling to Zahedan on an anti-regime mission.

I departed from Qom on a day fraught with risk. I was being pursued alone with a group of my companions in the wake of an incident which I presently do

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and Arabs—both Sunni and Shi'a—in Iraq. After Saddam Hussein's downfall, the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization was removed from Iraq and has consistently received American support.

47 Note that some of the mentioned figures passed away after these memoirs were recounted.

48 The Qur'an 9:48.

not recall. We slipped through a secret back door located in a basement, used for washing clothes in the Khan School. I was able to board a bus whose passengers were mainly clerics and seminary students on their way to various destinations for the purpose of preaching publicly. The final destination of the bus was Kerman, a city located approximately a thousand kilometers away from Qom. More than thirty passengers went off the bus to towns and village, on the way.

When the bus reached Isfahan, night had already fallen. The driver and passengers needed to rest so we rented a small house for the entire company. We spent a pleasant night, discussing various topics and reflecting on our hopes, worries, and details concerning preaching. We cherished such moments spent in amicable discourse the most.

When we reached Yazd, we incidentally encountered Sheikh Saduqi, an eminent scholar from the city who became a prominent figure during the Islamic Revolution and was loved dearly by Imam Khomeini. He was later martyred at the age of 80 by members of the criminal *Monafeqin* Organization while he was leading congregational prayers.

When we reached the city of Kerman, all the passengers descended and I was obliged to board a different bus to traverse the remaining 500 kilometers of my journey to Zahedan. I had some close friends in Kerman who insisted that I remain at their homes: Sheikh Mohammad Javad Hujjati Kermani with whom I had studied Avicenna's *al-Shifa'* under the supervision of Ayatullah Tabataba'i, and Sayyid Kamal Shirazi. Both scholars had left Qom after the grievous events which befell the city; Sheikh Mohammad Javad had returned to his native city of Kerman while Sayyid Kamal had chosen to live in the city two months prior to my arrival and had gotten married there.

I spent three days with my two friends. Those were among of the best days of my life, in the company of my friends in education and struggle. I was compelled to leave on the third day in order to fulfill my mission in Zahedan as the time had grown late. It was very difficult for me to part with the companions with whom I had found such spiritual and psychological tranquility and spent a period of rest. Furthermore, I was leaving Kerman alone and heading to an unknown place and facing an obscure fate with unknown consequences. My heart wrenched with pain while I was bidding my friends farewell. Whenever I recall those sorrowful moments, I still feel a pang of grief.

I boarded a bus which took off at night in the direction of Zahedan. We reached the city at dawn. After I descended, I asked a passerby to guide me to the location of the city's main mosque whereby he directed me towards Sheikh Kaf'ami's mosque. The mosque incorporated an adjoining courtyard with rooms that Sheikh Kaf'ami had specially prepared for the accommodation of non-native preachers. I laid my suitcase in one of the rooms and headed towards Sheikh Kaf'ami's home after asking for the address.

A reverent Sheikh in his fifties donning a brilliant white turban opened the door for me a few moments after I knocked. He was tall and stout, with a long beard and a smiling face. He welcomed me warmly, offering me words of endearment and informing me that he had received Ayatullah Milani's letter of introduction and that it had arrived with a personal note specifically directed to me. This note held a special meaning, as it demonstrated Ayatullah Milani's concern for my welfare and the importance he assigned to my mission. It also served in drawing Sheikh Kaf'ami's attention to this special treatment. Ayatullah Milani, in addition to being a very learned scholar, a poet and an Islamic mystic, was a man who directed his attention to grand social issues.

As for Sheikh Kaf'ami, I found him to be a man of noble character and very capable in directing Islamic activities in Zahedan. I later discovered that he was an eminent and influential figure in the city. Sheikh Kaf'ami gently reproached me for my delay in arriving in Zahedan since custom dictated that orators should reach their destinations prior to Ramadan in order to plan their schedules ahead of time. My arrival in the city coincided with the beginning of Ramadan, but nonetheless Sheikh Kaf'ami told me: "The mosque shall be at your disposal day and night, but another cleric has arrived from Mashhad to deliver sermons as well."

I knew the cleric whom Sheikh Kaf'ami referred to, an agent of the Pahlavi regime who had supported the Shah's reform plans and harshly criticized those who opposed them. The announcement took me by surprise, and I found it necessary to warn Sheikh Kaf'ami and discourage him from allowing the man to ascend the pulpit and deliver lectures.

While we were discussing the matter, the same cleric we were speaking of entered. Sheikh Kaf'ami's facial expression altered and he seemed evidently disconcerted. As for my part, I paid no heed to the cleric's arrival and maintained

my composure. In later times, Sheikh Kaf'ami would reminisce upon this incident and praise my calmness.

The scholar from Mashhad was a self-seeking sycophant. As soon as he set eyes upon me, he greeted me graciously with an artificial smile, making gestures which belied his flattery. I responded to his greeting coldly and refrained from rising from my seat or looking at him.

Later on, Sheikh Kaf'ami informed me that he had been obliged to invite the cleric since the man had supporters in Zahedan among government officials and they had pressured Sheikh Kaf'ami to send him a formal invitation to preach at the mosque after his arrival in the city. It is worth noting that Shi'a's formed a minority in the city and Sheikh Kaf'ami's mosque was the only Shi'a mosque in Zahedan.

## **Umm Hashem and Umm Ghasem**

Sheikh Kaf'ami insisted that I stay at his home and not at the rooms specified for preachers at the mosque. Thus, I discovered that he had two wives who lived in adjoining, identical houses. I noticed that he strove to treat his wives with complete justice and divided his time equally at each home according to a meticulous well-planned schedule. He also spent equal amounts of money on both houses in an extremely precise manner.

It seems that God bestowed upon him in a likewise manner; Sheikh Kaf'ami had four sons and three daughters by one wife, and four sons and three daughters by the other. He had labelled each house by the name of the eldest son therein; the first was known as the house of Umm Hashem, and the other the house of Umm Ghasem. His sons-in-law came to be known according to the branch of Sheikh Kaf'ami's household in which they had married. Sayyid Abadi, the current leader of congregational prayers in Mashhad, was associated with the house of Ghasem while Mazari, who was later murdered by a criminal gang in Baluchistan, was associated with the house of Hashem.

## **The Fiery Sermon**

It was decided that I should deliver sermons one day while the other cleric would deliver sermons on the other. I was annoyed by such a distribution, but I was nonetheless compelled to accept it. Furthermore, the scholar, regarding himself as a professional orator, asked for extra time and requested to ascend the

pulpit daily after I finish my sermons. His request was granted, and this enabled him to deliver lectures every day until the 15<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan.

One Friday, the mosque was crowded with worshippers. After prayer, I ascended the pulpit and focused my speech on the *ulama*, explaining the two types of religious scholars: those who fulfill their Islamic duties, and those who neglect their religious responsibilities. I intended this lecture as a prelude to the main topic which I had mainly come to the city to deliver on the 21<sup>st</sup> of Ramadan, the date corresponding to the martyrdom of Imam Ali (as), a national holiday marked by wide attendance in mosques.

During my lecture, I praised the *ulama* who fulfilled their religious duties and condemned those who sought affiliation with oppressive regimes, displayed their submission and strove to advance the interests of tyrannical governments. My approach was to direct my speech toward an imaginary “court” preacher sitting in front of me, and to berate him for not carrying out his responsibilities towards Islam and the Islamic Ummah and for yielding to oppressors. The cleric was present in the assembly while Sheikh Kaf’ami was seated on his prayer-mat in front of the mihrab. I preached fearlessly and delivered one of my best sermons without according any significance to the possible consequences. I concluded with reference to the tragedy of Karbala and then stepped down from the pulpit.

Throughout the previous days, the audience had remained seated after my lecture in order to listen to the other cleric’s sermon, but this time they all rose and came forward in groups, complimenting me and expressing their admiration and support. As I was exiting the mosque, I saw the cleric standing on the first step leading to the pulpit and imploring the audience to remain for at least ten more minutes, but they did not pay heed to his request and followed me out of the mosque on my way to one of the rooms in the courtyard to rest. I was later informed that only around fifty persons remained seated from the large crowd which had been present.

A quarter of an hour later, while I was sitting in the room, I heard loud cries. I rose and looked through the window to see Sheikh Kaf’ami yelling in rage, a portion of his turban still dangling beneath his jaw, while people stood behind him. Some minutes later, I saw the cleric leaving the mosque with a heavy step, disappointed and defeated.

A carpenter who was a friend of the cleric came to the room and informed me that his friend had spoken words which angered Sheikh Kaf’ami inside the

mosque and drove the latter to stand up and declare to those present that it was prohibited from now on to listen to what the cleric was saying. Sheikh Kaf'ami then stepped out of the mosque, leaving the cleric inside, while the remaining people followed him.

After I had left, the cleric had ascended the pulpit and launched a verbal attack on the *ulama* whom I had praised. Sheikh Kaf'ami had no choice but to fulfill his Islamic obligation and had thereby acted as he did. After this incident, I realized that the pro-regime cleric's mission had come to a final end in Zahedan.

## Second Arrest

As the sun was setting that day, I was invited to the house of a faithful man to break my fast, after which I returned to the courtyard room in preparation for the evening sermon. I heard someone calling my name from outside, and when I opened the door, I saw a well-dressed young man standing outside.

“Salam, are you Sayyid Khamenei?” he inquired.

“Yes, I am.”

“The Chief of Police wants to see you.”

“For what purpose?”

“No special reason, he merely wants to discuss some matters with you.”

“I know the meaning of such a summons,” I replied. “But I believe it doesn't serve your best interests. I have been invited to deliver a sermon at this mosque this evening. If the people discover that I have been imprisoned, the outcome will be unpleasant, especially after what happened today.”

The young man made it known that it was imperative to meet the chief of police and that I had no choice in the matter. As I walked out of the courtyard, I noticed that the mosque was encircled by police and army personnel. I realized that the governmental authorities were completely serious in their resolve to deter all dissidents, and I unwillingly accompanied the young man to the police station.

I was escorted into a large, luxurious chamber which differed entirely from the police quarters at Birjand. At the far-end of the chamber sat a bulky colonel at his desk, preoccupied with jotting down some notes. His behavior was a deliberate display of indifference generally employed to make those summoned to his presence feel vulnerable. I greeted him but he did not raise his head in

acknowledgement nor did he return the greeting. I decided to treat him in the same manner. Without asking for permission, I sat down on the most grandiose couch in the room and acted nonchalantly. The colonel realized that he had not made an impression upon me, so he raised his head and asked: "Are you Khamenei?"

"Yes, I am."

"Why are you provoking people?" he asked.

I answered defiantly: "'You are the ones who are provoking people!'"

He shifted his position and sat straight at his desk, inquiring: "How exactly?" He had not expected such a reply.

"I only elucidate Islamic principles and religious laws to people; is that considered provocative? But you, in turn, incite people by your actions."

His features assumed a calm expression as he said: "We don't wish to provoke people, but you have criticized the Shah's reforms."

"The information you have received is false," I retorted.

The colonel's tone altered, and he chose to follow a different course. "We are also Muslims like you, and we hold affection towards Ayatullah Khomeini."

There was no doubt as to his insincerity, and I was aware that he had uttered such a statement for the purpose of misguiding and deceiving me. I whispered in my heart a prayer to God, thanking Him for resorting such arrogant, military officer to pretense and flattery in his conversation with a poor, young seminary student clutched in his grasp. He strove to convey tenderness toward me and began to advise me in a calm voice: "You are still in the prime of youth and have the future in front of you. Why are you creating trouble and problems for yourself?"

Such a method in presenting advice was usually employed for the purpose of pacifying the listener. After achieving his purpose, the official would resort to aggressiveness and dictate what he desired. Therefore, I fully understood that the method should be met with a resolute reply that disappointed the "adviser."

"I have been arrested once before, in Birjand. I was taken to the chief of police and uttered a few words in his presence which I shall repeat to you as Well. 'I have been entrusted with a duty, and you have been entrusted with one. I have

a religious mission to fulfill, while you can carry out whatever your official duty requires. The most you can do is sentence me to death, and I have prepared myself for it. So, what are you frightening me with?"

Such declarations have an astounding effect on individuals who covet the material world, and fall upon their heads like thunder. The colonel was past his prime and feared death, but in front of him was a young man declaring his readiness to face death. He moved his head, clearly stunned, and his resolve collapsed. He recovered his mien and resorted to his old approach, saying with feigned kindness: "You shall face no serious trouble, God willing. All you have to do is pledge your readiness to abandon such activities. Now head to the adjoining room to answer some questions."

## **First Encounter with the SAVAK**

In the other room, the interrogator directed his questions at me in rapid succession: "What did you say in your sermon? Why did you choose that statement? What did you mean?" I realized from his questions that everything I had stated on the pulpit had reached the governmental authorities. When the interrogation came to an end, I was taken to another building where I encountered grim faces unlike any other. I realized that I was at SAVAK headquarters, the Shah's notorious security organization. The chief of SAVAK in Zahedan was a man known for his wickedness. He had assumed that very same position in Mashhad before being transferred to Zahedan.<sup>49</sup>

I was taken to a room where young men surrounded and meticulously searched me. They pulled out my wallet and removed the photos inside, inquiring about the identities of the people in the photos. They strove to pressure me psychologically through insults and ridicule, but I did not break nor did I display any weakness or self-defeat despite the fact that I was going through a great deal of emotional anguish.

An hour later, I was led to an awaiting car which drove us out of the city in the dark and bitter cold. It had been a year of extremely low temperature in the region and it had even snowed in Zahedan, a city which typically witnesses no

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<sup>49</sup> He was later dispatched to Kerman where he committed heinous crimes against the citizens of the city. He fled at the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution.

snowfall. I was taken to an army post and placed in the garrison's prison. The soldiers were taken surprised to receive such a guest; a thin, young man with eyeglasses and a black turban on his head. My outer appearance instilled sympathy in the hearts of the soldiers who flocked around me and started greeting me respectfully.

As soon as the local commander witnessed the extraordinary scene, he became anxious and hastily led me to a small room where an unkindled stove stood. He retreated from the chamber only to return a short while later with matches to light a fire, treating me with kindness and asking about my identity. He went out a second time to fetch some food and left me alone to eat, and later returned with another person. We engaged in a lively conversation throughout the night, and he told me: "The person who brought you to this room—(meaning himself)—is one of you." I understood what he was confidentially conveying, and as soon as the first light of morning appeared, he bid me farewell and departed.

My appearance always drew attention whenever I was taken into custody. I remember standing in front of the detainment room during my first incarceration, waiting for the necessary administrative procedures. General Minbashian, one of the most famous high-ranking officers in Iran at the time, happened to be descending down the stairs. He saw me from afar, and kept a steady gaze on me as he approached.

When he drew near, he asked: "Who are you? Why have you been brought here?"

"I have been accused of expressing statements that contradict the interests of the country."

He ordered an officer to fetch him my classified file and, while sifting through it, he shook his head regretfully and murmured repeatedly: "This is strange! Why have you behaved in such a manner? Why have you uttered such statements?"

With nothing more to say, General Minbashian departed.

## **My First Airplane Ride**

Early on the following morning, I was transferred back to the SAVAK headquarters where I remained until noontime and was subjected to interrogation for hours. I was very surprised to discover that the interrogator had been one of

my childhood friends with whom I had played as a child. His father and some of his brothers were clergymen who traced their lineage back to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his Household).

I was taken to the airport in the afternoon and forced to board a plane with two escorts. The plane took off toward a destination unbeknownst to me, but I soon discovered that we were heading to Tehran. It was my first trip on board an airplane.

It is worth noting here that my first aerial journey after the victory of the Islamic Revolution was to Zahedan. Accompanied by Sheikh Rashed, my fellow exile in Iranshahr in 1978, I headed to Baluchistan to fulfill a special mission dictated by Imam Khomeini. The day we landed in Kerman coincided with the date of the Islamic Republic Referendum, on March 31, 1979. From there, I boarded another flight to Zahedan where I was met at the airport by numerous *ulama*. I informed them: “From this airport, I boarded my first flight and now, my first aerial flight after the victory of the Islamic Revolution is to Zahedan.”

### The Ghazal<sup>50</sup> Ship

While on board the plane, I plunged in thought, silently deliberating upon the future of our Islamic uprising against the Shah’s regime. My thoughts revolved around Imam Khomeini, the leader of the Revolution; my father who was suffering from cataracts and needed my presence at his side during his treatment sessions in Tehran; and the future which awaited me.

I picked up a magazine and skimmed through its pages until I came upon a *ghazal* which I admired. It was my habit to record all poetry I found pleasing in a special notebook which I had preserved for that purpose and suitably entitled the *Ghazal Ship*. As I was jotting down the *ghazal*, I noticed that my two escorts

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50 Originally an Arabic verse form dealing with loss and romantic love, medieval Persian poets embraced the ghazal, eventually making it their own. Consisting of syntactically and grammatically complete couplets, the form also has an intricate rhyme scheme. The ghazal is composed of a minimum of five couplets—and typically no more than fifteen—that are structurally, thematically, and emotionally autonomous.

Traditionally invoking melancholy, love, longing, and metaphysical questions, ghazals are often sung by Iranian, Indian, and Pakistani musicians. The form has roots in seventh-century Arabia, and gained prominence in the thirteenth and fourteenth-century thanks to such Persian poets as Rumi and Hafiz.

were stretching their necks out of curiosity to read what I was writing. When I wrote down all the verses of the *ghazal*, I added the following note at the end: "I am writing these lines on board a plane heading from Zahedan to an unknown destination, accompanied by two well-mannered officers." This note left a positive impression upon my two escorts.

The plane finally entered the airspace of Tehran at night, hovering over the city which sparkled with lights. It was a beautiful sight to behold. I noticed that my escorts stared in rapture at the city and seemed delighted to have reached the capital. One of them looked especially overjoyed so I told him: "You must appreciate my arrest, for it has brought you by plane to Tehran. If you were entrusted with another prisoner, you would have been sent by vehicle to Khash, crossing the desert-roads in the dark. But now you are going to spend a pleasant night in Tehran!" He laughed heartily upon hearing my words.

## The Garrison of Saltanatabad

We descended the airplane stairs to find a SAVAK automobile waiting for us at the foot of the stairs. We boarded the car which sprinted through the streets of Tehran. I was sitting in the back seat and could not easily look out the window, but I identified some of the streets we passed. It was a freezing night and snow was falling from the sky.

We reached a deserted area devoid of any buildings. While I was still in the car, I experienced a brief feeling of apprehension and wondered if their intention was to murder me in such a desolate place. A few minutes later, I heard someone shout out "Stop!" which meant that we were at the entrance of a military garrison. One of the men came out of the car and handed the guard a document before the gate was opened. I later found out that we were at the garrison of Saltanatabad.

The car stopped near the guard tower and we stepped out. I was searched and entrusted to a military guard while my two escorts departed. I was then led to a spacious, clean room which contained two beds and an untarnished stove. The officer asked me if I had eaten supper and when I answered in the negative, he brought me a meal. I ate, offered my prayers and fell into a deep slumber. Darkness had submerged the room in deep shadow, and I was unable to see anything outside.

I woke early in the morning and performed my morning prayers. Someone entered and asked me whether I wanted to have breakfast and I answered: "Yes"

as I was not fasting since travelers are religiously exempted from fasting. He brought me a big cup of tea, a piece of butter, and thick loaves of bread specially prepared for military personnel and baked with butter, sugar and a pinch of camphor. I was very hungry, so I ate the entire meal which was delicious.

## The Snowy Day

I gazed through the window and saw that snow had covered the entire area. When we had first reached Tehran, it was snowing lightly and only a thin layer had settled on the ground. But all night long, snow had continued to fall heavily, draping the city in an immaculate white shroud.

I noticed an officer striding back and forth which meant that the room I was placed in was adjacent to the prison, and that the officer was a military guard. An hour later, I was summoned out of the chamber and I saw the same two escorts of the previous night. We boarded a car which drove us along the old Shemiran Road to one of the secret tenements of the SAVAK. The two men bid me farewell, and I could not help but notice a trace of sympathy in their expressions. Before walking away, they asked me if I requested something so I asked them to send my regards to Sheikh Kafami. By this short message, I wanted the Sheikh to know that I had been taken to Tehran.

I was led to a large room and left alone. After a while, a man flung the door open and looked at me sharply before retreating. He was followed by another man who did the same and then another until, finally, an operative appeared and said: "Come." I was surprised to be led once again to another car accompanied by two SAVAK agents. As the vehicle propelled through the city streets, I noticed that we were heading west of Tehran. We traversed Karaj Street (which was later named Elizabeth Boulevard only for the name to be changed after the Revolution to Keshavarz Street). I was quite familiar with this avenue because the Iraqi Consulate, where I had gone to receive an entry visa to Iraq in 1957, was located there.

The car drove on towards the northwest of Tehran until, once again, we reached an area with no buildings. My sense of suspicion heightened and I wondered what fate awaited me. The driver propelled the vehicle forward before turning right and driving through the entrance of a high barricade where men stood on guard. The car came to a stop in the square and we got out of the car.

I saw a large fortress surrounded by ten-meter-high walls, and at the other end a set of low buildings painted yellow and designated for military personnel. One of the two men entered a third newly constructed building standing to one side, while the other one remained behind to inspect the car engine and tires. Along the road, they had conversed in Turkish and were ignorant of the fact that I spoke Turkish fluently. I wanted to know where I had been brought so I asked the man who had stayed behind: “*Bura haradi?*” What is this place? The man was astounded; he looked around uneasily and said: “*Gizil Gal’a.*” This was the name of a notorious fortress which had been transformed into a prison, *gizil* being the Turkish equivalent of “crimson.”<sup>51</sup> I had heard of this prison before; a place of confinement known for its harsh living conditions and the brutal treatment of inmates.

The other man returned and the two escorts led the way towards the fortress. The outer gate was opened and a soldier hastened in our direction, his feet crunching on the snow.

“Is this the man?” he inquired, pointing toward me. When they answered in the affirmative, he turned toward me and curtly asked me to follow him. I later made his acquaintance and discovered that he was a young man from Shiraz on compulsory military service.

When we entered through the gate, I was surprised to find yet another high wall a few meters away in which a doorway had been constructed. Beyond the door and in the midst of a large square loomed the prison fortress. I entered through a heavy iron gate, tightly fastened with chains, to find myself in a narrow hallway flanked by small cells on both sides. I was pushed into one of those cells.

## Sergeant Zamani

I was carrying a small Qur’an, a rosary, my poetry notebook, *The Ghazal Ship*, and a copy of the book *Tazkirat al-Muttaqin*, a compilation of epistles and prayers written by prominent *ulama*. The book, which revolved around religious mysticism, was given to me by my friend, Sayyid Kamal Musavi, in Kerman and was my solace during my brief stay in Zahedan. What remained of the five tomans I had initially carried in my pocket was four tomans and 2 qirans, as I had spent

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51 It was transformed after the revolution to a fruit and vegetable market.





a portion of my money to buy some bread and two eggs during my incarceration at the SAVAK headquarters in Zahedan.

My cell was two meters by two in width with an elevated center on which had been laid a mattress filled with straw designated for sitting and sleeping. I also received two blankets, I had never been imprisoned in such a small confined place before. I sat down and gazed at my surroundings in astonishment, an opening was carved out of the ceiling from which a guard regularly looked down to check on the prisoner, and on top of the door was a small covered aperture to facilitate conversation between the prisoners and guards. At the other side of the cell burned a dim electric lightbulb.

After a few minutes, the door of the cell opened and a man in military uniform made his entrance. It was Sergeant Zamani, though at the moment he entered I was unaware of his identity. Five officers of the same rank were entrusted with guarding the prisoners alternately, and two of them were especially well-known among the prisoners: Sergeant Zamani, and the chief commander of the group, Sergeant Saki, to whom I will refer later.

When Sergeant Zamani entered, he asked: "What do you have with you" "You may search me yourself."

He took my copy of the Qur'an, looked at it closely, and then muttered: "A Qur'an. You may keep it with you." When he counted the small amount of money I had in my pocket, he seemed to be moved with pity. He then asked me about the book I had, inquiring: "Is this a book of prayers?" He had wanted me to answer in the affirmative in order to allow me to keep it. When I unheedingly started to explain that it was a book on mysticism, he hastily interrupted me and said: "Yes, a book of prayers. You may keep it!" His conduct clearly showed that he wanted to come to my aid. He only took my booklet which contained telephone numbers but allowed me to keep the rest of my belongings.

He departed and I was left alone in my small cell.

## **Arab Prisoners**

In my loneliness, I took refuge in the Qur'an and started reciting some holy verses in a loud voice. My Arabic accent was not burdened with Persian inflections, and it gave the impression that the speaker was of Arabian ethnicity. I was immersed in recitation when I noticed someone peeking from the aperture

over the entrance door. He disappeared and was followed by another. I assumed they were prison guards, but I realized that they were no! when one of them gazed through the opening and spoke to me in the Arabic dialect spoken by the population of Ahvaz. I did not understand what he said, but he was followed by another man who asked me in Arabic: “*Anta min al-Ahvaz?*” are you from Ahvaz? I answered: “No, I am from Mashhad.” They never returned.

I found out at a later time that these men were members of the Arab Liberation Front. Initially supported by Abdel-Nasser of Egypt, the Iraqi Baathists adopted the organization and used it as a tool to oppose the Islamic Revolution. It was highly peculiar for such an organization to confront the very same revolution which had ousted the Shah’s anti-Arab and anti-Islamic regime.

I find it pertinent at this point to mention that the activists in this organization belonged to a small minority. The majority of the Arabic-speaking population of Khuzestan were faithful Muslims. I noticed this religiosity among the Arabs of Khuzestan whom I had known before the revolution, and I sensed it to an even stronger degree after the victory of the revolution and especially after the outset of the Imposed War on Iran by Saddam Hussein. The men and women of Khuzestan fought heroically against the Baathist regime’s assault and thwarted Saddam’s hopes to secure the cooperation of the population of the region. The people of Khuzestan proved their allegiance to the Islamic state, endured the hardships of displacement from their cities after relentless bombardment, fought bravely, and offered caravans of martyrs. This is why the secular Baathist-backed Arab Liberation Front was rejected from the very first days of the Islamic Revolution by the people of Khuzestan and was consequently disbanded.

A few days after my imprisonment, I was allowed to go out of my cell and to walk in the hallway. It was an opportunity to make the acquaintance of a number of Khuzestani men and to forge a mutual bond of affection.. They all spoke Persian since they were Iranians by nationality regardless of their ethnic background, but I always conversed with them in Arabic due to my deep fondness for the language.

Among them was a man who was greatly fond of literature, Sayyid Baqer Nazari. He knew a great number of poems by heart, and it was from him that I memorized a myriad of poetic verses. He was a man of worship, who recited *Ziyarat Ashura* daily and walked along the hallway murmuring praises to God. In the cell adjacent to mine resided a man called Sheikh Hanash, his title of sheikh

clearly indicative of his status among the people of his tribe. In the other neighboring cell was a young man in his twenties called Sheikh Isa, a dignified and handsome youth who was an only child and held an eminent position in his tribe, and in the cell opposite to mine resided Abdel-Zahra Beheshti. Sheikh Dahrab Ka'bi was also a prominent tribal figure and was highly respected by the other Arab prisoners. I still remember that during the times when we would be allowed to go outside for some fresh air, the prisoners from Khuzestan would occasionally engage in playful fistfights but if one of them appealed to Sheikh Dahrab, no one would dare bother him anymore. I have many memories from my days in prison with the brothers from Khuzestan.

My fellow Arab brothers recited a version of folkloric poetry known as *abuthiya*. I often engaged in conversation with a man named al-Naser al-Ka'bi, and we spoke in Arabic. I taught him some Arabic grammatical rules because, like many people who have mastered their mother tongue as children without learning the rules of syntax, he was not well-versed in grammar. We held special conversations together, and I found him to be a man of special prominence among the other prisoners. He was revered by his fellow inmates, and whenever he passed by the members of the organization, they would rise out of respect for him. He never joined them in their moments of laughter, banter or mirth, but silently isolated himself out of dignity rather than a personal sense of superiority. He was chivalrous, and I still remember a phrase he once said: "My Sayyid, a woman should possess full feminine qualities!" His words made a deep impression upon me, not merely for their connotation but also for the fact they were expressed by such a wise man.

Our sessions commenced as linguistic conversations for the purpose of learning Arabic, Turkish and English. With time, our discussions developed into a discussion of the contemporary problems facing Islam and the hegemony of despots over Islamic countries. I once confided in him my desire to be affiliated with an organized opposition unit and he expressed his enthusiastic agreement. I admit that speaking of such a clandestine matter was contrary to the rules of caution—whether from my part or his—as our relationship had not yet adequately developed to share such thoughts.<sup>52</sup>

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52 Sayyid Khamenei: "When I was released from prison, I read news of his execution along with Sheikh Dohrab Ka'bi and Sheikh Isa in the newspapers. The report weighed my heart with intense grief."

My other neighbor, Hanash, was also dignified and respected among his people. He was about sixty years of age and once said to me: "I have three wives. I recently married a fourth one but I have not yet consummated my marriage with her. I have decided that if I am not set free before Eid al-Fitr, I will divorce her so that she will not remain in suspension." He was eventually released before Eid al-Fitr.

I once asked him about the meaning of his name, but he ignored my question. Sayyid Nazari later advised me not to reiterate such an inquiry as the word hanash implied a negative meaning. I was surprised and asked him why he had been named thus, whereby Sayyid Nazari explained: "Due to the high infant mortality rate, the people of the region believe that if they give an abominable name to their new-born baby, he will survive and remain safe from calamities. Such an odd custom! But what is stranger is that only Hanash remained alive among all his siblings!"

## **Ramadan in Prison**

During the nights of the holy month of Ramadan, and after breaking their fast, the brothers from Khuzestan would gather in the hallway of the prison. They would spread blankets on the floor, brew tea, and prepare hookahs for smoking while I gazed at them from inside my prison cell. After the guards allowed me to step out of my tiny confined space, I joined them. We agreed that I should deliver a sermon every night followed by poetry recitation and lamentations for Imam Hussein which were performed by Sayyid Kazem who was blessed with a pleasant voice.

My sermons were marked by an implicit condemnation of the regime. I chose to speak of the justice of Imam Ali (as) and the essential characteristics of Islamic rulers. I noticed that my speech gained a positive reception, and this was not surprising as my words were in conformity with the ideals and hopes of these prisoners who had faced hardship and suffering under the regime.

Every evening, one person volunteered to pay for the expenses of our gatherings—mainly to purchase tea and sugar—with the exception of myself as I had no money at all. There was also an Armenian prisoner by the name of Hovanesian among the inmates, and we later discovered that he was a leading figure in the Tudeh Party. He enjoyed special luxuries and possessed supplies unavailable to the rest of us. Hovanesian drew near during one of our sessions

and listened to my speech and seemed impressed. After a few nights, he inquired: “May you permit me to bear the expenses of the following session?” and when I welcomingly accepted, he procured tea and sugar for us. We were also allowed to visit each other in our cells, and one night I visited Hovanesian in his cell.

I attached great importance to the cleanliness of my cell, but my companion, did not give this issue much thought and would throw their cigarette ashes and butts on the floor. I decided to make some ash-trays out of cigarette packet, and whenever my visitors would light a cigarette. I would place one of those makeshift ash-trays nearby. They would look at the ash-trays in surprise and move their hands to drop the ashes on the floor rather than pollute my ash-tray.

### **The Gullible Prisoner**

I spent one month and a half in this prison, and during this period I witnessed humorous situations and sorrowful incidents. One evening during my first days at prison, at a time when I was still not granted permission to leave my cell, I heard new voices speaking with a Tehrani accent outside. I listened attentively and discovered that they had been arrested a few hours earlier, One of them opened the window overlooking my cell and asked for my name whereby I introduced myself and mentioned that I was a seminary student from Mashhad. They presented themselves and informed me of the reason they were detained.

I learned that they were young men who worked at a local market which incorporated, as was the custom, a main mosque flanked with porticos. In one of the arcades, a perceptive and revolutionary preacher led the worshippers in prayer. In Ramadan, it was customary for a preacher to deliver a sermon after prayer, so the imam had made sure to invite revolutionary orators. During the sermon, the young men had become impassioned and shouted out some revolutionary slogans whereby the police hurried to the scene and arrested them. I was glad to meet them, especially since I had not yet forged a deep bond with the brothers from Khuzestan at the time. After only a few hours I heard voices in the hallway and realized that the young men were being released. With their departure, I felt that I had lost something important.

At dusk, I performed my evening prayers and sat down to recite supplication when my cell window was suddenly opened. One of the young men peeked inside and said: “Sayyid, I have returned!” I asked him about his companion and he told me that they had been released but that he alone remained. When I was eventually

granted approval to go out of my cell, he would come to break his fast with me. I found out that he was a person of limited mental capacity, contrary to his cohorts who were intelligent, lively workers and merchants at the market and actively involved in the Islamic movement in Iran.

He constantly asked the guards to set him free, entreating them relentlessly, despite the fact that they were clearly unwarranted to implement such a decision. He implored them continuously until the guard on duty would feel obliged to state a date for his release. He would become overjoyed and rush to inform me of his imminent freedom, asking me if I needed anything outside the prison gates. When I was eventually released, he was still in jail. I later heard that he was sentenced in court to one year of prison for committing a ridiculous “crime.” The police authorities had found in his personal notebook a poetic verse written in the vernacular language, lacking a regular rhyme scheme and filled with linguistic errors.

*“All of you, young and old, repeat:  
Curses upon Reza Shah the great!”*

For such an offense, the poor man was sentenced to prison, a case which clearly demonstrates the triviality of the Shah and his judicial courts.

### **Sergeant Saki**

A group of five officers assumed the responsibility of guarding the prison, working in alternating shifts, with Sergeant Saki as the overall chief. Two of the officers were harsh and lacking in refinement while the other two were kind and well-mannered. Sergeant Saki was tall, broad-shouldered, and of a powerful, bulky build. He was a strong-willed individual who spoke Persian with a slight Turkish accent. Even though he was a non-commissioned officer, he issued his orders to higher-ranking officers and directed them to their missions. I witnessed his exceptional authority on more than one occasion.

I was once summoned to the investigation room where a colonel started asking questions which I answered. Sergeant Saki suddenly entered without bothering to ask for prior authorization and spoke with the colonel in a sharp, commanding tone. On another occasion, General Pakravan, the chief of SAVAK, visited the prison on an inspection tour accompanied by ten officers whose ranks were not lower than colonels but the only person who dared address him was Sergeant Saki. General Pakravan stopped in front of my cell and asked me some

questions but was interrupted by Sergeant Saki who declared in a rumbling voice: “General, he is a quiet prisoner!”

Magnanimous and of noble character, Sergeant Saki respected all prisoners who displayed resilience but behaved severely towards inmates who showed weakness in spirit. Faced with a weeping or pleading prisoner, he would angrily rebuke him saying: “If you can’t bear any hardship, why did you engage in activities which led to your imprisonment?” One of my fellow prisoners later spoke to me at length of Sergeant Saki’s noble mind, referring to an occasion where Saki had invited him to his house after the former’s release and the two had discussed many issues.

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, we learned that Sergeant Saki had been arrested among all other officers who had worked in political prisons. I was a member of Iran’s Revolutionary Council at the time, and all the members of the council were at a board meeting when we received the news. Most of those present had been previously incarcerated at *Ghezel Ghal’a*, and, being acquainted with Sergeant Saki, they expressed their dismay upon hearing the report. We decided to write a testimony in his favor and signed it before sending it to the relevant authorities.

As for Sergeant Zamani, I recall an instance involving him during one of my visits to Sheikh Hashemi Rafsanjani in the military barracks of Eshratyab in Tehran. It was either 1972 or 1973, and my wife had decided to accompany me. Even though it was not an easy feat to arrange a meeting with a political prisoner but, as a result of my prison experience, I managed to gain authorization to see him. My wife entered into the barracks before me and I surreptitiously followed her. Sheikh Hashemi greeted us lightheartedly, clearly impressed with the measures we had undertaken to guarantee a visit.

While I was talking with Sheikh Hashemi, I noticed a military officer standing nearby, a permanent smile etched on his face. I smiled back at him but was surprised to notice that during my entire meeting with Sheikh Hashemi, the man maintained his smiling countenance and watched us carefully. After Sheikh Hashemi was released from prison, he asked me: “Haven’t you recognized the guard who kept staring at you with a smile on his face?”

“No, I haven’t.”

When I answered that I hadn’t recognized him, Sheikh Hashemi replied: “It was Sergeant Zamani, and it seems that he had identified you.”

“I believe he would have recognized me, as I spent a month and a half in *Ghezel Ghal'a*,” I mused, though I had not personally recognized him due to the fact that he had put on a lot of weight since the last time I saw him ten years previously. He had certainly recognized me but chose not to say a word.

### Prominent Prisoners

During my days in *Ghezel Ghal'a*, I received news of the deteriorating situation in the country and the regime's loosening grip on the state of affairs. Due to an increase in Islamic revolutionary activities in mosques throughout the month of Ramadan, the regime carried out a vigorous campaign of arrests. Among those detained was a number of our comrades in resistance such as Sheikh Bahonar who later became prime minister of Iran and was martyred in an explosion instigated by the *Monafeqin* group which targeted him and President Raja'i. Other prisoners included some orators from Tehran. Even though they were all incarcerated in *Ghezel Ghal'a*, we did not gain the opportunity to meet as they were held in a separate section of the notorious fortress.

The prison authorities allowed us during certain days of the week to stroll in the courtyard of the fortress, inhaling the fresh air and basking under the sun for a quarter of an hour. Such an opportunity was only granted after the termination of the initial interrogations which would last according to the nature of the accusation and might even extend for weeks on end.

In the courtyard one day, I noticed a tall man who was in his fifties walking with an air of dignity and wearing neat clothes which implied that he was an important individual among the prisoners. I inquired after his identity and discovered that he was Mohammad-Vali Gharani, one of the most prominent generals in the Shah's military. He had been engaged in some revolutionary, perhaps even religiously oriented, activities and had established indirect contact with Ayatullah Milani and broached the issue of mutually commanding a takeover attempt. I had heard all of these details before but had not gained knowledge of Ayatullah Milani's response to this suggestion. The endeavor came to an abrupt end once the regime somehow managed to expose the plan and arrested General Gharani along with the intermediary who was a relative of Ayatullah Milani. General Gharani was sentenced to three years in prison.

It is worth noting that, prior to the victory of the Islamic Revolution, Imam Khomeini appointed Gharani as a member of the Revolutionary Council and as

Minister of Defense after the revolution's triumph. General Gharani was regrettably later murdered by the hypocritical, criminal *Monafeqin* Organization.

One day after performing noon prayers, I sat alone in the prison hallway eating my lunch, which I still remember was broth-when a guard summoned me to the main office. I donned my cloak and made my way to the office. I was met by the military official who declared: "You've been released from prison, gather your belongings and leave the premises." I returned to my cell in an elated mood, but my joy was shadowed with sorrow at having to part from the fellow prisoners with whom I had forged a deep bond throughout the days I spent in prison.

I was packing my belongings when a policeman announced in a loud voice the news of my release. Upon hearing the proclamation, all of the prisoners walked out of their respective cells and helped me pack my simple belongings. Then the prisoners of Arab ethnicity joined together in singing a special traditional chant, known as *husa*, and they reiterated in Arabic the following phrase: *Ya Sayyid Jadduka Wiyyana!* O Sayyid, your forefather is with us!

When the time came for the weekly prison visit a few days later, I purchased some sweets and headed to the prison to enquire after my friends. It is worth pointing out that while I had been in prison, I was not allowed to have any visitors.

## A Meeting with Imam Khomeini

After I was discharged from prison, I learned that a number of young seminary students had also been released from the respective prisons they had been detained in a few days before my release. The SAVAK officers had taken them to the Qeytariyye district in Tehran to meet with Imam Khomeini who was residing under house arrest, a procedure done for the purpose of appeasing them and limiting their feelings of resentment.

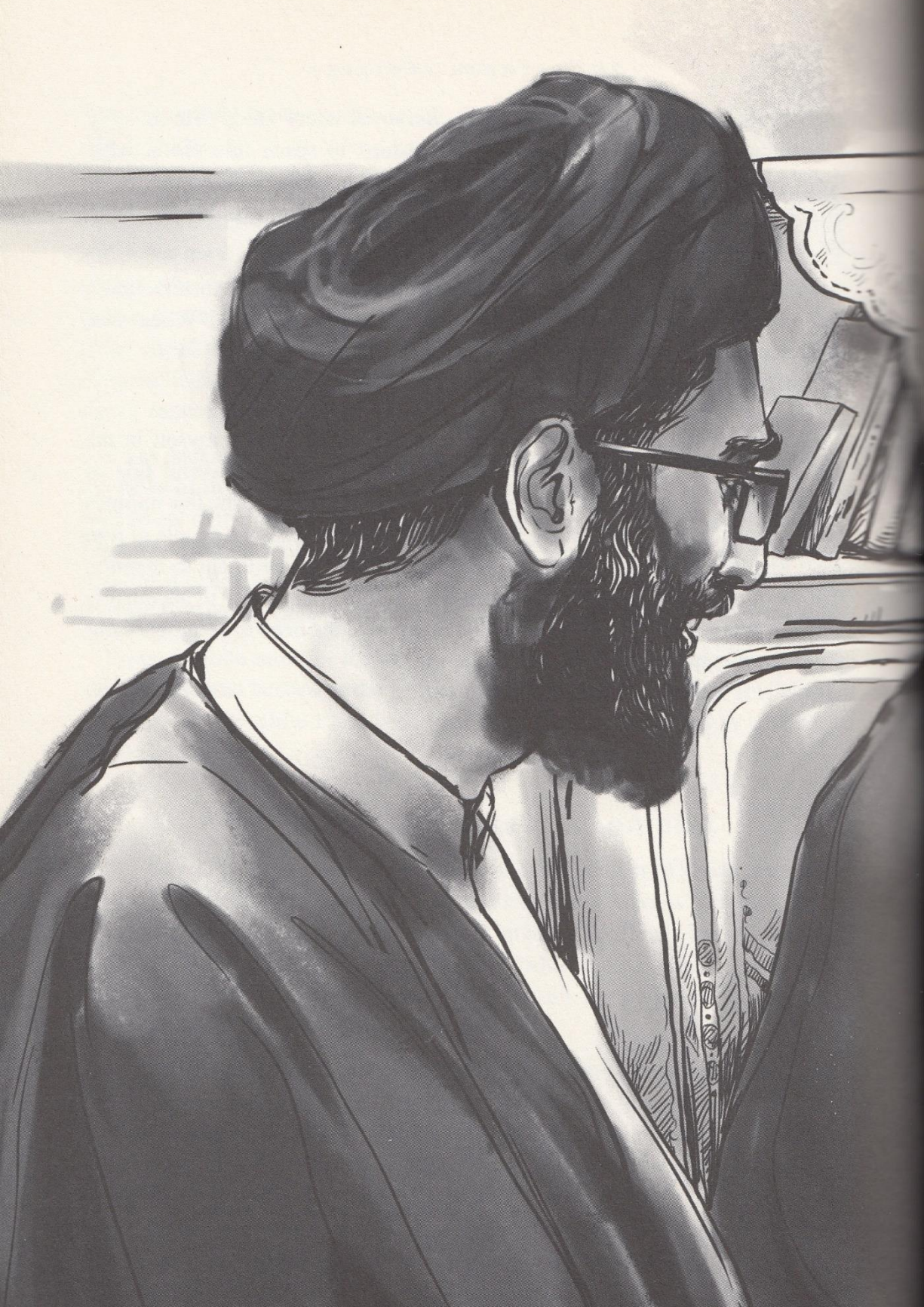
I longed to see Imam Khomeini. I put my trust in God and headed to the Imam's residence in the hope of acquiring permission to see him. I obtained the exact address of the Imam's residence in Qeytariyye and set out in that direction. At the time, the region was not a thriving residential area and only some solitary buildings had been constructed. I drew near to Imam Khomeini's house which was heavily surrounded by guards, and I told them: "I've been recently released from prison and I want to see Imam Khomeini just like the other seminary students."

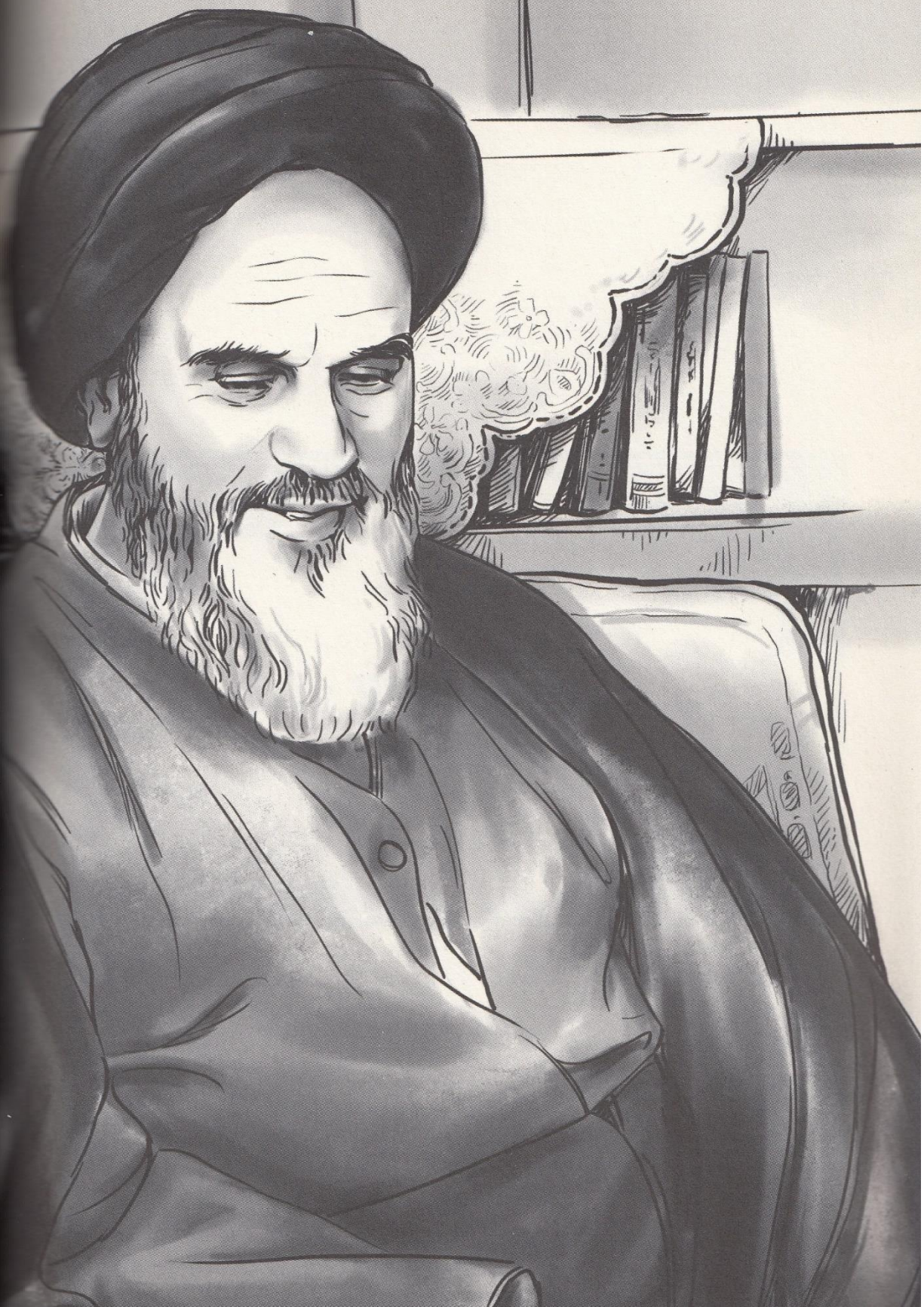
They disagreed among themselves. Some of them said: “He is only a seminary student who has endured hardships to reach this place, what harm would there be in allowing him to enter?” but others disagreed. After discussing the matter for a few moments, they finally decided to let me enter for a few minutes.

I knocked at the entrance door which was opened by Sayyid Mostafa, Imam Khomeini’s eldest son. He was surprised to see me and asked me: “When were you released?”

“Just two days ago!”

Sayyid Mostafa led me into a room where I finally found myself in the presence of Imam Khomeini. I was overwhelmed with a powerful tide of emotions but I maintained my composure and decided to seize the few minutes I had been allowed to inform the Imam of the circumstances the people of Iran were facing during his imposed absence. I also found it pertinent to mention that the month of Ramadan had passed without the opportunity to adequately take advantage of such an occasion, and mentioned the need to commence our plans for the upcoming month of Muharram.









**THE WHITE PALACE**

## An Intensified Setback

I was arrested a third time early in 1967, a year which proved to be a painful one for all pro-Islamic activists in Iran due to the fact that the Shah's regime had decided to inflict harsh measures upon the Muslim clergy. A few days prior to my imprisonment, one of the most prominent *ulama* of Mashhad, Sayyid Hasan Qomi, had been arrested and banished to Zabol.

It was in this year that the "June Setback" and the tragic Six-Day War between Arabs and Zionists, a military outcome which greatly saddened Muslims everywhere, occurred. We were additionally tormented in Iran by the spiteful media of the Shah's regime which unscrupulously derived pleasure from the misfortunes of the Arabs in general and Abdel-Nasser in particular. I shall never forget the articles which the malicious Amirani penned in the weekly *Khandaniha* magazine and which I read in prison. Amirani publicly rejoiced at the Arab military defeat and employed a writing style which wounded the hearts of Islamists at large and the entire Iranian population.

## The Future Belongs to This Religion

I moved from Qom to Mashhad in 1964 and got married the following year. After returning to Mashhad, I took part in a new set of intellectual and political activities. I maintained constant communication with revolutionary figures and opponents of the regime as well as seminary and university students. I also held sessions for intellectual discussions, planning, teaching, and preaching. Some gatherings were devoted to teaching Islamic concepts of religious uprising to a number of youths.

An important step in furthering our revolutionary activities was the establishment of a publishing house which we named *Sepideh*<sup>53</sup> in collaboration with the late poet Ghodsi, Tadayyon, and a group of activists from Khorasan. We launched our enterprise with the publication of Islamic books revolving around revolutionary themes, and I subsequently translated *The Future Belongs to This Religion* by Sayyid Qutb. We commenced the first stages of this book's publication in the famous Khorasan Printing Press. Shortly before the release of the book in late 1966, I went on a sightseeing trip with my family and relatives

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53 Persian for "dawn."

to Tehran followed by Qom and Isfahan. My son, Mostafa, was merely forty days old at the time. On the return journey, we stayed in a hotel in Tehran before heading to Mashhad. It was there that I learned of the SAVAK's raid on the Khorasan Printing Press, the subsequent confiscation of all copies of *The Future Belongs to This Religion*, and the imprisonment of the director of *Sepideh*. This was followed shortly thereafter with news of the detention of an employee at the company, and I was told that the SAVAK was searching for me.

I realized that the SAVAK had taken a hostile stance toward the book and myself personally because I had translated it. I broached the subject with my wife and my mother-in-law who had also accompanied us, and I suggested that everyone should return to Mashhad to keep me informed of the state of affairs in the city and to warn me if it were safer to remain in Tehran or return to Mashhad.

Some days later, a brother came to see me, bringing with him 50 copies of the book I had translated. The brothers had sensed the imminent danger and as a precautionary measure had hidden 100 copies of the book prior to the SAVAK's raid. I was overwhelmingly joyed with the book because it was my first published translation and had been finely printed with an attractive cover design. I presented some of my friends with copies of the book and entrusted the rest with one of my relatives warning him that the book was banned by the regime and would expose its owner to danger if discovered in his possession.

Some days later, a friend of mine invited me to deliver sermons at a mosque still under construction. The supervisors of the mosque had decided to make use of the area during the month of Muharram and they thereby set about enclosing it with a temporary tin fence and erecting a huge tent designated for prayer and mourning assemblies. I accepted his invitation and led the attendees in prayer and delivered sermons during the first ten days of Muharram. The mosque was later fully constructed and named Amir al-Mu'menin Mosque. It currently lies in Nosrat Street near the University of Tehran.

## **You Are Being Followed!**

One day, I was walking along a thoroughfare close to the University of Tehran, when I unexpectedly encountered Sheikh Hashemi Rafsanjani staring at me in astonishment. "Why are you walking in public and not concealing your whereabouts?"

“Why should I be hiding? I am the leader of congregational prayers at q mosque where I am currently delivering sermons.”

“You are being followed. They’ve found out about our eleven-member secret group, and they are searching for us far and wide in Tehran. Sheikh Azari Qomi has been arrested. I was on board a bus and when I saw you, I immediately got off to warn you.”

“What should we do now?”

“We have a meeting today with some members of our group to discuss the following steps.”

Since none of us owned a house in Tehran and we preferred not to inconvenience any of our acquaintances, we agreed to meet on Iran Street in downtown Tehran. Four of us gathered on the street: Sheikh Hashemi, Sheikh Ibrahim Amini, Sheikh Qoddusi and I. The SAVAK had summoned Sheikh Ghoddousi a few days before and questioned him about our eleven-member group, so it was necessary to learn the details of that interrogation session for the purpose of discovering just how much information the SAVAK had compiled on our group.

We pondered where to hold our discussion on such a critical matter, but we finally decided to head to Dr. Va‘ezi’s clinic. Dr. Va‘ezi was a religious doctor hailing from Najafabad, the hometown of Sheikh Amini. His clinic was not far from our gathering place, so we decided to sit in his waiting-room during our discussion because waiting in the antechamber to see the doctor would not raise any suspicions. To our misfortune, there were no patients at the clinic, a fact which prevented us from sitting in the waiting-room because there was no point in waiting as long as the doctor was not receiving anyone.

I would like to relate an incident which occurred twelve years later. A few nights after the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, we were gathered at Dr. Va‘ezi’s house along with Sheikh Mohammad Montazeri. Dr. Va‘ezi’s clinic was adjoining his flat in the same apartment building. I remarked: ‘I am familiar with this building, but it had not been modernized thus. It seems you have made some repairs and reconstructed some of its sections. I was here 12 years earlier,’ and I proceeded with recounting how we sought refuge in his clinic and our ensuing dismal departure. Upon hearing my story, Dr. Va‘ezi became upset. Tears flooded his eyes and he prayed that woe betide him because his clinic had

not been a source of refuge for us during those dangerous days. I made haste to calm him down, regretting having told him our past experience at his clinic.

After departing from Dr. Va‘ezi’s clinic back in 1966, one of us suggested seeking refuge at Dr. Bahonar’s house which was located at a close distance from Iran Street. He was alone at home so we requested if he could go out and leave us alone. He willingly accepted and indicated where the tea and sugar were placed and left the house.

Ghoddousi disclosed the details of what went on between him and the SAVAK interrogator, reiterating the questions which had been directed at him. During his temporary detention, the SAVAK agents had showed him a list containing the names of our 11-member group. He turned toward me and remarked: “Your name was the very first one!”

This information was alarming, because there was a high possibility that the SAVAK had released Ghoddousi for the purpose of secretly following him and exposing his connections. We reached the conclusion that each one of us should go into hiding. I could not remain in Tehran as I had no safe house in the city. The situation was critical due to the fact that all our names had been exposed. Two other members of our group, Sheikh Montazeri and Sheikh Rabbani Shirazi, had also been arrested though their detainment owed to some other activities and not their affiliation with our group. Thus, our final decision was to go into hiding.

## **Pursuit and Imprisonment**

I decided to return to Mashhad and hide there, but I did not inform anyone about my decision. I packed my belongings and boarded a bus heading to Mashhad. I believed there was a high possibility that the SAVAK agents might arrest me as soon as I set foot in Mashhad on charges of translating Sayyid Qutb’s book. I got off the bus before reaching the city at a side-road leading to Akhلامad, a scenic village situated about 50 kilometers away from Mashhad which I had visited a few times before as it had the most agreeable weather in summertime. It was still spring and the weather was still cool. I walked some 10 kilometers through mountainous roads entirely devoid of passersby. Darkness descended early upon the deep valleys. Whenever I remember the details of that hazardous journey, I express gratitude to God for granting me the courage on my way to Akhلامad.

I had regularly visited this village during summertime and had previously become acquainted with some of its inhabitants. I was accustomed to the summer bustle in Akhlamad, but now in late spring with the lingering of the cold weather the village was empty of its summer guests. I preferred to avoid encountering anyone who knew me, so I proceeded to a shop whose owner I did not know and inquired if he could direct me to a room I could rent. He welcomed me and accompanied me to his home where I stayed for a couple of nights, but I later decided to leave the village because a stranger would have been easily recognized, especially with the lack of vacationers, so I returned to Mashhad.

Once in Mashhad, I changed my lodging every night, alternating between, my father's home and my father-in-law's house and returning at a late hour. I owned no house of my own. I spent three months in this manner. My elder brother Mohammad, who was also a member of the group, chose to hide at my father's house. In the summer of this year, Sheikh Hashemi Rafsanjani, who had also been followed by the SAVAK, came to Mashhad with his family and we subsequently journeyed to an area with a pleasant climate. I have many memories extending back to that time.

Constantly going into hiding became a source of weariness for me, so I decided to head to Tehran, a huge populous city where I was unknown and which allowed me to live as an ordinary person. I rented a house with Sheikh Rafsanjani and remained in Tehran until the end of the Iranian year which coincided with the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1967.

I decided to return to Mashhad without appearing in public, assuming that after all this time the SAVAK's pursuit of me would surely have abated. Once in Mashhad, I could not bear remaining inactive in society. I frequently visited Sayyid Milani and Sayyid Qomi with whom I discussed the issue of moral deprivation in society. I disapprovingly inquired why the Islamic clergy chose to remain silent and urged a resolute stance against the corrupt regime. After my arrest, I found out that everything I had said in my conversations had been reported to the SAVAK in detail, inevitably by some person in the service of one of the two Ayatullahs.

On the third of April 1967, the revered and formidable Ayatullah Sheikh Mojtaba Ghazvini passed away. He was a prominent and noble cleric, steeped in knowledge and strong in faith. His life was characterized by worship and asceticism and he was highly respected by Ayatullah Milani. His death was a

tragedy and I could not remain confined at home any longer. I was keen attending his funeral.

A short while past noontime, after the burial and the dispersal of the mourners, I headed with my younger brother, Hadi, towards my father's house. My father was alone at home as my mother had gone on pilgrimage to Mecca. Halfway down the road, several SAVAK agents surrounded us and ordered me to accompany them to SAVAK headquarters. I refused, so the agents requested the help of some policemen and thereby forced us into a car. At the SAVAK headquarters, my brother was released while I remained in custody.

## **Military Prisoners**

The city of Mashhad did not accommodate a military jail for political prisoners during that period, so I was removed from SAVAK headquarters and taken to a prison situated in a military compound adjoining a police department. I was also imprisoned a fourth time in this jail as I will later recount.

In due course, a special prison was constructed for political inmates wherein I was detained for the fifth time. The facility was clean and painted white; we jokingly called it the "White Palace." It contained a few solitary cells and two public halls, one designated for privates and the other for non-commissioned officers. Prisoners of higher rank were placed in special rooms with open doors and some means of comfort unlike the cells of political prisoners.

All the inmates were military prisoners with the exception of one civilian, a shopkeeper named Ghasemi, who was very glad to see me. It seems he had been detained for travelling to Iraq and returning with some documents regarding Imam Khomeini. There was also a young officer accused of murdering his wife who was held in one of the special cells. He left his room whenever he chose and occasionally strolled along the hallways with a swagger, haughtily ignoring the other prisoners.

Ghasemi and I were incarcerated in solitary cells, devoid of any luxuries and resembling a cage, contrary to the officer's cell. The other prisoners were held in multiple-detainee cells. The doors of our two cells were not locked which permitted Ghasemi and I to occasionally meet one another though we were sometimes chided and prevented from doing so by the guards.

It is thereby pertinent to clarify the state of prisons prior to the year 1971, before the detainment of political prisoners became radically altered. The gathering of prisoners and the possession of books, writing materials, and radios had been permissible despite occasional restrictions arising from the strictness of some wardens. But after 1971, these privileges became absolutely forbidden.

## **Mourning Assemblies for Imam Hussein in Prison**

A few days after my imprisonment, the month of Muharram came upon us, with its religious atmosphere, sermons, and assemblies in commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (as). Ghasemi aided me in reviving religion, rituals within the prison and urged the inmates to conduct congregational prayers. After leading the military prisoners in prayer, I would deliver sermons and exhortations. For his part, Ghasemi mournfully recounted the incidents marking the tragedy of Karbala and recited lamentations for Imam Hussein,

Our schedule was placed in effect for a few nights, but one evening the officer in charge of prison appeared and was astounded to see the military inmates praying behind a political prisoner. He had expected the prisoners would hastily stand at attention after his appearance to give him the military salute, but all faces were turned in prayer in the direction of the Sacred Mosque at Mecca and no one noticed him. This scene irritated him immensely and he departed furiously.

After the completion of our prayers, a prison guard approached me and declared: "You are no longer allowed to hold congregational prayers or converse with the military prisoners." This restriction proved to work in my favor as the military prisoners became more sympathetic toward me. I advised them to continue their sessions every night and to read the book *Where Truth Prevails* which provides an analysis of Imam Hussein's revolution and contains biographical notes about all the martyrs of Karbala.

## **Unrecognized by My Own Son**

One day in prison, a soldier rushed toward me declaring: "They have brought your son to see you!" I gazed at the prison entrance and saw an officer coming in my direction carrying Mostafa who was two years of age. I took him in my arms and kissed him, but he did not recognize me as I had been detained in prison for such a long time. He stared at me sullenly, his eyes wide open with astonishment, and began to weep uncontrollably. I was unable to soothe him so I gave him to

the officer to take him back to his mother who was not allowed to see me. As a result of this incident, my heart was inflicted with pain which gnawed at me for some while after.

## My Unfinished Memoirs

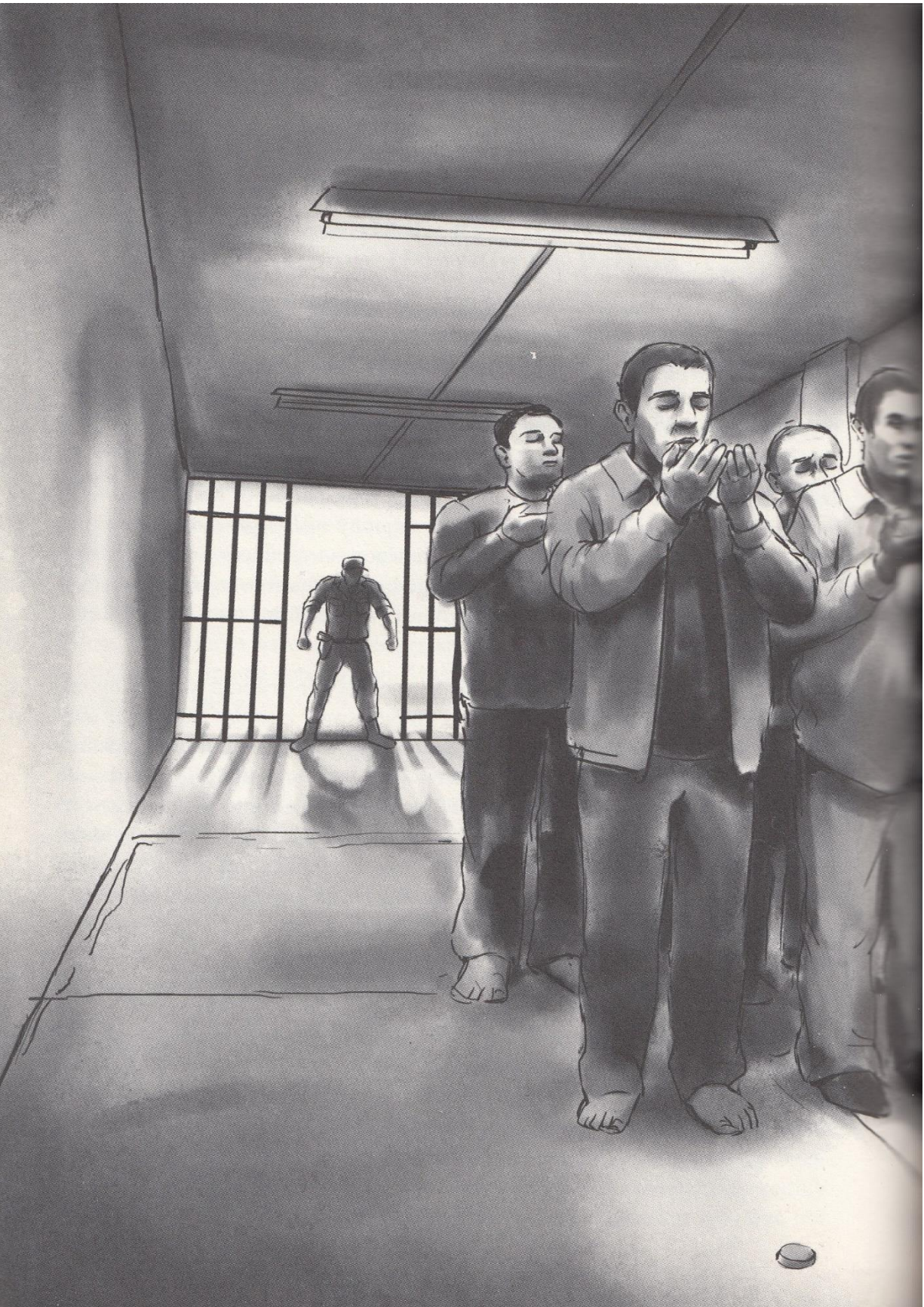
It was at this prison that I started writing memoirs on a daily basis, an enterprise which I stopped after a while as my desolateness prevented me from continuing. The last sentence I recorded was the following: “At this point, I will cease writing. What possible use could be derived from these memoirs?” but when I revise these notes at the present time, I regret not having continued them because they were valuable in truth, contrary to what I had assumed.

I started translating Sayyid Qutb’s *Islam and the Dilemmas of Civilization*, but once again the tedium caused by such a long period of detainment in 2 small, dark cell and burdened with the monotony of life prevented me from completing the translation or writing a translator’s introduction for the book. The work remained unfinished until I was held in the fourth prison where I subsequently finished the translation. Thus, I started the translation in one prison and finished it in another.

The memoirs I wrote in this prison include an account of the moral depravity and misconduct I witnessed among some military personnel and the mistreatment of soldiers at the hands of officers. Also mentioned are some details relating to an imprisoned officer who was fortunately religious and intent on performing his religious obligations. I must note that the severe conditions prevailing in prisons usually contribute to a heightened individual connection to religion and recourse to prayer and supplication. A prison is like the ship mentioned in the Qur’anic verse: “When they embark on a ship, they call upon God sincere to Him in religion.”<sup>54</sup>

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54 Qur’an 29:65







**A HOME WITH  
NO FURNITURE**

## The Voice of Palestine

After the numerous reports which the SAVAK received against me, I was arrested once again in 1970. The incidents preceding my fourth arrest occurred as follows. One summer evening, I tuned to the radio station Voice of Palestine to listen to coverage of the tragic massacre of Palestinians in Jordan, a series of events which later became known as *Black September*. All we could do was set the frequency to the Palestinian broadcasting station and listen with grief-stricken hearts to the latest news reports of the massacre.

I still recall that the station was transmitting the contents of a telegram message Yasser Arafat had sent from Jordan to the Arab League Summit in Cairo. I jotted down the text of this message, a feat which was facilitated by the newscaster's constant repetition of the telegram. Due to the profound effect the message had on me, I still remember some of its expressions. When Yasser Arafat arrived in Tehran in 1981, I cited some of its phrases and after mentioning the following expression "a sea of blood and 20,000 killed and wounded," Arafat remarked: "In fact, more than 25,000 were killed and wounded."

I was absorbed listening to the radio coverage and jotting down my notes when my brother, Hadi, hurried in, clearly astonished to see me. He said breathlessly: "You are sitting here?" whereby I answered: "Where else should I be?"

"Haven't you been arrested?" "Here I am, sitting in front of you!"

Hadi sat on the ground and recovered his breath before he recounted what happened. "I was in Goharshad Mosque when I heard a man (who was hostile toward the Islamic Movement and favored the Shah's oppressive regime) saying that you had been arrested! I rose immediately and hurried to your house!"

After assuring himself that I was actually at home, Hadi left. Even though I felt a trace of confusion, I did not give the matter much thought and headed the next day before noontime as usual to see my father. It was my habit to visit him every single day and spend an hour with him, discussing theological and jurisprudential issues with him and offering him company.

As I was conversing with my father, we heard a knock at the door. My mother went to see who had come calling but returned a moment later, stunned and bewildered, and said: "Two SAVAK agents were asking after you."

“What did you tell them?”

“That you were not here.”

“But mother, why didn’t you tell them the truth?” I protested.

“Because they are beasts, and we must ward off their malice!” She replied.

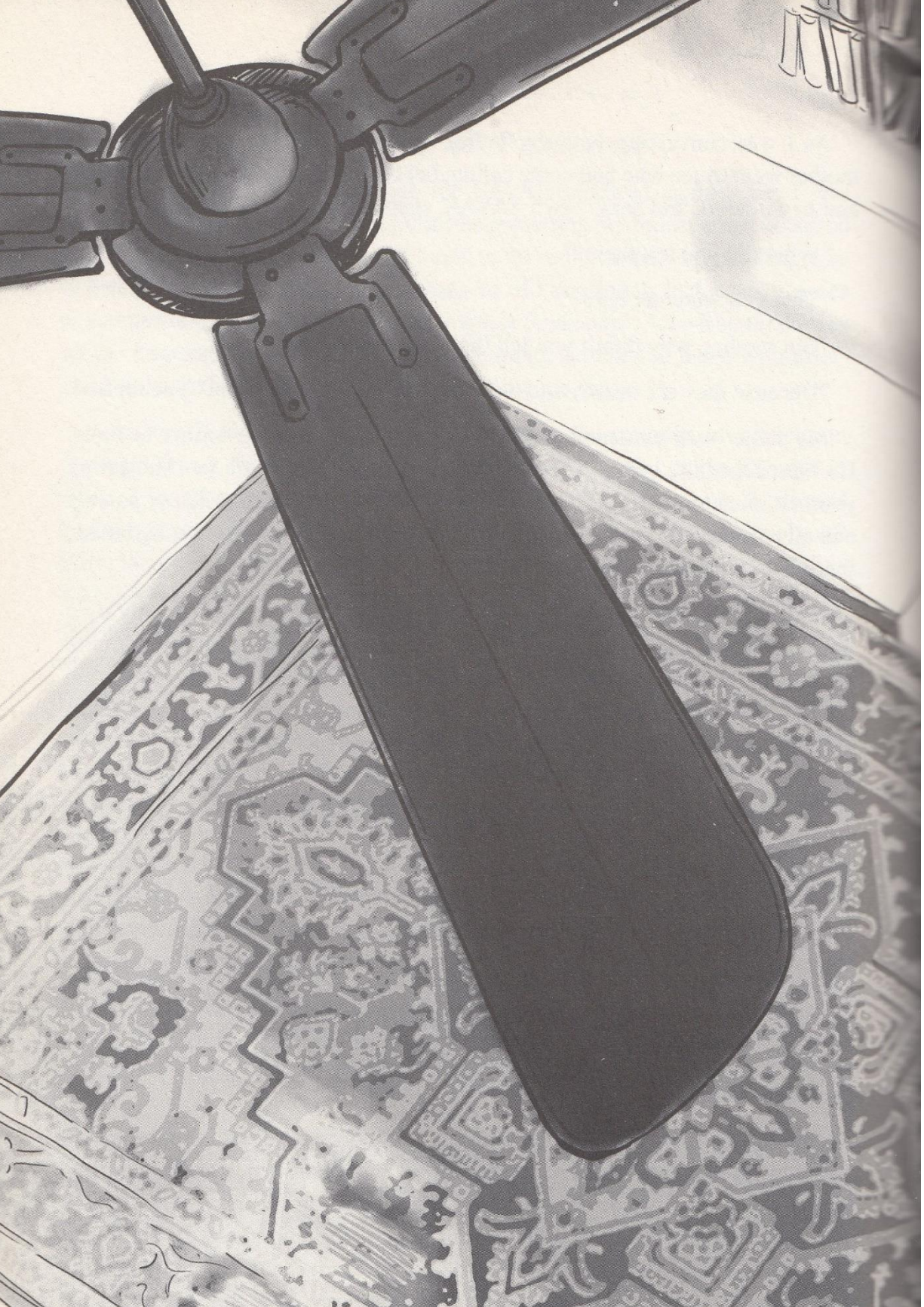
My father was saddened and his despondency was clear on his features. He reproached me gently, saying: “What happened? Why are you subjecting yourself once more to imprisonment and trial?” I tried to console my parents and allay their fears, so I said: “They have probably sought the wrong house, there is nothing to worry about.”

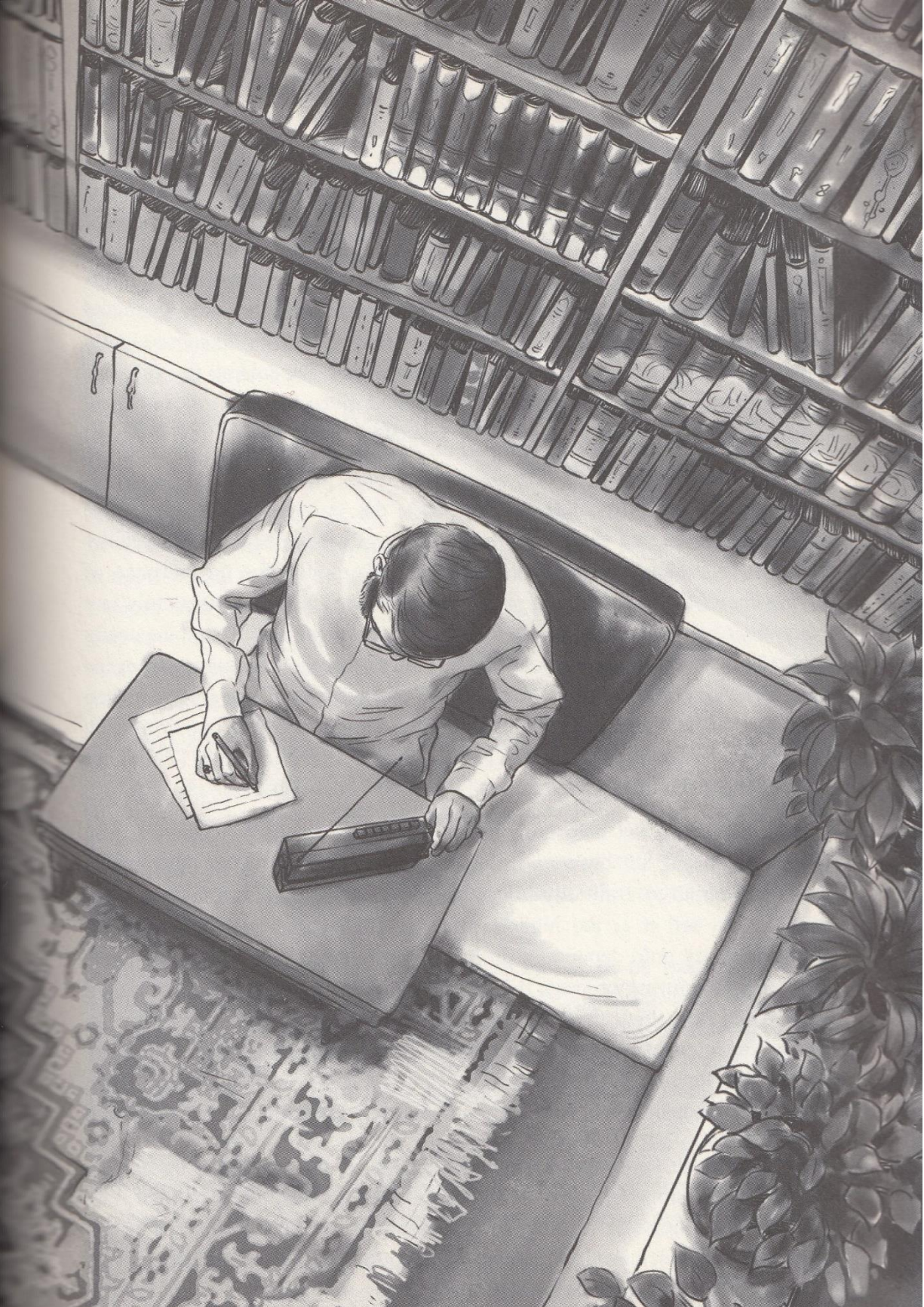
It struck me just then that the SAVAK agents might seek me at my own house next, so I bid my parents farewell and hurried home to inform my wife so that she would not be taken by surprise. Once there, I was relieved to find out that the SAVAK agents had not come searching for me at my home, and I subsequently notified my wife of what had occurred.

## My Dedicated Wife

In appreciation of the active role my wife has had in my life, I find it pertinent to dwell, albeit briefly, on her personality and noble qualities. First and foremost, my wife is endowed with fortitude and a high morale. She never displayed any traces of fear, weakness or mental breakdown despite the recurrent assaults on our home by the SAVAK henchmen and my frequent arrests before her eyes. These attributes were also manifest in an instance when our home was raided at midnight and I suffered a beating at the hands of SAVAK agents in her presence, as I will mention later.

She visited me during my prison sentences, displaying a high morale and Strength of character. Her visits inspired me with confidence and tranquility. She always refrained from informing me of any distressing news such as the illness of one of our children or anything disturbing about my family or friends. She was also very patient, enduring difficult living conditions before the Revolution and insisting on a life of simplicity after the victory of the Revolution. I thank God that our home has always been devoid of any luxuries or nonessential items, even those which are found in ordinary homes. Despite the fact I personally started my marital life with such restraints and directed my wife to such a way of living and induced that spirit in her, she played a major role in maintaining our modest





livelihood and I must say with all honesty that she has by far excelled me in this domain.

Many memories resonate in my mind regarding the asceticism of this virtuous lady. She never asked me to buy her any garments but only reminded me of the required items of clothing for our children and would subsequently buy them herself. She never purchased any jewelry. She sold all the valuable ornamental pieces her parents and relatives had given her as a gift and spent the money on charitable causes. She currently doesn't own any items of adornment, not even an ordinary ring.

During the harsh winters in Mashhad, the citizens of the city were accustomed to buying charcoal to be used as a source of heat. Some wealthy religious individuals chose to entrust me with money for the purpose of buying charcoal and distributing it among the poor. I would subsequently buy a quantity of charcoal and leave it at the store whereby I would send the needy to collect their share. One year, however, I did not receive any money from the usual benefactors and I was compelled to apologize to all the impoverished individuals who were used to knocking upon the doors of the *ulama* in such circumstances asking for charcoal. I was greatly saddened because I could not provide them with their needs.

My wife could not help noticing my dejection so she suggested selling a bracelet one of her brothers had given to her as a gift after the birth of one of our children. I initially refused but she insisted, so I took the bracelet intending to sell it at the highest price possible taking into account that goldsmiths buy gold depending on its weight without considering the costs of the manufacturing process. It happened that one of our neighbors visited us so I told him about the developments in the hope of encouraging him to sell the bracelets at the best value. He took the bracelet and sold it for more than a 1000 tomans and added the same amount to be paid for charity. Thus, I compiled a considerable sum with which to buy charcoal and our sorrow at being unable to aid the poor dispelled.

Non-indulgence in excessive luxuries had a great impact on my life. Hankering after unnecessary items enslaves a man as the poet says:

*Behold how coveting the superfluous,  
Suspends the chain of slavery on man's neck.*

## A Home with No Furniture

Sheikh Rabbani Amlashi was a very close friend of mine with whom I had studied theology for two years at Qom Seminary. One summer, he came to Mashhad while I was still residing in the city. I had departed from home, travelling to spend a few weeks at a summer destination not far from Mashhad. The cost of spending summer at resorts surrounding Mashhad was very low, a matter which allowed seminary students to rent houses or rooms in those destinations with probably less expenses than life in the city.

During that period, my home was vacant for five days per week; two were set aside for conducting sessions with youth from all over Iran who filled my house from morning till noontime. I gave Sheikh Amlashi the keys to my house, placing it at his service but when I encountered him a few days later he remarked after thanking me: "I did not know that you had emptied your house of all the furniture and taken it with you to the summer resort, otherwise I would have stayed at a hotel!" He gently reproached me as to why my house was devoid of furnishings, and when I finally understood what he meant I said: "I did not remove anything from my house except a few blankets, some plates and spoons, and a single cup."

Sheikh Amlashi stared at me in astonishment and asked: "Are you serious?"

"Yes, this is what I own. What you have seen at my house amounts to all my furniture, I have no additional belongings."

He fell silent and shook his head in amazement, regretting having reprimanded me, and uttered a heartfelt utterance of sympathy which I still remember to this very day.

Like most Iranian households, the floor of our home was covered with carpets, but I felt that these carpets were superfluous so I decided to sell them and kept only two in my wife's guestroom. I preferred to keep the matter Concealed from my wife's brothers and maternal uncles who worked as carpet merchants, fully aware that they would have discouraged me from selling them.

I asked Saffarian, one of my acquaintances, to remove the carpets I had selected and to sell them, and requested that he buy rugs in their stead. In Iran, rugs are smaller in size than carpets and cheaper too, so Saffarian was able to buy a considerable number of rugs. After covering the surface of three rooms with

nine rugs, 15 rugs remained so I asked Kamiab, one of my students, to accompany Saffarian in his car and distribute the surplus among my Seminary students.

My wife only had one objection. “Why did you keep two carpets in my room?” She insisted that I sell them as well and Saffarian was summoned once again. We chose to buy two floor coverings which were better in quality than the ordinary rugs we placed in the other rooms. Eventually, my wife gave away those two coverings. Our home today still contains the nine rugs which Saffarian brought.

My wife’s uncles and brothers visited us one day and were surprised to find our home devoid of carpets. “Carpets are more durable while rugs become shabby after constant use,” they reproached me. “If you think this is a form of asceticism, it isn’t. What you’ve done is pure wastefulness.”

“I don’t think that economic management of household commodities is manifested through buying carpets instead of rugs. There is another reason for my decision. Some individuals regard me as a role model, and this is why] prefer to include ordinary rugs in my home instead of carpets which aren’t affordable by everyone.”

“There is a type of carpet which is cheaper than rugs,” one of my in-laws ventured. “Why don’t you buy one of those?”

My wife’s relatives proceeded to inform me of a type of threadbare carpet well-known among carpet merchants which had lost part of its wool with only the threads remaining. I took their advice into consideration and bought two of those carpets. These two carpets currently cover the floor of my office which is situated on the upper floor of our two-storey home.

I still remember an incident during my term as president when I lived in a small house behind the building of the Majles. A friend came for a visit and when he noticed the threadbare carpets, he exclaimed: “Why have you laid these carpets upside down?!”

My wife spurned worldly allurements and material comforts, and displayed the trait of self-denial which can only be acquired with utmost patience. Throughout the numerous tribulations I underwent —my imprisonment, torture banishment and assassination attempt—never did I notice a sign of despair her face. Her firm resolution inspired me and provided crucial support which aided me in continuing on my path.

Even though my mother was a very brave and fearless woman who always encouraged me to remain steadfast, yet she was not as enduring and unwavering as my wife. When I was released from my first incarceration, my mother told me: “My son, you have made me proud. I ask God to aid you on this path.” But after my recurrent detentions, her emotions took hold of her and she sometimes reproached me gently, complaining that [ I was wasting away my youth in prison. But I never heard the slightest complaint nor sensed the smallest indication of weakness in my wife.

I left my father’s house and hurried home. My wife immediately began to help me in preparing myself for a potential arrest. I had become used to a certain procedure if I sensed that my imprisonment was imminent. On such occasions, I usually packed a few personal possessions, changed my clothes, and trimmed my nails and beard.

I had not yet finished the translation of *The Peace Treaty of Imam Hasan*. I had been preoccupied with the translation. The publisher was intent on publishing the book as soon as possible and had already printed the parts of the book I had translated and sent them to me for proofreading. Part of the book was translated and in need of revision while the other part was yet to be translated. I arranged the pages in piles so they could be easily accessible if I were to enter prison and ask for permission to continue the translation in confinement.

After the initial preparation, we had lunch, performed our noontime prayers and waited for SAVAK agents to arrive. My wife, who was very tired, could not remain awake and drifted into a deep slumber. I wandered into my library to select some books that might be allowed in prison, and while I was pondering which publications to choose, a thought came to my mind: *Why shouldn't I go into hiding, and conceal myself in a safe haven where I can continue the translation of the book?* I consulted the Qur’an a few times and each time I alighted on verses which encouraged me to go through with my plan. I still remember one of the verses: “And he said, ‘Indeed, I have given preference to the love of good [things] over the remembrance of my Lord until the sun disappeared into the curtain [of darkness].’”<sup>55</sup>

I gathered my papers and roused my wife from sleep and informed her of my decision. She was joyed and asked: “Where will you be going?”

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55 Qur’an 38:32

“I don’t know yet, but I intend to finish the translation of this book.”

She murmured a prayer for my security before I bid her farewell and went out, all the while on the alert in case the house was being watched. I glanced around but found no one lurking around, so I cautiously hurried to a friend’s home.

Ghulam Reza Ghodsi was surprised to see me at his door in the sweltering heat of noon. He welcomed me warmly and invited me inside where I informed him of the turn of events. Ghulam Reza was a man whom I agreed with, and we both shared a deep concern for Islamic issues. He insisted that I remain at his home and complete my translation there, but I turned down his offer and told him that it was difficult for me to restrict my energy within four walls without any movement.

An idea crossed my mind. I asked Ghulam Reza to summon my friend, Sayyid Ja‘far Qomi, so we could think of an inconspicuous place for hiding and probably find a place where one could walk about and have some exercise. Sayyid Qomi was an advocate of the Islamic movement and had suffered years of displacement as penalty for his convictions.

The three of us gathered in Ghulam Reza’s home, and after exchanging opinions, we decided that it would be the best place for me to make my way to Akhlamad, a village with pleasant weather not far from Mashhad. I also consulted with the Qur’an twice and in both times the verses were encouraging. I managed to communicate with one of my relatives who owned a car and after he arrived, Sayyid Qomi insisted upon accompanying me to spare me the unpleasant feelings arising from loneliness.

I remained in Akhlamad for little more than a month, and during this period I completed the translation and sent it to Tehran for publication. I returned to Mashhad where I resumed my normal life again, walking in public and attending assemblies. I wondered why no measures were taken to imprison me, and surmised that the SAVAK authorities had abandoned their opinion of taking me into custody after their suspicions had faded. I felt reassured and returned the things I had previously concealed back to their original places. But I was mistaken. In the month of Mehr (the first month of fall), the SAVAK detained me again. Three of my imprisonments occurred in Mehr, a fact which drove me to change the name of this month into *keen*, *mehr* being the Persian word for love, and *keen* for malice.

# THE MILITARY TRIBUNAL

## A Defiant Stance

One day in the month of Mehr, I was invited to my father's house to enjoy, midday meal with some *ulama* who had come to visit my father. I took my son, Mostafa, who was then around four years of age, with me and entrusted him to my mother's care in the interior part of the house.

Regardless of their spatial dimensions, the houses of all *ulama* were customarily composed of two sections; an interior part for immediate family members, and an exterior part for guests, each section with its own separate door. While we were having dinner, one of my brothers hurriedly entered and informed me that two SAVAK agents had penetrated our courtyard. I rushed outside to prevent them from entering the guest-room, only to see my mother standing defiantly in front of them. With her chador draped over her entire body and a part of her face covered, my mother argued intensely with the two men.<sup>56</sup>

From the words which were exchanged between them, I understood what had happened. The two men had first reached the entrance leading to the interior section, and when my mother had blocked their way and informed them that I was not present they had made several attempts to barge in. My mother had managed to shut the door, denying them entrance. The two men then circled the house and knocked at the gate leading to the exterior section. My brother, who had been oblivious to the identities of the men standing outside, had opened the gate, enabling them to come inside the courtyard. By that time, my mother had reached the courtyard and prepared to confront the two men once again.

When they saw me descending the stairs leading to the courtyard, one of the two men angrily spun toward my mother, saying: "How dare you say Sayyid Ali is not here?" This, however, did not intimidate my mother who stood firm in her resistance.

I immediately intervened and directed my accusatory question at the SAVAK interrogator: "Do you know who this respected lady is?" I mentioned her name with the utmost reverence, expressing my disapproval at their conduct.

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56 One of the operatives was a notorious SAVAK interrogator who was killed after the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

I turned towards her and said: “Mother, allow me to speak with them myself.”

Directing my gaze toward the two agents, I asked: “What do you want?”

“You have to accompany us.”

My son Mostafa had witnessed the entire scene; astonishment and terror were etched on his features. I commended Mostafa to my mother’s care and bid her farewell. On our way to the gate, I heard one of the henchmen utter a disrespectful remark in response to the words I had voiced regarding my mother, and this elicited a sharp retort from me. From there, I was taken to the SAVAK Headquarters.

## The Interrogation Room

Once inside the SAVAK building, I was led to the office of the chief of command, a spacious, opulent room dotted with luxurious furniture. At the far side of the office, the chief sat at a large desk, feigning preoccupation with some documents he had at hand. This was a deliberate routine employed by SAVAK officials who aimed to instill psychological intimidation in their detainees through their spurious lack of concern. I was familiar with such methods of conduct, and, as was my wont, I nonchalantly sat down on a comfortable armchair without asking for permission. When the chief took notice of this, he raised his head and asked: “Who are you?”

He was certainly aware of my identity, but I answered him nonetheless. “Ali Khamenei.”

“Oh, yes. And where have you been Sayyid Khamenei?” he inquired.

The inquiry was a prelude to a set of questions which made me realize that the SAVAK actually possessed insufficient information on my file. They thought that I was still in hiding, and were ignorant of the fact that I had returned to Mashhad. They were also unaware that I had moved to an independent residence, and had assumed that I would still be abiding at my father’s house. It was surprising to discover that a security organization such as the SAVAK would be in possession of such limited intelligence.

The chief addressed me in a harsh, crude manner. I retorted in the same tone at times, but chose to remain silent at others to convey my indifference. In the midst of our debate, an interrogator entered holding a thick dossier in his hand. He stood by the chief, opened the file and leafed through its pages, pointing at

certain passages while the chief looked on reprovingly and shook his head in a sign of disapproval. The actions of the chief and the interrogator were at obvious display of artificiality for the purpose of frightening me. When the interrogator terminated his charade, the chief turned his attention from the film and angrily issued his order: "Take him away!"

I was led into another room where several SAVAK henchmen awaited forming a tight circle with their bodies. I was pushed into the middle where I was met by their insults and acerbic remarks. I had undergone a similar experience previously, so I was psychologically prepared to confront them, forcibly and unflinchingly. Up until that moment, the SAVAK operatives had not resorted to outright physical torture.

I still vividly remember one of the SAVAK operatives, a colonel in civilian clothes who went by the pseudonym Neshat. He spitefully asked me: "What are you aiming at? What do you think you will achieve? Have you forgotten what King Hussein<sup>57</sup>, that weak and incompetent king, did? He murdered five

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57 King Hussein of Jordan: In full, Hussein bin Talal bin Abdullah (November 14, 1935–February 7, 1999), king of Jordan from 11 August 1953 to his death in 1999, a period spanning 46 years. King Hussein was a member of the Hashemite dynasty, and his grandfather was the Sherif of Mecca. After World War I and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire against Britain and France, Hussein's family assumed monarchical control of Jordan. In May 25, 1923, the British recognized Transjordan's independence under the rule of Emir Abdullah, but, as outlined in a treaty as well as the constitution in 1928, matters of finance, military, and foreign affairs would remain in the hands of the British.

Many Palestinians—who by the mid-fifties represented a majority in Jordan—felt little attachment to his dynasty. Hussein responded by strengthening the military establishment to assert the authority of the crown over that of parliament. With U.S. aid, he steadily expanded and modernized his military forces, which he used to prevent attempts to overthrow his regime. Hussein reluctantly entered the Six Day War of June 1967, but Israel's military victory was a severe setback, resulting as it did in the loss to Israel of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which Jordan had annexed in 1950, and the influx of some 250,000 additional Palestinian refugees into the country.

By September 1970 the PLO virtually controlled a state within a state. With his future in doubt Hussein launched a full-scale attack to expel the organization in a civil war later remembered as Black September which resulted in hundreds of slaughtered Palestinians. Hussein was full supporter of the Pahlavi. After the Islamic Revolution, he offered his support to Saddam Hussein in his war against Iran, in addition to forming a front with Saudi Arabia and other countries in opposition to Iran. In the wake of the Israel-PLO accords of 1993, Hussein signed on October 26, 1994, a bilateral peace treaty ending more than 40 years of hostility and normalizing relations between Jordan and Israel.

Thousand Palestinians in one day! We have much more power, and are easily capable of slaughtering five million individuals in a single day.”

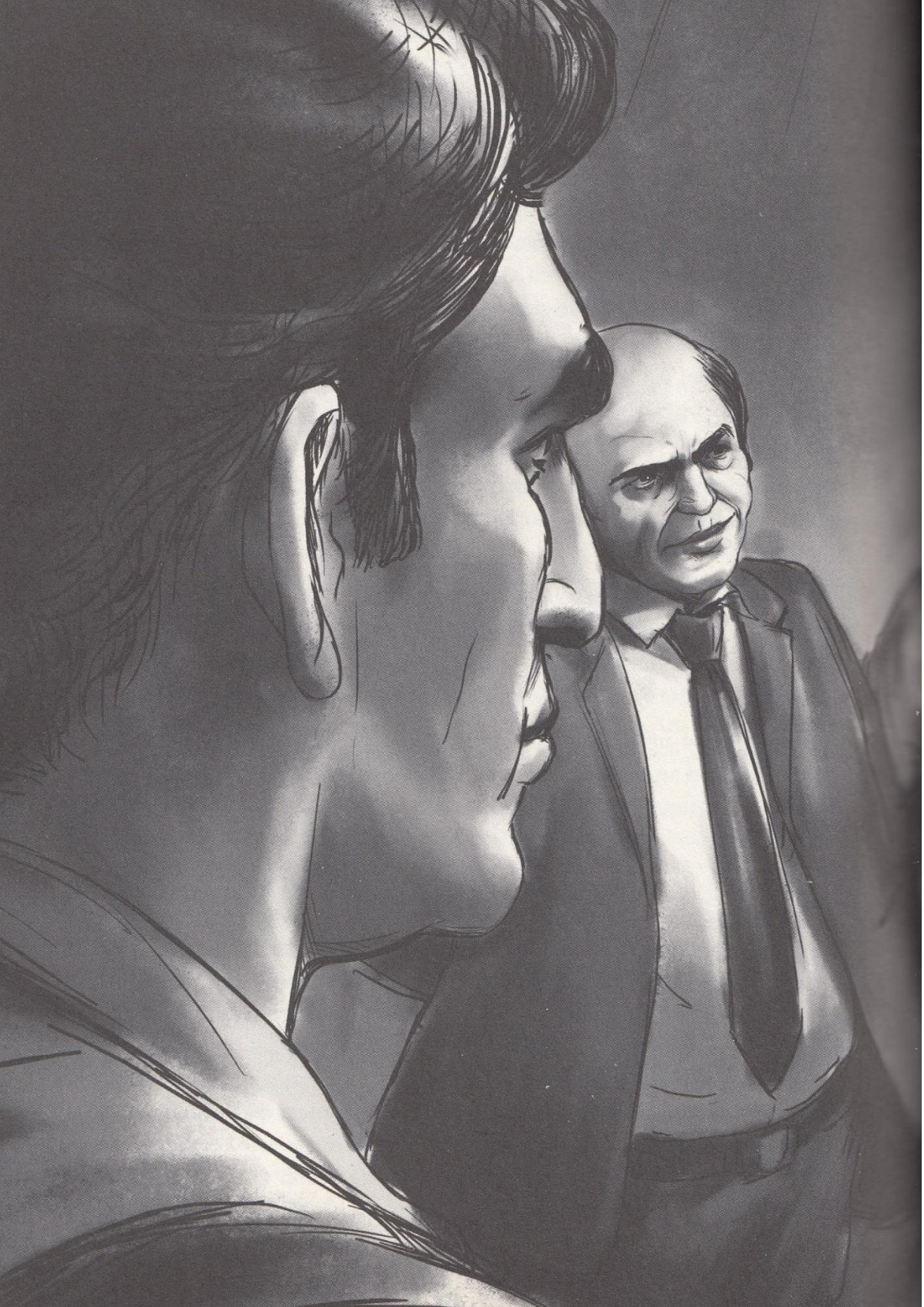
His words struck me with astonishment. The number he cited was a clear exaggeration; he was either ignorant of the facts or was trying to deceive me, and in both cases, it showed his ineptitude. Moreover, why would he threaten a seminary student with no weapon but his pen and sermons—in such a manner? If I had been the leader of a large social movement, his threat of murdering five million people would have been credulous, but uttering a threatening remark in such a situation was only a clear sign of his weakness. In truth, SAVAK agents were frail in personality and lacking in oral communication skills. Apart from their negative attributes, they were mentally deranged and it is known that a madman may unexpectedly launch an attack and inflict serious harm. Hence, even though I considered them weak and contemptible, I harbored a sense of fear of them.

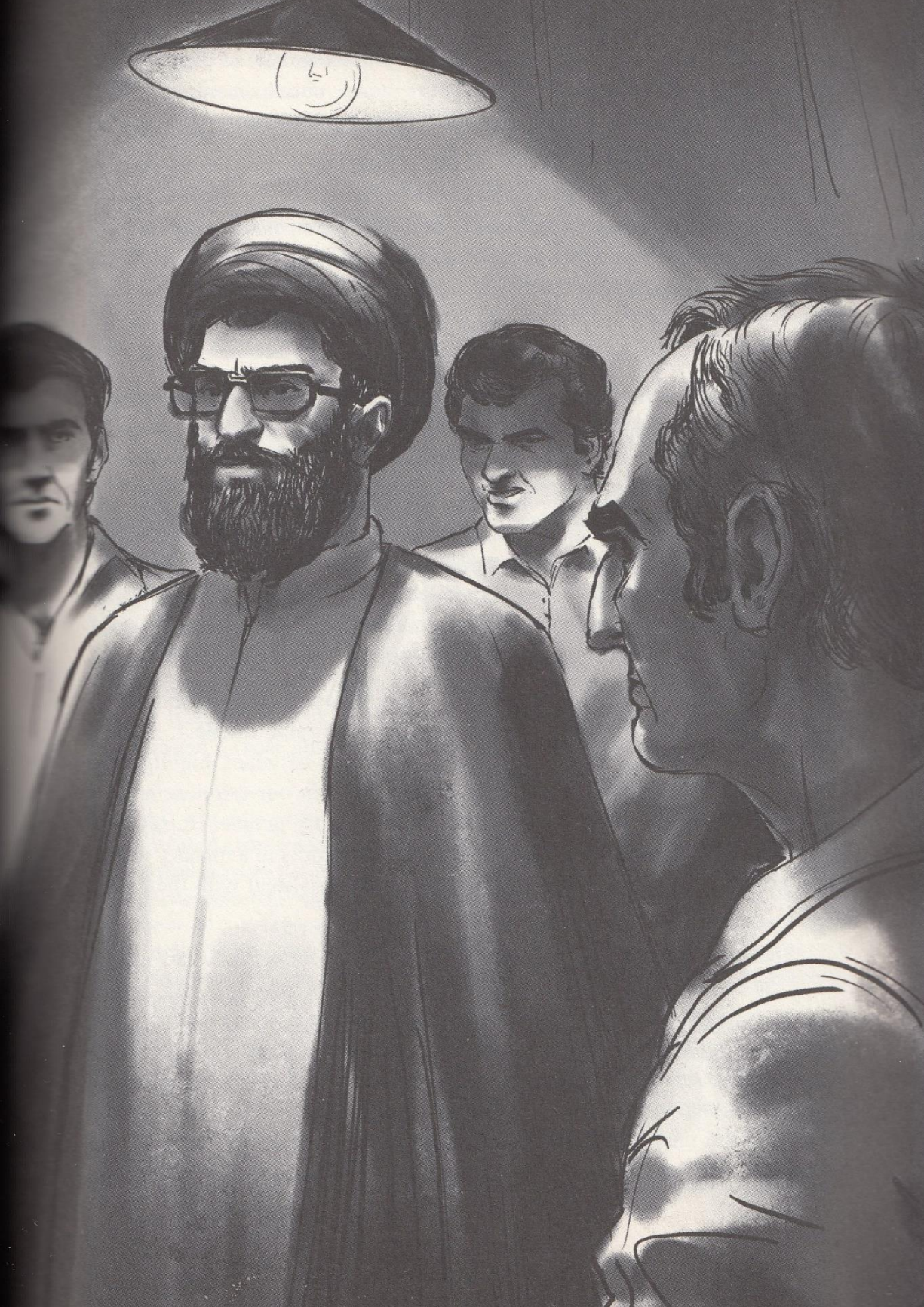
They searched my pockets but found nothing of use to them. Then, they all exited and left me alone for more than an hour. Someone eventually returned and said: “Come!”

I was pushed into a car and taken to another building. Upon entering the tenement, I realized that it was the very same prison I had been incarcerated in three years previously. The white-washed walls were a clear sign that that I was at the “White Palace.” I was home again!

I was placed into one of the cells, while the sergeants in charge of the prison gathered around the cell door and expressed their respect and concern. The door remained shut and I was not allowed to leave my cell under any circumstance.

After a few days in prison, I contemplated finishing the translation of *Islam and the Dilemmas of Civilization* by Sayyid Qutb. I had previously translated three quarters of the book and had entrusted my brother, Sayyid Hadi, with the task of translating the final part. I communicated with my brother, asking him to bring me the portions of the book which he had already translated so I could review them thoroughly and ensure that the translation as a whole was harmonious. Only the final chapter had been left untranslated, so I embarked upon the task of completing the work. The last chapter was written in a strong literary style and was marked by a harsh critique against Western civilization. In addition to completing the translation of the final chapter, I penned an introduction to the book, infusing it with newly-instated terminology which I placed into brackets as





a distinguishing feature from the rest of the text final preparation preoccupied me for an entire month; once I accomplished the work, I handed it to my brother, Sayyid Hadi, and indicated the person who would be willingly ready publish it.

Throughout this time, I was informed that my Arabic translation of *The Peace Treaty of Imam Hasan* by Sheikh Radi Al-e Yasin<sup>58</sup>, a historical analysis of the treaty, had been recently published. I received a copy in prison, a matter which made me deeply contented.

## Mutual Compassion

Two weeks had elapsed since my imprisonment, when I heard one Of the prison guards shouting in a loud voice: “Glad tidings! Glad tidings! Abdel-Nasser is dead!”

This news deeply pained my heart. As Islamist revolutionaries in Iran, we held a paradoxical attitude toward two prominent Egyptian figures; we highly sympathized with Sayyid Qutb’s plight and admired his intellect, but at the same time we felt empathy toward Abdel-Nasser who had sentenced him to death. I shed tears of sorrow upon hearing news of the execution of Sayyid Qutb, but I also wept when I heard of the death of Abdel-Nasser.

Our attachment to Sayyid Qutb could be easily understood. In the light of his personal affliction, literary pen, and dynamic Qur’anic intellect, he was able to portray a revolutionary and productive image of Islam, highlighting its broad horizons. He encouraged us to take pride in our religion, and to remain aloof from trivialities which preoccupy ordinary people. He adopted an Islamic revolutionary approach in his exegetical works in a manner which Muslims, regardless of their respective sects, find consistent with their own beliefs.

On the other hand, our admiration towards Abdel-Nasser had its roots in certain psychological factors, and was not based on doctrinal grounds. At the time, the people of Iran faced an overwhelming campaign instigated by great powers, aiming at degrading the status of religion and disparaging Muslim clerics. This process had a great impact in inculcating a sense of psychological defeat in Iranian youth and intellectuals who came to believe that it was not possible to challenge the big powers dominating the world. In such an atmosphere

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58 He (1897 – 1953) was one of famous Iraq scholars, historian, *mujtahid* and jurisprudent.

of moral defeat in the face of the West and the United States of America, we welcomed any raised voice which defied those powers and expressed resistance.

Abdel-Nasser was such an individual. While listening to his public addresses against the tyrannical world powers, we sensed a deep feeling of pride. We were constantly eager to listen to his speeches which were aired on the *Sawt Al-Arab*<sup>59</sup> (*Voice of the Arabs*) radio broadcasting station. We were drawn to every movement which aimed to accomplish liberation from imperialist domination in the Islamic World and the developing countries of the Third World as well; hence, we expressed our solidarity with all revolutionary movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

I still remember that after I received news of the Libyan Revolution,<sup>60</sup> I promptly voiced my support for the movement during one of my sermons and commended the Libyan revolutionaries for bringing upon the downfall of King Idris, whom I called Iblis.<sup>61</sup> I later discovered that Sheikh Hashemi Rafsanjani had also endorsed the Libyan Revolution during his sermons.

We were driven by a yearning to recover the glory which had been trampled upon by despots, and the honor which had been violated by the tyrants of the world. To us, the name of Abdel-Nasser was a symbol of Arab Muslim resistance and perseverance against Zionist forces in the region. This, however, did not diminish our discontent with the strict measures Abdel-Nasser had directed against Islamic activists. As I previously mentioned, the media outlets of the Shah

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59 *Sawt Al-Arab* radio-station: *Sawt Al Arab (Voice of the Arabs)* radio-station was founded in 1953 under Gamal Abdel-Nasser's rule (1956-1970). *The Voice of the Arabs* played a prominent role in strengthening the Pan-Arabism, fueling anti-colonial sentiments and nationalist ideologies. The main medium through which President Gamal Abdel-Nasser spread his ideas, *The Voice of the Arabs* enjoyed popularity among Iranian freedom fighters by virtue of its pro-nationalist and anti-imperialist tone. It was the only media outlet in the region which broadcast concepts of independence, national pride, confrontation of imperialist powers, and armed opposition against the Zionist regime.

60 Libyan Revolution: In September 1969, several Libyan cadets who had reached their third year in the military academy and belonged to the Free Officers Movement decided to overthrow the monarchy of King Idris, who was in Turkey for medical treatment. This was achieved after the fashion of Gamal Abdel-Nasser and Mohammad Najib's Egyptian Revolution of 1952 which overthrew King Farouk. The 1969 Libyan *coup d'etat* ended in the ascension of Muammar Gaddafi to power.

61 Iblis, in Islam, the personal name of the devil. Iblis, the equivalent of the Jewish and Christian Satan, is also referred to as Shaytan.

aimed to sow animosity against Abdel-Nasser in Iran. What saddened me the most was the way the serviceman had delivered the news of Abdel-Nasser's death; he had articulated the information with ungrounded delight, and was clearly ignorant of Abdel-Nasser's prominent status, merely another, citizen influenced by the Shah's propaganda.

I had obtained a small radio with the assistance of some sympathetic Guard, and strove to keep it hidden from the eyes of the more severe prison officers since being in possession of radios was strictly forbidden in prisons. After receiving news of Abdel-Nasser's death, I constantly tuned to the *Voice of the Arabs* radio station, deriving great solace from listening to the famous Qur'anic recitations of great Egyptian reciters such as Abd al-Baset, Mostafa Ismail and Mahmoud Ali Banna. I wrote down the names of the reciters I listened to on the back cover of my copy of the Qur'an.

I still vividly remember the recitations I listened to, and one verse particularly stands out in my memory: "*And with how many a prophet has there been a large number of godly men who fought beside him. They did not become weak-hearted on account of what befell them in Allah's way, nor did they weaken, nor did they yield, and God loves those who are steadfast*".<sup>62</sup> One reciter kept reiterating the expression "*Godly men who fought beside him*" in an awe-inspiring manner. From early evening, I would listen to these Qur'anic recitations on the *Voice of the Arabs* and when they came to an end, I would switch to other radio stations in search for more.

## Systematic Indoctrination

I find it relevant here to cite another example which clearly depicts the predominant mentality of the military personnel in the Shah's regime. Among the prisoners was a Turkish-speaking corporal from the province of Azerbaijan who was sentenced to a six-month prison term for committing a trivial offence. Destitute and in need of money, he was granted permission to prepare tea and sell it to the prisoners, and was allotted for this purpose a hollow space in the ground near the lavatory. I conversed with him in Turkish, and this linguistic accord served in forming a bond of mutual friendship and affection between us.

The soldiers guarding the prison would stand around the pit, drinking tea: while I remained in my cell as I was denied the right to exit except on certain

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62 Qur'an 3:146

occasions to enjoy some sunshine. I preferred to dissociate myself from such a place, and hence, the corporal brought tea to my cell and I paid him its cost. Thus, three common factors brought us closer together: imprisonment, fluency in the same language, and customer ties.

On the occasions I was allowed to bask in the sun, I routinely sat at a corner of the prison yard. Several military personnel gathered around me, and I entertained them with anecdotes and allegories. One day, our discussion drifted toward the communist movement which had not yet established a footing and had only commenced its activities that same year. The Pahlavi regime, strongly opposed to communism, magnified communist activities beyond the limit of truth, and cracked down on several young men, placing them in prison under the charge of affiliation to communism.

The tea-serving corporal joined our discussion, expressing his animosity towards communists and claiming that he had killed several of them while on military duty on the day they declared their short-lived independent republic in Azerbaijan in 1946. He held the SAVAK at fault for not using excessive force against them, declaring vociferously: "If the SAVAK would only grant me permission, I would be willing to kill communists one by one, in absolute secrecy. But no! The SAVAK treats such people leniently and places them in prisons to eat and sleep in comfort!"

Upon hearing those words, I decided to jest with him so I asked: "What would you do if the SAVAK ordered you to kill me?"

He did not hesitate. In a decisive tone and without the slightest hint of reluctance, he declared: "I swear by your forefather, I would kill you!" He had issued such a solemn oath because he was aware that I was a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, my black turban, a clear testimony to my lineage. Despite the fact that we had many things in common, he had promptly declared that he would have no scruples about killing me. Such was the method of controlled systematic indoctrination undertaken by the Shah's regime among military personnel.

Throughout this period, a group of university students was incarcerated in what would be the first instance of undergraduate student arrest in Mashhad. On the basis of this unprecedented incident, I realized that a new movement had emerged in society. This filled me with joy and yearning to discover what was

going on beyond the prison walls, but there was no means possible for such an opportunity.

Due to the limited number of cells at the prison, I was removed from my Cell to make room for the new inmates. I was transferred to a large room which was singled out for prisoners near the prison door where I spent more than two months.

## Spirituality in Prison

Before my transfer to the large chamber, I joyously welcomed the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan in my small cell. I had cherished this month from childhood, taking pleasure in the alteration of daily life and spirituality inherent in fasting. At the time of *iftar*<sup>63</sup> on the first day of Ramadan, I was not served anything to eat as no significance was granted to such religious rituals at the encampment or military prison. I performed my prayers and reminisced upon the joyous moments of the past, remembering my family's gatherings around the *iftar* table, the pleasant bubbling sounds made by the samovar, and the light dishes prepared specifically for *iftar*. I was especially fond of a traditional dish commonly prepared by the people of Mashhad and known as *maqut*; composed of water, cornstarch, and sugar and lovingly prepared by my wife, *maqut* was my favorite *iftar* dish. I was immersed in such thoughts when I suddenly came back to my present condition and asked God for forgiveness. Perhaps it was my hunger, or even my loneliness, which stirred all these recollections, but I had no choice but to be patient.

Half an hour after sunset, I received a cup of tea, and, after that, the customary unappetizing supper. I consumed a small portion of the meal and kept the rest for *suhur*.<sup>64</sup> At dawn, I reluctantly ate the leftovers which had become even more stale after a few hours. Such passed the first day of Ramadan in prison.

On the second day, however, my circumstances changed drastically when the guard handed me a parcel containing various plates piled with the food which I

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63 Iftar is the meal served at the end of the day during Ramadan, to break the day's fast. In Arabic, the word literally means "breaking of fast."

64 Suhur (in Arabic and *sahari* in Persian) is an Islamic term referring to the meal consumed prior to dawn by Muslims in the month of Ramadan, during which Muslims are required not consume food or drink beverages throughout the day.

normally enjoyed during *iftar*. The meals, which were enough to feed various individuals, had been prepared by my wife who managed to bring them to prison. I was also sent the necessary appliances to prepare tea. I consumed my share, which proved to be a fine tasting meal, and distributed the rest among the other prisoners. This process was repeated every day.

I grasped the opportunity of my presence behind prison bars to spend the nights of Ramadan in increased worship, reciting the Qur'an and offering supplication. On the night of *Eid al-Fitr*<sup>65</sup>, I performed the religiously commended prayer which involves reciting *Surat al-Ikhlās* one thousand times after *Surat al-Fatiha*.

This was the second Ramadan that I spent in prison and, as I will mention later, I was yet to spend another future month of Ramadan in a fifth prison. Despite all the hardships I endured under confinement-especially in the fifth prison-spending Ramadan in captivity proved to be a significant opportunity to engage in purification of the soul, to remember God more often, and to muse deeply over the verses of the Qur'an. Most of the memoirs I recorded in prison are linked to the days of this blessed month.

## Roots of Corruption

I sadly noticed the moral depravity rampant among the military prisoners. The state of affairs was indicative of a deliberate plot to propagate immorality, and was not merely a sign of negligence at the individual level. Despite the strict security laws at the prison which involved close inspection of all items being entered, narcotics were distributed at a large scale among the military inmates. I was informed that some individuals incarcerated in the section specified for prisoners of rank consumed alcohol, while I personally saw others who inhaled anesthetic substances to induce a drug-like trance.

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65 *Eid al-Fitr*, (Arabic: "Festival of Breaking the Fast"), first of two canonical festivals of Islam. *Eid al-Fitr* marks the end of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of fasting, and is celebrated during the first three days of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar. As in Islam's other holy festival, *Eid al-Adha*, it is distinguished by the establishment of communal prayer at daybreak on its first day. *Eid al-Fitr* is a time of official receptions and private visits, when friends greet one another, presents are exchanged, new clothes are worn, and the graves of relatives are visited.

Any young officer who entered these prisons inevitably sank into corruption. The atmosphere was akin to an infested swamp; all who plunged in would be negatively influenced save for those who received the mercy of God. If such was the situation in a military prison subject to strict regulations, how depraved would it have been in an ordinary civilian jail?

Witnessing such an atmosphere, I ardently strove to save the highest number of individuals possible. A few days before Ramadan, I gathered the prisoners and delivered a sermon in which I reminded them of the imminence of death and the approach of Judgment Day. They earnestly promised to fast the entire month, and, true to their promise, they fasted on the first day. On the second day, they maintained their fast until noon but their resolve weakened and they broke their fast in the stifling atmosphere of the prison. On my planner, I recorded the names of those who had fasted on the first day, and those who had fasted for a day and a half.

## **The Military Court**

While I was incarcerated at this prison, my file was presented to the military justice court located at the center of the garrison. I was constantly in contact with the relevant authorities; either through responding to their summons and answering their questions, or by sending them letters of objection and listening to their responses. I protested against their refusal to release me on bail despite it being a condition secured by the constitution. I also voiced my objection at being placed in solitary confinement after the termination of the initial phase of interrogation and being prevented from receiving any visitors, either family members or close companions. I was fully aware that the military court had no authority to approve my demands, but I meant to take a legal stance against their outright violations of Iranian law.

I still remember that the chief of court once commented mindlessly in response to one of my requests: “Well, I must ask the SAVAK about this.”

I expressed my surprise and asked: “Does this court lie under the jurisdiction of the SAVAK?” Upon hearing my inquiry, he instantly changed the topic and resorted to praising the chief of SAVAK in Mashhad, mentioning his attributes with admiration.

A date for my trial was eventually announced, so I asked the officials for permission to revise my file in order to prepare a defense statement. The court

had assigned a military defense attorney to work on my case, but I was aware that such a measure was merely a show of artificiality. Thus, I prepared a coherent defense report which covered thirty pages and strictly drew upon the legal system.

On the day of my trial, I entered into the courtroom to find the chief of court, the two accompanying judges, the general prosecutor, and the defense lawyer already seated in the center of the room. All of those present were military personnel of varying ranks, their chests decked in shining military awards and their shoulders adorned with epaulettes. I read my defense testimony in a loud, firm tone, uttering the points I had prepared with determination.

The judge and jury had not expected to hear such a personal defense testimony or witness such a stance from a seminary student, as they had harbored negative notions regarding religion in general and clerics in particular. They could not conceal their admiration and exchanged expressive glances with one another. During the rest interval, they expressed their appreciation and lauded my performance and diction.

After the conclusion of the session, I was asked to leave the courtroom and wait at the door in anticipation of the verdict. I counted for the moments to elapse, excitedly anticipating the legal judgment. The day of my trial had coincided with visiting day; my family members stood in expectation at the entrance gate of the prison, which was some distance away from the court building, and when the wait extended until noontime some of them left while the others remained. The decree had been issued, but it needed to be typed on special forms and then read out in the presence of the members of the court and the accused.

One of the court officials exited from the courtroom, and, while passing near the main prison gate he noticed my family members waiting outside. Once he discovered that they were my close relatives, he informed them of the decision the military court had reached. Thus, my family received news of my release before I did. They did not head home, however, and when the waiting period extended further, one of the guards told them to go home and added: "He shall be among you as soon as the formalities are over."

I was summoned at around two o'clock in the afternoon to the courtroom where a court official proceeded to read out the verdict. He announced that my legal sentence was actually less than the prison term I had served, and declared

the decision to discharge me from prison until the date for the second trial. The court of appeal was typically convened a few months after the initial trial.

The chief of court ordered the soldiers to accompany me with their rifles carried over their shoulders, an indication that the man they were escorting was not a prisoner, and to aid me in completing the necessary administrative procedures prior to my exit from prison. Once this was done, I returned to my room to collect my belongings and bid farewell to all the prisoners.

It was winter and the weather was cold; it would get even colder at night, spotted several young men from my family waiting for me at the prison gate. Withstanding the weather which turned colder with the fall of darkness, placed my possessions into a car and I while I was about to get inside, Officer approached and said: "You may not leave; follow me." He led me another vehicle in which some other military officers were sitting, and, on inside, the car headed on the route leading to SAVAK headquarters.

Various thoughts raced through my mind along the way. Was my trial and release merely a pretense? Are they intending to remove me from SAVAK headquarters and take me to Tehran? Such were my thoughts on that dark and frigid night, with an unknown destiny awaiting me.

Once inside the SAVAK building, I found myself once more in front of Ghazanfari, the interrogator who had questioned me during my third and fourth imprisonments. He asked me in a conceited and cunning tone: "Why have you come here?"

"I did not come of my own free will; I was brought here!" I hotly retorted.

"You may leave. We have issued the order for your discharge."

Failing to comprehend their strange conduct, I stepped out into the dark, cold night. It was a relief to have entrusted my relatives with my bags; my belongings would have proved to be burdensome in such a situation. As I was awaiting a car to give me a lift home, a vehicle suddenly pulled up in front of me. I looked closely and realized that my relatives had followed the military automobile that brought me to SAVAK headquarters and had parked their car in the dark to see what would happen. They took me home.

I found my wife sitting in expectation, gazing intently at the entrance door. As for the children, they had tired of the long wait and had fallen into a deep slumber.

## An Unfriendly Encounter

On the very same night I returned home, I headed to visit the shrine of Imam Ali al-Rida and to offer prayers at Goharshad Mosque. The hour was late and the courtyard of the shrine was all but empty, but from afar I caught sight of two of my fellow seminarians. A special bond of friendship linked me with one of them; we even looked alike to the extent that people often thought we were brothers. I was delighted to see the two clerics at such a late hour, and I headed eagerly toward them as my imprisonment had deprived me of their company. I had expected that they would rush toward me, overjoyed at our reunion, but when I drew near and was almost on the point of greeting them, they turned their faces away. I sensed that one of them muttered to his companion: "He's been just released; perhaps he is still under SAVAK surveillance."

This incident hurt me deeply. Any recently discharged prisoner would anticipate a completely different greeting by his friends, especially if they are among those who are expected to have Islamic concerns at heart. As a matter of fact, I had previously witnessed numerous instances of such conduct among clerics. In contrast, young seminary or university students increased their support every time I was incarcerated and whenever I became exposed to the regime's oppressive measures.

## Clerical Confrontation

This is not to say that the *ulama* did not take honorable stances toward Islamic activists in Iran. There is no doubt as to the leading role the *ulama* played in confronting despotic regimes throughout history. In the contemporary era, many instances of clerical confrontation stand out: the religious verdict Mirza Qomi issued against the Russians, the position of the main religious authority during what became known as the Tobacco Protest, the measures undertaken by the *ulama* in the Constitutional Revolution, the oppositional stance of Sayyid Hasan Modarres against the Shah, and the position of the clerical establishment during the 1920 Iraqi Revolution<sup>66</sup> against the British invasion of the country.

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66 In 1920, the British dominated Iraq, and in the summer of that very same year, the Iraqi people revolted against British invaders, first under the command of Ayatullah Sayyid Mohammad Kazem Yazdi, and then under the auspices of Ayatullah Mirza Taqi Shirazi. A large number of eminent scholars and seminary students from the religious establishment in Najaf joined the rebellion. Many revolutionaries were killed during the revolt against the British forces, among them the son of Sayyid Yazdi, while others were imprisoned after they fell victim to a British

Imam Khomeini continued the struggle of the previous generations of religious leaders, and, leading the greatest revolution in contemporary history, managed to overthrow the most powerful regime in the region. The Shah's government, backed by the greatest political power in the world, was toppled and in its place emerged an Islamic state in Iran. Heirs to the Prophets and reformists throughout the history of mankind, it comes as no surprise for the *ulama* to be at the forefront in confrontation.

Yet not all the clergy in Iran felt the same level of concern towards their responsibilities, for reasons which are irrelevant to mention at hand. Some clerics merely expressed their support for Islamic activists but steered themselves from personal involvement in the struggle, while others maintaining a completely neutral stance and refrained from issuing any supportive Or oppositional comments. Furthermore, some clerics oppressed Islamic activists; a number of individuals among this group criticized the Islamic movement when the topic came up while others directed their verbal assault openly regardless of the circumstances.

I find it relevant here to mention the details of an incident which occurred in 1976. A devastating flood had overflowed Quchan that year, so I rushed to take part in relief operations within the city. Despite my humane mission, I was ordered by the governmental authorities to leave the city immediately. I still remember the moment an officer informed me of the decision; I was in the large arcade of the main mosque that had been transformed into a big warehouse where we stored public donations. We had arranged the materials in a highly organized manner, a task rarely accomplished by non-specialists in the domain of relief-aid.

I walked desolately into one of the adjoining rooms where Sheikh Zabihullah and some of his companions were sitting, and said in a voice laden with sorrow: "Orders have been issued for my departure from the city."

They looked at me with sad expressions on their faces, their compassion clearly apparent on their features. One of the two clerics who had ignored me at the courtyard adjoining Imam Ali al-Rida's shrine also happened to be present. As soon as he noticed the group's sympathy, he hurriedly said: "Such people are

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ploy. Ayatullah Sayyid Mohammad Taqi Khansari was among the prisoners. This revolution is considered an important watershed in contemporary Iraqi history.

not here to offer aid; they are corrupt vandals.” Such was the deep grudge some clerics bore against Islamic activists.

## Court of Appeal

Prior to the specified date of my session at the court of appeal, I was required to go through some administrative procedures with reference to the justice department of the army. While I was completing my paperwork one day; I noticed a young officer staring at me intently as if he wished to say something in private. When I approached him, he immediately said: “I want to tell you something.”

“Go ahead.”

“I advise you to refrain from presenting a defense testimony similar to the one you delivered during first trial. If they sense your intelligence and strength of character, they might treat you more harshly. It is in your own interest to appear as a feeble-minded and half-witted individual.” As he seemed to be a well-intentioned officer, I thanked him and moved away, fully aware that I could never make such a pretense in front of judicial officials who held hate towards clerics.

When I entered the courtroom, I noticed that the very same officer was the secretary of court. This time, the judge was a known figure who had previously served as general prosecutor and now assumed the position of chief of court. In rapid succession, he directed a set of questions at me regarding my views on various issues and I promptly answered. When his onslaught came to an end, he turned to his two advisers who sat at either side and jestingly commented: “We should sentence this young man to ten years of prison. This will provide him with ample time to spend in research and writing books!”

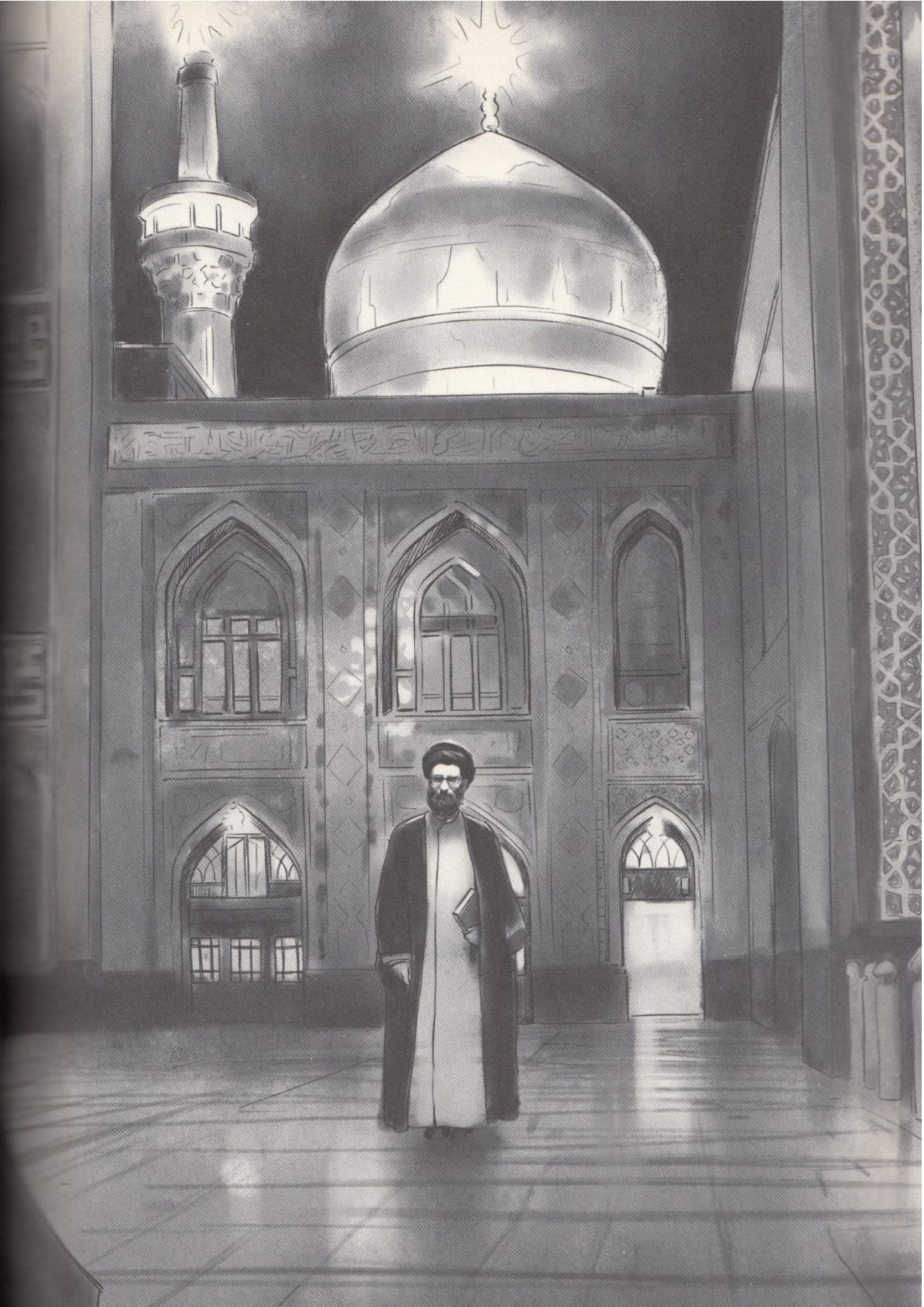
My only response was a line from the Qur’an, mentioned in tribulations: “*We belong to God, and to Him shall we return.*”<sup>67</sup>

Even though the chief of court was being humorous, yet his jest carried an implicit meaning which justified the advice of the officer. To my relief, the final decision was issued. The verdict of the preliminary trial was confirmed. But my days of freedom were not to be long. My fifth imprisonment would coincide with the month of Mehr as well. My fourth imprisonment was on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 1970, and my fifth incarceration was on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1971.

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67 Qur’an 2:156







**PRISON CELL 14**

## The Secret Signal

On a sweltering summer night in 1971, I was plagued with a peculiar feeling of melancholy. I took refuge in God and occupied myself with reading, but the electric current went off. Power outage was a common problem throughout those years. I felt increasingly saddened, and my heart weighed with gloom I contemplated going out of the house, but found myself uninclined to do so, with no lantern readily available at home, I thought: What shall I do in this darkness?

My strain of thoughts was interrupted by a swift knock at the door. I hurried to open it without inquiring after the identity of the visitor, a habitual practice of mine, and was deeply pleased to find a friend from Tehran at such an opportune time. I welcomed him heartily but suddenly noticed his gloomy expression. When I asked him to come inside, he placed his hand in his pocket and removed an object. This was a secret form of non-verbal communication I used with an armed underground group—with whose leader I was in contact—to convey important information. I maintained an interchange of communication with this group, revising the pamphlets and proclamations they issued before public dissemination.

Upon noticing this secret gesture, I murmured: “Before your arrival, I felt rather low-spirited and out of humor. You have come at a most suitable moment and brightened my dark evening.”

To my astonishment, he answered: “Your sorrow will increase.”

Without attaching much significance to this phrase, I asked him to sit down and prepared tea for him before inquiring: “Are you a member of the organization?”

He hastily interrupted me, saying: “Be silent! There might be a covert listening device installed in your house!”

His words took me by surprise, and I answered him cynically: “I am a seminary student. Who would bother to monitor my home?”

“The issue is more sensitive than you think. I will clarify everything for you,” he said, before asking for some pieces of dough which I worriedly fetched. He proceeded to insert the dough into the electrical outlets within the room once he finished I immediately asked: “Tell me what has happened?”

He was silent for a moment before responding. “Everything has been seduced to ruin.”

“What do you mean?”

“Our group has been discovered. All the identities of the brothers have been exposed, and some members have already been arrested.” I understood though, from his discourse, that the two individuals I was in contact with had not been detained yet.

“I have been sent to warn you to remove everything in your house which bears connection to our group,” he continued, pointing out to the pamphlets which I needed to dispose of and those which required to be dispatched to Tehran with someone other than himself. I stared at him grimly, listening to his directions while sorrow hung heavily over my heart. Then he departed, leaving me in such a gloomy state of mind.

## My Confiscated Memoirs

A few months after that mid-summer meeting, and with the advent of autumn, the Shah launched his preparations for elaborate festivities in celebration of the 2,500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Persian Empire. This phase was marked by heightened security measures and increased suppression of Islamic activists.

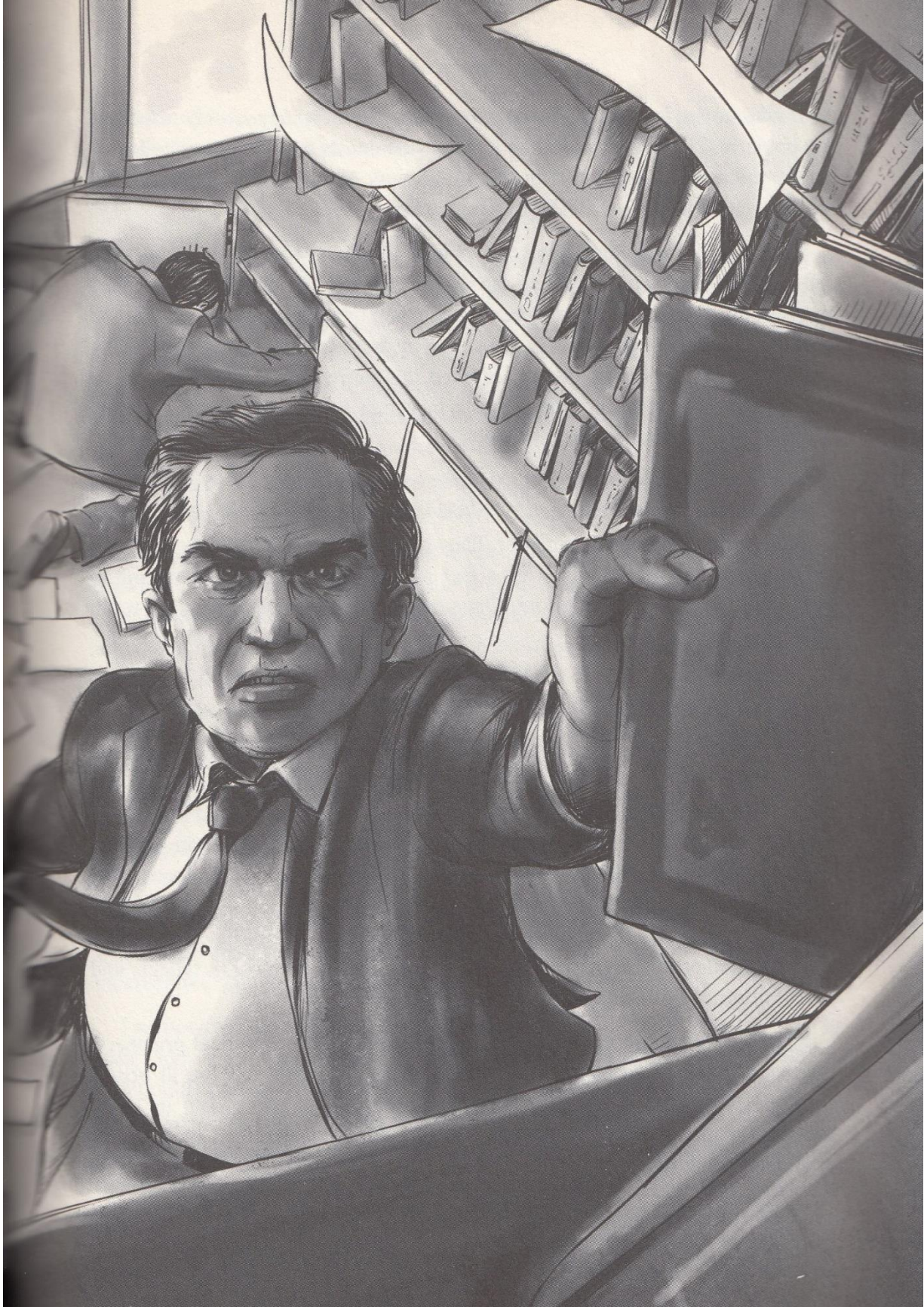
I still recall that a cleric from Qom and his family members were guests at my house. A closed door separated my library and the special guest-chamber in which I sat with my visitor; our dinner laid before us. I heard a knock at the dividing door, and when I rose to open it, I found my wife who promptly informed me: “Agents from the SAVAK are standing at the main entrance of the house.”

“How do you know they are SAVAK operatives?”

She insisted on their identity, articulating her words with the utmost gravity and expressing her absolute certainty. She reiterated her conviction while I remained unconvinced. Gliding silhouettes behind a frosted glass window were not sufficient to specify the true identity of the individuals standing outside.

I headed toward the main door and discovered that they truly were SAVAK agents. They had apparently assumed that I would be in hiding, for they could not conceal their glee upon seeing me. They shoved their way inside the house and proceeded towards the corridor. The first thing which attracted their attention at the end of the hallway was my library; they closely inspected the books and leafed





through their pages while one of the operatives collected all the documents and notes. In this raid, many of my memoirs and written material were lost, never to be retrieved again.

I stood aside, watching them and wishing that they would only inspect my library and refrain from opening the door leading to the guestroom lest they frighten my guest. My hopes were dashed when one of the operatives opened the door, and, once he saw my guest, he sat next to him and began posing numerous questions. The others searched the entire house; I still remember that one of them drew near to the crib in which lay my ten-month old son, Mojtaba, and looked at him pityingly.

The operatives collected a large number of papers and led me to an awaiting car which whisked us to the new SAVAK headquarters. I was taken to a room where I remained alone for an hour. They returned and, covering my eyes, led me to a vehicle with no windows—a fact which I discovered by managing to peek from beneath my blindfold. Once again, I found myself heading to an unknown destination.

## Political Prisoners

The vehicle came to a stop. I was taken out and, my blindfold removed, found myself in a large hall with a very high ceiling and small rooms along the walls. The space seemed like a huge warehouse; I later discovered that it was a section of a very large stable located on the far side of the Mashhad garrison where I had been previously incarcerated. We moved toward a door at the farthest side which led to another large warehouse in which stood a smaller low-ceilinged construction, with ten rows of newly-built cell blocks at either side. Altogether, there were twenty cells along the hallway, with faucets and small toilets at both sides of the establishment.

Mashhad had not previously included a special jail for political prisoners: for that reason, I had been incarcerated during my third and fourth prison sentences at the military prison adjoining the precinct house. But in 1971, a makeshift prison with an independent portal was constructed for military prisoners at the rear part of the garrison.

I was led to cell no. 4, the smallest confinement space I had ever seen in my entire life. It was 1.5 meters by 1.5, with no window nor even a lamp. The cell was submerged in absolute darkness; a faint light crept inside only when the door

was opened or its overhead aperture unlocked by a prison official or guard who wished to address the prisoner.

## High Morale

The autumn temperature was gradually declining as the day neared its end, and I had not been afforded the opportunity to offer my prayers yet. I demanded to perform ablution, and was allowed to venture out of my cell to the corner where the water faucets were installed. As I passed by the other cells, I sensed that some prisoners were sequestered inside and were striving to gain a view of the newcomer by peeking through the door slits. As I moved past one of the cell doors, I heard a quivering voice whisper out his name. I recognized him immediately. He was one of my fellow activists and had just been recently imprisoned though I had not previously received news of his incarceration.

I understood that the prisoners were suffering from low morale, so I decided to resort to a certain course of action. I started speaking to the guards in a loud voice so that the prisoners could hear me and derive strength. I asked the guards: "Where exactly can I perform ablution?" and then inquired: "Which is the right direction of the *Qibla*?" One of the guards answered: "In the direction (of the corner of the cell)." I seized the opportunity to respond in a loud voice: "You are right, the *Qibla* is always in the corner of the cell" in a reference to the constant spiritual attachment of the faithful to the Sacred Mosque of Mecca, situated in a valley devoid of vegetation.

One of the guards ordered: "You must take off your turban according to prison regulations."

I retorted in a high voice, for all prisoners to hear: "I refuse to comply with your rules. I never removed my turban in the previous prisons I was incarcerated in; you can go and ask your chief."

I recited the *adhan*, the Islamic call to prayer, and the word sequences of the *ruku'* and *sujud* in a high voice. After I concluded my prayers, I was plunged in thought and wondered: *Why have they imprisoned me this time?* I was fully aware that there were many reasons to detain me, but which incentive directly bore upon the situation at hand? Which one of my activities had been exposed?

I had conducted many secret meetings, some of them with seminary Students, in which I clarified revolutionary Islamic concepts which formed the intellectual

basis of the revolution, and then handed out the lesson outline for the students to copy. Six seminary students took part in the session once, three students in another session, and one student in a third one, a seminarian from Afghanistan who was later martyred at the hands of the Afghani communis regime which was responsible for executing large numbers of *ulama* from Afghanistan.

I also held secret meetings with university and high school students and assemblies with merchants. Moreover, I conducted work sessions with selected seminarians for the purpose of discussing the current political situation and taking the suitable measures, printing pamphlets that were sent to Qom or receiving leaflets from the city. As I mentioned previously, I was also linked to a clandestine organization which was involved in armed struggle against the regime.

*Had one of these secret gatherings been discovered? Or had I been imprisoned on account of the public lessons I had delivered on Qur'anic exegesis and Islamic concepts?* I was mostly worried about my secret sessions as they were an indefensible offence as far as the security authorities were concerned. I implored God to forgive me for overburdening my mind with such thoughts, and I sought refuge in Him. My gaze wandered around the room, and my memories drifted back to the previous prisons I had been incarcerated in. Strangely, I felt as if I had grown accustomed to imprisonment.

But I was yet to discover the difference between this prison and all the previous detainment centers I had been placed in.

## No Eyeglasses Allowed

After a while, one of the guards returned and told me to pack all my belongings. He led me to cell no.14 on the opposite side of the hallway—a cell slightly larger than the previous one but more enveloped in darkness to the extent that I was unable to see the rosary I held in my hand. On the following day: I learned the basic daily prison routine; the door of the cell was opened three times a day for meal provision, and then another fourth time in which the prisoner would be given a broom to clean up his cell.

The morning hours passed languidly. After dinner, I called the guard and asked him: “I have some money, Could you buy me a watermelon?” He agreed and appeared after a short period of time, carrying a watermelon. He fetched a knife at my request, even though prison regulations forbade guards from entering

prisoners' cells with sharp edged objects for fear that the inmate would stealthily grab the utensil and attack the guard. But this guard was akin to most guards I had encountered in the previous prisons who never even harbored a thought that a prisoner like myself would be capable of such an assault.

He left the cell door ajar and occupied himself with cutting the watermelon when a SAVAK agent passed by and noticed the scene. The operative expressed his extreme annoyance and harshly reprimanded the guard for his misconduct, warning him about the risks his negligence entailed. He then ordered the guard to confiscate my eyeglasses; the latter promptly obeyed and departed, closing the cell door in his wake.

During the short time when the cell door was open, I noticed unusual movement in the prison hallway and saw men scuttling back and forth. Even after my door was closed, I could hear the sounds of other cell doors being opened and then slammed shut. Suddenly, I heard the anguished screams of a man being subjected to brutal torture. A few moments later, I heard the sound of someone being shuffled to his cell, moaning heart-wrenchingly with every movement. I strove to catch a glimpse of the man through the tiny cracks in the door, and was able to identify him. The SAVAK henchmen dragged the sheikh, whose beard had been shaven, across the floor, his senseless body limp and incapable of walking after he had been so savagely tortured.

## Systematic Torture

Moments later, someone opened my cell door. "Khamenei?" he asked. "Follow me."

He led me to a side room in the aforementioned warehouse where I suddenly found myself in the presence of six or seven persons. I could not discern their features as I had not been wearing my glasses, but I could sense an imminent, looming danger. In my usual manner under such circumstances, I vehemently protested: "Why have you taken my glasses?! I can't see without my spectacles."

While I was objecting, one of the men drew near which enabled me to recognize him.<sup>68</sup> He had interrogated me in the previous prison and prepared a report against me which was presented to the military court. I had made an

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68 He was killed before the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

allusion to him in court without mentioning his name explicitly and declared that the person who had prepared the report must have been a fool. This had clearly antagonized him as he angrily approached me and said in a mocking tone: "Do you think you can speak as you wish at this court?"

He proceeded to mimic my voice derisively, and then suddenly the first blow fell on my face. I tried to maintain control, but the second blow caused me to founder. I lurched forward, landing on a bed in the corner of the room. I tried to rise but one of the men shouted: "Stay exactly where you are. You've fallen on the right spot."

I realized that I had collapsed on a bed reserved for torturing prisoners. The agents proceeded to fasten my feet to the bed while one of the men reached for one of the lashes hanging on the wall. He struck several successive blows on the soles of my feet, and dealt his strikes until he became tired. He then handed the whip to his colleague who did the same and then passed on the whip to the third assailant. Each of the men had the time to rest but I was constantly beaten with no respite. In such adverse circumstances, I could not help but marvel at their sadism. As SAVAK operatives, their work involved the infliction of torture on prisoners; constant beating of captives until the point of collapse was a part of their job. But some of the SAVAK agents displayed peculiar cruelty; they would grab the handle of the whip with one hand and use the other to pull the strap straight behind their backs before directing their blows in order to make the lashes more painful.

Throughout the thrashing, one of the men would stand near my head and order me to denounce a certain figure or the Islamic movement. Faced with my refusal, the blows would continue to descend until I finally lost consciousness.

Through this agonizing experience, I reached the conclusion that foot whipping is one of the most severe forms of torture. The lashing may continue for hours before the victim loses consciousness, and the procedure has a grave effect on the nerve system. I learned that the SAVAK torturers had undergone special training courses in torture methods under the supervision of Israeli instructors, and thus became professionals in their work and adept at forcing confessions out of their victims.

Prior to experiencing outright physical torture, my fellow activists and I had regularly discussed the methods of torture and considered ways to counteract such techniques. We even brought up the issue of hunger strikes which drove me

to comment: “If I decide to go on a hunger strike, it would not last for long nor will it achieve its intended purpose. Constant abstinence from food would make me ill due to my sensitive stomach, entailing my urgent transportation from prison to hospital. Nor would my endurance of torture stretch for a long period of time because I don’t have a strong physical build. I would lose consciousness within a short space of time.” One of the friends who was in that meeting gestured with his hand, imitating a glass of water being splashed over my face which would cause me to regain consciousness.

In my first experience of physical torture, I found what he implied to be true. I drifted into the blissful realm of unconsciousness but was awoken when one of the torturers poured a glass of water over my face and splashed the remaining water in the glass on my feet to render the upcoming blows all the more painful.

### **My Beloved Cell**

Everything comes to an end and withers away—be it torture, adversity, or pleasure. My first session of torture drew to a close and my feet were untied. I tried to stand up, my feet swollen, my legs tottering, but was unable to walk. Excruciating pain racked through my entire body.

One of the operatives said: “Return to your cell. We shall repeatedly drag you here until you confess.”

When I finally entered my cell, I felt a strange sense of comfort, and a feeling of security and reassurance. The four walls of prison cell and the door which closed behind me served in creating an atmosphere of inner tranquility after the brutal torture to which I was subjected. I thanked God who had turned this cell—a place of loneliness and desolation—into a location of calm and serenity. I sat on the ground, grateful for the opportunity to stretch my legs without expecting a series of lashes and to lean my head against the wall without hearing insults.

SAVAK agents were known to resort to various methods for the purpose of extracting information from their victims. For instance, they would hand the prisoner a few blank sheets of paper and order him to record his confessions in question-and-answer form. They would stand nearby throughout the entire time, relentlessly pressuring their victim to write. If the prisoner inquired unwittingly as to what he should write, they would strike him repeatedly and reiterate: “Write, write, write!” On some occasions, the prisoner would Write two pages, perhaps

three, but the interrogator would look at the sheets Derisively, tear them to pieces, and then shout: "This is of no use. You have to write more."

I cannot fully discuss the various torture techniques employed by the SAVAK: they exceed the power of speech. I also find that there is no need to relate these details as it would prove painful to the listeners. Therefore I prefer to pass over these disturbing experiences and reminisce on another memory for your personal enjoyment which carries an inherent moral worth contemplating.

### **From Jailer to Jailed**

Five or six months following the victory of the Islamic Revolution, I traveled on a special mission from Tehran to my hometown of Mashhad. At that time, I was a member of the Revolutionary Command Council and a representative of the aforementioned board in the Ministry of Defense. I was also the personal representative of Imam Khomeini in many government departments. After years of injustice, persecution and suppression, God had ordained my return to Mashhad, reveling in the glory which He had granted to Islam and Muslims and the honor He had conferred upon the Mujahedin in His path.

The authorities of Mashhad had formally sent me a request to visit the Central Revolutionary Committee in the city. During those early days, the revolutionary committees had undertaken the task of administrating most governmental affairs in Iranian cities. The revolutionaries had taken over the building formerly belonging to the Rastakhiz Party, a sprawling multi-storied and opulent edifice previously constructed to house the headquarters of the Shah's political organization. The revolutionaries used the establishment as an operation base, and, after the victory of the Revolution, transformed it into the central headquarters for the Central Revolutionary Committee in Mashhad.

After my arrival, I was informed that the dangerous inmates were incarcerated on the top floor of the building. As I listened to their names, I realized that I knew most of them. Among those arrested was an operative who had tortured me in the fifth prison I entered. He was called Borumand at times, at others Baba'i; I did not know which was his real name. When I heard the news of his arrest, I immediately uttered the phrase: "Praise be to God, there is no might nor power except through God."

Together with Sheikh Tabasi-the head of the Central Revolutionary Committee, Imam Khomeini's representative at the Shrine of Imam Reza, and

the governor of Mashhad, I headed to inspect the place. It is worth noting that Sheikh Tabasi had also been one of my fellow prisoners at the aforementioned prison and had personally suffered torture.

We proceeded toward the top floor and entered the large rooms in which the arrested individuals were sitting. I noticed that the rooms included large windows with unbolted iron locks. I believed this represented a prospective risk as the prisoners with suicidal urges might feel inclined to throw themselves to the street below, but apparently, the members of the Central Revolutionary Committee understood that such individuals coveted life more than anything else and would never jeopardize themselves.

The door to another large room was opened and I recognized some of the prisoners within. After the customary greeting, I advised the inmates to cooperate with the revolutionaries and reveal all the information in their possession. Taking into consideration the collapse of the Shah's regime and the victory of the Islamic Revolution, there was no point in hoping for the reinstatement of the former rule.

In the corner of the room, I spotted Baba'i, my former torturer, performing prayer. To ascertain his identity, I asked the other prisoners if it was really him. When they answered in the affirmative, I murmured: "How strange, I have so many memories of him."

All eyes turned toward him, but he continued his prayers—one *rak'a* after another—without even stopping. He had clearly preoccupied himself with false prayers to avoid a confrontation with me. I retired to another room to inspect the arrested individuals therein, but I decided to return to the former room. Upon seeing me again, Baba'i, who had terminated his pretense, became panic-stricken. He implored me beseechingly and swore that he had merely been a deceived and beguiled young man.

I stood there listening to him and after he terminated his stream of solemn oaths, I reminded him: "Do you remember how you treated me in prison? I will only remind you of one instance. Do you recall how you once grabbed me by my beard in that torture room, and hurled me to the ground? You then proceeded to pull me up by my beard while uttering verbal abuse and then threw me to the ground, with force, then frequently repeated the process."

He admitted that he had committed all I had mentioned, and upon hearing this those accompanying me were infuriated. If I had not calmed them down, they would have assailed him immediately.

“I could save your life, and you do know that I have the authority to do issue such a decision,” I continued. “But under one condition. Where is the Chief hiding?”

The chief I was referring to was one of the most wanted SAVAK henchmen in Iran. He had established the SAVAK as a security organization in Mashhad and remained closely associated with the force since its inception until its ultimate dissolution. Despite the fact that chiefs of SAVAK were generally changed, this man had remained in his position and possessed all valuable information regarding what went on in Mashhad and the entire province of Khorasan. I perceived that Baba’i knew the hiding place of his chief and had remained in contact with him during the Islamic Revolution as the operatives of SAVAK were closely linked to one another, but he insisted on his ignorance on the matter and surmised that his chief had fled from Iran.

Baba’i was placed on trial at a later date, found guilty of multiple crimes, and executed. Each of his crimes would have been sufficient to necessitate a death sentence. His chief, the SAVAK prison commander, was apprehended after years of hiding and was taken into custody.

Many memories come to my mind regarding Baba’i’s insolence during my fifth incarceration. The day after the initial brutal torture I suffered, Baba’i entered my cell and sat down next to me on the ground even though it was forbidden for prison guards and SAVAK agents to sit down in the cells. In a most respectable manner, he asked: “How are you, our venerable Sayyid? I hope you find the prison to your liking. I want to advise you for your personal welfare. Confess the information you have and provide frank answers to the questions directed to you. If you don’t, the operatives might—God forbid—treat you in a manner unbecoming to your eminent status and character.”

With such a tone full of affectation, spoke the man who had inflicted upon me physical and psychological torture just the day before. I expressed my mirth with a laugh, and refrained from answering him. Rising to his feet, he left my cell.

## **How I Obtained a Copy of the Qur’an**

I was arrested in late Rajab or early Sha‘ban, and the holy month of Ramadan was swiftly approaching. A few days before Ramadan, I heard the familiar tread of the chief interrogator in the hallway outside. When the sound of his footsteps

drew near, I called out to him. He opened the door of my cell and asked: “How are you Sheikh?” He refused to call me Sayyid as custom dictated, and deliberately altered the pronunciation of sheikh, stressing the word in a derogatory manner.

“The holy month of Ramadan is approaching, and I am incapable of performing my religious obligations adequately in this cell. Considering discharging me during this month.” I was fully aware that he would never secure my discharge from prison, but I had asked for an unattainable request in order to pave the way for a more obtainable one.

“Oh, I see, the advent of Ramadan is near,” he answered despicably. “This is the best place for fasting. This is a mosque,” he said pointing to the cell, “and this is a restroom,” he continued, pointing in the direction of toilets. “Remain here. You are free to pray and fast.”

I immediately replied: “Well then, may I be granted permission to obtain a copy of the Qur’an?”

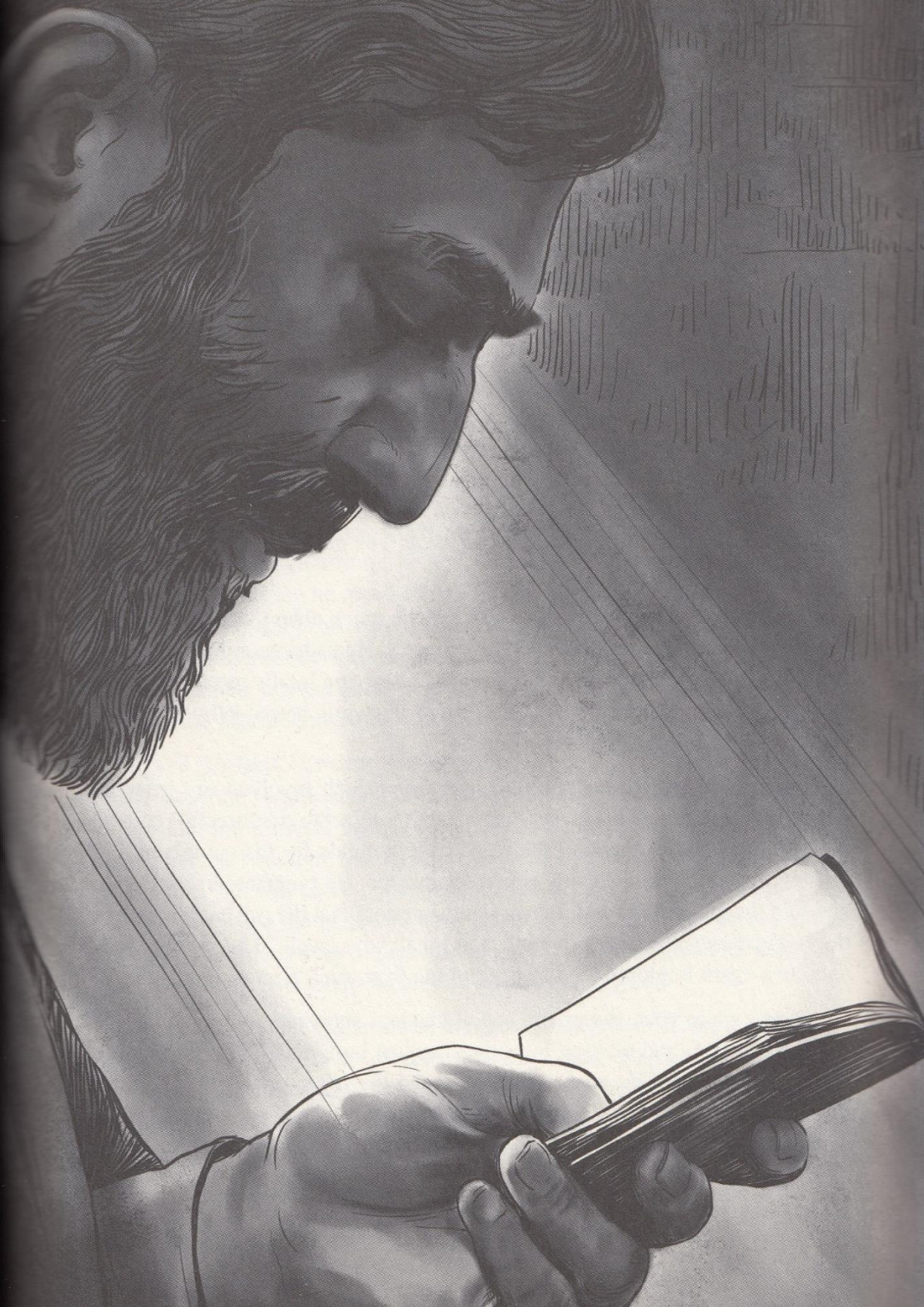
“That is possible.”

I received a copy of the Qur’an which was brought from my home, but reading proved to be impossible in the pitch-black darkness of the cell. I asked the guard if it were possible to open the door of my cell to facilitate my Qur’anic recitation; he retreated to ask for authorization and when he returned, he left the door slightly ajar. This crack admitted sufficient light which enabled me to recite the Qur’an extensively throughout the month of Ramadan and memorize many verses. But torture, coupled with reading in the darkness and abstinence from food for religious purposes, had a detrimental effect on my eyesight.

## The Envious Cleric

In this prison, I once again faced the strict policy of mandatory facial hair removal. Muslim men grow beards in adherence to an established religious tradition, but to the *ulama* in particular, growing beards is an indispensable part of their religious appearance. Inmate grooming standards which required a completely shaven face in the first prison were, to me, catastrophic. I fortunately did not face such a compulsory requirement in the other prisons I was incarcerated in, and Mashhad prisons generally did not have such a rule. But when I saw a





cleric with a shaved beard in this prison, I realized beforehand the fate which would befall me.

A certain day of the week was specified for shaving. On that day, I could hear the sounds of prisoners shuffling out of their cells one after another and heading to the shaving room. Thoughts swerved through my mind. *What should I do? Must I submit or resist?* In the end, I entreated God to alleviate my distress.

When it was my turn, the door of my cell was opened. The superintendent of the prison peered inside, and once he saw me, he said: "No, you can stay," and shut the door behind him. I had not expected this so I expressed my gratitude to God. This incident was repeated over the course of the following weeks, and every single time I was the only prisoner exempted from compulsory beard shaving.

It is relevant to note here that imprisonment, devoid of diligent self-purification, does not improve the character of the prisoner. Confinement, like other life experiences, might serve in enforcing the inner strength, determination and character development of certain individuals but might not produce a positive nor a negative effect on others. For the latter, incarceration might actually result in spiritual deterioration. The matter is wholly related to one's aims and ideals.

In one of the cells of this prison was a cleric much older than me, who was stricken with a most negative trait: severe envy. He had somehow discovered that I had been exempted from shaving, as I heard him loudly protesting when the door of his cell was opened: "I refuse to shave my beard! Why don't you shave the beard of the prisoner in cell 14?"

I was greatly distressed by his suggestion which involved my personal injury as a consequence. He had every right to object to the forceful removal of facial hair and to mention the reasonable grounds for his complaint, but he had no right to provoke any action against me. He reiterated his objection and told the guard: "Go and inform your superiors that the prisoner in cell 14 doesn't undergo mandatory shaving, and I shall not as well." I became anxious and once again implored God to exempt me from such a procedure.

A short while later, the prison superintendent appeared, and, opening the cleric's cell door and uttering invectives against him, pulled him by force to the shaving room. The guards then removed the other prisoners, one after the other, and subjected them to mandatory shaving. In view of the cleric's conduct, I did not expect to be exempted from facial hair removal this time, but the guards did

not stop at my cell and continued on to the neighboring cell. I was greatly relieved and thanked God for His benevolence.

## **My Seminary Students Tortured**

One of my most painful memories in this prison was witnessing my own seminary students being tortured. Ten turbaned clerics, most of them previous students of mine, were incarcerated at this prison in addition to a number of my university pupils. The elite individuals among them, with whom I had participated in secret sessions, were brutally tortured.

One of them was Sayyid Abbas Mousavi Quchani who was later martyred during the imposed war on Iran. Sayyid Quchani was detained in cell no.15, while another cleric was kept in cell no 13. The two had been arrested for distributing anti-regime pamphlets while I had been arrested for a charge completely unrelated to theirs.

The cleric in cell 13 had confessed under torture that he had received the leaflets from Sayyid Abbas Quchani. He was not to blame for confessing after suffering savage torture; he was severely whipped on the soles of his feet and the thrashing he received had carved a hole in one of his feet which perhaps remains until this very day. Sayyid Quchani, on the other hand, was obliged to preserve the secrets he knew because his confession would have had detrimental consequences and endangered certain individuals at high levels in the Islamic movement. Sayyid Quchani had no choice but to resist.

Sayyid Quchani, however, was subjected to more savage torture. He would return from the torture chamber, heart-wrenchingly moaning in agony. The torture that the SAVAK agents inflicted upon him was unparalleled in the prison. On one occasion, he was returned to his cell for an hour's respite from the brutality but was taken once again for torture. This was repeated again at late evening when the prisoners were about to sleep, and then once more at midnight. I heard his cries of pain during the day and throughout the night, my heart wrenching with every moan that drifted into my cell.

My recitation of the Qur'an was a source of consolation for Sayyid Quchani, every time he returned to his cell from the torture chamber, he listened to the Qur'anic verses which I carefully selected and recited in a loud voice to provide him with spiritual comfort and strengthen his resolve. Sometimes, I spoke to him

in Arabic by employing the same rhythmic tones of the Qur'anic recitation, and enjoined him to be patient and maintain his perseverance in the path of truth.

The prison authorities later decided to move Sayyid Quchani away from the other cleric's cell, so they transferred him to the cell blocks opposite to us. There, he was completely isolated with no one to offer him solace, so he attempted to approach me and listen to my voice on numerous occasions. Resorting to special measures.

Sayyid Quchani's leg was injured due to torture and he lost the ability to walk. Therefore, in order to go to the toilet, he was compelled to crawl on his backside. There were two lavatories in the prison; one near my cell and the other near his. Sayyid Quchani decided to come up with a pretext to pass by my cell.

"As you see, my leg is injured and I cannot use this lavatory," he told the guard on duty one day, pointing to the toilet near his cell. "I must use the other one."

The guards were usually ordinary soldiers who sympathized with the prisoners, especially those suffering from wounds. I once witnessed how a guard carried Sayyid Quchani on his back towards the toilets. Thus, it was not strange to hear the guard grant him permission to use the toilet near my cell. When Sayyid Quchani emerged from the toilet, he told the guard that he wanted to perform *tayammum*<sup>69</sup> as he could not perform the standard ablution with water due to his wounds, and requested that he be allowed to perform the procedure in the empty space in front of my cell. He was, once again, allowed permission.

He approached my cell and started performing *tayammum*, all the while uttering sentences in Arabic in a tone similar to that used during supplication recitations. Any person ignorant of the Arabic language would have supposed that Sayyid Quchani was merely reciting an invocation to God.

"Sayyid, salam!" he commenced in a rhythmical tone. "You can't imagine the suffering I am going through. If I die in such conditions, will I be considered a martyr in the sight of God?"

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69 Islamic dry purification by sand, dust or stone when there is no water to perform the ablutions of *wudu* or *ghusl*. If water is available, but barely enough for drinking, or due an illness or fear of contracting a disease, *tayammum* becomes permissible.

After finishing his dry ablution, he stretched his legs on the ground but the guard ordered him to swiftly move on. When he replied that he was in dire need of a rest, the guard allowed him to remain seated on the floor for a while. I seized the opportunity to answer his question in a similar lyrical manner in Arabic. “My most respectful Sayyid, be patient until these villains abandon all hope. Don’t confess to anything, and God will certainly save you.”

He seemed to be reassured and returned to his cell, and was to repeat this scheme numerous times.

## **2500 Years of Imperial Power**

My imprisonment coincided with the formal celebration of the 2500-year anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire. The Shah spent millions of dollars on this lavish festivity which was marked by unimaginable extravagance. The celebrations represented a major challenge for Islamic activists, and caused emotional pain to all individuals concerned with the welfare of the Iranian people and their struggle to provide daily sustenance. Millions of Iranians at the time were deprived of their most basic needs such as access to clean water, electricity, health services, educational facilities, and paved roads.

Through these celebrations, the Shah intended to sever the ties between Iranian history and Islam, and to confer glory and magnificence upon pre-Islamic Iran. The implicit message was signifying that Islam had put an end to the golden age of Persia. This misconception was publicly propagated by writers affiliated with the royal court, and was explicitly stated in history textbooks taught at Iranian schools throughout the country. The Shah wished to emphasize an Iranian culture wholly unrelated to Islam and firmly rooted in the ancient Achaemenid civilization.

Prior to the festivities, and in a procedure marked by a significant implication, the Shah changed the Iranian Solar Hijri calendar—dated from the Prophet’s migration to Medina—to the Shahanshahi chronological timetable. Suddenly, the year 1350 according to the Solar Hijri calendar became 2550 according to the new system.

Ironically, many official delegations from Arab countries participated in these festivities and congratulated the Shah for the insult he directed at Islam, the Muslim conquest of Persia, and everything linking Iran to Arab history and the Arab World. Islamic activists exerted every effort to reveal the true nature of

these celebrations and expose the large amounts of money which were extravagantly spent on organizing those festivities. These activists displayed resistance against the change in the Islamic calendar until the Shah was compelled to formally revoke the new calendar a few months before the victory of the Islamic revolution.

Despite all the Shah's measures, Muslims in Iran confronted the ethnic discrimination propagated by the Shah which aimed at detaching Iran from the Islamic World until, with God's permission, the Revolution triumphed and the Iranian people re-joined the Islamic Umma. Since its early days, the Revolution aimed to remove all obstacles which separated Iranians from their Arab brothers, but how did the leaders of Arab countries respond? That requires a long discussion which I will not elaborate on further.

The clamor of those festivities drifted into our prison cells. The prisoners, despite the atmosphere of terror prevailing over the prison, declared their indignation and objection, reciting the following poetic verses.

*Night of dreariness, of evil, of Satanic gloom,  
Insolence has rejoiced in the looming doom.*



**THE CRYPTOGRAPH**

## Congregational Prayer

I was imprisoned for a sixth time in 1975, during a period in which I had become more actively involved in social life in Mashhad. After assuming leadership of worshippers in congregational prayer, I forged extensive social ties with a variety of individuals.

I first led the faithful in prayer at Imam Hasan Mosque, a small mosque located in a narrow back street, but I subsequently transferred to Karamat Mosque. The latter was a large mosque constructed in a strategic location near the religious center of the city which incorporated the shrine of Imam Reza and a number of seminaries. It was a short distance away from the modern quarters of the city where the University of Mashhad and some cinemas stood, and in close proximity to the bazaar. In a word, the mosque became a focal point for social groupings which had traditionally diverged in opinion: seminary students, merchants, and university students.

As the activities in this mosque developed and expanded, the governmental authorities were irked and prevented me from leading the worshippers in prayer. Three months after this ban, I returned to lead prayers in Imam Hasan Mosque which, due to its small size and remote location, was not a focus of attention for the security apparatus. As soon as I started leading prayers at the mosque, large numbers of students and merchants flocked to attend until the custodians of the mosque were obliged to construct additional space. Thus, the small Imam Hasan Mosque became larger than Karamat Mosque.

In order not to arouse the suspicions of the local authorities, I only led prayers on Saturday evenings and delivered a lesson on *Nahj-al-Balagha* which was attended by large gatherings. My home became a hub for different segments of society who came to ask questions, make suggestions and engage in various discussions. I warmly welcomed all of my guests who not only hailed from Mashhad but from various cities in Iran and sometimes remained at my house until midnight.

## Public Invitations

I received numerous invitations to deliver sermons in cities throughout the country, including the capital Tehran. I accepted some of them but was obliged to turn down some others due to time constraints. One of the invitations I accepted was from Sheikh Mufatteh who requested that I deliver a sermon on the occasion

of the demise of Imam al-Sadeq (as). After my return from Tehran, Sheikh Mufatteh was arrested, a matter which I had expected.

Despite my busy schedule, marked by constant reception of guests and responses to various invitations, I gave two daily lectures at the seminary, one on Islamic jurisprudence and the other on principles of jurisprudence. I had commenced these lessons in 1964, the year I returned from Qom to Mashhad.

I responded to invitations from Hamadan and Kerman, and was on the verge of traveling to Arak to deliver a sermon when I was taken into custody as I will discuss later.

## Journey to Mazandaran

One day in the Persian month of Azar<sup>70</sup>, as the temperature was decreasing and the air was turning considerably cooler, I experienced an overwhelming exhaustion and felt inclined to take a period of rest. I suggested traveling for a few days, but my wife did not agree. I reiterated my desire during the following days until she finally acquiesced. Therefore, we agreed to travel to the province of Mazandaran in northern Iran.

At the time, we had three sons: Mostafa, the eldest, was already enrolled at school while his younger brothers had not yet reached the required age for formal education. Thus, we commended Mostafa to his grandmother's care. I invited my wife's uncle, a tradesman and a close friend upon whom I relied in times of hardship and dire need, to accompany us on our trip. With his wife and children, we set off to Mazandaran where we stayed for three days before returning at my insistence to Mashhad prior to Saturday night in order to arrive on time for congregational prayer and the regular sermon.

But [as we shall see later] before I could have the opportunity to go to the mosque, the SAVAK agents would raid my home and take me to prison.

While at Sari, the center of Mazandaran Province, I headed one evening to the main mosque in the city, accompanying my little son, Mojtaba. I sat in one of the porticoes, awaiting the time for prayer, when a young man approached me, intently scrutinized my features, offered a brief greeting, and then sat nearby without uttering a single word. Moments passed before another man arrived and sat next to the first unknown individual, and was followed by a third and a fourth.

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70 Ninth month of Iranian Solar Hijra Calendar, from 22<sup>nd</sup> November to 21<sup>st</sup> December.

Before twilight set in, twenty men had already gathered. I felt apprehensive, and decided not to address any of them lest they be SAVAK agents.

One of them, however, chose to break the silence and asked: “Are you Sayyid Ali Khamenei?”

“Yes, I am,” I answered. “Can you lead us in prayer?”

“There are multiple congregational prayers being held throughout the arcades of the mosque. Why don’t you join one of them?”

“We have no full confidence in the current imams,” they replied, reflecting the view maintained by all religious young men in Iran who supported revolutionary, self-sacrificing *ulama* known for their valiant opposition to the regime and denounced clerics who did not proceed in this direction, even if they held a favorable attitude towards the Islamic movement. Revolutionary youth were not satisfied with mere expression of empathy on the part of the clergy but demanded diligent action and sacrifice.

“Then what do you do every evening?” I inquired.

They clarified that they offered their prayers behind a certain cleric—a friend of mine—who had gone to Tehran and insisted that I lead them in prayer. I complied with their request, and led them in prayer while more individuals joined the prayer rows. After prayer, I offered a detailed interpretation of *Surat al-Fatiha*, dividing its concept into parts. I stood up, bidding them farewell, but they insisted that I stay with them for a few more days. “Our sheikh is in Tehran, and we have no one to lead us in prayer or offer religious guidance.”

“I have to travel home in time for the Saturday evening session.”

“If only our sheikh would treat us in the same way you care for the worshippers at the mosque you attend,” they complained. “He frequently travels to Tehran to attend to certain affairs, but leaves us without a mentor.”

During this trip to northern Iran, I sought a bookstore in the city of Shahi, low known as Qa’emshahr, and took my son along. While leafing through the pages of a book, a young man approached me and asked: “Are you Sayyid Khamenei?” I suspected him to be a SAVAK agent, but after we engaged in conversation I was reassured of his intents.

## Back to Mashhad

While walking along the Caspian Sea, we encountered some fishermen who kindly offered us the fish they had caught. I insisted to pay the price but they vehemently refused because Iranian fishermen consider Sayyids to be harbingers of fortune.

We reached Mashhad late at Friday night. The following morning, my wife went to her mother's house to see Mostafa while I joined them at noontime for lunch before returning home alone to prepare for the evening sermon.

According to Shi'i jurisprudence, a complete surah must be recited *after Surat al-Fatiha* in prayer. Imams usually chose to recite short surahs such as *al-Ikhlās* or *al-Qadr*, but I made a point during congregational prayers to recite a surah from the 30<sup>th</sup> *juz'* of the Qur'an after reciting *Surat al-Fatiha*. The surahs contained revolutionary messages, carefully chosen to strengthen people's beliefs and solidify their religious qualities. On that evening, I was reiterating the verses of *Surat al-Mutaffifin* in preparation for recitation in congregational prayer when the doorbell rang.

## Arrested Again

I opened the door to find the familiar faces I had become accustomed to during every raid on my home. They swooped inside without bothering to ask for permission and strode directly toward the library where I kept all my books, notes, and pamphlets. They proceeded to collect anything they thought would serve as an incrimination against me. During those moments, the call to prayer drifted inside my home. It was my custom to be present at the mosque prior to the *adhan*, to greet the worshippers and exchange pleasantries with them. I had to confront the assailants and make my will be known.

"It is prayer time and I have to be at the mosque to lead the worshippers. If I am late, you should brace yourselves for potential repercussions."

"Don't worry about us, Sayyid," one of them answered coldly.

While they were searching the library, one of my wife's brothers came to check why I was late after he noticed how delayed I was in reaching the Mosque. My curt reply of "I can't come to the mosque this evening" was enough for him to understand what was going on.

I no longer remember whether they blindfolded me or not. I was led to a car which drove to the same prison in which I had been detained in 1971; the prison with the small, dark cells with merely narrow beams of light penetrating the cracks in the wall. I was placed in one of those cells, but was not divested of my turban and outer garments as was the custom. I sat on the floor and pored over the memories of the previous days, lingering especially on my insistence to return to Mashhad on time for the sermon. The request of the young men from Mazandaran echoed in my memory, and I found myself regretting why I had not accepted their invitation and stayed with them for a number of days.

The following morning, one of the agents came to my cell door and issued a terse order: "Pack everything you have." I presumed that they intended to set me free for it was pointless to order a prisoner to gather his belongings after the first day of imprisonment. I was escorted to a car and taken to the train station. I realized that I was to be deported from Mashhad, but I pondered why it had to be by train? Were the agents so miserly as to refrain from buying airplane tickets? I was transferred into the custody of two police officers who were waiting for me at the station in civilian clothes. I recognized one of them. A man who lived in our vicinity and whom I had suspected was in connection with the security apparatus.

We boarded the second-class passenger compartment of a train heading to Tehran. We were not alone. Three passengers sat within while the two agents strove their best to deceive them into thinking we were ordinary passengers and refrained from acting in any way which indicated I was under custody. Due to the fact that the general people expressed their complaints to the clergy on the state of affairs in the country, I feared that the three passengers might strike up a conversation with me and unheedingly speak of political issues, thus falling into a precarious situation. Ignoring the two operatives, I decided to tell the three passengers the truth.

I uttered my sentence calmly and with a smile: "These two men are officers who have been entrusted with the task of transferring me to the SAVAK headquarters in Tehran." My words had a deep effect on the passengers. All throughout the trip to Tehran, they gazed at me sympathetically. I could notice the silent anger blazing in their eyes, mingled with sympathy.

The train pulled into the Tehran railway station early in the morning. After we disembarked, the two agents led me to a police kiosk where they whisper the

details of their mission to the officers sitting within before proceeding to conduct a telephone call. A short while later, a few agents arrived and asked me to accompany them. They pushed me into a car and blindfolded me, treating me with harshness. The car sped through the streets of Tehran, and whenever we encountered heavy traffic, the agents roared: "Lean your head on the back of the front seat!"

## The Joint Security Committee

The car finally stopped, though I did not know where. I was ordered to dismount and was led away. Once my blindfold was removed, I found myself in a room where a few SAVAK agents were standing and, with them, the two police officers who had escorted me to Tehran. They: conversed with each other in hushed tones before one of them said: "Remove your clothes."

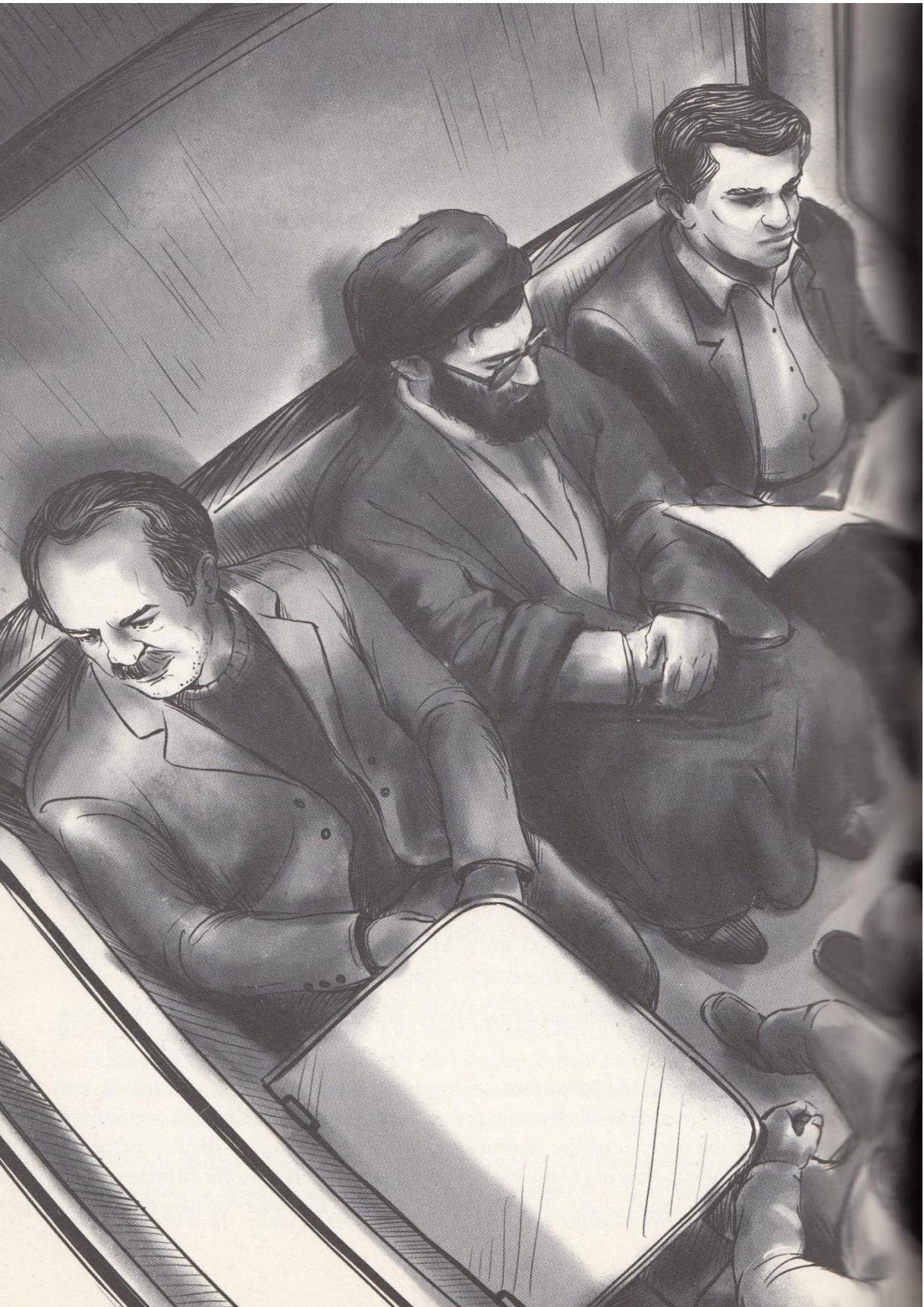
I removed my turban and clerical garb and remained in my pants and undershirt before being handed a prison uniform consisting of a shirt and pair of trousers. Once I donned the uniform, I noticed the two men who had escorted me staring with sad expressions on their faces. I met their gazes with a smile. It seems they had never expected to see me in such a miserable situation.

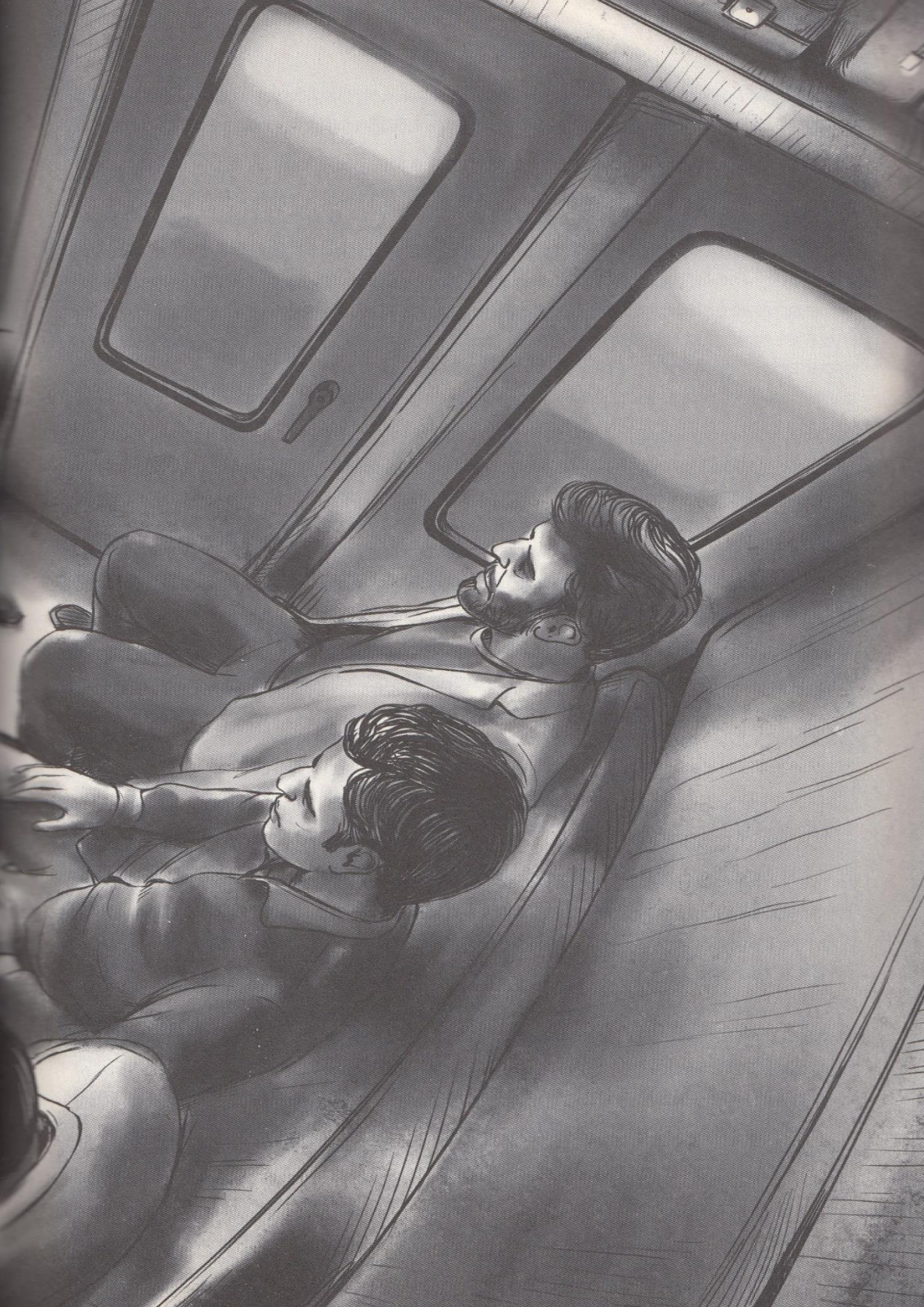
Once again, the operatives ordered me to remove my shirt but this time to pull it over my eyes. I was led out of the room, still unaware of the place of my confinement. I heard the sound of chains clanging on a gate and sensed that I was being led into a large space. The guards opened a door and shoved me inside before barring it shut. Once inside, I pulled the shirt from my face to find myself in a dimly lit room facing another prisoner, his joy evident on his features. "What's your name?" he hurriedly asked me.

"Ali Khamenei." He was stunned. "Are you truly Ali Khamenei?" he repeatedly inquired before enveloping me in an embrace and showering me with kisses.

"I've been imprisoned for twenty days, and all throughout this period I was alone."

I responded to his affections in kind but remained wary of him. It was necessary to maintain alertness in political prisons. Some inmates were secret agents in the service of the regime, specifically installed to display affection and all the while striving to derive covert information from unheeded prisoners who





let down their guard. We remained confined together for two months, in which I discovered that he was not an Islamic activist, before he was removed to another cell or altogether transferred to a different prison.

This prison was known as The Committee and had been recently established as a joint facility for the SAVAK, the police and the internal security forces. It had been founded in the wake of numerous incidents which revealed sharp discord between the three forces, all of whom rivaled for the Shah's favor, especially the SAVAK and the police. The SAVAK and the police department were primarily integrated into a unified committee and were soon joined by the internal security forces who were responsible for suppressing revolutionary activities carried out outside urban areas by active groups entrenched in forests.

The days of my confinement dragged by with a heavy monotony, unfathomable by anyone who has not suffered solitary confinement. A single day spent in isolation equals a month in a public prison. I may honestly claim that the eight months I spent in that small, dark cell are tantamount to eight years spent in a public penitentiary. This makes it all the more significant to mention that Mohammad Ali Raja'i spent 28 months in segregation inside one of the cells of this dreadful prison.

My cell's height was 2.4 meters and its width was 1.6 meters. I spent periods of time alone, but I was sometimes joined by up to three prisoners. My personal affliction did not only arise from the limited space of the cell, but the constant threat of psychological and physical torture as well. The agonized cries of prisoners being subjected to torture penetrated our cells during the day. And sometimes extended throughout the night until the break of dawn. The prison officials had mastered the techniques of torture, applying innovative methods in pain inducement. Everything in this prison served in shattering the prisoners psychologically. Prisoners were tormented even while relieving themselves in the latrines. As soon as a prisoner entered a toilet, the guards standing outside would relentlessly shout at him to exit and would resort to kicking open the toilet door.

The guards verbally insulted the prisoners and had no scruples in striking them. Talking was forbidden inside the cells, so the inmates spoke in whisper or relayed information by hand-gestures. If a guard heard us speaking in low tones, he would angrily shout at us to remain silent. The food served in prison was of the worst quality. Meals were presented to the prisoners who were mostly clerics, intellectuals, and university students in an offensive manner, as if the guards were

feeding animals. If the cooks happened to add a piece of meat to the prisoners' meals, the guards removed it and consumed it themselves.

The prisoners were not allowed to go out of their cells except to the toilets or for interrogation. If one month in a solitary cell equaled a year in public prison, one day of interrogation was as intolerable as a month spent in a solitary cell. I was once taken for interrogation in the morning and only returned at night. My three cellmates were greatly distressed after I was late in returning, and had assumed I had died under torture. They did not recognize me when I returned; my beard had been shaved and my features had become distorted. It was only when I spoke that they realized my identity and started crying.

One of my cellmates was Ahmad Ahmadi, the grandson of the renowned Sheikh Mohammad Shahabadi, Imam Khomeini's teacher of philosophy and mysticism. Whenever Ahmad returned from an interrogation session, he crept on his behind after losing the ability to walk. Our hearts always wrenched with grief upon seeing him in such a state, but he tried to comfort us and soothe our pains. Ahmad suffered constant and brutal torture until he was martyred in that prison.

I still remember the savagery in that prison, but I can never convey the level of tragedy. The prison officials were cruel and vile. Whenever I fell asleep, I awoke moments later upon hearing the cries of people being tortured, but I did not know whether it was real or emitted from a recorded tape.

My greatest worry in this prison revolved around my mother. Even though she was a courageous woman and possessed formidable resilience, the frequent hardships I faced had started to take their toll on her. Before my latest arrest, she told me when I visited her: "If you get imprisoned one more time, I will die!"

I had tried to offer her some reassurance then. "Why should I be arrested again? What have I done? But assume it happens, why should you be so distressed? I have never heard you speak in such a manner before."

Yet I realized she was serious. From the moment I was imprisoned, her words resonated in my ear and gave me cause for concern. I spent six months in prison without receiving any news about her which amplified my anxiety. Finally, the prison officials allowed me to conduct a single telephone call. I dialed my parents' home, and my father picked up the line. The first question I asked was about after my mother's health.

"She's fine." My father's answer did not allay my fear.

“Where is she?”

“She’s not at home.”

“Why is she not at home? Where has she gone?”

“She went to participate in a *rowzekhani*.<sup>71</sup>”

I remembered then that my mother was keen on attending a regular mourning assembly, and I felt assured that my father was not hiding any unfavorable news from me. I must confess here that I can never describe the severe conditions in that prison; I have never witnessed or heard of a similar level of brutality anywhere else.

## Morse Code

It is in human nature to rebel against unpleasant circumstances. As soon as a person takes the initiative to confront adverse conditions, he naturally resorts to personal creativity and inventiveness. In prison, the prisoners primarily focused their thoughts on overcoming two obstacles: the mostly illiterate guards who lacked mental acuteness, and the cunning security agents. In this respect I remember some interesting events.

Talking inside the cells was forbidden, let alone communicating with the prisoners in the adjoining cells. The prison officials considered such communication a breach of security as the exchange of information would endanger the process of interrogation and acquisition of information by the security interrogators, especially when some inmates were accused of a joint crime. Despite the hazards of communication, we resorted to using Morse Code. A single cell separated my cell and that of Raja’i. The prisoner confined next to me acted as an intermediary; he relayed my message to Raja’i and then tapped back Raja’i’s reply.

How did I learn Morse Code in the first place? It all started when I heard successive taps coming from the neighboring wall. I did not know their meaning, though I realized they were of significance. The incident passed without a special occurrence. Then another day, while I was staring at the notes inscribed on my

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71 Mourning assembly for Imam Hussein.

cell wall to pass time and reading the scribbled memoirs and demands of the previous prisoners, I discovered something important.

I found a chart with symbols and letters drawn near the door, in an area barely illuminated. I had previously acquired knowledge of some occult symbolism, and this made it easier for me to learn the signals used in Morse Code. I began studying the signals meticulously and gradually began to comprehend the meanings of my neighbor's taps at the wall. In time, I tried, albeit slowly, to respond to my neighbor who offered an enthusiastic reply. We began communicating; he tapped quickly and efficiently while I responded slowly. He sometimes understood what I meant to say after I tapped only a single letter or two, and tapped back that he had understood the word I intended to convey.

I gradually mastered communication via Morse Code to the extent that I was able to set up a line of communication with the adjoining cell without anyone present inside my cell noticing. I used to lean my head against the wall, stretching my hand behind my back and knocking at the wall with my nail. At the same time, I conversed with my cellmate who never noticed that I was in communication with the neighboring cell and only thought I was absent-minded, a matter normally witnessed in many prisoners. Sometimes, when the other prisoners were asleep, I used my toes to send signals but under such a condition hearing is very difficult due to the distance between my ears and the wall.

We spoke in Morse Code on a variety of topics and exchanged several questions such as: Were you taken for interrogation today? How was your day? What have you dreamt of recently? I discovered that the prisoner in my neighboring cell was a university student but I did not learn any additional personal information about him. He never divulged his name, but this was quite normal because concealing secrets was an absolute necessity for Political prisoners. He was a very intelligent and blessed with a good sense of humor. He always volunteered to clean up the toilets despite the fact that the other prisoners competed for this service as it represented a chance to flee the stifling atmosphere in the cell for a few minutes. Once outside his cell though, he would not only clean the latrines.

He once succeeded in misguiding the local guard and leading him temporarily away from the cells. He ran toward my cell during this interval, lifted the cover of aperture carved in the door, beckoned me to approach, and swiftly

kissed my cheek before rushing back to his work without anyone noticing what he had done.

On another occasion, while he was cleaning the toilets, he noticed a large Jug placed in the prison hallway. He stealthily approached and pulled the Cover aside to find a considerable amount of butter and jam placed over an ice-pack. He realized that this share had been stolen from our breakfast ration by the guard on duty. The guard had discovered that the food to be served at suppertime was not to his liking so he had stolen our breakfast and stored it with ice. My friend was fasting that day. He removed the butter and jam noiselessly and rushed to his cell. Once there, he informed me by Morse Code of what he had done.

In the evening, the hungry guard hastened to consume his meal, but when he found the jug empty, he was enraged. It did not cross his mind that a prisoner might be responsible for the theft, so he asked the other guards about his food first. But when he realized a prisoner was to blame, he decided to search all the cells with the aid of the other guards. My friend hurriedly contacted me by Morse Code when he discovered their intent and asked me what he should do with the remaining food, especially since he had no fellow cellmate to help him. I advised him to eat as much as he could and to conceal the rest under the floor rug he slept on. The guards searched all the cells, including my friend's cell, but found nothing. My friend escaped severe punishment, and the incident remained a small example of human rebellion against a bitter reality.

## **Different Prisoners**

I became acquainted with different prisoners who were brought to my cell to spend short periods of time; some of them were dynamic Muslim youth and others were communists. Among the former was a young man from the city of Nahavand who was a member of the armed group Abuzar 2. All the members of Abuzar 1 had been annihilated by the regime so the young men of Nahavand had decided to form a second group to counter governmental forces. I have mentioned this particular individual because I was recently reunited with him; he came to visit me with a group of people and I asked them to introduce themselves. Once he mentioned his name, I paused but then remembered my previous cellmate from Abuzar 2.

Some of the prisoners who resided temporarily in my cell were communists. One of them was a young man who avoided disclosing his affiliation to me or the

other two prisoners who were confined with us. He acted as if it would only be a short period of time before his release. I asked him about himself but he never answered explicitly and chose to speak of trivial matters. I sensed a benevolent streak in his character and remember once telling him: "I detect in you an inclination towards spiritual matters."

It seems his intuition was correct because he was taken after a brief period of time to a place unbeknown to us. He telephoned me shortly before the victory of the Islamic Revolution, and informed me that he was a journalist who worked in a newspaper office. He had not forgotten the phrase I had told him in prison. After the Revolution, it was discovered that he was a member of the communist Tudeh Party, and then, to our astonishment, a document was found certifying his membership in the SAVAK. He was arrested with other members of that party during the events surrounding the collapse of the Tudeh Party a few years after the victory of the Revolution. His wife wrote a few letters to me, requesting his release and reminding me of what I had told him in prison. He spent a period of time in confinement, but was subsequently released.

Not all communists were alike in their aversion toward religion. I met another communist during my imprisonment who was full of malice and was morally depraved. When he first entered our cell, I was sitting with another prisoner reciting prayers following evening prayer. I was accustomed during worship to wrap some of my white clothes around my head like a turban and to drape a blanket on my shoulders instead of my usual clerical mantle. Hence, anyone who saw me in the darkness of the cell would immediately realize I was a clergyman.

He temporarily paused, waiting for his eyes to get accustomed to the light, but when he caught sight of his surroundings and glimpsed at us, his countenance contorted with distaste. He crept into the corner without speaking a word, depressed and anguished. I drew near him and tried to console him. "Are you hungry or thirsty?"

He did not reply. I assumed that his reaction was a result of his psychological state. He tried to avoid all of my questions, but I managed to discover that he had been arrested that morning and had not eaten anything since then. I was accustomed to saving part of the food I consumed during *iftar* to eat throughout the night in order to alleviate the pains of the stomach ulcers I had developed in that prison. I offered him some jam and bread but he refused to eat so I resorted to feeding him compulsorily. He felt slightly better after eating, but I chose to

remain near him and to briefly delay night prayer in order to comfort him. He thought that I was comforting him because I wrongly assumed that he was an Islamic activist or out of a desire to attract him to the Islamic movement. He raised his head and said in a dry voice: "Let me confess that I don't believe in any religion."

I understood what was going on in his mind, and searched for an expression which suited his logic and circumstances. "Do you know that President Sukarno of Indonesia proclaimed during the Bandung Conference that the criterion for the unity of underdeveloped nations is not uniformity in religion, history or culture but 'the unity of need'. Such a unity connects us now. The problems we are facing are the same, and our destiny is unknown. Religion should never be a separating factor between us."

He had not expected such a reply, and I noticed a visible change in his features. His demeanor changed and he responded to our friendly advances, when I realized his morale had risen, I asked him to rest while we performed our prayers.

I learned that his wife was also imprisoned in a separate cell, so I exploited my long experience in prison to facilitate communication between them. He spent two months with us and made a confession during this period: "When I first saw you, I felt that I had fallen into a catastrophe. I said to myself: All I needed was a mullah. But I must admit, I've never met a person as tolerant and unbiased as you."

Despite my friendly conduct toward him, I discovered that his words were insincere and that his malicious character had not changed. He grasped every opportunity to ridicule religion and clergymen, and strove through various means and in a most vile manner to mock religious customs.

I suffered one day from severe stomach cramps and needed to go to the toilet frequently. Prison regulations allowed for only three visits to the toilet daily, but sometimes the guards malevolently denied us a visit. The day I was inflicted with pain, the guard on duty happened to be considerate and, upon seeing me in such condition, allowed me to go to toilet often. He did not follow me to the toilet door, despite the prison rules, and waited for me at the cell door. When I returned, I saw a strange spectacle. The other prisoner in our cell had shoved the communist to the floor and was beating him. No two prisoners were allowed to fight in the presence of a guard, but I discovered that the communist prisoner had been

mocking me in front of him. The unwritten rules of prison dictated that no prisoner should deride another in front of a guard.

This is why the guard had stood aside and not interfered when my cellmate had pummeled the communist with his fists. His conduct drove me to tell him one day: “Do you remember what you said, that you've never met a person as tolerant and unbiased as me? In my turn, let me tell you that that I've never met anyone as biased and stubborn as you,”

It is not to be doubted that my attitude stemmed from my fundamental beliefs while his behavior arose from his conviction. Islam calls its followers to strictly adhere to religious laws, and these very same laws urge Muslims to kindly associate with non-Muslims and to refrain from using acerbic remarks with them during conversation. The Holy Qur'an states in this respect:

*“...Thus give good tidings to My servants. Who listen to speech and follow the best of it.”*<sup>72</sup>

And:

*“Invite to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and with kindly exhortation, and reason with them in the best manner. Surely your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His path, and He is most knowing of those who are [rightly] guided.”*<sup>73</sup>

There are more such recommendations in the Qur'an, and I quote another verse:

*“Respecting those who neither fought you in religion's cause, nor did they drive you from your homes, God does not forbid that you should do them good, And, be in treating them, most justly. Indeed, God likes the justice-doers best.”*<sup>74</sup>

Our Prophet's narrations also direct us to the same course of action! The widely known tradition-”Seek knowledge even in China”-delivers a message of openness. Muslims can acquire all domains of knowledge from non-Muslims and employ these disciplines for religious purposes. In contrast, materialists follow

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72 The Qur'an 39: 17-18

73 The Qur'an 16: 125

74 The Qur'an 60: 8

lifeless and inflexible principles, lacking in moral values and ethics, and this inevitably affects their attitude and behavior. It is a grave injustice that Muslims today are labelled as fundamentalists, a word implying fanaticism and severity.

## A Beam of Light

Certain matters acquire an aura of importance to prisoners locked up in a dark small cell, while people in the outside world consider such matters extremely ordinary. I still remember that day when a weak beam of sunlight managed to penetrate the layer of dust which had settled on the little window, and had pierced the darkness of the cell. I could not contain my joy and shouted:

“Sunshine, sunshine!”

My cellmates and I gazed enraptured at this light which served as a link between us and the vast world outside. Our eyes remained transfixed on the ray for half an hour until it receded. The following day, the beam increased in size and remained for a longer time. This process continued for some weeks until the sun reached an angle no longer permitting the humble light to enter through the window crack.

On another occasion, I woke up to the sounds of birds chirping outside the cell. They were twittering cheerfully, heralding spring, and we realized that one tree at least stood near the facility. We plunged in thought; the sounds we heard evoking the pleasant images of springtime in our minds. Another thing which I mostly dwell upon when remembering my time in prison is the pleasant sound of the *adhan* which reached us faintly from a distance every dawn. The silence of the city and the crisp air before sunrise facilitated the movement of the soundwaves, making the *adhan* audible from inside my cell. I waited for the sound every day and listened to it with absolute joy even though some words were scarcely audible. Whenever I remember those moments, I feel a spiritual elation which has not dampened even after the passage of so many years.

Everything in this locked cell, isolated from society, assumed it's our special form and meaning, even the dreams which visited us in our sleep. We sometimes passed our time relating the visions we had to one another and discussing their possible implications. I had a few truthful visions in this prison, and I would like to mention one of them: I fell asleep one day after morning prayer and saw myself standing in desert with a dried-up river in front of me. On both banks of the river stood very old and wilted trees, devoid of any shrubbery. Suddenly, a large and

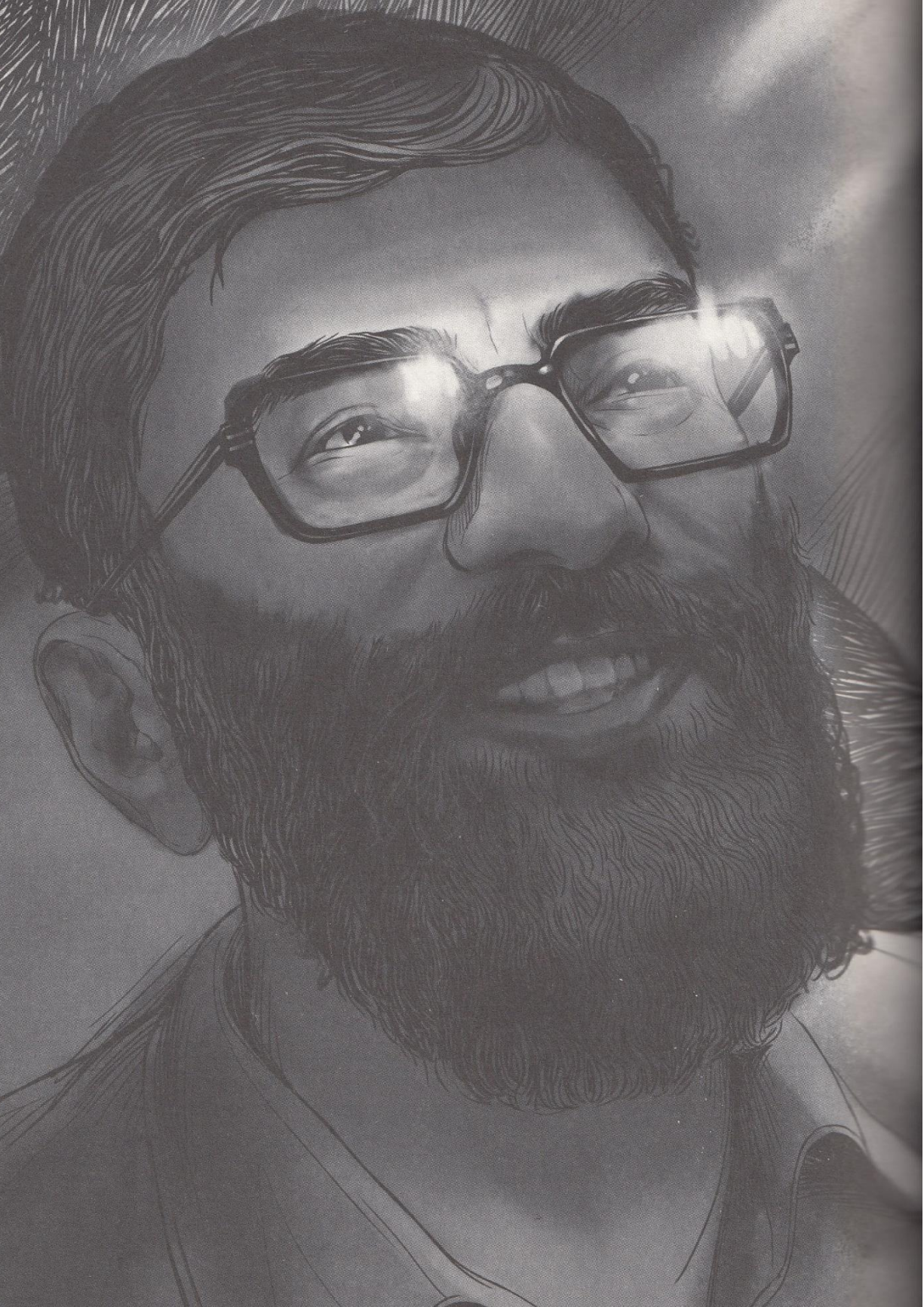
terrifying hound appeared from the opposite side of the river, lunging towards me and barking violently all the way. I was filled with alarm and froze in my place, looking alarmingly around me but failing to find a safe shelter. By this time, the hound had considerably drawn near but his barking had reduced in intensity until he fell silent altogether and retreated. I was surprised, but felt happy after my narrow escape.

When I woke up, I had all but forgotten my dream. A few moments later, a guard opened the cell door, holding a piece of paper in his hand. "Which one of you is Ali?" The guards never mentioned a prisoner's full name for the sake of secrecy; if a guard happened to open the wrong cell and mention the surname of another inmate, it would alert the other prisoners to his presence in prison. The guards were numerous in number and were constantly changed. Having no personal acquaintance with the prisoners, they only used the inmates' first names whenever they called them.

The guard ordered me to cover my face and to follow him. This was also a usual practice when escorting a prisoner to a certain room. I walked along with him, realizing from the familiar turns I took through the winding corridors that I was being taken to the interrogation room. I had formed an image in my mind of the internal plan of the facility and had even drawn a map of the structure after being released. After the Revolution, I visited the prison and compared my drawing to the actual construction and discovered that the differences were trivial.

The guard led me into a room and asked me to sit on a chair. "Now raise your head," he ordered. I uncovered my face to see the interrogator who was in charge of my case-and whom we called Anwar Sadat due to his resemblance to the Egyptian president-standing in front of me. He proceeded to ask me the usual questions and I answered in turn. During the interrogation, a man opened the door and peered inside: "Doctor," he addressed the interrogator. "Do you happen to have any tea?"

Titles such as *doctor* or *engineer* were used by interrogators when addressing one another. The usage of such unwarranted titles was a clear sign of an inferiority complex from which the uneducated prison officials suffered. I realized that his request for tea was merely a pretense to show that had entered by chance. He entered an assumed an air of surprise upon seeing me, asking derisively: "What is this?" This form of question was known in prison; interrogators used pronouns





referring to things and not humans when asking about the identities of the prisoners.

“Khamenei from Mashhad.”

“This is the person who wants to become the Khomeini of Mashhad?” the intruder replied, reiterating a phrase recorded in my security file. “Doctor, you are dealing with a very dangerous man.”

He then turned toward me and menacingly warned: “Khamenei, you won, get out of here alive!”

Then, abruptly changing his words, he added: “I want to ask you about the exact meanings of *taqiyya*<sup>75</sup> and *tawriya*.<sup>76</sup>”

Without waiting to hear my explanation, he turned to the interrogator and said: “These people are engaged in secret activities but display a public cover and name this process *taqiyya*. They also utter phrases that disguise their true intents, and call this procedure *tawriya*.”

He was clearly annoyed with the precautionary concealment of beliefs under duress employed by clergymen which served as a shield against the regime. My head was lowered the entire time he was speaking, but when I noticed his insistence on hearing my definition of *taqiyya* and *tawriya*, I chose to mutter a simple answer without meeting his gaze. He was infuriated and began uttering threats against me. I had felt uneasy since the moment he entered, but when he began threatening me, my apprehension increased. I raised my head to look at his face and was startled to see the same features of the hound I had seen in my dream.

The images of my dream suddenly surged forth; the hound rushing toward me, his incessant barking, and then his halt to a standstill without harming me. I regained my calm and felt completely at ease, certain that he would not be able to inflict any injury upon me. Things went as I had expected.

The interrogation went on for hours. Seven agents joined the two interrogators who were present in the room, They surrounded me from all sides, relentlessly asking their questions, but inflicted no physical harm upon me.

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75 Precautionary concealment of one's beliefs under duress.

76 Concealment.

I later discovered the identity of the man who resembled the hound from my dream. His name was Kamali. He went into hiding for several months after the victory of the Revolution, but then decided to visit the Evin prison authorities, imprudently demanding his unpaid salaries. By that time, revolutionary forces had taken over Evin prison. The prison officials ushered him inside and interrogated him, subjecting him at a later date to a public, televised trial. I was asked to testify, but declined because Kamali had not personally harmed me. Many witnesses presented their testimonies against him and exposed the crimes he had committed. In the end, Kamali was found guilty and was executed.

The aforementioned interrogation was followed by other more severe interrogation sessions, rife with physical assault and psychological torture. Whenever interrogation sessions lengthened in time and the interrogators sensed the determination of a prisoner, they strove to break him down psychologically. Five agents or more would join the main interrogator as if they coincidentally entered the room, encircling the prisoner and directing insults and offensive words at him. The excuse was always: "Doctor, do you have some tea?"

I endured many of these interrogation sessions and never hesitated in answering the relentless onslaught of questions. I always strove to offer careful replies which would not lead to any condemnation against me.

One of the interrogators was Kuchesfahani. He once asked me scornfully during a session: "Sayyid, do you know Sa'idi?"

I answered his question even though I was fully aware that the SAVAK agents knew of our friendship bond, especially since we both hailed from the province of Khorasan. "Yes, he was a friend of mine."

"Do you know that he died in prison?"

"Yes, I do."

"Are you aware that he was interrogated in this very room?" I sensed that he was most probably lying and decided to keep my silence.

"I told Sa'idi to reveal all the information he knew," he continued. "He told me that he wished to consult the Qur'an in order to discover if divulging the information would be favorable or not. I told him it was a form of pessimism, but he did not heed my advice and look what happened to him."

Kuchesfahani paused a little, then rose up and drew near. He took a pen from the table and proceeded to tap its end on my head, repeatedly musing: ‘Pessimism, pessimism...’

I inwardly laughed at his deliberate lies and comical behavior by which he ‘tended to threaten me. If only he knew that his words had no effect on me.

I have already mentioned one truthful vision I had in prison. But it was not the only one. In another dream in early 1975, I saw myself in one of the mosques of Mashhad which was located in the middle of the bazaar. Ayatullah Milani had appointed one of his disciples, Sayyid Alam al-Huda, as the imam of the mosque. In my dream, I saw two men who resembled angels standing on both sides of the entrance to the mosque. They were so tall that I could only see the lower parts of their bodies. Then I noticed that the carpets of the mosque were folded. Some bricks had toppled from the walls, and dust and rocks had covered the floor.

When I woke up, I told my cellmate: “I think either Sayyid Alam al-Huda or Ayatullah Milani has died.”

The following day, I was taken for interrogation but was led to a different room where Kaveh, the chief interrogator, was waiting for me. He began asking me questions until he said: “Surely you’ve received information that Ayatullah Milani has passed away?”

“How would I know?”

“Well, he’s dead.”

The last cellmate to join me was a cleric who harbored pro-regime sentiments, but was imprisoned for an unknown offense and suffered beating in prison. I surmised that he had been sent to my cell to extract some information from me, even though I was released from prison before him. He informed me one day that he had seen a dream concerning me.

“In my vision, you and I were at the shrine of Sayyid Abdul ‘Azim Hasani in the town of Ray. You gazed at the high minaret and told me: “I want to climb to the top.” I protested and said it was impossible, but you disagreed. I suddenly noticed how you floated in the air, and when you reached the top of the minaret you waved your hands in a farewell gesture and said: “Now you believe that I could do it!” To my greater astonishment, you flew up to the sky saying goodbye.”

After he finished relating his dream, I said: "Martyrdom is certainly the interpretation of such a vision." But was proven wrong. The true interpretation was freedom. After a few days, I was released from prison.

## Another Joseph

I still remember a strange vision which can be traced back to 1969. The political situation in Mashhad had reached a point of maximum intensity, and Islamic activists were experiencing immense hardships. Only a few of my close companions had stood their ground while others abandoned the domain of conflict.

Under those circumstances, I dreamt that Imam Khomeini had passed away and that his coffin had been laid in a house not far from my father's residence in Mashhad. A huge crowd of people had gathered to participate in the funeral procession and I was among them, my heart burdened with pain and sorrow. Some mourners raised the Imam's coffin on their shoulders while the rest followed closely behind. I joined them and noticed that many clerics were walking among the dense crowds. I wept in a loud voice and did not conceal my grief, but my sorrow was intensified upon seeing some clerics disrespectfully conversing among themselves and laughing without expressing any signs of sorrow.

When the procession reached the outskirts of the city, most of the mourners began to retreat. The procession progressed but the participants had considerably reduced in number until approximately 30 persons remained. I was one of them. The coffin was carried to the top of a hill and placed on the summit. The number of mourners had drastically decreased and only a handful of people had remained. I approached to pay my last respects to the Imam and catch a final glimpse of his face. As I was staring at the Imam's face, he suddenly raised his right hand and moved his forefinger. I was astounded. Then the Imam sat up, his eyes closed and his hand still raised, until his forefinger reached my forehead. His lips moved and I heard him saying twice: "You'll be another Joseph."

I woke up then, the details of my vision clearly etched in my mind. I recounted the details of my dream to some of my friends and relatives, but my mother's reactions to it was the most interesting. After hearing the incidents of my vision, she immediately remarked: "You will become another Joseph means that you are going spend your life in prison!"

I informed Sheikh Javad Hafezi of my vision and my mother's subsequent interpretation while we were incarcerated in Mashhad in 1971. After I was elected president, Sheikh Hafezi visited me and said: "The presidential elections coincided with my pilgrimage to Mecca. As I was heading to cast my vote in the ballot box provided at the main headquarters of the Iranian Pilgrimage Delegation, I recalled your dream and your mother's interpretation, Tears streaked down my face because I understood that the Imam's statement, went beyond remaining in prison forever!"

## The Glory of Islam

The prison was rife with physical and psychological torture. The prison officials were harsh and especially malicious toward the Islamic prisoners, treating them severely and inflicting cruel measures upon them. Despite the rampant suffering, the oppression of the Islamic prisoners and the authority exerted by their opponents, I perceived the glory of Islam. The hardships Islamic activists faced as I was counting off the days of my final imprisonment had reached their highest point, to the extent that nobody thought Islam could emerge as a social force in Iran.

As prisoners we needed to fortify our patience. We found solace in reciting Qur'anic verses that promised God's aid to the faithful. We repeated *Surat al-Kawthar* often in prayer, and convinced ourselves that that it heralded the establishment of an Islamic government despite the fact that all material estimates pointed otherwise and indicated the impossibility of Islam returning as a ruling force in Iran.

Under such adverse circumstances, I was summoned one day to the interrogation room but found myself being led to another chamber where I was ordered to sit down and wait. Kaveh, the chief interrogator, entered the room with a smile on his face and proceeded to speak with me amicably, enquiring after my health. I was perplexed to witness such an outward display of affability from a man who had personally beaten me. His demeanor had undergone a complete transformation. Adopting a lenient attitude, he plunged into a discussion of the "insignificant accusation" directed at me and how my case could be easily solved. At that moment, Moshiri, the main interrogator entrusted with my file, entered and took a seat behind the desk. Kaveh proceeded with his explanation and, pointing to the other interrogator, said: "He can help you."

I understood the import of Kaveh's words. He was making it known that my release from prison would be imminent, but he was also exempting himself from personal responsibility of any harm which had heretofore befallen me and placing the blame on the subordinate interrogator.

Moshiri, however, was not to be fooled and chose not to miss the opportunity of offering a clever retort. "I pray to God that your charges will not prove to be serious, but in the end it all depends on our chief," and here he pointed to Kaveh. "He is younger than I am, but he has a bright future."

Thoughts sped through my mind. *If they are planning on releasing me from prison, why are they resorting to flattery? Why was the chief interrogator and his subaltern engaging in such exchanges, each one of them striving to exonerate himself?* I was well aware of the fact that they could kill me, a powerless prisoner in their grip, with utmost ease if they intended.

I was reminded of a recent, previous encounter with Kuchesfahani who had strangely informed me of his deep religiosity and mentioned how he had, during his childhood years, regularly attended the sermons of Husam Va'ez, a prominent orator in the city of Rasht located in the province of Gilan. I had wondered then: *Why is he feigning religiosity?*

I realized there was only one explanation for this: the glory of Islam. The petty prison officials inwardly regarded Islamic prisoners with a grudging esteem. They felt insignificant and weak, disregarding their rank of authority.

## Freedom

On the day I was discharged in late summer, I was sitting with two of my cellmates; the first was Sheikh Mahdi Shahabadi and the second was the cleric to whom I previously referred. As usual, a guard making his rounds approached and asked: "Which one of you is Ali?"

"I am." I replied.

"What is your surname?"

"Khamenei."

"Cover your face then, and follow me."

I followed his steps to Kaveh's room who said as soon as he saw me: "You are to be set free."

I was taken by surprise, and as I stepped outside, I could scarcely believe that what I had heard was true. It was the first time I could see the prison hallway, as my head had always been covered during the previous instances I was ordered out of my cell. All the prisoners who heard about my release were astounded, and the first question each one of them asked me was: "Why have they set you free?" while I jokingly replied: "You must file your complaint to the prison authorities."

I first headed to my cell and only found one of my two cellmates, the other was absent for some purpose. I bade him farewell before I was led to the dressing room where the clothes which I had removed upon entering prison were kept. It was almost dusk and the weather was hot. The clothes I had worn when I entered prison were winter garments as I had been detained in winter, but now I was being freed in relatively high temperature.

I donned my clerical attire and turban and went out of the prison gates. Outside, everything seemed interesting and worthy of observation; people walking on the streets without a guard to order them around, the lights twinkling in the streets which hurt my eyes after spending months in darkness, I had dreamt of my release numerous times in prison, and now found myself asking: *Is this also a dream?*

I walked towards Tupkhaneh Square<sup>77</sup> which was not far from the prison. I had a trifle amount of money and bought some food to appease my hunger. I consumed my food without taking into consideration social decorum which entailed that a clergyman should not consume food while standing on the Street.

I managed to telephone Sayyid Beheshti's house. He was astounded to hear my voice at the other end of the line and could hardly believe it. "It's really you, you've been set free! How were you released? I'm eagerly awaiting you!"

I made my way to Sayyid Beheshti's home. Mr. Shafiq, a friend and activist was there too, and had been on the verge of leaving Beheshti's house when I telephoned and had decided to remain to see me. The first thing that caught their attention when they saw me was my shaved beard, so I remarked: "It was shaved in prison but will eventually grow." I stayed at Beheshti's home for an hour and received an amount of money before heading to my elder brother's house in Tehran. I called my family in Mashhad, and after a short period of time traveled to the city to be reunited with them.

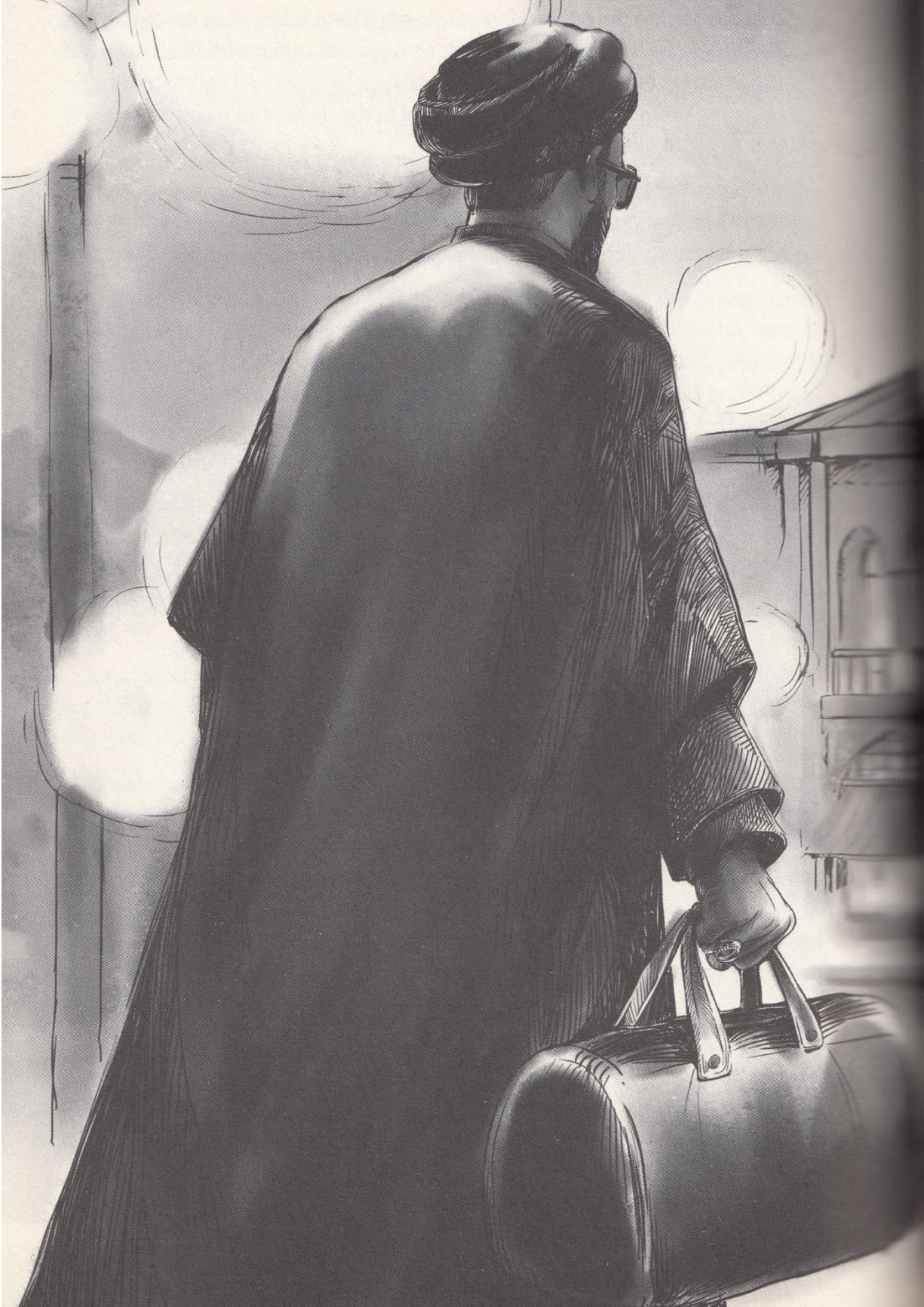
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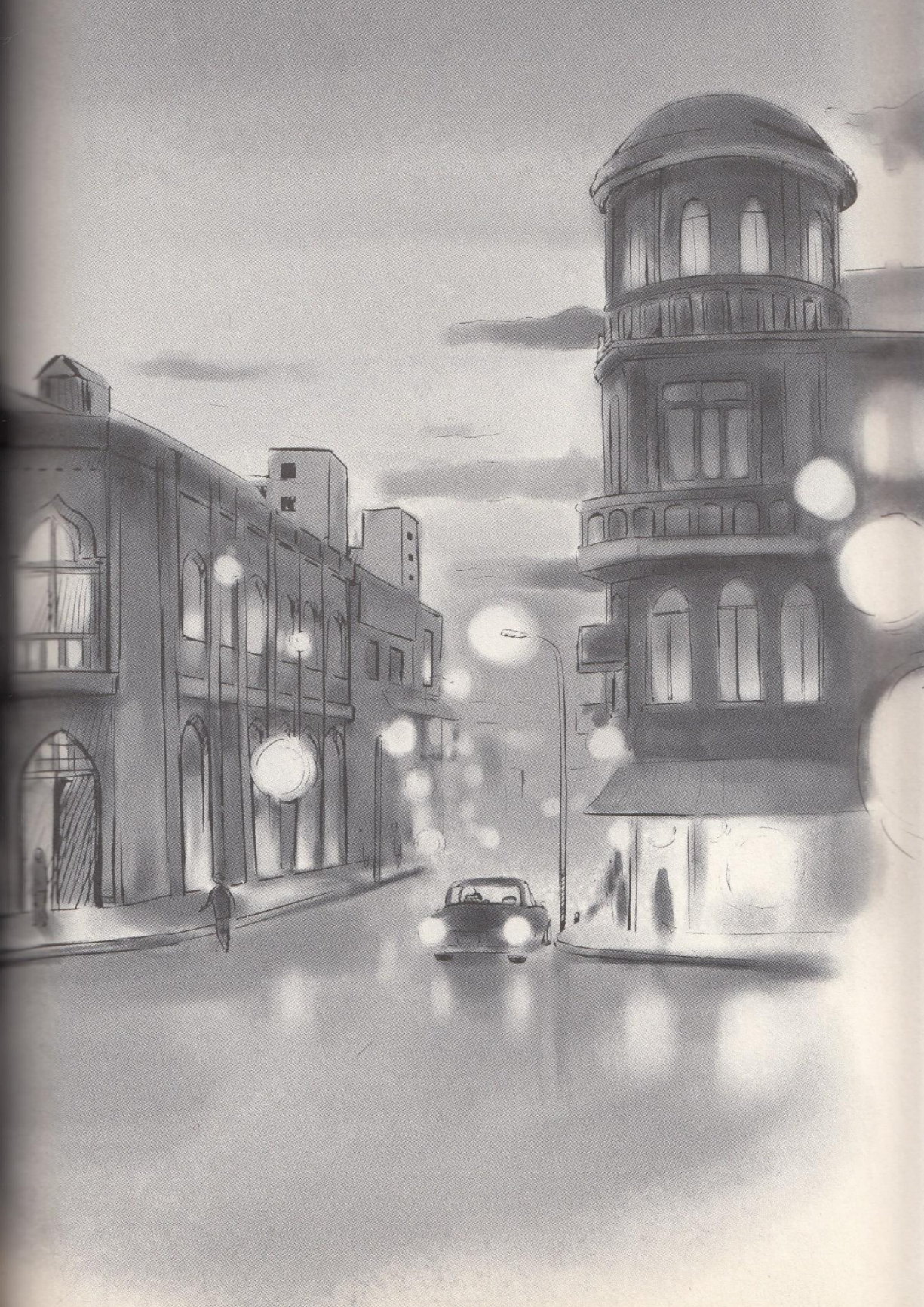
77 Renamed as Imam Khomeini Square after Islamic Revolution.

## THE CRYPTOGRAPH

Once in Mashhad, my family members, who had suffered a lot during my absence, recounted the details of what they had endured during the months I was in prison. My wife told me that her mother used to take Mojtaba, my second son, who was then a small child, to the shrine of Imam Reza and encouraged him to beseech God through the intercession of the Imam to liberate me from prison. Mojtaba would then face the direction of the Imam's shrine and beg God for my imminent release. These visits were recurrent, but one night Mojtaba was greatly affected; he wept and spoke with the Imam as if he were standing in front of him. He was shaken by grief and childish emotion that his grandmother regretted bringing him to the shrine and resolved to never ask him to plead again.

Two days after this incident, the telephone in our house rang and my family members heard my voice on the other end of the line, speaking from my brother's house in Tehran, informing them of my freedom.









**EXILE**

## **The Passing Away of Haj Agha Mostafa Khomeini**

In autumn 1977, IRAN plunged into turmoil. Sayyid Mostafa Khomeini, Imam Khomeini's eldest son, died in October in the city of Najaf under highly suspicious circumstances. His death evoked great sorrow in the hearts of Iranians, and sparked a wave of public anger and protest against the regime

As soon as news of Sayyid Mostafa Khomeini's death reached Mashhad we decided to prepare an effective plan of action. I headed to the post office where I prepared four telegrams; the first one was composed according to my personal viewpoint on the incident while the others were written on behalf of Sheikh Tabasi, Sheikh Mohami, and Sheikh Hasheminejad. I submitted the telegrams to the postal service operator who, after reading the contents, expressed his surprise. He handed the telegrams to his co-workers who stared at me in bewilderment after scrutinizing the text.

The telegrams, composed as a formal expression of condolence, contained a fiery critique against the regime and high praise for Imam Khomeini. The cost of sending four telegrams was high, and the operator assumed that a person of my social status would not be able to afford the required sum. His surprise further increased when I handed him a 1000-toman banknote, an amount which clerics normally did not possess.

Plans were underway to hold a mourning ceremony in commemoration of Sayyid Mostafa Khomeini in one of the mosques of Mashhad, but the authorities made their objection known and prevented us from conducting the assembly. In Qom, however, mourners had managed to hold a commemoration ceremony, but a number of the participants were arrested toward the end.

Those days were marked by unprecedented Islamic revolutionary activities in various cities throughout Iran. This entailed the exertion of fervent efforts. I was actively engaged in political and organizational activities among seminary and university students, composing essays on politics, conducting secret communications, and holding sessions of Qur'anic interpretation in which I elucidated Islamic revolutionary concepts.

One day during the bustling activity, Sheikh Khalkhali telephoned me from Qom and informed me that many Islamic activists had been arrested and that it would soon be my turn. I could not conceal my surprise.

“What have I done to be arrested again?” was my answer.

## **Eagle...Eagle...We've Got Him!**

Very late one winter night, I was awoken by a knock at the door. As usual, I headed to open the door without stopping to ask who it was. It was an hour before dawn, and all my family members were fast asleep in the inner chambers of the house.

When I opened the door, I was astounded to find some young men standing outside, armed with revolvers and machine guns. The first thought which rushed to my mind was that they were radical leftists who intended to murder me. Sayyid Beheshti had previously informed me that leftist groups had launched a campaign to assassinate Islamist activists, and had warned me to remain alert and on my guard. I suddenly remembered how some armed leftists had assaulted the house of Sayyid Mousavi Ghahdrijani in Kermanshah at night, and bound him as a prelude to murdering him. He had managed to escape though, and was spared certain death.

As soon as I recalled the incident, I pushed at the door in the flash of an eye. The men at the other side tried to shove the door open but fear of death had given me incredible strength and I managed to close the door shut. Thoughts raced through my mind. I stood my ground, fearing that the men might scale the outer wall or find another entrance. I could hear them striking at the condensed glass on the door with their weapons, followed by the sound of shattered glass. I heard one of the men shouting: “Open the door, in the name of the law!”

I realized that the men were SAVAK operatives. For the first time, I thanked God that they were SAVAK agents and not radical leftists as I had initially assumed. I retraced my steps and opened the door. The six men pounced on me and started beating me violently outside. Mostafa, my eldest son who was 12 years old, was awoken by the commotion and watched in fear from a window overlooking the yard, screaming from behind the glass. The agents used their hands and feet to deal their brutal blows, deliberately kicking my forelegs with their boots.

They handcuffed me and ordered me to lead them to the inner rooms, but I voiced my objection: “It isn’t inappropriate for any of my family members to see me in handcuffs!” This seemed to have an effect on them because they yielded,

Inside, I noticed that my wife was quite heartbroken and sad; three of my children flocked around her while my fourth and youngest son, Meysam, who was only two months old, was asleep. I tried to reassure them. "Don't worry. They're only guests."

The agents searched the entire house, and even inspected the kitchen and toilet. During the fervent search, my wife somehow managed to slip unnoticed inside the guest-room where I received visitors and hid revolutionary pamphlets and publications in a concealed area. The room had two doors, one leading to my library while the other opened to the outer yard. She pulled out all the incriminating materials and hid them under a carpet, denying the SAVAK operatives the opportunity to lay their hands on such valuable information. From the library, however, they confiscated many of my books, papers, and written material, all of which remain missing to this very day.

They searched the house for more than an hour without missing a corner, by the hour's end, dawn was approaching. I informed them that I wanted to perform prayer. One of the agents accompanied me to the place of ablution where I performed my ritual preparation for prayer and then returned to the library to perform my prayers. One of the agents offered prayer as well but the others did not and resumed their search. I do not clearly recall if I asked my wife for some food to take with me, but I remember that I asked her to wake Mojtaba and Masoud, who had fallen asleep again, so that I could say goodbye. While I was saying goodbye to my sons, one of the operatives told them: "Your dad is going on a trip."

"There is no need to lie to them," I objected, and told them the truth.

When we stepped out of the house, I noticed that other agents had surrounded the perimeter. A four-wheel drive was driven into the narrow alley; I sat in the vehicle but this time my eyes were not covered. One of the agents kept repeating on his wireless: "Eagle...Eagle...Eagle. We've got him...we've got him!"

This incident occurred exactly one year before the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

## **Exile and Not Prison**

I was taken to the SAVAK headquarters in Mashhad where I was confined in an underground space consisting of narrow corridors and cells on either side. I

remained there for a few hours during which I consulted a small Qur'an I carried with me. The verse heralded a good omen and the fulfillment of God's promise, so I joyously hurried to record it on the back cover of the Qur'an. After consuming the meal which I was served, I was led once more to a car which drove us to the outskirts of the city.

I was fully unaware of what the SAVAK operatives intended to do. This time, their behavior differed from the previous times I had been arrested. The car was ordinary, my eyes were left uncovered, and we were leaving the city behind. But when the car stopped in front of the internal security forces headquarters, I realized that I was being sent into exile and not to another prison. I remained at the headquarters for five days, and during this period some family members and friends who had found out about my place of arrest visited me. I was not confined in the military prison which formed a part of the headquarters but was allowed to stay in the room of the sentinel officer. The chief of headquarters was a colonel of noble character, and his conduct towards me was not that of a prison ward towards a prisoner. I enjoyed relative freedom in this tenement and was allowed to practice physical exercise in the early morning outside in the fresh air.

### **Sir, Please Do An *Istikharah* for Me!**

I was eventually informed that I was to be exiled to Iranshahr. I was pleased to hear this because my friend, Sheikh Mohammad-Javad Hujjati Kermani, had been exiled to the same city. On the day of my departure, my family members and friends came to bid me farewell, but our parting was not bitter because I was being sent to exile which was far easier than the previous imprisonments I suffered.

An officer and two sergeants accompanied me to the bus station where we boarded a bus heading to Zahedan, a city not very far from Iranshahr. The bus made a temporary stop in the town of Gonabad where we had lunch and performed prayers. I was familiar with Gonabad as I had visited the city several times previously and it was the hometown of some of my students such as Sheikh Farzaneh, Sadeqi Gonabadi and Kamyab who was later martyred. The bonds of affection which tied me to my students were exceptionally tight and transcended the ordinary relations between a teacher and his students. I was present at the wedding ceremonies of some of my pupils in Gonabad and had become acquainted with the people of the city.

When we got off the bus, a young man noticed me and quickly approached asking for an *istikhara*. While I was consulting the Qur'an, the officers stood watching me carefully. The young man found an opportune moment to whisper: "I'm not here for an *istikhara*. I want to know why you've been brought here under guard."

"Do you know me?"

"Quite well," he answered.

"I've been exiled to Iranshahr. Kindly inform the brothers of this."

We reached Zahedan in the early hours of the next morning and remaining in the city for an hour. We went to a mosque where I prayed before eating breakfast. Then we boarded another bus to Iranshahr. Once there, I was first taken to the governor's office where the operatives were informed that I must be taken to the police headquarters. A special file was prepared for me at the headquarters. The officials required that I issue an oath promising to remain in the city and informed me that I must report daily to the police station to sign a document proving my presence.

## Devotion to God

I went out of the police station alone and asked some individuals I encountered in the street to guide me to a mosque. They directed me to Al-Rasul Mosque, the only mosque for Shi'as in the city. The population of Zahedan was predominantly Sunni, and the rest of the mosques built in the city were for our Sunni brothers.

Tall trees stood in the courtyard of the mosque and a water stream flowed in the enclosure. The water was so sweet to the taste that it rivaled the celebrated waters of Tehran which were renowned in all of Iran for its sweetness. The weather was warm and pleasant and very agreeable for my body, especially since I suffered an intolerance to bitter cold temperatures. From the inside, the mosque was majestic and strikingly beautiful, and exquisite carpets covered the floor.

I removed some of my outer garments, placed them in a corner, and performed ablution. I stood in prayer and was engulfed with a profound sense of devotion which I can still vividly recall to this very day. I was entirely alone, isolated from my family members, my children and my friends, taking refuge with all my soul in God and sensing an unparalleled feeling of spiritual ecstasy.

I exited the mosque carrying my suitcase and noticed that the citizens of the city were staring at me, pondering the identity of the new exile who had been sent to their city. Zahedan had turned into a center for banished political activists. I headed to the main thoroughfare in the city to find an address which I had previously obtained the contact details of a faithful man by the name of Ra’ufi who had a shop in the center of the city. People guided me to his shop, but it was closed. I decided to stroll in the vicinity to pass the time, but when I returned, the shop was still closed. I gazed through the glass façade but saw no one inside. When I turned around, a Volkswagen parked near me with two men sitting inside.

“Do you know Mr. Ra’ufi?” One of the men asked.

“No, I don’t, but (...) has directed me to him.”

Upon hearing this, the man descended from the car and said: “I am Ra’ufi and this is my brother.”

We embraced and I joined the two men in the car. It was almost time for evening prayers, so we headed to a place of worship named *Fatemiyya*, where I prayed. At the end of that long, eventful day, I felt extremely exhausted and told my hosts that I was in need of rest. They asked if I preferred to rest there or go to their house, but I chose to rest where I was. I slept for an hour even though my eyelids were still weary with fatigue and sleeplessness. It was the month of Muharram and crowds of people had gathered to participate in the mourning assemblies. I encountered my friend, Sheikh Hujjati Kermani, and together we went to Ra’ufi’s house.

## Meeting Again with Friends

We stayed at Ra’ufi’s home for a few days before moving to another residence. – Despite Ra’ufi’s kind insistence that we remain at his home, Sheikh Hujjati Kermani and I decided that it would be better to find a house for ourselves. We found a house and were on the verge of moving in when a delegation composed of twenty men arrived from Zahedan to visit us. At its head was Sheikh Mo’in al-Ghuraba, a prominent cleric from Zahedan. As soon as they discovered that we were moving to a new house, they helped us with cleaning the place and preparing it. We dwelt in this house for a few months before moving to another more suitable residence.

Sheikh Mo'in al-Ghuraba was not the first prominent figure to visit us in Iranshahr. Our first visitor was a young man named Karimpur who knocked at Ra'ufi's door at midnight at a time when our host happened to be away. I was perturbed when I heard the rap at the door at such a late hour. Since the raid on my home back in Mashhad, I was filled with apprehension every time I heard a knock at night. I had inadvertently developed a sense of alarm after the trauma I had undergone.

Sheikh Hujjati was the one to open the door. He found a polite, well dressed young man who introduced himself as a relative of Ra'ufi. Karimpur's character soon materialized; he greatly sympathized with prisoners and exiles and proved to be very energetic in Islamic activism. He was later martyred during the Imposed War.

The first person to come to see me from Mashhad was Haj Ali Shamaqdari. He was a member of a special group among my students, known as 'commoners', who possessed a high degree of Islamic knowledge and were knowledgeable in details regarding Islam of which many educated men were ignorant. They understood Islamic revolutionary concepts well and closely adhered to Islam in their daily lives. Haj Ali had attended all my classes in Mashhad attentively and recorded down all the important points.

Sheikh Saduqi also visited us during the period that we dwelt in the second house, together with a group of well-wishers including Sheikh Rashed. Their visit occurred a few days before the advent of Nowruz; they then left for the city of Chabahar to see Ayatullah Nasser Makarim Shirazi who was banished there. On their return journey, they passed through Iranshahr to visit us again and spent a night at our home. A few days after Nowruz, Sheikh Hujjati was sent to Sanandaj, a city marked by pleasant, cool weather. During his stay in Sanandaj, Sheikh Hujjati frequently sent me letters in which he wrote: "I am lamentably enjoying this fine weather while you are living in the hot weather of Iranshahr."

It was during those short visits that I made the acquaintance of Sheikh Rashed who was cordial and humorous, forever smiling and always ready to utter witty remarks. I heard that after he returned to Yazd, he kept saying: "If only I had been exiled to Iranshahr to spend more time with Sayyid Khamenei!"

His wish soon came true. Two weeks after they returned to Yazd, a police officer came to see me and handed me a note. It was, strangely enough, from Sheikh Rashed informing me that he was at the police station. I rushed to the

station to see him sitting comfortably, joking with eight police officers who had gathered around him and were bursting with laughter.

I approached them and asked him why he was there. He informed me that he had ascended the pulpit in Yazd on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March 1978, in a mourning ceremony conducted in memory of the passage of 40 days after the regime's slaughter of many people on the streets of Tabriz. Sheikh Rashed had criticized the regime during the course of his sermon, and was immediately detained and sent to Iranshahr in an ambulance. I brought him to my house and we thereafter worked closely together in preparing for Islamic activities in the city, in the absence of Sheikh Hujjati who stayed at the time in Sanandaj.

In Farvardin, the first month of spring, the temperature in Iranshahr increased considerably. During this period my family came to visit me from Mashhad. My fourth and youngest son Meysam was only 6 months old at the time. My family members, accustomed as they were to colder temperatures, could not bear the increasingly hot weather, especially with the lack of cooling appliances at home. Thus, they returned to Mashhad after two weeks.

### **Meeting and Cooperating with the Sunni Brothers**

During the early days of my exile, I had not yet established contact with the natives of the town. I regularly met with Ra'ufi, his brother and a few others where we discussed current issues and exchanged opinions. Every now and then, we received some visitors from Zahedan, Qom, and Mashhad. Gradually though, I forged new bonds with certain individuals, especially the youth in Iranshahr.

The very first young man I met in the city was the son of a humble shopkeeper. He was still a student in secondary school and his age did not exceed 16 years. Through him, I obtained the chance to encounter more young adults. We conducted intellectual sessions which continued all throughout my residence in Iranshahr. After the victory of the revolution, he visited me with his family and I conducted his marriage ceremony. He joined the fighting ranks during the Imposed War and he was martyred. His father still visits me regularly.

According to the established rules of banishment, I was forbidden to engage in any religious or political activities in Iranshahr which drove me to expand to activities outside the city. To my delight, I received an invitation from the citizens of Bazman, a town situated 100 kilometers away from Iranshahr. Sheikh Hujjati

and I made an initial visit to the city by car before fixing our schedule into one visit every week or two.

In Bazman, I led the faithful in congregational prayers and delivered short sermons, My activities did not go unnoticed. After a while, the local governmental authorities became suspicious and exerted pressure on the driver of our car, ordering him to halt his trips. He chose not to inform us of the warning he had received, but we realized he was in a critical position so we decided to stop our trips to Bazman.

Back in Iranshahr, my first priority was to revive Al al-Rasul Mosque. The mosque was not functioning properly, and a great part of the dilemma lay in the fact that the founder of the mosque resided outside Iranshahr. He only came to the city once a year during the first ten days of Muharram to supervise the mourning ceremonies of Imam Hussein (as). After the mourning period, he would leave Iranshahr and the mosque would be devoid of activities.

The sectarian divisions in Iranshahr were the root cause of segregating Sunni mosques from Shi'a ones. Small Sunni mosques were constructed in the city, each accommodating a small portion of worshipers. As for the Shi'a Al al-Rasul Mosque, it only operated once a year. I proposed that we strive to revive the Al al-Rasul Mosque and received considerable support for my idea. With the aid of Sheikh Rashed, I began conducting congregational prayers and delivered a concise yet beneficial speech afterward.

The prayers and short sermons were broadcast through a loudspeaker, and this contributed to enhancing spirituality among the citizens of Iranshahr at large and Shi'as in particular. The Sunni inhabitants of the city took satisfied notice of the constancy in performing prayers, the eloquent recitation, and the variation of surahs recited. I then found it suitable to suggest establishing Friday prayer, The rate of attendance was high, and it soon became the largest Friday Prayer gathering in Iranshahr. Due to his keenness on the establishment of this prayer, Sheikh Rashed recited the *adhan* himself.

We gradually established friendly relations with the Sunni *ulama* in the city. I was intent on devising a practical plan leading to the removal of psychological obstacles implanted between Sunnis and Shi'as in Iranshahr. The solution, I believed, rested in religious cooperation between the two sects. For this purpose, I conducted a cordial dialogue with Moulavi Ghamar al-Din, a Sunni cleric in the city and the imam of Nur Mosque.

I remember telling him: “Our common Islamic responsibility requires contemplating the future of Islam and carefully considering the looming threats and prospective obstacles. All Muslims, regardless of their religious denominations, have to shoulder great responsibilities. If we occupy ourselves with scrutinizing bygone incidents, and searching historical sources to find cases for dispute, this will only serve to intensify grudges and arouse hostile emotions. That can never be to the good of Islam and Muslims, I do not mean that we should sever our connection to the past because our intellect and doctrine are dependent upon it, but our cooperation should be based on a firm outlook to the future of Islam.”

### **The Birth of the Prophet, Our Symbol of Unity**

This was the main theme of all my conversations with the Sunni *ulama* I met, and I noticed that the faithful among them favorably received my idea. In order to advance my outlook, I devised a humble but practical plan: to unite our celebrations marking the Prophet’s birthday. Sunnis maintain that his birthdate was on the 12<sup>th</sup> of Rabi‘ al-Awwal, while Shi‘as honor his birth on the 17<sup>th</sup>. We agreed to jointly celebrate the days between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of Rabi‘ Awwal.

We prepared the vast Al al-Rasul Mosque for those ceremonies during the blistering days of summer, when the temperature reached 63 degrees centigrade in the sun, and 54 degrees in the shade. The sun scorched our faces with its blistering rays, and all throughout the day we suffered under the oppressive heat. Our daily respite came at about 10 in the night, with the arrival of a faint breeze. The gentle gusts gradually increased until the weather became pleasant, but this had no effect on cooling the ground which remained unbearably hot to sit on regardless of how many rugs would be placed on the floor.

But the weather on the evening of our celebration was surprisingly different. Clouds gathered in the sky, shading us from the sun. A breeze wafted and the temperature decreased—which was quite unusual at that time of year—and small drops of rain began to drip on our heads and faces. We anticipated pleasant Weather for the following day.

On the day marking the Prophet’s birth, the sky began to rain. People went out of their homes in groups, reveling in the weather and joyously heading to Al al-Rasul Mosque which was soon overflowing with people. The main prayer hall

was filled with participants and those who arrived later sat in the adjoining pavilion.

At the close of day, I stood to lead the worshippers in evening prayer. I was in the second *rak'a* when I heard a strange sound, as if many palm branches were being dragged by a cart and trailing on the ground. The sound did not cease. If it had really been a passing cart, the sound should have disappeared, but it lingered.

### **The Flood and Imam Hussein's *Torba***

Moments passed before I heard the sound of crashing waves and realized that we were facing a flood. By the time I concluded my prayer, water had submerged the city and had reached the pavilion despite the fact that it was half a meter higher than ground level. I shouted directions to the men present, and asked them to take all precautionary actions to prevent the women and children from being hurt. The water kept flowing in overwhelming amounts for another two or three hours, and throughout the entire time we could hear the sound of houses crumbling one after another until I feared that the mosque where we were seeking refuge would also come crashing down. It was a terrible experience. The electricity had gone out, the water was roaring and uprooting everything it encountered, and the houses were collapsing one after another. Through it all, we could hear cries for help.

Under such circumstances, the human mind strives to find any method to confront the difficult situation in which it finds itself entangled. I remembered that I had once heard someone saying that the *torba*, the mud from Imam Hussein's grave, could be used to break free from danger with God's permission. I happened to have a clay piece of *torba* in my pocket, so I removed it, and putting my entire faith in God, cast it into the tumultuous waves which were flowing all around the mosque. It did not take long, and with God's mercy, the flooding ceased.

Once the flood stopped, I hurriedly established a local relief committee to aid the citizens of the city. There was not much we could accomplish that night, so we decided to launch our operations the following morning. I made my way back to my living quarters which was composed of two adjacent houses connected with a common door. Sheikh Rashed and I lived in one house while Rahimi<sup>78</sup> and

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78 After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, Rahimi was elected as member of parliament and was later martyred.

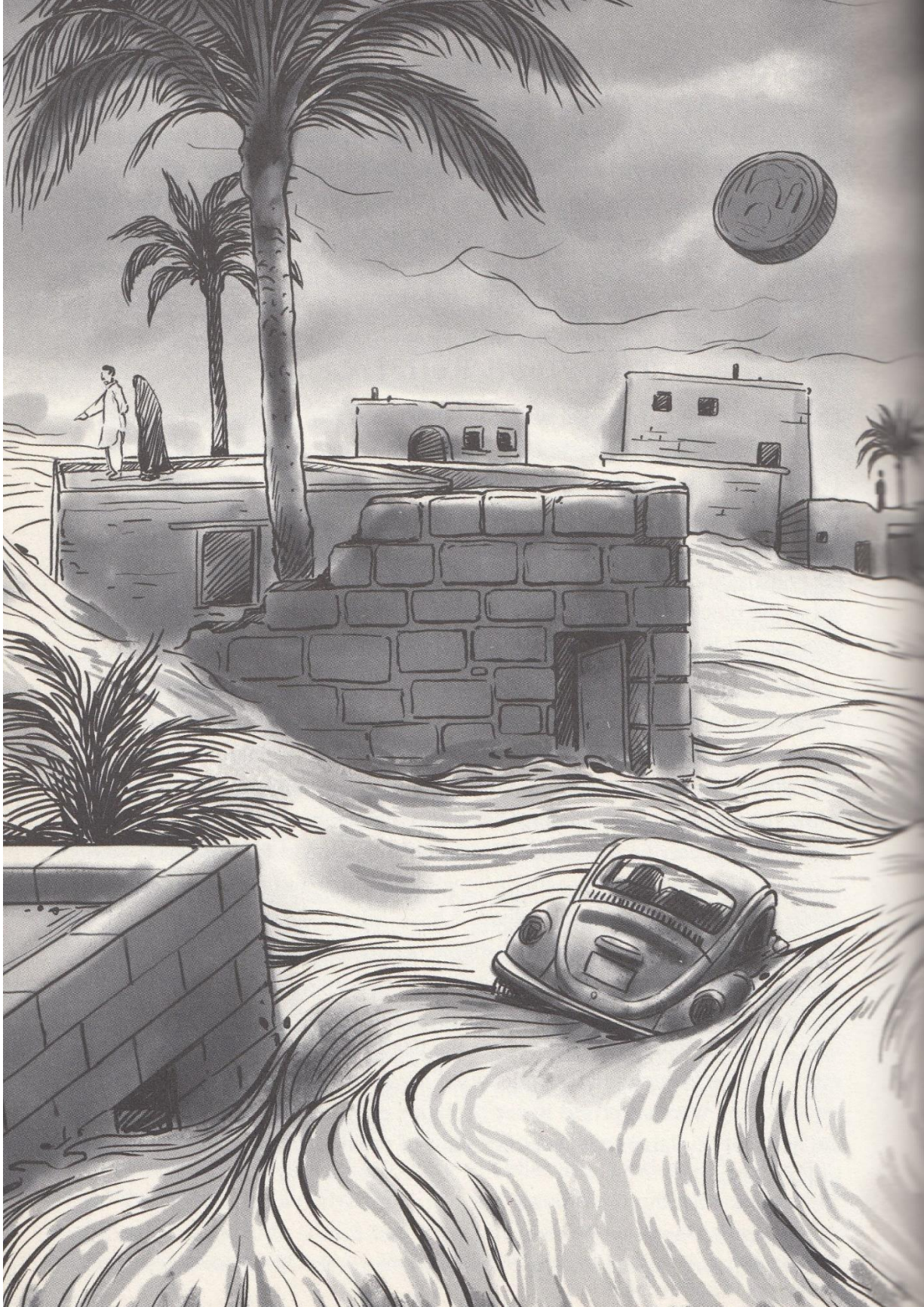
Musavi-Shali who had both been sent into exile after Sheikh Rashed—lived in the other. I was surprised to find that the house had not been damaged and no water had leaked inside though it had come quite close. Word spread in the town that the flood had not reached the house of the exiles, and some people assumed it was a sign of divine favor so I was quick to point out the location of the house on high ground was the true reason it was not affected by the flood, and that there was nothing out of the ordinary.

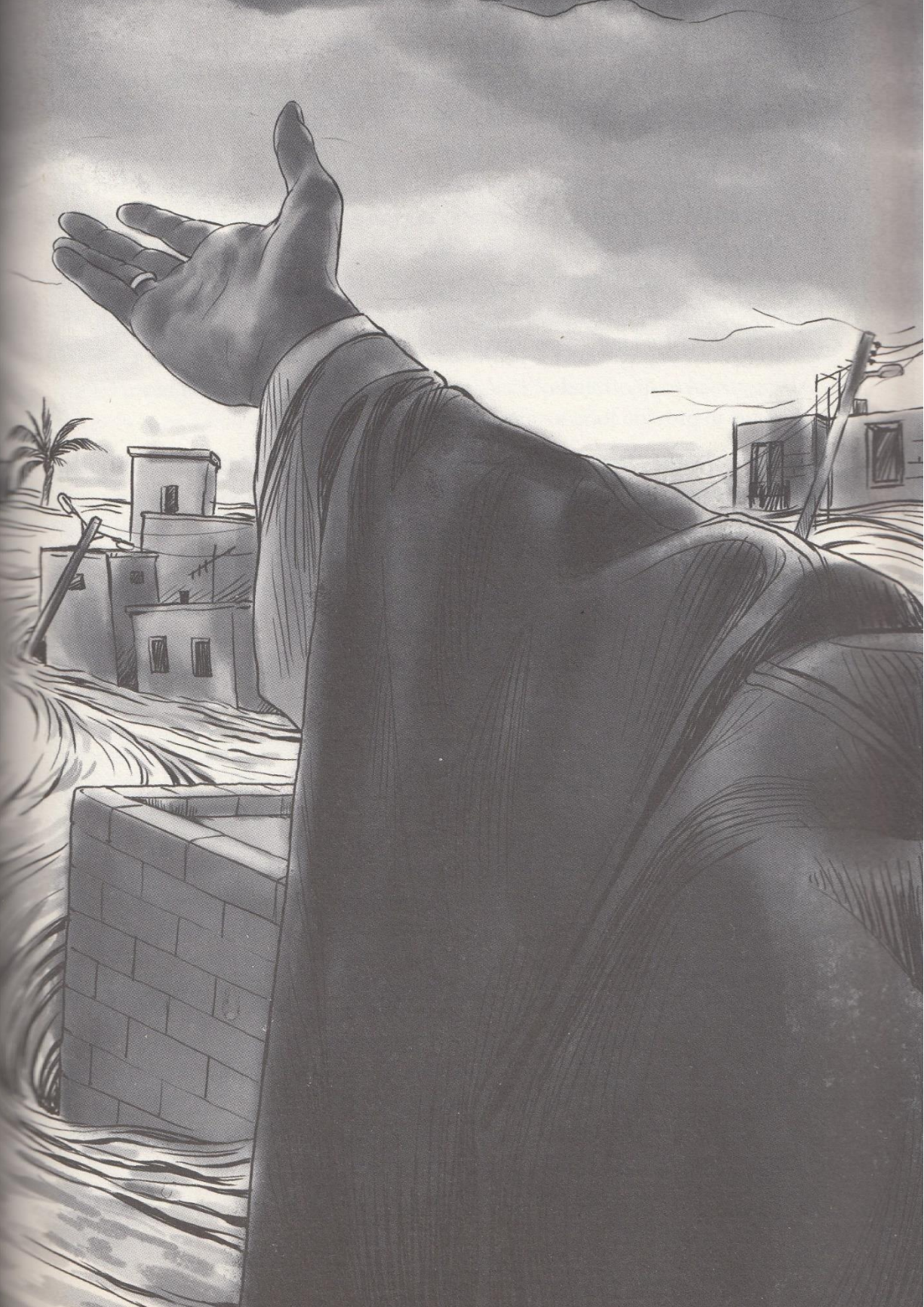
## The Flood Relief Center

The next morning, I headed with Sheikh Rashed and Rahimi to the outskirts of Iranshahr to inspect the houses which had been swept away in the valley. These homes were the main factor behind the catastrophe. The city was known throughout history to witness downpours of rain. The water would drift through the valley and traverse the city without incident. For this reason, the construction of any houses along this water passage was illegal because it led to the blockage of the water pathway. Some unscrupulous individuals had constructed their houses in the area and endangered the entire city.

We descended the valley to find the houses completely destroyed. While we were standing there, staring at the destruction, we saw a Baluch family approaching from the distance. We could make out a man, a few women and some children tottering along. The man was carrying a sleeping child while the women were weeping. Once they came nearer, we realized that the child the man carried was dead. This scene shook me to the core and I started sobbing. I bear a special sensitivity towards women and children, and cannot abide any harm which befalls them. I have often told my friends that I can never be assigned as a judge in disputes between men and women because I always favor women. And when it comes to children, I cannot stand the sight of them suffering misfortune, even during on-screen performances. This is why I was so distressed when I saw the dead child and freely expressed my grief, and the Baluch family understood my sorrow. Sheikh Rashed later told me that they were surprised to see someone grieve more than them and soon the news of my lamentations at the sight of the dead child spread among the Baluch citizens.

We returned to the city with grief-stricken hearts. The members of the relief committee we had established informed us that 80 percent of the houses in the city had been destroyed, and those which had not collapsed had been inundated. This was expected as most houses in Iranshahr were only one-story constructions.





With so many responsibilities to bear, it suddenly crossed my mind that the citizens of the city had not eaten anything since yesterday at lunchtime and that they must surely be hungry. The bakeries in the city had been closed down and water had seeped into shops and warehouses. It became clear that it would take a few days for everything to be restored to order but it was a luxury we could not afford. Hunger was threatening the entire town.

I suggested to my friends: "Let's raise the slogan 'Save the Famished City', and strive to provide food by any means possible."

I could see the citizens of the city wandering through the streets in shock. The catastrophe which had befallen them had rendered them speechless and senseless to hunger. I came upon a grocery store that was saved from the flood by virtue of its location on higher ground. Its owner was standing at the door, continuously glancing at both sides without knowing what to do. I approached him and asked: "Do you have any food?"

"Only biscuits."

"I'll buy all the biscuits you have."

He only had a few available cartons which I distributed immediately among the displaced people in the area. It was only a temporary relief, and in no way a solution for a stricken city.

I made my way to the post office and telephoned Sheikh Kaf'ami in Zahedan. I informed him about the details and asked him to send bread, dates and cheese as soon as possible. "Can you also contact Sheikh Saduqi in Yazd? And would you send news to Mashhad and Tehran and inform them of our need for food?" I asked, and constantly repeated: "I'll be anxiously awaiting the bread and dates."

When I hung up the phone, I noticed that some people had gathered behind me, listening to my appeal and exchanging surprised looks mingled with admiration. It was obvious that news of the phone call would spread in the city in less than an hour. The citizens were appreciative of my efforts because they were fully aware that the local clergy were incapable of providing aid while

The government officials were acutely incompetent in launching a relief effort, not to mention their indifference toward the plight of the city.

I returned to Al al-Rasul Mosque to prepare it as a center for the local relief operations. In less than three hours, a big truck loaded with bread, dates, cheese

and watermelons arrived and parked in front of the mosque. We broadcast a short Qur'anic recital through the loudspeakers of the mosque before publicly announcing that the mosque had been transformed into a relief center for providing aid and distributing food.

“Give food to anyone who comes here. If someone says it's not enough, don't hesitate to give him more,” I advised the brothers. “If he comes again, don't say ‘You've already taken your share’. This will prevent people from becoming too greedy.” I was certain that help from other cities would soon arrive; and that was how we began our relief work.

I personally supervised the distribution of various tasks among the brothers and established a relief organization. I benefitted from the experience I had gained during the two months of aid in the wake of the earthquake which struck the city of Ferdows in 1968.

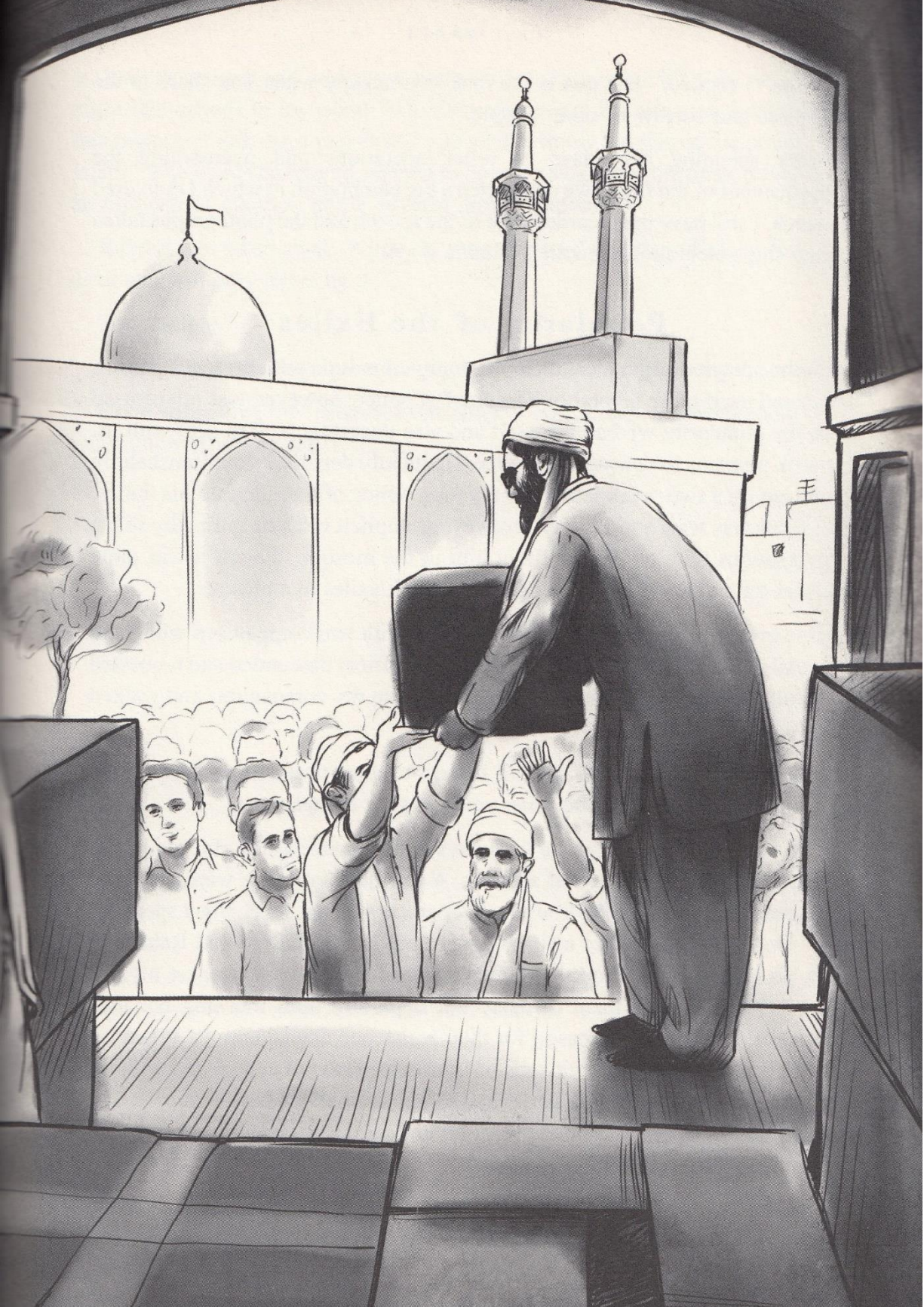
The operation continued for fifty days. We checked on the citizens in their houses, cottages and tents and prepared detailed statistics of the number of family members in each household. The number of losses we received were sometimes exaggerated but we never challenged them.

We distributed the items according to the statistics we had recorded and issued food coupons for each family to receive its allotted share. We also distributed blankets, lamps, kitchen utensils, furniture and other basic necessities. Some people resorted to forging my signature on fake coupons they had prepared. Even though my signature is simple, it contained a small cryptic clue. I always recognized the forged ones, but I never put them to Shame.

During the relief operations, Sheikh Hujjati came to Iranshahr. He had fallen ill in his second place of exile, the city of Sanandaj, and had asked for Permission to go to Kerman. From Kerman, he made his way to Iranshahr to See us. It was wonderful to see him again. We stayed up all night, immersed in Conversation. I suggested in the morning to take him on a short trip in my car through the city. While driving through the streets, men, women and children raised their hands in greeting. Sheikh Hujjati could not hide his surprise. “Do you remember when they refrained from saying the simplest of greetings?”

“I do,” I replied. “But this is the rank you occupy when you share in the happiness and sorrow of other people.”





After spending fifty days of relief operations and overcoming the consequences of the flood, we conducted a big celebration in which I delivered a speech. I still have the recorded tape of the speech and the photographs taken during this celebration are still available.

## Popularity of the Exiles

With the advent of Ramadan, the opportunity to mingle with the local citizens presented itself more favorably. The chief of police, however, was not pleased with the popularity we had amassed and was uncertain how to deal with us. He took no pains to conceal his malice. He luckily departed from Iranshahr in Ramadan on a two-week leave and a young police officer took up his duties. The latter was wise and rational, conveying implicit hints of sympathy in his conversations with us. We first met him in the mosque, though it was quite unusual for a chief of police to personally seek exiles in a mosque.

One evening, I was walking along a street with two companions who were also exiled. A car pulled up near us, the young officer descended and requested to speak with me in private. I stepped away from my companions and walked slowly by his side.

“The three exiles in this city will be sent to three destinations: Jiroft, Izeh and Eqlid. Keep the news between you and your companions.”

The young officer was in the final days of his service as the chief of police had returned after his leave of absence. A few days later, we were informed to prepare ourselves for the imminent departure without receiving a specified date. One night, the police officers sought our home and ordered Rahimi to pack his belongings and informed me that I had two hours to prepare myself. We tried to convince them to delay our departure until morning but they vehemently refused. The reason for their insistence dawned on us. When WW? First arrived in the city, the citizens of Iranshahr were not acquainted with us but with time, we gained popularity and forged cordial bonds with people. The local authorities feared a violent reaction among the citizens and had chosen to remove us from Iranshahr at night.

Rahimi was busy packing up his belongings while the policemen stood nearby and kept urging him to hurry up. They pressed him relentlessly until he lost his temper and addressed them with fiery words. What he said that night still echoes in my mind: “Don’t be fooled by the temporary power of this regime. It

will soon perish and you shall witness the rise of the power of Islam.” The words he uttered seemed to be mere slogans at the time, driven by an outburst of emotion under adverse circumstances.

Rahimi was taken away. When my turn arrived, I told the officials: “I own a car and will only travel by it.”

“Impossible.”

“Well then, I refuse to leave the city, and you can do whatever you want.”

Upon witnessing my insistence, the chief of police relented and granted me permission to use my car.



**VICTORY AFTER HARDSHIP**

## My Car

Before I was sent into exile, I had frequently visited Tehran to fulfill some duties linked to Islamic activism. Once in the capital, I was constantly on the move and it was only a matter of time before I realized that I was in need of a car. One of our active members, Sadeq Islami, offered me use of his relative's car whenever I came to Tehran and I accepted his offer. Islami was later martyred in the explosion that targeted the Islamic Republic Party's headquarters by the Mujahedin Khalq Organization.<sup>79</sup> The bombing claimed the lives of 72 prominent revolutionary figures including Ayatullah Beheshti.

The car, a Peugeot 404, belonged to Haj Ahmad Ghadirian, a wealthy businessman who owned many vehicles. After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, he halted his business enterprises and dedicated himself completely to serve the new revolutionary administration. Whenever I was in Tehran, I contacted Ghadirian. After hearing news of my arrival, he would personally drive his car to meet me or send his son instead. I kept the car for a week or two and, when departing from Tehran, I would either park the car in the parking lot of the airport or main train station and place the key under one of its tires. Then, I would telephone Ghadirian, informing him of where I had parked his car.

When I was banished to Iranshahr, I was in need of a car in order to drive to the outskirts of the city and to reach the airport of Zahedan, the sole landing field in the area, to meet my family members who had come to visit me. I was used to wearing the local Baluchi attire which blended well with my skin color and beard. Wearing Baluchi clothes instead of clerical garb was the right choice under those circumstances due to the restrictions imposed on my movements outside the borders of Iranshahr. I still have my Baluchi traditional costume and still wear it sometimes.

Since I really needed a car, I telephoned Ghadirian and made a request. "If you think that Iranshahr is as important as Tehran, send me a car!" A few days later, someone came up to me and asked: "Are you Sayyid Khamenei?"

"Yes, I am."

"I've brought you a car," he said, pointing to a brand-new Peugeot 404 which was parked nearby.

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79 Popularly known as *Monafeqin Khalq*

“Is it from Ghadirian?”

“It sure is.”

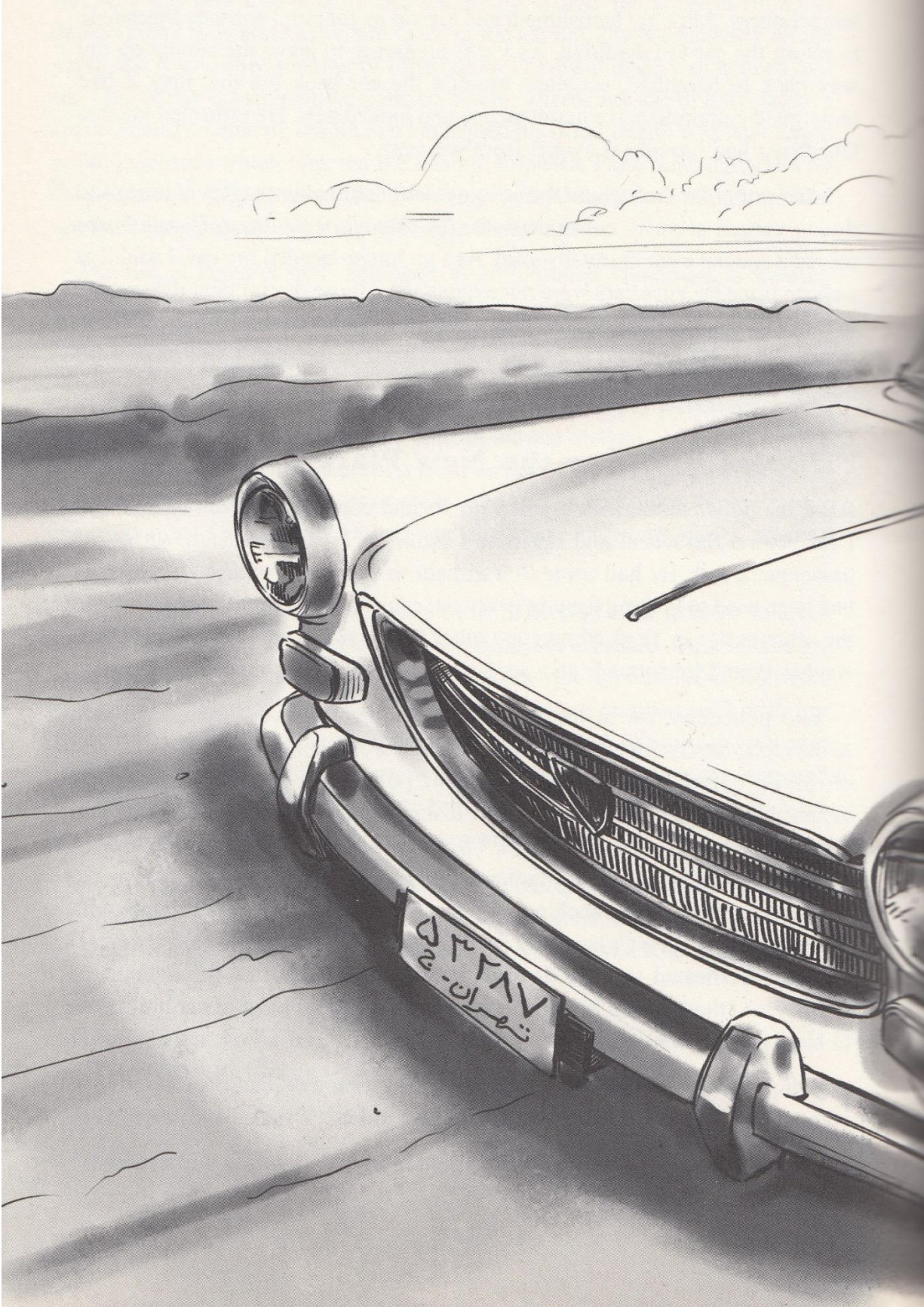
I used this car during the time I was in exile in Iranshahr and Jiroft, and the car had become battered after being used on a rugged terrain in hot temperatures. After my banishment and arrival in Tehran, I entrusted someone to return the car to Ghadirian. As I was preparing to leave the capital on my way back to Mashhad, someone brought the car back but this time it had undergone comprehensive maintenance and looked new. He informed me that Ghadirian had brought it as gift from the start.

I drove this car throughout the ensuing period, but after the Revolution, and due to certain security considerations, the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps placed a special car at my disposal. As I no longer needed my car, I sold it at a cheap price because cars were not expensive in those days. I later discovered that it had changed hands five times before a friend of mine spotted it and purchased it. He repaired it and brought it back to me, and I still have it till this very day.

## En Route to the New Place of Exile

After the police authorities granted me formal consent to drive my own car, I sat behind the wheel and my wife’s brother, Hasan Khojasteh, sat in the passenger’s seat. He had come to Iranshahr to spend a few days with me. He had been used to visiting the city every once in a while, to deliver my letters to the other exiles in Yazd, Shiraz and other towns and bring back their replies. Asghar Pour-Mohammadi also accompanied him during those missions.

Two policemen sat in the rear seat clutching large old-fashioned rifles. A decrepit, barely functional police vehicle drove behind us. My car could obviously outrun the other vehicle, so the police officers asked me to drive behind them. After traversing a short distance, they changed their mind and ordered me to drive ahead of them. They could not agree on which course of action to take until my car’s radiator overheated and I was forced to make frequent stops. Before reaching the city of Bam, I filled the radiator with water, sat in the driver’s seat, and sped toward the city to avoid having to deal with an overheated radiator again. I had become exhausted throughout the journey and thus did not heed the constant signals from the rear car urging me to slow down.





“Stop this car immediately,” the two policemen who had boarded my car commanded, but I paid no attention to their order.

“We’re going to the police headquarters in Bam and they’ll join us there!”

We finally reached the city and I drove toward our destination. The other car reached the headquarters later on, its passengers panting with fatigue.

The temperature was high and I was drained of strength. I noticed a room, near the entrance door of the police headquarters which included some buns, beds inside. I turned to Hasan and asked him to seek Haj Seddiqi who had frequently visited me while I was living in Iranshahr. A native of Yazd and living in Bam, Seddiqi was a truck driver who aided exiles and it was crucial to inform him of our presence at the police headquarters.

Without asking for permission, I made my way to one of the bunk beds and laid down, surrendering to a deep slumber. Shortly afterwards, I was awoken by Seddiqi who welcomed me cheerfully.

“My car is in a battered condition and we still have to drive 72 kilometers to reach Jiroft. The terrain is mountainous and rugged, and the roads are narrow, Could you take us to Jiroft in your car while I leave my car here for repair?”

“Of course!”

## **Prayer in the Coffeehouse**

Seddiqi sat behind the wheel while I sat next to him and Hasan sat in the back seat with two policemen. Three police personnel followed in their car, At noontime, we stopped at a coffeehouse in a beautiful location filled with orchards and flowing fresh water. The place was a stopping point for travelers in that part of the country, where they rested and ate before resuming their journey.

I descended from the car and strode towards the coffeehouse, followed by Hasan, Seddiqi, and the five police officers. I asked for a place to perform ablution before prayer, and was guided to a beautiful garden behind the coffeehouse. I then suggested that we perform our prayers on the spot, though I was expecting the policemen to object because the area was exposed to passersby on the street. But they did not pay attention until it was too late.

We stood up and started praying, and before long we attracted the attention of the village inhabitants who could see us from where they stood. Ordinary

Iranians, and especially those who dwelt in rural areas, harbored affection toward Sayyids, the *ulama*, and all opponents to the Shah's regime who suffered injustice at the hands of the authorities. I had amassed all these descriptions; my black turban was indicative of my lineage, my clerical garb was a clear sign of my social function, and the presence of the policemen behind me showed that I was a dissident.

By the time we concluded our prayers, a group of villagers had gathered on the roadside, gazing at us in surprise mingled with admiration, but they kept their distance. I asked the policemen if we could rest for a while, but they tried to convince me to move on. When I insisted that we remain, they relented because we had forged a bond of familiarity and they knew that I never yielded to their orders. Nevertheless, they surrounded me while I rested out of fear that I might flee from their grasp.

After a brief respite, we rose and headed to the waiting cars. A big crowd had gathered around the cars, reciting *salawat* in loud voices which indicated their sympathy and support. I greeted them and met their affections in kind, but the policemen became frightened upon witnessing this sight and I pitied them for their situation. We boarded the cars and headed in the direction of Jiroft, my heart feeling warm after receiving the kind expressions of support.

## Jiroft

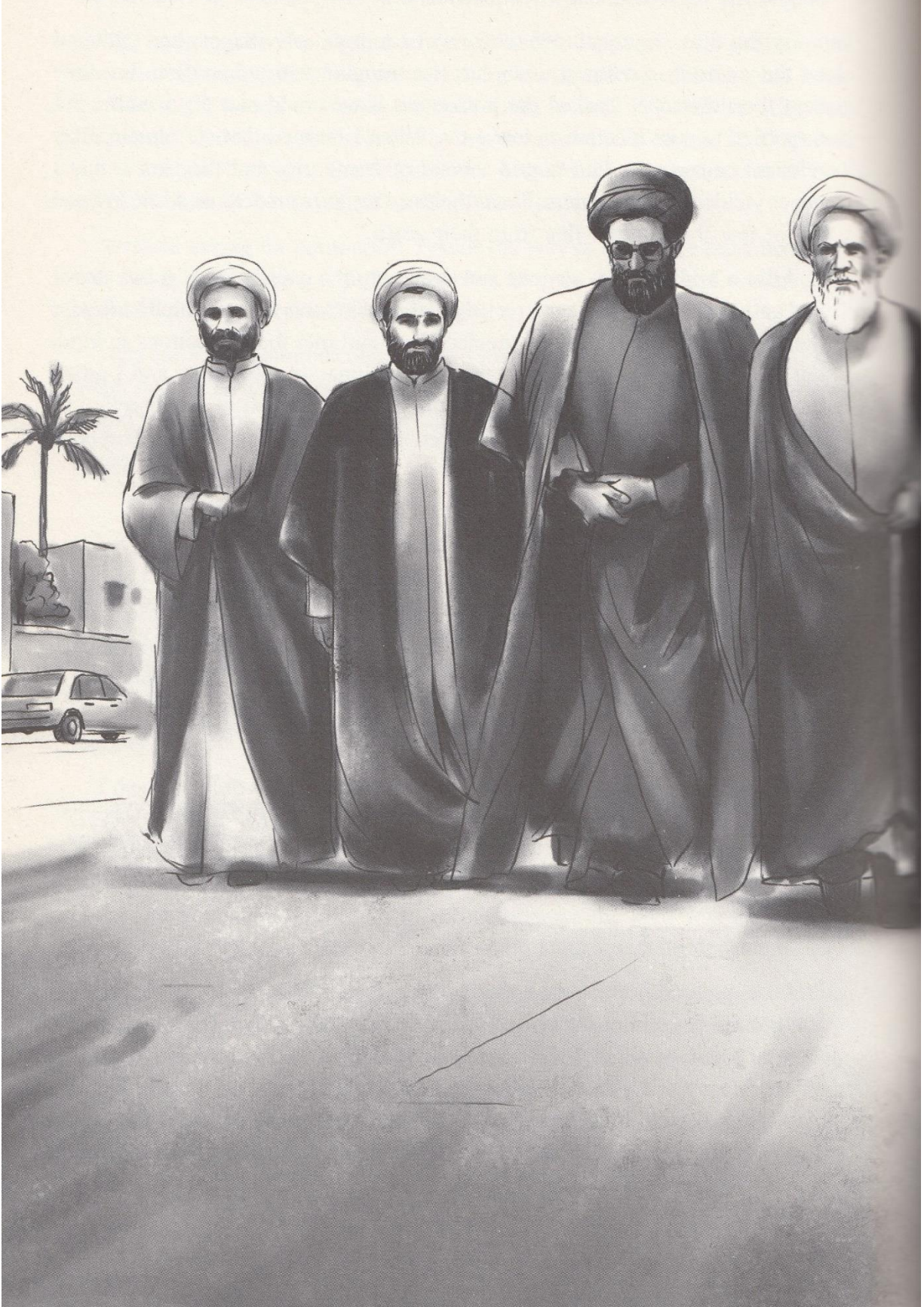
We finally reached Jiroft.

The town was, in fact, more like a huge orchard. When I first set eyes upon Jiroft, it seemed as if the city were originally a vast orchard in which the citizens had decided to construct a number of homes and shops and to pave some streets. Its weather, however, was as hot as in Iranshahr but it was very humid. Insects were everywhere whereas in Iranshahr the climate was arid with no insects.

I was led to the police station, a narrow, dull building with no servicemen inside because they had gone to rest in their homes. I was asked to sit down and wait for the policemen to return to duty but found the atmosphere stifling and unbearable.

“I can't stand this place; I prefer to sit outside.”

I was granted permission so I hurried outside and sprawled my mantle on the ground in front of the police station and sat down. The street was empty save of





a few passersby who expressed their surprise upon seeing me sitting there. Meanwhile, Hasan had gone to find the house of Sheikh Rabbani Amlashi who had been banished to the city before me two months earlier, My ties with Sheikh Rabbani, may God have mercy on his soul, extended to the year 1957. I first made his acquaintance in Karbala when he and Sheikh Hashemi Rafsanjani were in the city. Our bond of friendship strengthened, and we later participated in a seminary course together for two years.

The policemen finally returned from their homes and, after concluding the routine procedures, Hasan and I headed to Sheikh Rabbani's house. Sheikh Rabbani was extremely pleased to see me. "What had brought you here?!" he asked in amazement.

"Destiny has brought me here!"

I was the second person to be exiled to Jiroft after Sheikh Rabbani Amlashi. Later on, more individuals were banished to the city until our number rose to nine. The regime had followed a new policy of banishing dissidents to a limited number of Iranian cities to prevent them from spreading their message far and wide because they were known to perform Islamic activities wherever they went.

## The Newcomer

A few days after my arrival, a shopkeeper from Qom appeared at Sheikh Amlashi's house, which had become the primary destination for exiles. He had been banished to the suburbs of Khorasan before the decision was made to send him to Jiroft. I still remember the details of his arrival; I was awoken from sleep by sounds at the door. I rose up and opened the door to find a parked car loaded with pieces of furniture and luggage. Inside, sat the new exile with two accompanying policemen.

The first thing I noticed was the newcomer's energy and courage, especially his cleverness which is a trait generally shared by the citizens of Qom. He directed the two policemen to stand a short distance away from each other and started unpacking his belongings. He began nimbly to hand the first policeman an item while the latter handed it to his companion, and every time he handed an item to the policeman, he would tell him: "*Begu: Marg bar Shah*" Say: Death to the Shah! The two policemen could not help but laugh. Intelligent and efficient, the people of Qom offered great services to the Islamic revolution. Even the *ulama* who

hailed from different regions: but lived for long periods in Qom acquired the commendable traits of the inhabitants of the city.

As our number increased, we decided to hold sessions at the main mosque in Jiroft. Sheikh Rabbani Shirazi, the eldest of the exiles, would walk in front of us on our way to the mosque while we walked behind in respect. Our procession which was composed of seven clergymen and two merchants walking purposefully inspired affection in the hearts of the local citizens. Each night, one of us would deliver a sermon which kindled the sentiments of the audience and drove them to chant Islamic slogans. I still remember that the first time we heard slogans being chanted, the voice came from the women's quarters behind the curtains which separated them from the men.

## Revolution

The first reports of the Islamic Revolution reached us while we were still in Iranshahr. The uprising of the citizens of Qom which occurred on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1978 was violently quashed by the Shah's security forces. The blood which was spilt on the streets of Qom fueled a series of demonstrations in other cities. On the Arba'in, the 40<sup>th</sup> day of mourning for Qom's fallen protesters, demonstrators were murdered in the streets of Tabriz, and then on the Arba'in of the murdered protestors of Tabriz, demonstrators were shot in Yazd. Similar demonstrations erupted in many Iranian cities.

When we first received news of the demonstrations in Qom, we could hardly believe what we had heard. An atmosphere of total suppression prevailed throughout the country and there was no sign of a potential mass opposition movement. We had never expected an escalation or an actual confrontation that would end up in so many people being murdered by the regime's forces. It was a total surprise with no foreseeable signs. The Islamic Revolution was a major incident which came into being without any previous indications.

Events followed in rapid succession, and we realized that something monumental was going to take place. I followed the news extensively. There were also some young men who kept me posted.

In the midst of the sweeping developments, Sheikh Saduqi sent me a short letter from Yazd, asking me to send him a reply regarding the current events. It was a good opportunity to address the *ulama* in Iran through a prominent figure

such as Saduqi and offer them a deep analysis and direct them to the proper stance and suitable measures.

The *ulama* had effectively assumed command, and this responsibility entailed the presence of experienced individuals who could make correct evaluations of events, develop efficient plans for the future, and be adept at detecting conspiracies. Such rare qualities could only be found in scholars who were in the Qom or Mashhad seminaries or lived in Tehran since the great majority of other clergymen lacked any previous experience in organizing political activities, especially on such a large scale.

I wrote a two-page letter to Sheikh Saduqi in which I expressed my view on the ongoing events from an Islamic political angle. He wrote me back, thanking me for the reply and asking me for an additional detailed response, so I wrote him an eight-page letter under the heading “The Responsibility of the *Ulama* towards the Islamic Revolution and in the Opposition to Hostile Conspiracies.” This analysis was published and distributed in Mashhad, Yazd, and some other regions without the author’s name.

Realizing the positive impact of such publications and their significance in developing the positions of the leaders of the Islamic movement, I continued to write. After the grave incidents which occurred in Shiraz, I wrote a letter to Sayyid Abdul Hussein Dastgheib in which I addressed the *ulama* of Shiraz.

I also penned a letter to Sayyid Shari‘atmadari to express my objection to his statement which was published in the local newspapers in which he called the Islamic activists “extremists.” Sayyid Shari‘atmadari’s approach was to express proclamations which satisfied both the regime and the people. The scale was to be tipped in favor of the regime because the authorities scrutinized the connotations of all public statements and took a severe stand. Calling activists “extremists” carried an extremely perilous connotation, and if such a description were to spread, all revolutionaries and followers of Imam Khomeini would be labelled as “extremists” and would be condemned. This is why I wrote a letter to Sayyid Shari‘atmadari and cautioned him from issuing statements which would grant the regime justification to massacre opponents in the name of eliminating extremism.

Before I could send the letter, news reached me of a massacre at Zhaleh Square<sup>80</sup> in Tehran—an incident which would later be known as ‘Black Friday.’<sup>81</sup> This drove me to write the following phrase on the margin of the letter: “This is the beginning of operations against extremists.”

My arrival in Jiroft coincided with the dismissal of prime minister Jamshid Amuzgar and the instatement of Sharif Imami. This incident heralded a swift series of events; accelerating disorder swept through the entire country and the regime was on the verge of losing control. As the authorities were losing their grip, harassment of dissidents slackened and this spread to include exiles as well. Some exiles left Jiroft without official permission, some of them were able to avoid being caught while others were arrested in Tehran.

I personally chose to remain in Jiroft because I did not want anyone to say I had escaped or grown weary of exile. I did not wish to be arrested on the run like some other brothers and chose to remain in Jiroft until the issuance of the formal decision to end my exile. I knew that it would not take long.

## Freedom from Exile

One night, the chief of police came to see me and said: “You’re free.” I did not express surprise or joy and received the news with indifference. The chief of police was puzzled and was even the more surprised when I answered: “I would like to remain in Jiroft.” He insisted that I grasp this opportunity and leave, but I was adamant in my decision. “I want to stay.”

There was a purpose behind my decision. I did not rule out the possibility of an assassination attempt on my life on the road back home. I was listening to Tehran Radio which was broadcasting the proceedings of the Majles. A member of parliament stated that some exiles who had been freed were killed on their way home by a staged car accident. On that day, the Majles was in complete chaos and some of the representatives were striving hypocritically to defend the revolutionaries. The police chief’s insistence on my departure only served in exacerbating my suspicions.

I decided to leave Jiroft without the local authorities knowing. I sent someone to Bam to seek my trusted friend Saduqi, and another acquaintance by the name

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80 Renamed as Martyrs Square after Islamic Revolution

81 This incident occurred on 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1978.

of Haj Yazdan-Panah, asking them to come to Jiroft. They both answered my call and when they arrived in Jiroft, I informed them of my intention to flee under cover. They were unhesitant. "We'll take you away late at night. Leave your car and belongings in Jiroft to avoid attracting any unwanted attention."

I had many belongings at home, most of which my friends had brought me. I only took the necessary items and left the rest behind to be used by any future exiles in the city. Fortunately, they were not used by anyone because the Islamic Revolution soon triumphed by the grace of God.

I left Jiroft in secret before dawn and headed to Bam with my two companions. I remained in Bam for two days during which I met some locals before leaving for Kerman at night. The journey to Kerman was pleasant and memorable. Many factors combined to increase my deep contentment: my freedom, the intensification of the Islamic movement, hope in a bright future, and the pleasure of a night journey on a fine road. I left my belongings in a seminary school in the city and then headed to the market to buy socks and a pair of shoes. While living in Iranshahr and Jiroft, I only wore slippers due to the sweltering heat, but wearing slippers in Kerman was not suitable. I could not afford the price of a pair of shoes, so I only purchased socks.

Sheikh Abbas Pour-Mohammadi, who hailed from Rafsanjan, was first sent to exile in Bandar-Lengeh, but when he fell ill, he was sent to Kerman for medical treatment. He resided in a large house surrounded by trees which belonged to a merchant in the city. When Sheikh Pour-Mohammad discovered that I was in Kerman, he invited me to this house and insisted that I stay there. I accepted his offer and remained in Kerman for two days. My time was filled with receiving the locals of Kerman whom I had met before; they flocked in groups and I welcomed them from morning till night. While I was in Kerman, news reached us that the Iraqi regime was exerting pressure on Imam Khomeini in Najaf and had encircled his residence.

After Kerman, I traveled to Yazd where I found that Sheikh Saduqi had assumed leadership of the city, directing all revolutionary, political, and economic affairs. He directed the locals to their responsibilities, and taught them everything they needed to know. He was courageously present in the field of the revolution and countered the regime like a lion who feared no consequences.

In Yazd, I heard that Imam Khomeini had traveled to Paris. I flew to Tehran and, from there, I headed to Mashhad where I engaged in revolutionary activities

until I was summoned to Tehran by order of Imam Khomeini to take part in the Council of the Islamic Revolution. On 11<sup>th</sup> of February 1979, the Islamic Revolution was victorious, and in 1981, I was elected President of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The time span between my exile and my investiture as member of the Revolutionary Council was about four months. And less than three years later, after the exile, I was elected President of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

*To Allah belongs the command before and after, and on that day the believers shall rejoice. In the victory of God. He grants victory to whomever He wills; and He is the Mighty, the Merciful.*<sup>82</sup>

*Glorified be thy Lord, the Lord of Majesty, from that which they describe. And peace be on the Messengers. And praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.*<sup>83</sup>

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82 Qur'an 30: 4-5

83 Qur'an 37: 180-182

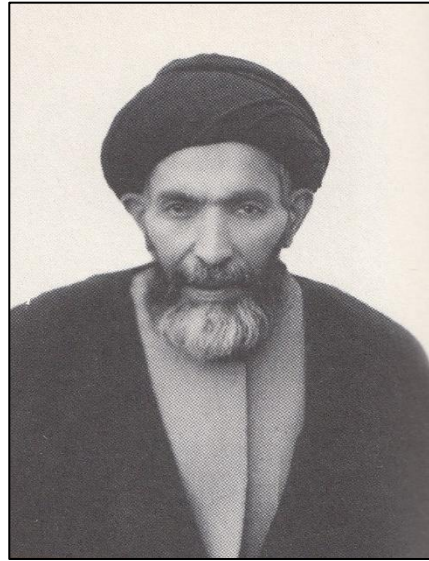




**PICTURES AND  
DOCUMENTS**



Agha Sayyid Hashim Mirdamadi  
Najaf Abadi in Reza Shah's prison.



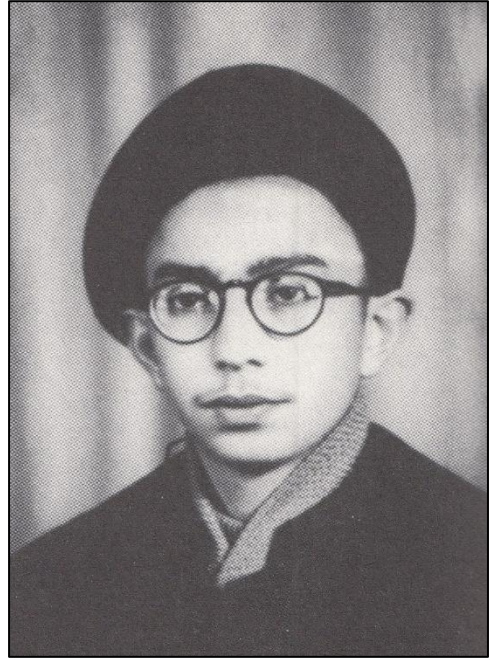
My maternal grandfather, Agha Sayyid Hashim Mirdamadi Najaf Abadi. One of the eminent scholars who was reputed for his erudition, asceticism and extensive knowledge in the exegesis of the Qur'an.



My father was the imam of mosque located in the center of marketplace of Mashhad where storekeepers, merchants and wealthy individuals presided. He was modest and non-materialistic

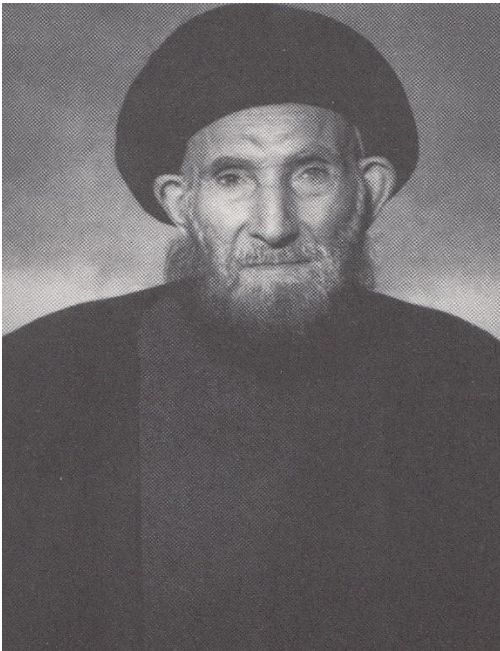
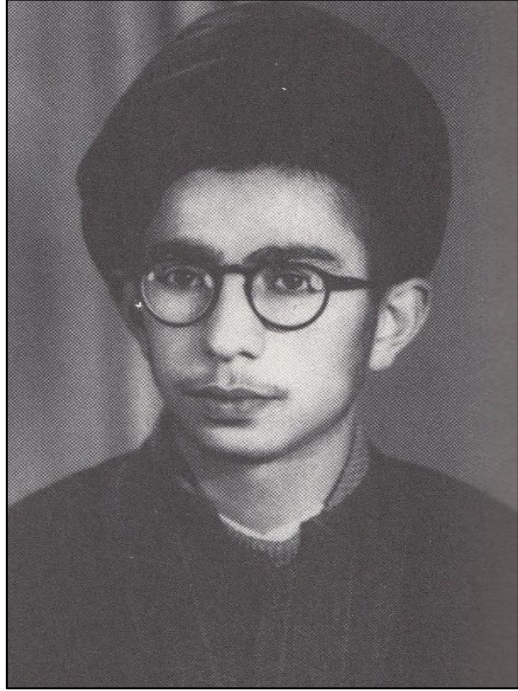
## PICTURES AND DOCUMENTS

I wore a turban during my early youth while I was still a student in the second grade. The reason I wore a turban at such young age owed to the general Iranian custom of wearing headgear. Naturally, my father refused the idea of his children wearing Pahlavi hats, and so the only remaining choice was to wear a turban.



I was famous for reciting the Qur'an- with excellent tajwid and reading a beautiful tone. I would recite the Qur'an in the ceremonies of our primary and when prominent people were welcomed upon visiting the school.

In 1953, I transferred to Madreseh Navvab from Madreseh Suleimaniya. During this period, my mental capacities erupted with full power. I developed an insatiable urge for learning and displayed an extraordinary potential for comprehending lessons.



I witnessed a level of poverty at my father's house which was rarely to be noticed in the homes of clergymen during that period.

PICTURES AND DOCUMENTS

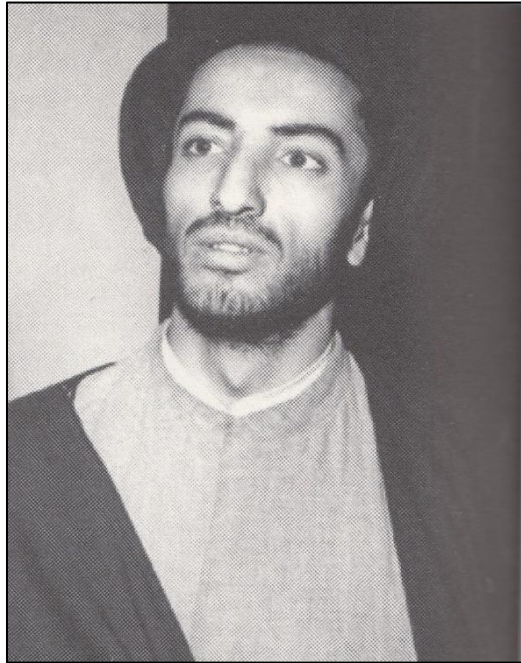


On the right, Hujjatul Islam Sayyid Hadi Khamenei and on the left, Mr. Sayyid Hasan Khamenei.



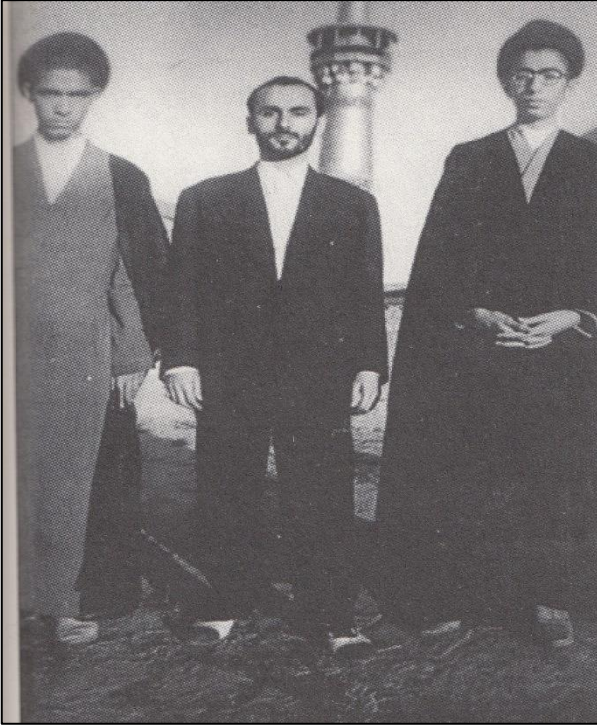
From the right: Hujjatul Islam Sayyid Hadi Khamenei, Hujjatul Islam Sayyid Mohammad Khamenei, Ayatullah Sayyid Javad Khamenei, Ayatullah Mirza Habibullah Maleki Tabrizi, Hujjatul Islam Sayyid Mohammad Bagher Hujjati and Ayatullah Khamenei.

Navvab Safavi ignited the first spark that illuminated the revolutionary and dynamic dimension of Islam for me.



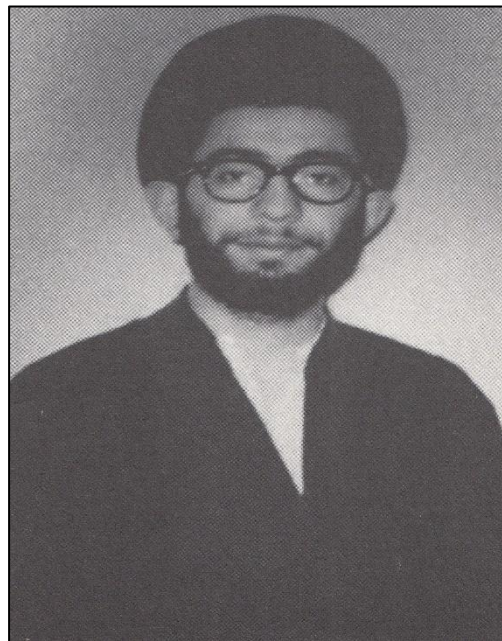
Navvab Safavi's voice still resonates in my ear, and I can still hear him uttering the following narration: "Son of Adam, prepare your provisions for the road is long, and reconstruct your ship for the ocean is deep."

## PICTURES AND DOCUMENTS

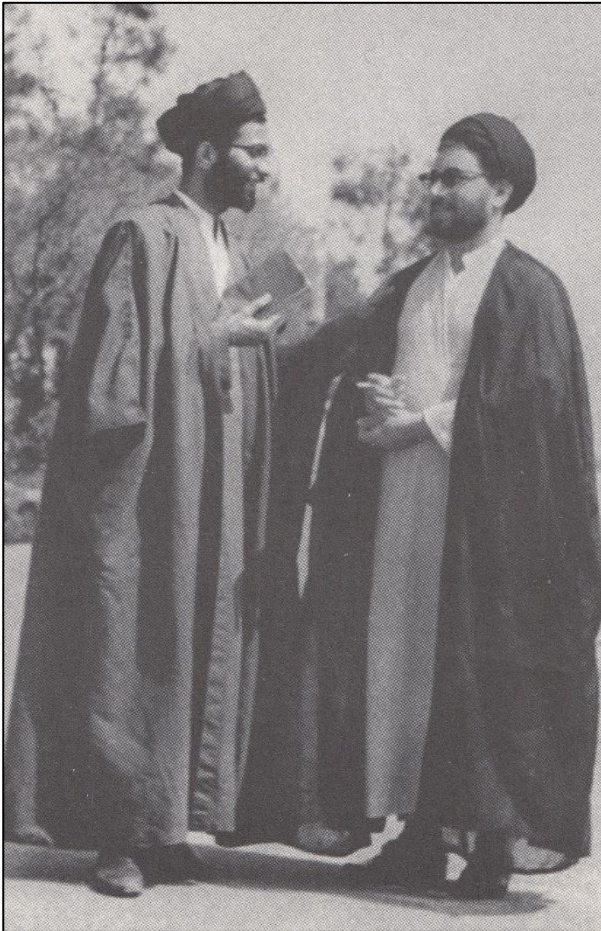
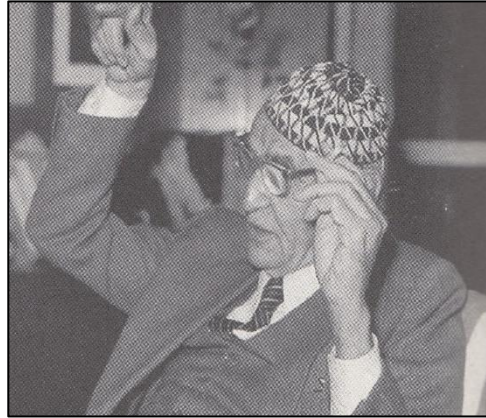


In the year which followed Navvab Safavi's martyrdom, we met a person who had come to Mashhad to spend the summer break. His name was Abbas Ghalleh-Zari and he was a member of the Fada'iyān-e Islam.

When I traveled to Iraq, I strove to communicate only in the Arabic language, but I sometimes faced difficulty in differentiating between formal and colloquial Arabic.



I read the works of prominent Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi writers and poets but found my refuge in the works of the Iraqi poet Mohammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri. He writes in an eloquent style. The notable characteristic of his poetry is that he demonstrates deep empathy with the pains and wishes of the masses.



My admiration for al-Jawahiri increased when my Lebanese friend and erudite writer, the late Sayyid Mohammad Javad Fadlallah, spoke to me of al-Jawahiri's revolutionary spirit and his firm stances.

PICTURES AND DOCUMENTS



Speech at the mass rally, Autumn 1978 in Mashhad.



Speech at the political rally, Autumn 1978 in Mashhad.



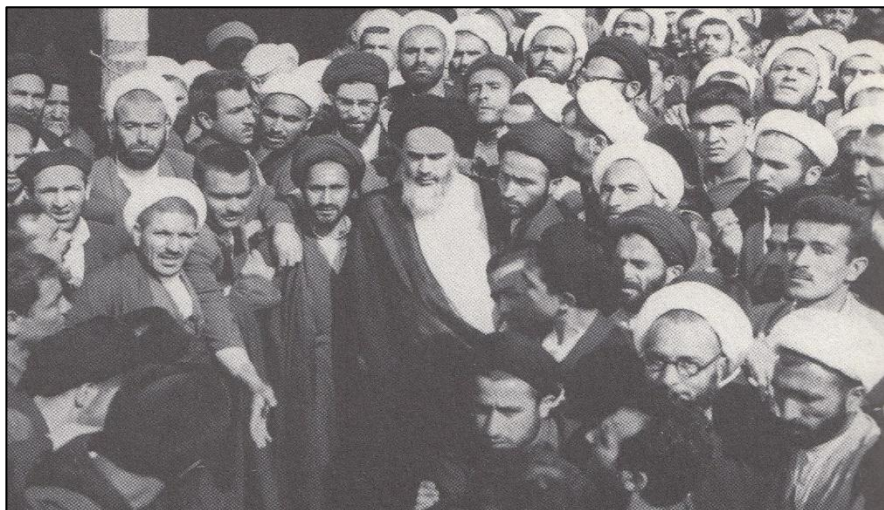
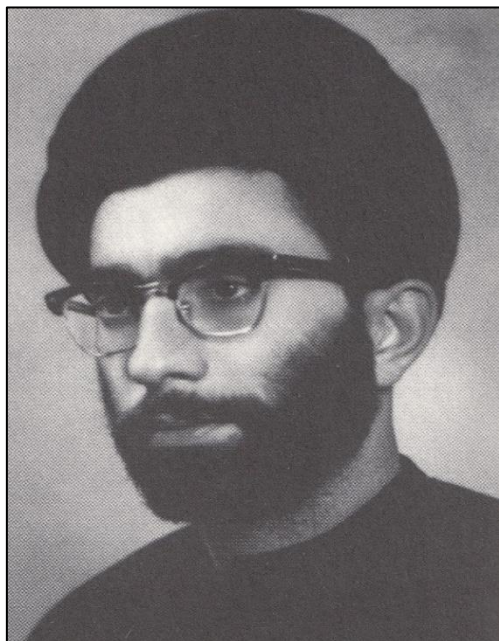
Giving speech at the people's huge gathering in the Nawab seminary school, Autumn 1978.



The people from right are: Martyr Sayyid Fakhruddin Rahimi (while in exile), Mr. Musavi Garmsar (while in exile), Ayatullah Khamenei (while in exile), Mr. Sayyid Ja'far Mirdamadi, Mr. Rashid Yazdi (while in exile) and Martyr Hossein Fazili.

## PICTURES AND DOCUMENTS

I translated *The Future Belongs to: This Religion* by Sayyid Qutb, a work which sparked in my mind many reflections that I added in it translator's footnotes and that aggravated the SAVAK more.



Imam Khomeini was a serious lecturer with neat and tremendously clean clothes. He would enter the class with his head down and would impart knowledge to his students in a serious manner and answer the seminarians' questions and problems with concentration and attention. He was popular amongst the seminarians, whether they were his students or not.



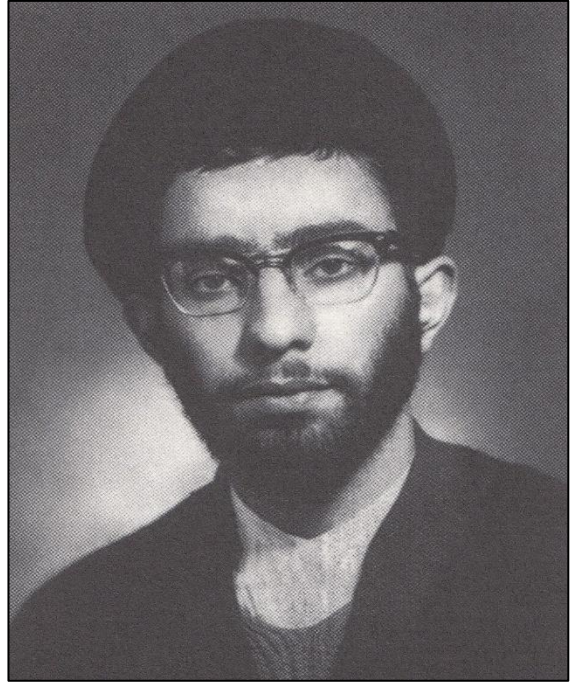
In this charged atmosphere, full of anger and discontent against the government marked by an intense Islamic revolutionary spirit, it was announced that Imam Khomeini was to deliver a speech on the Day of Ashura on the promised day, the Imam delivered his amazing historic speech.



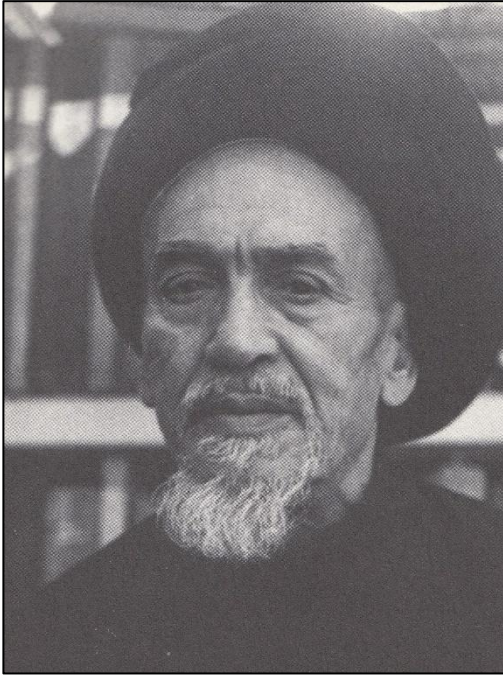
The homes of other *maraji'* who had participated in the uprising, like Sayyid Golpayegani, Sayyid Mar'ashi Najafi, and Sayyid Shari'atmadari, witnessed a similar atmosphere, but Imam Khomeini was the most prominent and pivotal figure on the scene of opposition.

PICTURES AND DOCUMENTS

I headed to Birjand at the beginning of Muharram so that according to the Imam's plan I could expose the Shah's government.

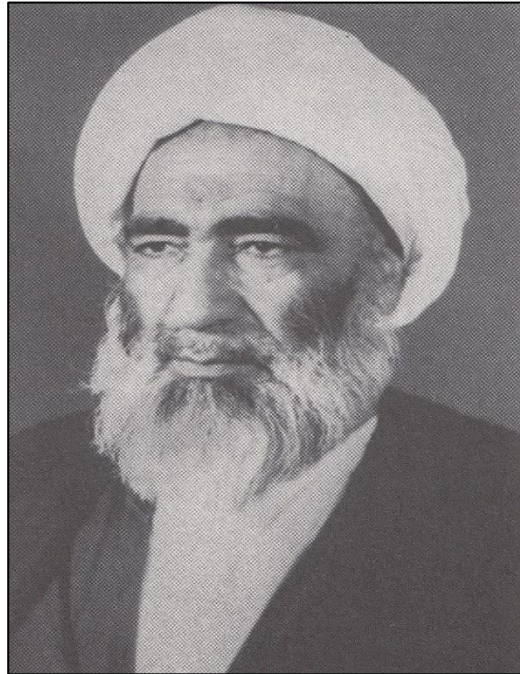


I intentionally chose to travel to Birjand, the stronghold of Amir Asadullah Alam, the Shah's court minister. Alam's influence exceeded that which his rank entailed, and he exercised great power in Iran.



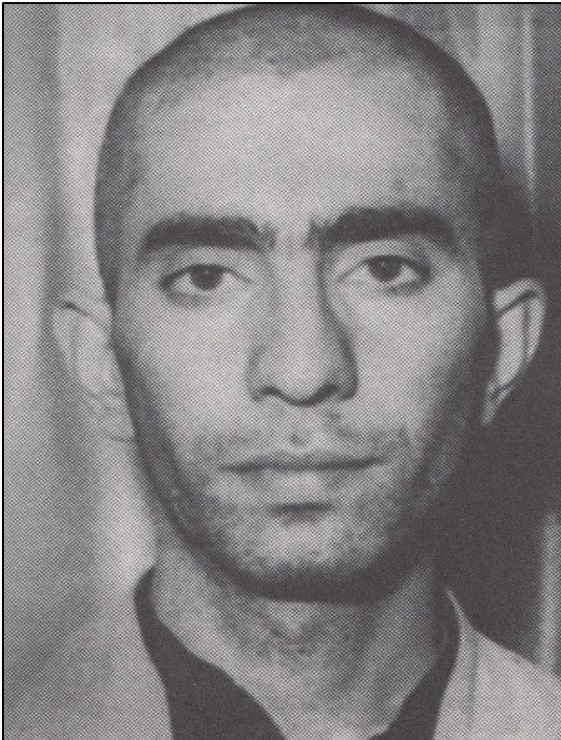
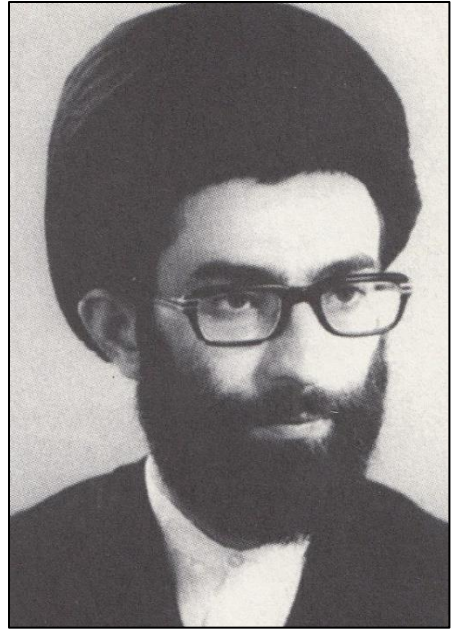
Ayatollah Milani was one of the grand *ulama* in Iran at that time, a *marja'* whose religious edicts were followed by a large sector of the population. He was very kind to me. He was also fully aware that I was travelling to Zahedan on an anti-regime mission.

I headed towards Sheikh Kaf'ami's home after asking for the address. I knocked on the door. It was the first time that I saw the eminent and refined Sheikh who was in his fifties; he was tall and stout with a long beard and donned a brilliant white turban.



## PICTURES AND DOCUMENTS

I said: "I have been entrusted with a duty, and you have been entrusted with one. I have a religious mission to fulfill, while you can carry out whatever your official duty requires. The most you can do is sentence me to death, and I have prepared myself for it. So, what are you frightening me with?"



On my way, an officer known for his rudeness saw me and called out mockingly from afar: "Sheikh, you have become beardless!" I immediately retorted and denied him the chance to revel in his rude mockery: "I haven't seen my chin for years, and I thank God for granting me the opportunity now."



A few years before the victory of the revolution, I presided over the ceremony donning the turban of Hujjatul Islam Mohammad Ali Rowhanifard. He was later martyred in 1986 after Ba'th regime's attack on a passenger plane.



The text written by the author on the back of this photograph: Two days ago when I was holding Mostafa's hand, a photographer who had recently opened his shop asked if he could take my picture as a blessing. My seemingly pious appearance and righteous face were effective in his making this request: "O Allah! Make me as they presume..." "It is the first ten days of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah 1389 (February, 1970) and Mostafa has just turned five. May Allah make him an asset that we have for our religion and our world as well as the delight of our eyes for us in this world and the next. Amen, O Lord of the Worlds!"

## PICTURES AND DOCUMENTS



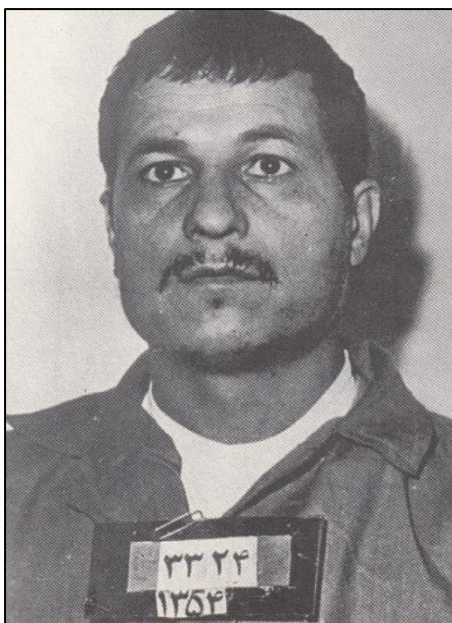
One of my brothers hurriedly entered and informed me that the SAVAK agents had entered our home. I rushed outside to prevent them from entering the guest-room, only to see my mother standing defiantly in front of them in the court yard. With her chador draped over her entire body and covering her face, she stood firm against the two agents like a lioness.



I wanted to know where I had been brought so I asked the man who had stayed behind in Turkish: "*Bura haradi?*" What is this place? The man was astounded; he looked around uneasily and said: "*Gezel Gal'a.*" (Crimson Fortress)



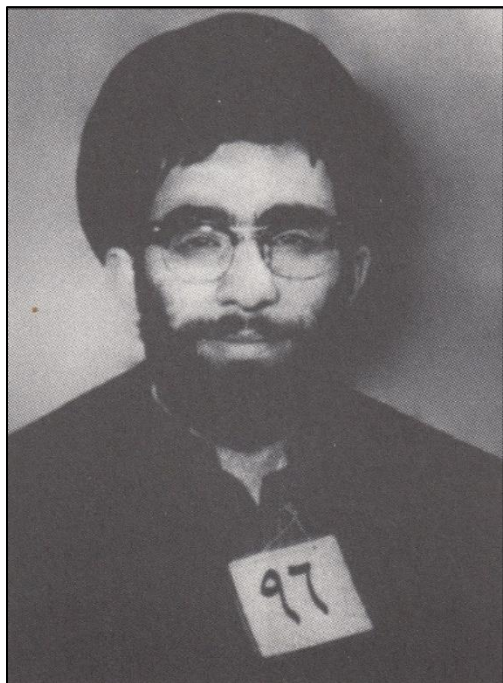
I knocked at the entrance door which was opened by Sayyid Mostafa, Imam Khomeini's eldest son. He was surprised to see me and asked me: "When were you released?" "Just two days ago!" Sayyid Mostafa led me into the room where I finally found myself in the presence of Imam Khomeini.



My wife and I decided to visit Mr. Hashemi Rafsanjani. It was not easy to meet political prisoners, but I could facilitate this meeting because I had a lot of experience in prison. When we met Mr. Hashemi, he was happy for the fact that we came to meet him in this prison.

## PICTURES AND DOCUMENTS

In the court yard one day, I noticed a tall man who was in his fifties walking with an air of dignity and wearing neat clothes which showed that he was an important individual among the prisoners. I inquired after his identity and discovered that he was Brigadier General Gharani, one of the most prominent generals in the Shah's military.



The city of Mashhad did not accommodate a military jail for political prisoners during that period, so I was removed from SAVAK headquarters and taken to a prison situated in a military compound adjoining a police department.. the facility was clean and painted white; we jokingly called it the “White Palace.”



Through the celebrations of the 2500-year anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire, the Shah intended to sever the ties between Iranian history and Islam, and to confer glory and magnificence upon pre-Islamic Iran; his implicit message was that Islam had put an end to the golden age of Persia!



Some of my friends and I were the pioneers in organizational activities, which was a novel thing in Qom at the time. We established the first organizational body in Qom among the *ulama* and formulated its internal governing rules.

## PICTURES AND DOCUMENTS



After assuming leadership of worshippers in congregational prayer, I forged extensive social ties with a variety of individuals. I first led the faithful in prayer at Imam Hasan Mosque...but I subsequently transferred to Karamat Mosque... As the activities in this mosque developed and expanded, the governmental authorities were alarmed and prevented me from leading the worshippers in prayers.

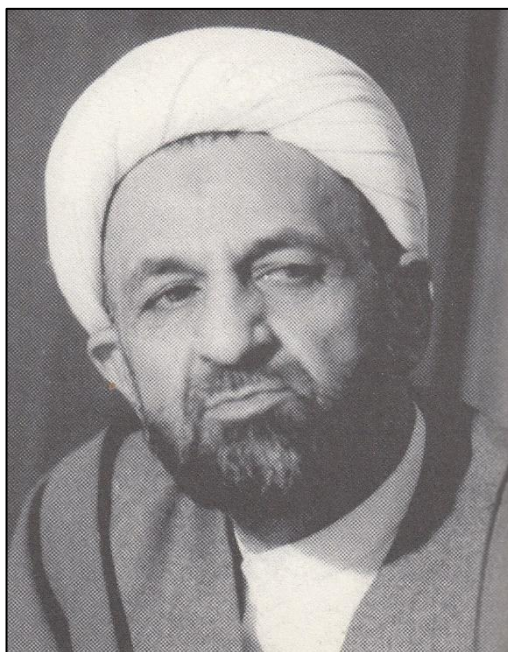


Sheikh Amlashi stared at me in astonishment and asked: "Are you serious?" "Yes...what you have seen at my house amounts to all my furniture, I have no additional belongings." He fell silent and shook his head in amazement, regretting having reprimanded me, and uttered a heartfelt utterance of sympathy which I still remember to this very day.

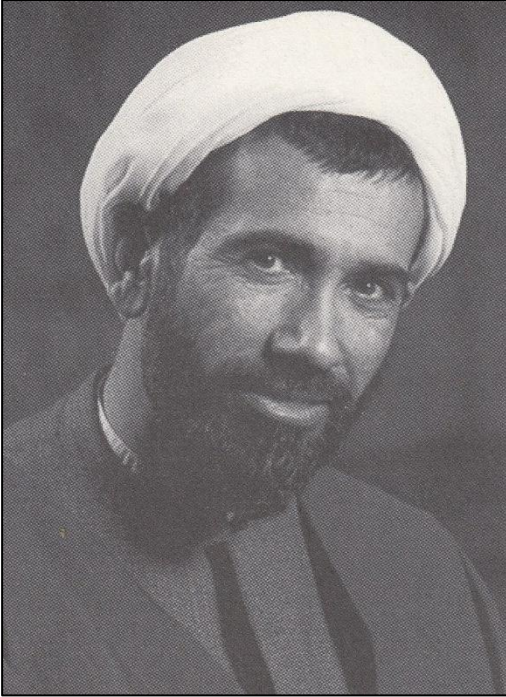


One day, I was walking along a street close to the University of Tehran when I suddenly encountered Sheikh Hashemi Rafsanjani... He told me: "Why are you walking in public and not concealing your whereabouts?" "Why should I be hiding?" He said: "They are searching for you. They've found out about the 11-Member secret group."

Mr. Ghoddousi began to speak. He disclosed the details of what went on between him and the SAVAK interrogator, reiterating the questions which had been directed at him. During his temporary detention, the SAVAK agents had shown him a list containing the names of our 11-Member group. He turned toward me and remarked: "Your name was the very first one!"

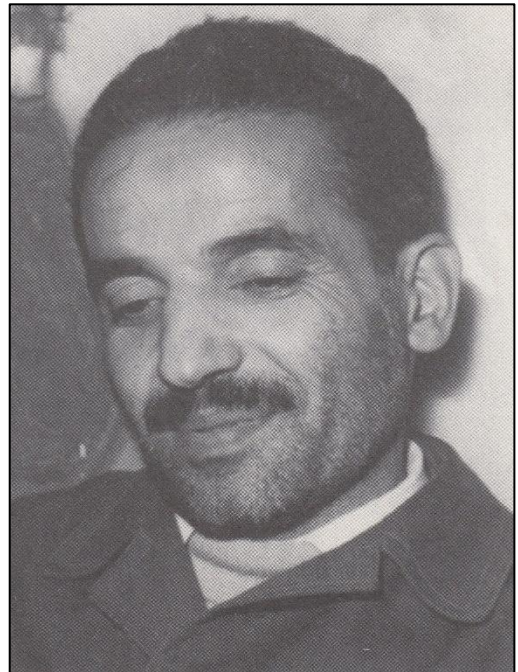


PICTURES AND DOCUMENTS



One of us suggested seeking refuge at Dr. Bahonar's house which was located at a close distance from Iran Street. He was alone at home so we requested if he could go out and leave us alone. He graciously accepted our request and indicated where the tea and sugar were placed and left the house.

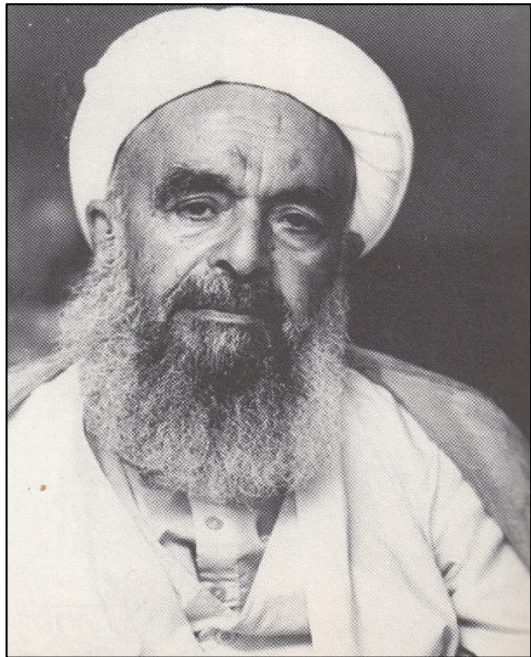
Despite the hazards of communication, we resorted to using Morse Code. A single cell separated my cell and that of Raja'i. The prisoner confined next to my cell acted as an intermediary; he relayed my message to Raja'i and then tapped back Raja'i's reply.





I managed to telephone Dr. Beheshti's house. He was astounded to hear my voice at the other end of the line and could hardly believe it. "Is it really you? Have you been set free? How were you released? I'm eager to see you!"

I then travelled to Yazd. I found that Sheikh Saduqi was the true leader of the city, directing all the revolutionary, political, and economic affairs. He directed the locals to their responsibilities, and taught them everything they needed to know. He was courageously present in the field of revolution and fearlessly countered the regime like a lion.



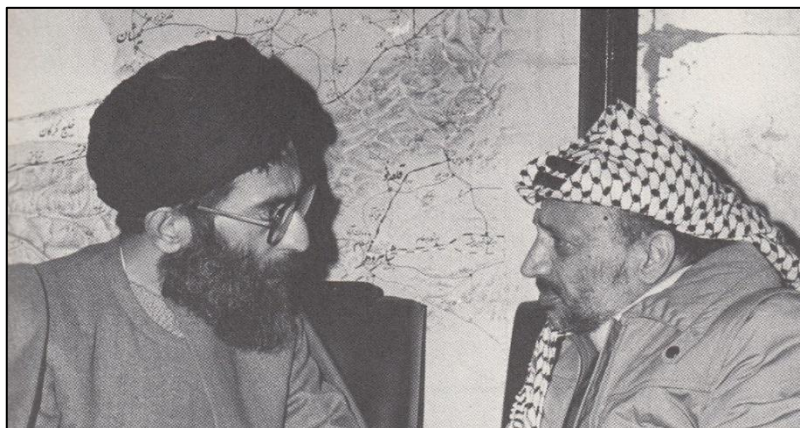
## PICTURES AND DOCUMENTS



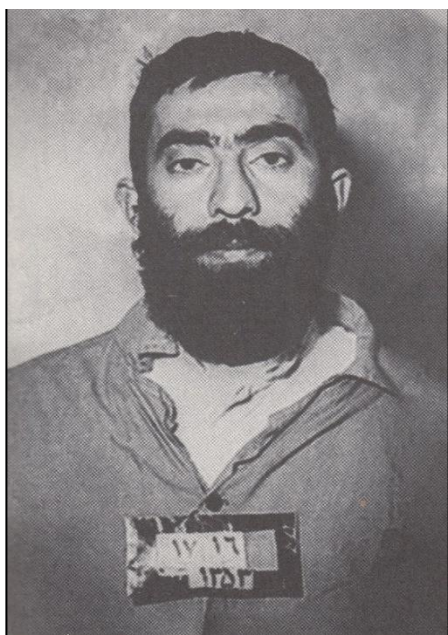
As soon as news of Sayyid Mustafa Khomeini's (may Allah bless his soul) death reached Mashhad, we decided to prepare an effective plan of action. I headed to the post office where I prepared four telegrams; the first one was composed according to my personal viewpoint on the incident while the others were written on behalf of Sheikh Tabasi, Sheikh Mohami, and Sheikh Hasheminejad.



We were forced to mend the surfaces of the pathways inside the garrison. After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, I visited the location and delivered a speech in which I addressed the military personnel and informed them of the fact that I took part in smoothing most of the pathways of the garrison.

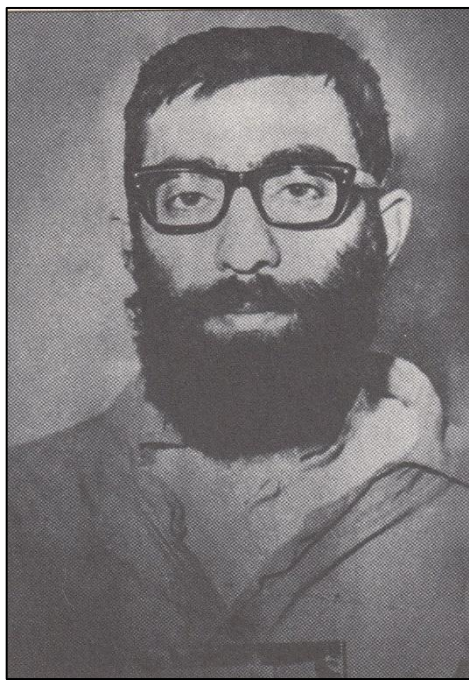


I still recall that the radio station was broadcasting the contents of a telegram message Yasser Arafat had sent from Jordan to the Arab League Summit in Cairo. I jotted down the text of this message, a feat which was facilitated by the newscaster's constant repetition of the telegram. Due to the profound effect the message had on me, I still remember some of its content. When Yasser Arafat arrived in Tehran in 1981, I cited some of its phrases and after mentioning the following expression "A sea of blood and 20,000 killed and wounded..."

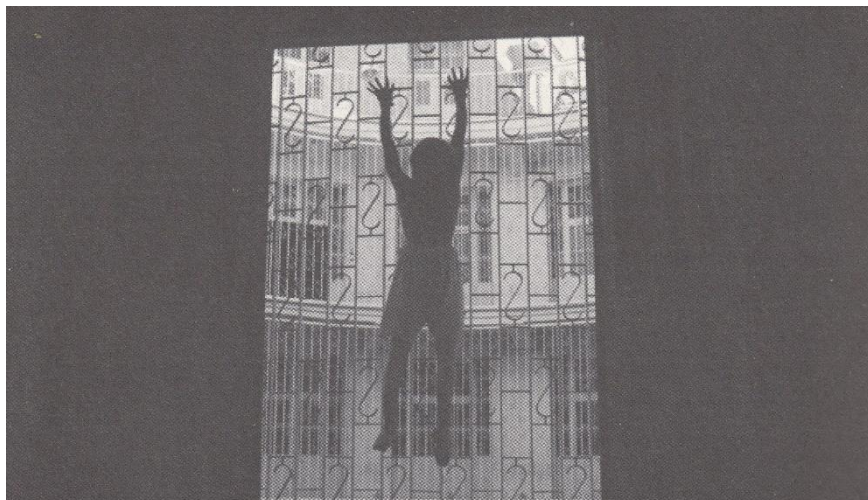


My gaze wandered around the room, and my memories drifted back to the previous prisons in which I had been incarcerated. Strangely, I felt as if I had grown accustomed to imprisonment. Up to that point, I did not see a difference between this prison and the previous prisons.

## PICTURES AND DOCUMENTS



I woke up then, the details of my vision clearly etched in my mind and I still remember the memories up to now. I recounted the details of my dream to some of my friends and relatives, including my mother (may Allah bless her soul). After hearing the incidents of my vision, she immediately remarked: “You will become another Joseph and this means that you will remain in prison!”

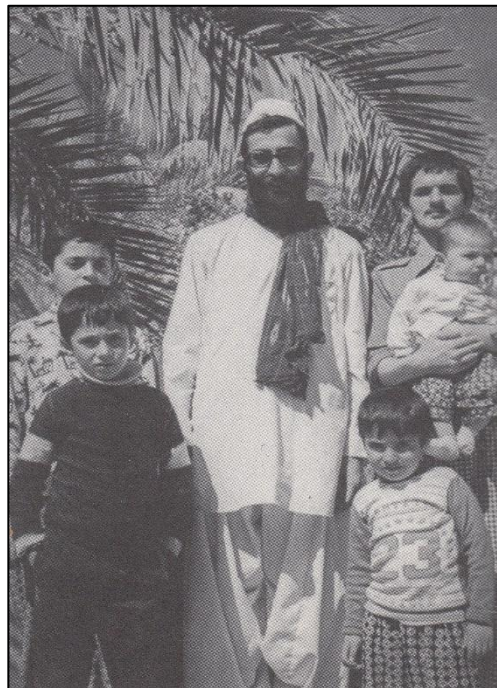


The agonized cries of prisoners being subjected to torture penetrated our cells during day and sometimes extended throughout the night until the break of dawn. The prison officials had mastered techniques of torture, applying innovative methods in inflicting pain. Everything in this prison served towards psychologically shattering prisoners. (Reenactment exhibit in the Ebrat Museum).



The days of my confinement dragged by with a heavy monotony, unfathomable by anyone who has not suffered solitary confinement. A single day spent in isolation equals a month in a public prison. I may honestly claim that the eight months I spent in that small, dark cell are tantamount to eight years spent in prison without isolation from other inmates. (Reenactment exhibit in the Ebrat Museum).

During this period, my family came to visit me in Iranshahr. My fourth and youngest son Meysam was only months old at the time. My family members, accustomed as they were to colder temperatures, could not bear the increasingly hot weather there, especially with the lack of cooling appliances at home and because the temperature would go up to 53 degrees Celsius. Thus, they returned to Mashhad after two weeks.



## PICTURES AND DOCUMENTS



Mr. Rashid Yazdi is famous for being cordial and good-humored. Despite being very knowledgeable, he is forever smiling and always ready to utter witty remarks.



With the advent of Ramadan, the opportunity to mingle with the local citizens presented itself more favorably. The chief of police, however, was not pleased with the popularity we had gained and was uncertain how to deal with us.



The local Baluchi attire blended well with my face and beard. Wearing Baluchi clothes instead of clerical garb was the right choice under those circumstances due to the restrictions imposed on my movements outside the borders of Iranshahr.



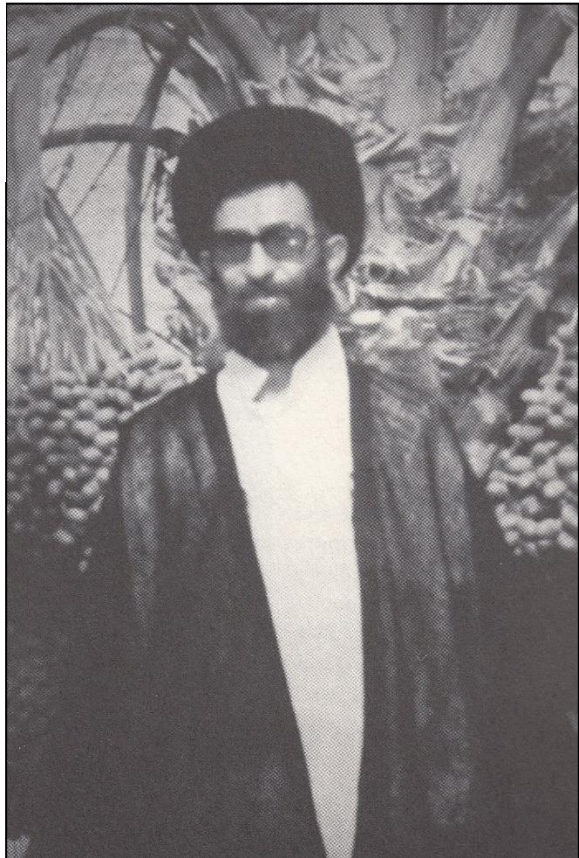
I was so distressed when I saw the child who had died in the flood incident and freely expressed my grief, and the Baluch family understood my sorrow. Sheikh Rashid later told me that the local people were surprised to see someone grieve more than them and soon the news of my lamentations at the sight of the dead child spread among the Baluchi people.

## PICTURES AND DOCUMENTS



I told them: “I own a car and will only travel by it.” They said: “Impossible.” I replied: “Well then, I refuse to leave the city, and you can do whatever you want.”

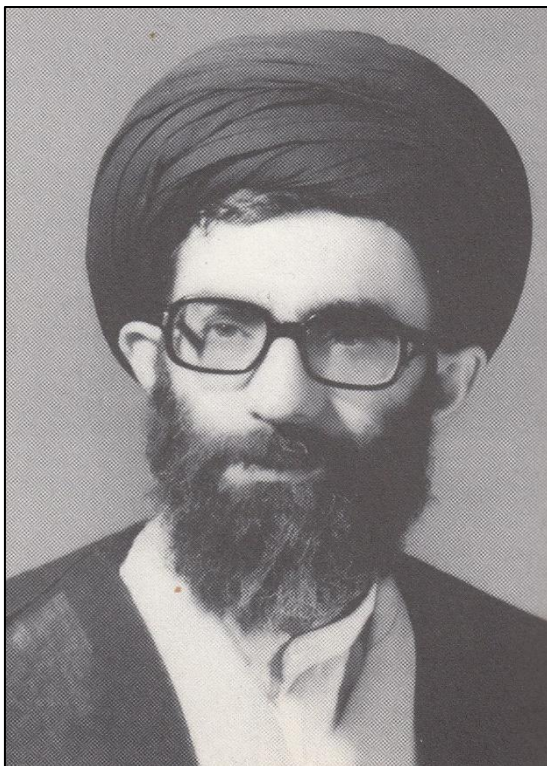
One night, the chief of police came to see me and said; “You're free.” I did not express surprise or joy and received the news with indifference. The chief of police was puzzled and was even all the more surprised when I answered: “I would like to remain in Jiroft.”



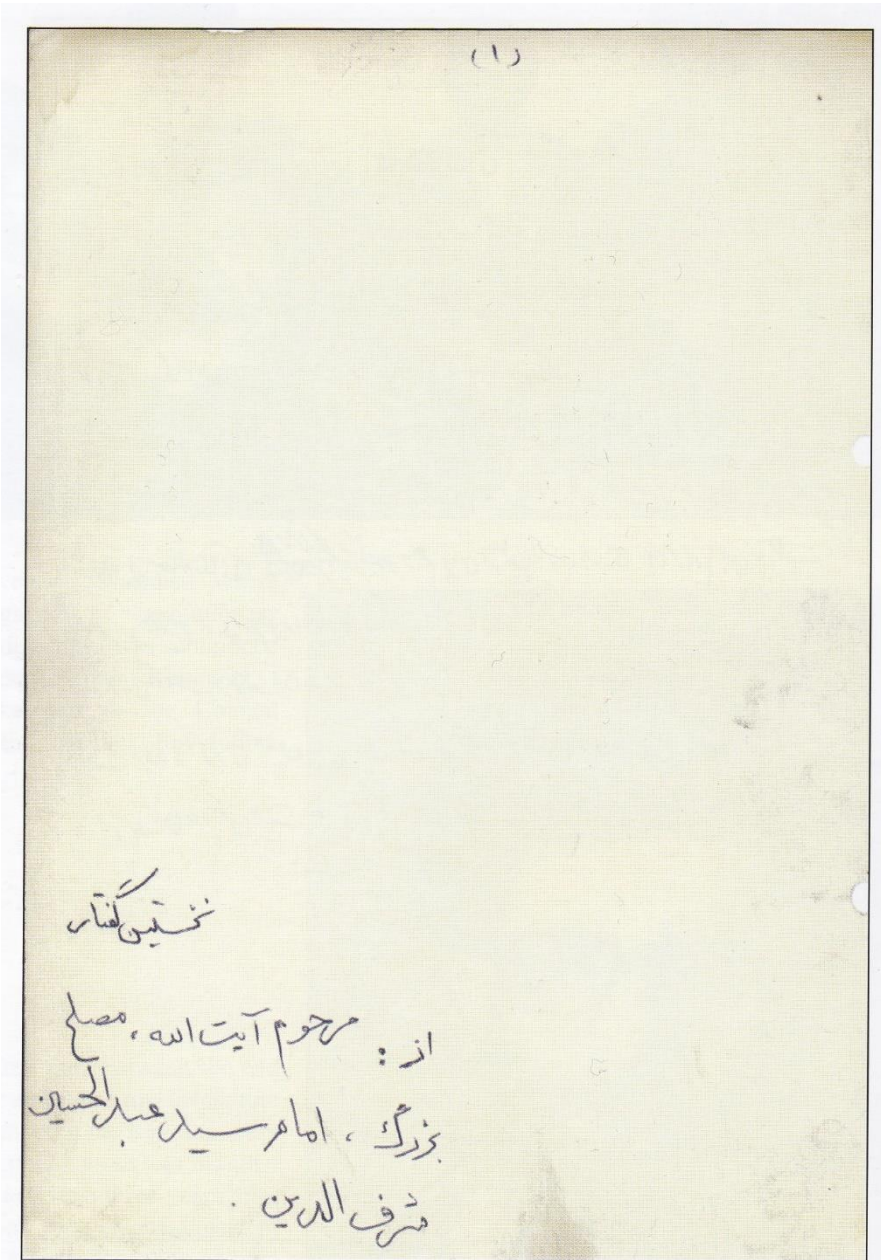


I stayed in Mashhad where I engaged in revolutionary activities until I was summoned by order of Imam Khomeini... to take part in the Council of the Islamic Revolution.

The time span between the end of my exile and my investiture as member of the Revolutionary Council was about four months! Also, less than three years after freedom, I was elected President of the Islamic Republic of Iran.







A facsimile of Ayatullah Khamenei's handwriting (from the first page of the manuscript of his Persian translation of *The Peace Treaty of Imam Hassan* by Sheikh Radi Al-e Yasin).

۲

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

صلی علیہ وسلم بخاریه - از زر ازین و انان جو که امامان اهل بیت پس از زول کرام -  
 صلی علیہ وآلہ - از احوال این است بدان چهارشنبه اند .  
 X ۲۱۱ حسن با این صلح . آینه محنت طاقت فرسا کشید که همگی جز بنگ خدا ، قادر و مخلوق  
 نیت . لیکن اد این آزمائش عظیم را با بیداری و متانت تحمل کرد و در بلند و پدید آمدند و  
 دست یافته به هدف خود - یعنی مراعات حکم خدا و قرآن و پیامبر و صدق مسلمانان -  
 از آن میرده است . . . این هاه هدفی بود که او بر این ~~تکلیف~~ هر گشتار عمر بدان نظر داشت  
 و عشق می ورزید .  
 آنان که ادراک رحمت طلی و عاقبت بدینی متم کرده اند - دم آندسته از ایضانی گرفت  
 تاثیر نرود حس ، آرزو در بندگی : کاش می نیز در جهاد با معاویه بیداری میکرد و از  
 راه نجات ، زندگانی می یافت و به میردزی از هاه راهی که بر او می در روز عاثر ارف  
 در سید ، می رفت و می رسید . . . این هر هر کرده را در نیز ان ~~تکلیف~~ کوفت ، دوزخ و مقدراری  
 نیت .  
 شگفت آنکه مردم تا کنون هر روز بر این صلح چهارشنبه و کج بینی اند و ~~هر روز~~  
 که با بررسی کامل و با استناد به دلائل و تراهد عقلی و فقهی ، سیاسی این صلح را درونی سازد .

A facsimile of Ayatullah Khamenei's handwriting (from the first page of the manuscript of his Persian translation of *The Peace Treaty of Imam Hassan* by Sheikh Radi Al-e Yasin).



آنچه مرز حصار گسنگ و حتی نایب ایران را به محبت و رحمت بدخته، بر بسیاری و موقع منی صمدی علی  
 مذهبی روحیات است و مسرتش بر کوهی حصار گسنگ و کوه در مسلمان. زیرا آنگاه هی روحیات، آنگاه  
 ملت است و تقسیم و عزم تا قطع در پی دارند، می عمل و اندام ملت. مبارزه می یک صنف، چندان خطری  
 برای ایران در ضد مردمی در بند دارد. در نپو در سفید، طلب، و حتی کار کردن و صنف تنها هی یک خطری  
 صدمی برای این برام در کرب نمی زند. میزان با برادران راجع هی صنف و هی یکی، از مبارزان از بار قهر می  
 ملت برید، و مفضل کرد و با صلح است و هر صلح ایگز. که البته برای یک دستگاه مستعد و بر کار در از  
 درستی نیست. حتی ملت و در انش یعنی دیگر قهر در زود و در بار یا ساکت ساخت. آنچه خطری  
 و بزرگ را تشکیل می دهد مبارزه می «ملت» است: وقتی هدی قهر از در نپو و طبع تا کار او  
 کند و در قاع علم بزرگ و مراجع و صنف و بیله دران و تا کارندان و آمران ملت. کمال و  
 یک ملت زبان - بهتر از گویند و دل به تقاضا ندارند؛ وقتی هدی جسم باز شد و همه دانستند که چه  
 می گذرد و چه فلاحی بر آنان سایه افکند و چه جسمی بر آنان می رود؛ وقتی هدی از سرها و دلهای زفرمان  
 قرآن و اسلام را از زمین می و چوب تغییر بر می و شکر و فدا جری و حاجت را با شنید و نویسد؛ وقتی  
 همه دانستند و همه خوانستند و همه تقسیم رفتند و همه دست به اقدام زدند، آنوقت است که خطری برای غاص  
 منصب و ولایت ضد اجدهی و صلح نایب است. چه موقع و چگونه هدی ملت ایم می زند و چه کسی یا  
 چه زده می تواند از عده ای این نام بر آید؟ در وضع کنونی و در راه بنا بر چه چیزی بافت و قوای ملت  
 مسلمان ایران، تنها زده می تواند هدی ملت را صلح کند صمدی علی - مذهبی روحیات است، و  
 نه هم زده می تواند...

و بدین صورت است که هر اراده در حقیقت در لطف حق بالقره جمال حظی بزرگ علیه قدرته است . و هم  
 بدین صورت است که درسی چند سال گذشته حکومت ایران همیشه خواسته است که او را در اعلامی دین فکد کند و  
 حتی دهان حال دگرسانی از آستانه رگه بهترین و بهترین عیضه آن را امر در حقیقت آن قرین خیرت و اوایی  
 از کوشش و ای جیب نظر دیگران خوداری نمی کرد . و بیترمانه باز هم سبک خردی از رصل دین را پسندی داشت  
 بهین عوارث خیرت همدند که چنانکه با فاضلی خویشی که در قم مرکز رحمت سید . و همی در حرم اندک شرح  
 معظم تقلید آفرینند از کمال فصاحت آینه آن حرفه در امرش کردند  
 و نیز بدین صورت که عیضه این ظاهر رحمتی از دین رصل دینی بسبب سبب غیره از دین قدرته است بر  
 صمدی علمی - مذهبی و البته بر قهر سهرتی و بالفضل مبارزه و در آن در است

باری ، امروز مبارزه رنگ تازه و بسیار بقی یافته است و آن هم طایفه مردمی شده است که  
 در زمانه در مزدور رنگ آخرین ایران نقل از مقامات منزل جبرانی در این زمینه هستند البته بطور ایستادگی  
 در امر ای و آزادی مطبوعات و در ضمنی برای ترغیب و اعجاب و عدم نظر در ظاهر است . اما در نتیجه - نتیجه ای که بهیچ وجه  
 تصد آن را انداختند - حاصل یک دقیقه ؛ و وقتی که رسالتی در بهترین میام این خبر بود . و آن عبارت  
 بود از کتبی در دنیا که در چشم عمومی ظاهر گردید و نام است که در آن . از عهدی این خبر آن بود  
 که گمان در دست آن آذربایجان یا خراسان و یا . که در آن سینه بسیار زیاده گمان و علمی مذهبی یا عیضه ای  
 تقلید با خود داشته است دست از کار کشید یا کثیر آن بود . از رسیدن نام آن و سبب سبب  
 این یک دیدی بسیار است که هدی قهر دولت زیاده - غیر فخر بکسانید و در کل حال در حرم است  
 عمومی و سیاسی لرزند . و این دید را که در وقت و در حالت و آنکه امثال مردم در مبارزه . بر حرم آورده است  
 از آن در ۵ خیزه میل از مبارزه هم چنین میس آید . و آخرین بار باز در حرم رصل ۴۲ بود . و آن

ماجرای قضاة سید حسینی عفا، بانی اصلی این پدید، کسب می کند. در آنستقام حکومت و سید  
 که برای مردم شکر است نهفت عمری در آنجا قرار از طرفی ایام عرب و دولت مردم در آن عادی  
 از طرفی خوزی و قزاق. و هم در آن علم زید، از طرفی فایده و سبب در آن خوزی و سبب  
 میساقه و ارجاع. و در آن ظاهر نظمی در سبب باقیات و سبب و کسب لغزبان و صدر جماعتی که  
 بهانه را که چنانکه در آن قرار آن را امید می دیدیم.  
 و از طرفی ایام تربید و فصل در علم بزرگ و نوزاد در آن فکری می که آنان را صاحب  
 از راه و روح افکار بزرگ و بیات این مطلب که حکومت از نظر و آنچه در آن بود و هر دو  
 در سبب و سبب که در علم هر لغزبان از این بود و از این می دارد که در بیات مردم است  
 لغزبان سبب می کند یا اینکه این ابدیات حکومت را تسخیر می کند و اجزای سبب می کند  
 آن را صاحب می دارد (که یکی از سبب سبب و سبب می کند) یا اینکه کار از این حرفها است  
 و خطای آن است که در سبب با عدم رضایت که در سبب است از سبب سبب و سبب  
 آن در داد (که در سبب است می از سبب سبب می کند). بیاید است که چیزی در آن فکری از  
 چه در سبب سبب می آورد و سبب از کجا می آید و با چه سبب می در ذهن آقایان علم لغزبان  
 و از طرفی آن فایده که در سبب است بر از طرفی سبب در سبب سبب است که در سبب  
 در آن سال سبب می ۴۲ و ۴۳ تا ۵۰ علم بزرگ می در سبب و سبب که در سبب سبب است که در سبب  
 حرفی علم را که در سبب است در سبب و سبب که در سبب سبب است که در سبب سبب است که در سبب  
 خود سبب می که در سبب است در سبب و سبب که در سبب سبب است که در سبب سبب است که در سبب

این نوشته بود از آدمائی که حکمت ایران پس از این از خرداد ۴۲ برای خشنی اردن نصبت در برتری است ایام از  
 کتبه در بر روی دیواری نیز جاری است که قهقهه میزند به ذکر آن نیست. ولی این کتبه نصبت عهدی مستر صده  
 شصتی است که حکمت ایران پس از خرداد ۴۲ همراه همگی را برای خشنی اردن نصبت بود و حکمت ایران  
 راه تاسین جریسته در مردمی که قصد او قیام کرد و بودند. برای نمونه یک آهنگ را می توانست در آید که دستگاه  
 حاکم لغزیه یا پنج نوبت به دولت مردم بخام راه و یک گام بسوی مردم پیش آمده باشد. آهنگ مستند  
 در ایران طبعاً و ذاتاً مندرج در رویی خود کتبه است از عهد بعین و در یک کتبی جدید  
 البته در ۱۵۰ هزاره که در کوشش دستگاه حکم ایران برای حاضر کردن است. تا در پیش بینی عهد است  
 ز سید این روش و خشنی سده قهقهه و دیگر در آمد زحمت آن نیز بنا بر اینست ۴۲. قابل  
 و مورد انتظار است. زیرا ای دستگاه بموجب باطل بودن و واضح بودن سکون به سنگت در اول است و  
 در هر یک نزدی یا دور و مصادمی در برابر آن موضع نمی کند بموجب حق بودن بیشتر به نزدی و یک  
 است. لذا است الهی در بقا و در ام جویان مبارزه می جوی. همگر کرد به عصر نسبت مقادیر و  
 حسیکی با بدوی چون حضرت آیه هر برضی چنین موضع آستی باید بر خود اهرمان خود کرد. و تفسیر این  
 و پس حق عهد را هم از پیش روی دستگاه حکمت تک کرد. بیان تاریخ سده ۴۲ و عهدی در اهرمان  
 قهقهه چون از زهر زمان از آستی است در غنیمت معنوی تازه بی با خود آورند. عاقل عهد بدیلهای  
 صافی در چشم مبارزه می سازد نمودار شدند. سندی مبارزه که در برابر طوفان زوال پیدا چشم دستگاه  
 در کس که بود آتش را در روز و باران آبی را کتبه و ساخته کرد. رنگ در تازه می که فعلی تازه را  
 در بهایت مردم مسلمان ایران باز میگردید آمد و خنده اگر دیکه دستگاه و تفسیر خشنی سده مبارزه





چهار راه است آن ایسی که بختی از عکس نظر موقوف آن در ابرام لفظ است. تفسیر در درستی  
 بر این لفظ - که گاهی از زبان بعضی از بزرگان ما هم شنیده می شود - مراد از آن آن است که در  
 زندگی که در ذهن و جوارح حضرت مسکون است همان بزرگوار است - عالی تر از آن و کینه نفس در دیده  
 در این حرکت از راه است و روح آن در سجاد روح آن روحی است هر آدمی می تواند آن را  
 ببیند که این حرکت از راه است - نام در چون حکومت و نام آدمی - یا احادیث حضرت است  
 چیزی چه مطالبی یک از آن بیاید نیست - اگر آن را با تمام عبادت و با نانی بدم را با تمام هر گانه و  
 طاقت بر جوی که دارد .

جایز این - جراح مسلمان و قوی و ملی بی حوصله و کم وضع است که ما وجود دارد و این کلمه در جرات  
 با آن را می نماند با در دستگیری از زندگی و علمی خود می کند و علاوه بر کلمات روحی از جمله چنین  
 بطلی است که همه در این مقام و در دستگیری این است - اگر بیدار روح است - و جو قهر مفری در  
 در حقیقت و گفت که در این دنیا بودی که عاقل از عاقل از در حدیث در شرح مختلف بیان در روی نقد است  
 که روی گفته در جرات است که بیان در دستگیری می شود در حال روح است - اندکی و فانی و کمالی  
 و در این چنین کمالی و دستگیر می شوند - کسی که امروز با هم نگرانی با صفا با کمال است - حتی  
 در این دنیا است که نسبت به وحی از خدا که در این و در جوارح هر از صحنی عاقل در جوی نیز در این  
 در دست و در از کمال است - از نظر آن لفظ که است این که عاقل در جوی و هر چه در آن نفس است  
 دارند در جوی و در هر دو است - در این با آن کارگانی تا آنجا که در حدیث با آن که جوی است  
 است که فقه تفسیر کمالی از این است طاعت در است با هر دو است که از این از صحنی که که فقه  
 هم در این و در هر دو است آن با کمال هر دو است و نگاه در حقیقت امر است که جوی است که فقه در این  
 در این



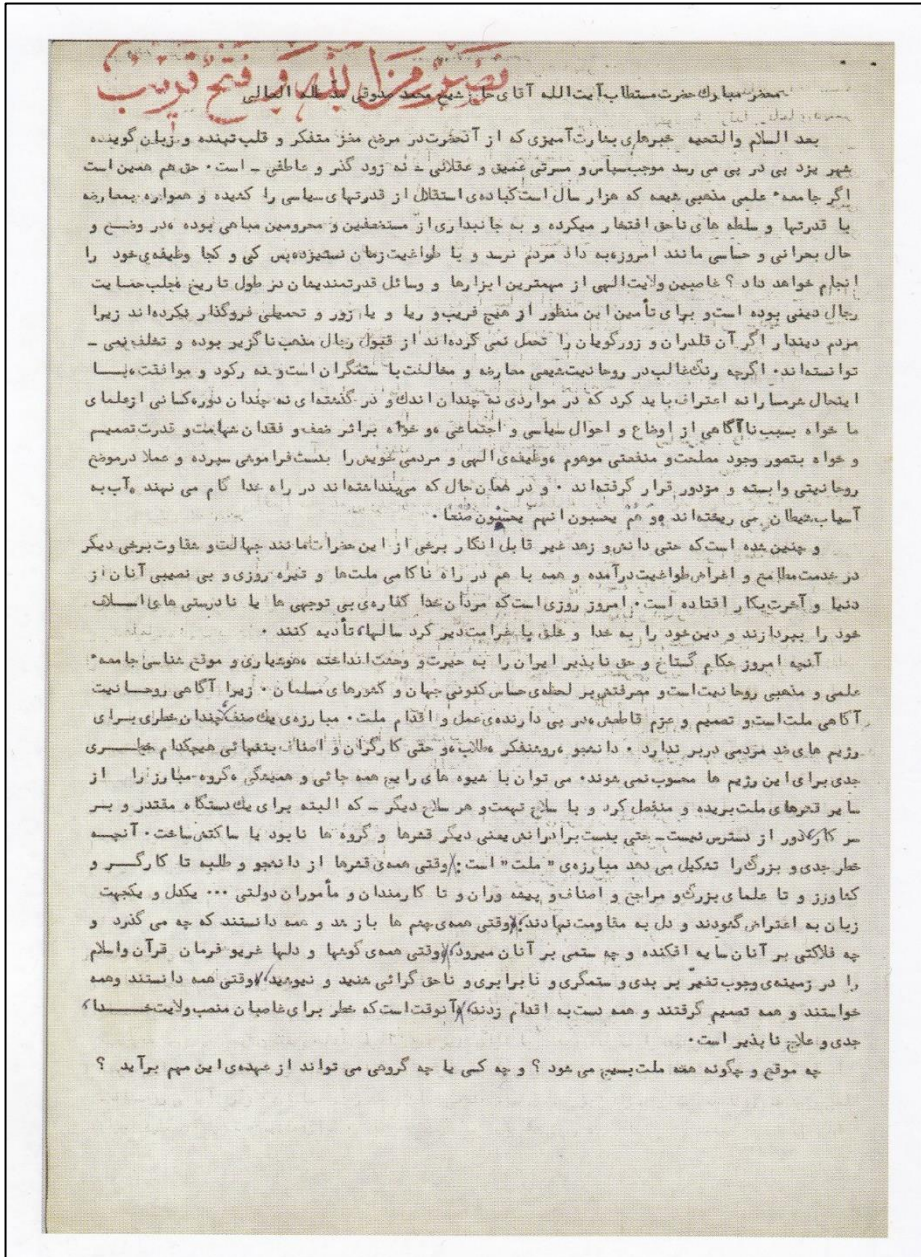
از علم سوزد و نظر آن برینند باقی است از حکایات بسیار و بسیار است و در کمالی و خطیر بود  
 کوشش غشایی نماید و راه را از آن پس از لوله طلسمی تمامه هیرن آن لشکر همه تیر می بندید  
 نکته ی بسیار آن است که معرفت در آن خود ترغیب است و ایضا لشکر در آن راهی است و صفت در آن  
 علیه در میان چو در بعضی مفرقه در لشکر و است

در وضع کردن که در آنجا لشکر و تیر می خور است و در کوشی آن بپرست میرانست و نیزه ما و سایر در آن  
 خدمت در آن معرکه بر صفت و در کوشی و در آن کوشی این و سایر و همی می باشد که در آنجا  
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 می زنده است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است  
 از هر دو مرد در آنجا می آیند و در کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است  
 در کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است  
 خاطر می نیرنی می آید که در کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است

و در این در کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است  
 عمل در کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است  
 که در این کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است و در کوشی است







A facsimile of the first page of the pamphlet "The Responsibility of the *Ulama* towards the Islamic Revolution and Confronting the Enemy's Conspiracies." (vide p. 238).



This autobiography covers the first half of the life of Iran's current supreme leader Sayyed Ali Khamenei from his early childhood all the way to the 1979 Islamic Revolution that brought the monarchical regime to an end in Iran. It provides a gripping account of a life full of struggle and fighting for justice and establishing an Islamic order in his country.

It is a remarkable saga of a young cleric blessed with an indomitable spirit who fights a dictatorial regime with his sermons and speeches as well as with his organisational abilities. He never loses hope despite being sent to prison and exile, and finally emerges victorious against all odds.

This book serves as a source of inspiration to all activists around the globe who are trying to bring about social and political change.

