

Mahmoud Mousavi

THE MIND OF AN
IRANIAN

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Chapter One

That which touches all, must be approved by all. There is one promised land, but there are many lands of promises. If today it is Iraq and Syria, tomorrow may be your next-door neighbour's, or wherever it is you happen to be. Why? Because it is written and it must be done – it has been so for a long time... Enough is enough.

A wise man once said: “He who listens right; he will live right.” In the same vein, an American President, Abraham Lincoln, stated: “He has a right to object to give a solution.” So it is better to drink from the fountain, as a Roman advised so more than 2000 years ago.

At the start of the 1980s, my friend, Doctor Jamshid Farzin, international lawyer from the London School of Economics, whom later became my attorney and consultant here in Iran, started a petition supported by court-accepted exhibits and evidences in Tehran, Iran. It was in regard to the violation of his right to privacy and the infringement of his rights as a human being. The case involved and challenged the second amendment of the constitution of the newly established Islamic Republic of Iran. This amendment signified the issue of the absence of the 12th imam of Shiite Muslims who, apparently for fear of his life, had two periods of hiding. The first, short one, lasted roughly 72 years, some 1200 years ago (from 870 A.D –

941 A.D) and the second longer one, continued for more than 1000 years (from 941 A.D — 1980-81 A.D), until a suitable Islamic regime of the Shiite type that supported him was established in the world of Islam. The Islamic Republic of Iran in 1980-81 accomplished just that, falling just short of a person actually being taken and played into the part of that 12th imam for them.

For that matter, Doctor Farzin, the international lawyer, whose life was under merciless surveillance and close observations without his consent and permission, was under unlawful control. Inspection instruments of animate and inanimate types were installed and put to work around him round the clock for more than twenty years, there to watch and collect meticulously each and every move and characteristic of his daily life. His habits and behaviours were collected, to be checked up on and closely studied and analysed by professors of theology. This was because they believed he might be the promised one, and in their eyes that allowed them to implement ceaseless efforts in fatalistic fits of religious fanaticism to compile information for comparison, to find out if their findings matched those of the narrations of “Hadith” (old sayings). There were comparing the habits and behaviours of their Mahdi, as promised 12th Imam in “Isna Ash'ari” (twelve Imams), a branch of Shi'ism out of a dozen categories of Shiites. The inflictors of this surveillance had no sympathy when their actions caused property loss and severe physical injuries for Doctor Farzin upon his resistance. After more than two decades of his steadfast, resentful opposition of such feeble-mindedness culminated in frustration with these villainous intruders.

The end result of these Shiites articles of faith, written in their “Hadith books” (sayings of old books), culminate in the total destruction of the world: no question about that. Doctor Farzin convinced the higher courts of the Islamic Republic of Iran in his affidavit eventuality, just about the

time of his last hearing, when the high court of Iran in Tehran was about to rule in his favour in 2004. This was when he was assassinated in cold blood.

The case is not closed yet; Doctor Farzin was an expert in Iranian national law and set up the case in such a manner that his death wouldn't affect the legality of his demands. The motion on the stagnated verdict, legally, will activate the case and bring the whole Iranian constitution and articles of faith before an international tribunal to decide on their moral rationality. This may legally bring to halt the support for fulfilling these prophecies to the detriment of the whole world.

A wise man never under estimates any source of information, because he knows that history has proved big events may have unexpected, small origins.

The pages you are about to read are the work of one person, plus the help of an Iranian-English typist, whom, in his own words, knows little English; as much as English typing and nothing more.

The material of the book I have written is either from personal experiences, observations and/or the product of conversations with people who I presumed to be reliable sources. Other than that I copied from books – extracts, for which I had to rely on my own memory, or refer to scraps of notes I had in my hands. There is no proper library in Iran that I could refer to, or any individual I could confer with for revising the book. Much is as limited as means of connecting to outside world are here, some may suggest the use of the internet, or phone, but I tried and could not reach out. For that matter, I do thank in advance those writers from whom I have borrowed parts and portions of their works. The limited facilities here do not allow me to even call them for permission, let alone pay them. I hope their generousities, which I have relied upon have been used in the right way; to take a step forward, beyond the material world. I hope. I cross my fingers. Thank you.

I am an Iranian living in Iran. I carry an Iranian birth certificate, national card and an Iranian passport and nothing else. I lived in America for some 12 years during the early 70s (1972) to the early 80s (1983), up until the political upheavals. The Iranian hostage crisis was when I was shipped back to my country, on my request, after nearly serving four years (3 years & 8 months) on a five – fifteen-year sentence on a first-degree rape charge. That was in 1983-84, when I came to an Iran in the beginnings of a revolution, an Islamic revolution, and Iran is still paying for it – or experiencing the reprisal, I might say.

I am not much into politics, I never was. I never ran in the streets shouting for or against any group, or person, I never voted in my life or gathered in a crowd, rabble rousing. Mr. Jim Brown, or Bojangles, as Americans call it, certainly is not my type. I have been a loner all my life, mostly observing – reading is my hobby as a pastime and in my seclusion, I have tried to lift my spirits up. Like many people, I started from nothing. I did not have or know any connections who would show me the special handshake that would move me up and get me an easy, high paying government job. Frankly, the art of cheap flirting or whining intonation is peculiar to Iranians; I have been deprived of it. That's why I started from sidewalks in the street, selling second-hand books and later on, because of revolutionary guard harassment on a repeated basis, I quit and started searching for simple seasonal jobs in daily papers. My degree in mechanical engineering from America, even though approved by the revolutionary educational ministry, was useless and could not get me a job. I was lacking, what they called, a "Moarref" – someone who could identify my loyalty to the new regime and the new laws which had just been passed. I was also included as one of those exempt from military service.

Later on, in 1985 I rented a small place and opened a bookshop near by Tehran University, selling second-hand

books, mostly English books. I kept that place for 25 years until it was burned down completely and that ended my career as a bookseller – an early retirement, so to speak. That was around 2009 or 2010.

Selling English books when Iran was just bursting into revolution was mostly just so that I would be able to read books cheaply, but at the same time it was considered reactionary. This was avant-garde, because the revolutionary Iran found it was best to ban all foreign books and return to the roots of Farsi language and get rid of all others as quickly as possible: the “Khareji books” (foreign books) as they were called. It was mostly English and French, some German and few Russian books which were considered contraband and if found at any bookshop, you were charged with a misdemeanour and you were fined and had to pay in cash in court. I can recall, once or twice a month there were inspections at bookshops, and this lasted for over twenty years – I remember the nightmare of a bunch of besieges (Khomeini youth) rushing in the shops on a rampage, banging everything to the floor, smashing books to your chest, tearing up everything, shouting and yelling: “Didn’t you hear? Imam said these are “Naggis,” (unclean) and works of infidels and evil...” Once I remember I asked one of them if they had a search warrant and he slapped the book in my face and pushed back the side of his coat to show the butt of his revolver, next to a pair of handcuffs fastened to the girdle of his belt. It said, *these are my warrant* – yet he had no uniform and was barely 15 or 16 years old; not a hair on his face.

Really, now thinking back about all those years, it’s nothing but a bitter memory, hitting me to the marrow of my bones. They would dump sacks of English and French books and make them into a heap using shovel and wheelbarrow and set them on fire. The very act didn’t bother you as much as the prevalent hypocrisy which was apparent, because many a time I noticed those so called

revolutionary soldiers who were supposed to guard their faith, smuggling out books which contained pictures of stars or models, hiding them under their coats and shirts. I remember once one of the soldiers of Imam came back the day after a shake down and apologized, begging to know if I had better books showing all models and movie stars more openly, emphasizing... “You know what I mean...”

Despite these shows of strictness, there were still courses and classes offered at the university. Seminars and conferences were held for advanced improvement on the education of foreign languages, namely English, French and German. Really, it could not have been anything except a mockery and show off. An English professor told me once: “... Many a time during my lectures, little girl beggars suddenly pop up into the class, going around begging with plates in their hands and I can’t say anything – I have to wait till they finish their round... It’s a laughing stock... Really, if I do anything like kick them out or what, I will be called by the Ministry of Islamic Guidance the next day, for in any class there are Hezbollahhs in the class just for reporting any so-called misconducts.”

On television, you could see representatives of neighbouring countries; Islamic provinces of southern Russia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and some African and Arabic countries listening to long soporific speeches from an Iranian ministry on the importance of improving and developing education of European languages for the sake of the betterment of relations with other civilizations. The hypocrisy was so apparent it didn’t need an expert to notice it; it was so artificial and cold it would almost make you throw up. Picture the scene: it was like promising and actually uttering the words “I promise” just to mislead the promisee, when you have no intention of carrying the promise out. You could even distinguish between what it was that his words meant in merit versus what they meant in truth, and what it was that his saying

those words meant for his image after having said them. These double-edged misleading statements are what is called “performative contradictions”. A case I remember was in a recreational resort: the guy behind a microphone threatened people who were sitting outdoors by the riverside: “Keep your Islamic hijab (veil), if you don’t I’ll put the Koran tape on...” Why should it be like that? Why do the organizers of these programs take the viewers and listeners as a bunch of fools? Perhaps they know something that we don’t know, but I do know to some extent, since I have a habit of reading books beside academic books. I could guess it has roots in our language and literature which is a dualist and it goes back to the Zoroastrianism religion of old Iran, which was founded on life being a struggle between light and dark; two polar of opposites, like the differences in temperature between night and day in Iran, which very different in regions covering most parts of the Iranian plateau. Individuals doing a somersault in their philosophy or behaviour is quite common and considered natural, and if you question that, it’s like questioning an irrational act, which is quite rational in Iran. I have read many Farsi books; the writer in his life made a trip to a tomb of a Shiite Imam and repented. His writings were divided between before and after his pilgrimage, and if he had moustache and was considered leftist before, he changed completely growing a beard, carrying rosary beads and repenting. He was welcomed to brotherhood of Hezbollah and he started working on his image to try and present an appearance of sickness to further master the skill of attaining a low, whining, sighing tone of voice that helped him fit in his new role – very shallow and hollow, dirt cheap and insignificant. Hypocrisy, when spread everywhere, can get to a point where no one feels odd and/or wrongly about it, but I should say that even within the limited means in the country of Iran in today’s world of international communication, it cannot last forever.

70 years ago Arthur C. Clark, referring to his invention, the satellite, said: “We are going toward an era where there can be no iron curtain,” and it was not long before that when President Franklin Roosevelt of America at the end of the Second World War stated: “We are going toward an era, where everywhere is a front,” maybe he meant the vast range of global conflict at the time, or maybe he was referring to newly invented long range rocket missiles, or perhaps he was talking about the doors of new perceptions that satellite and the internet would open to mankind in the not-too-distant future.

Whatever the case was then, we are now already there and moving fast, for good or for bad, we are there and doomed – or it is perhaps better to say destined – to progress. Speed is the keyword, just like the fastest is the best, in a nutshell, happiness and satisfaction can be found in a capsule which is spelled “speed”. If you have toothache or suffer pain in your stomach, just sit in a car and push the gas pedal, the more you push, the more the pain goes away.

What I had in America for nearly 12 years was a failure to communicate, which is nobody’s fault, even though I was put in correctional centres for some time to somehow be “corrected” in order to adopt to American way of thinking. But this cultural gap, though shallow, was wide. There is too wide a distance between Iranian culture and American culture to try and stitch and stick the two together for long. I felt out of place right up to the day I was deported and I still do. You may call it a “marrano” (departed of my own culture and not accepted by another). America being leader of the western countries in general is down to this belief that might is right and, in defining might, they see it in power and guns. Middle eastern countries and Iran in particular have a similar view in defining rightness, except that in the Middle East the power is seen in verses of holy books and tradition. Therefore, there is no need to learn about other

cultures and countries, other than what necessitates us and what we have.

Adopting and learning about other cultures, I presume, is independent of racial differences in intelligence, although a satisfactory comparison cannot be made between intelligence in one culture and that in another. Further, looking to the intellectual achievements of the east in the past shows that even if there is difference, it is insignificant, certainly it is not to the extent that it prevents innovation or the changeability of social culture. Jung, noted psychiatrist, said that the east paid too much heed to the unconscious at the expense of the conscious, while the west did the opposite. The sad part is that each side emphasizes their own ground to the extent that they try to devalue the other by any means possible. C.P. Snow looked at this issue in another aspect. In an article, he compared the gulf between science and art and he went on to show how much each side missed by not considering and respecting the other as the product of a human mind. Instead, each insisted on putting the other down. Furthermore, he stated in his research that if you were to ask a group of scientists if they have read Shakespeare, they think of you as emotional, and if you were to ask a group of literary people about the second law of thermodynamics, the response would be cold. Maybe it's time we face this painful reality, not as a joke, but as serious matter. In this regard let me refer to an incident told by *The Peter Prescription*: "Charles Babbage, an English mathematician in the nineteenth century, was the engineering genius who invented the speedometer and the cowcatcher. He once wrote to Lord Tennyson the poet.

"Sir, in your otherwise beautiful poem the *Vision of Sin* one verse reads:

*"Every moment dies a man,
Every moment one is born.*

“If this were true, the population of the world be at a standstill. In truth, the rate of birth is slightly in excess of that of the death. I would suggest that in the next edition of your poem you have it read:

*“Every moment dies a man,
Every moment 1 and 1/16 is born.”*

Chapter Two

The first time I got busted in America was on a traffic ticket, for missing a stop behind a school bus. I went to a one room courthouse in Bay City, Michigan. That was in 1972, and for the violation I had a choice: either to pay a fine in cash, or spend a day in jail, or have my driver's license confiscated for a week. That was reasonable, I thought so back then.

But when I faced the rape charge in 1979, the only reasonable part about it was when the judge in court rejected the lie detector test result as evidence for the prosecutor. Hegel said that it is not technically sophisticated to be able to distinguish between right and wrong, especially against a weight of evidence – the weight of evidence indicates something touchable, so lie detector tests, photography, cassette tape recordings, I think since late 60s, were banned in US Courts as evidence. In Iran, the law is based on Franco German since the Qajar dynasty (200 years ago) and the judge decided and there would be no jurors. Nevertheless, courts all over the world are based viewing evidence to establish justice, but in a single judge system where one person decides, the knowledge of the accused and the knowledge of the technicality of the law and legal language, including where and how the law is extracted, become important. For example, the laws here in

Iran concerning marriage, inheritance, and wills are more than a thousand years old because they are copied from Koran – same as it is for other Islamic countries in the region – and it is considered stagnated compared to America, where amendments can be added based on cases and new laws can be born or die. In my eyes, I feel the jury system is more reasonable and more human, compared to a legal system that is based on what has been written in a holy book, because holy books leave room for interpretation and there is a need for professors in theology to investigate their meanings. In a country like Iran, it makes an incomparable difference if this certain professor be from the seed of prophet, which is called “sayyed”, because his word is considered proper and more accepted by the community, because he is considered infallible.

Fredrick the Great of Germany said more than 250 years ago that nobody goes to hell, everybody has a reason to go to heaven. So, in order to make sure on the road to heaven there won't be clashes and we do not suffer traffic jams, let's make some laws on this earth for everyone to respect. From there, I imagine, the path to a common understanding between races and nations took shape, which led to the League of Nations in the early twentieth century and then United Nations today.

It is a fact that no matter where we are born, we will adapt to a language considered as our mother tongue. As western researchers Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann pointed out, ways of becoming and being human are as numerous as man's cultures. Therefore, we make our own nature and, on the same trend, we progressively grow. We adapt ourselves to the particular culture we are born into, other than that of our own. We become more aware of the social pressures in different societies: maybe economic, geographical, historical, religious, or racial. Facing these vast diversities in human societies, who can tell in our daily lives, what is normal? Standard? An American dictionary

defines conforming as usual. Normalness again is defined in the dictionary as natural – but words change their meanings throughout the centuries. The word normal in 1530 meant right angle, while in 1890 meant character, but to take it on today's definition as natural, it still suffers lots of hang-ups and falls into pitfalls in the context of discussing human behaviour. We cannot ignore the fact that humans will adapt to the society in which they find themselves. What may be natural in one society, may be highly inconvenient and therefore considered unnatural in another society. So, as long as words are our main form of communication, which means common use, we cannot function unless there is a conventional agreement about their meaning. As Wittgenstein has convincingly shown, there can be no such thing as a private meaning. Meaning belongs to language itself. Though, of course, in the development of language as I showed throughout a human history, there is always the creation and appreciation of new meanings, which could be considered the intellectual life of a particular society.

An Iranian philosopher of the 11th century, Farabi, said that in confronting problems in life, look at nature; it will show you the correct ways. But nature, too, consists of laws. To put light on this point, let me get into a little discussion: persistent physical laws which follow a pattern of cause and effect in a mathematical form, like heat and gravity, and other parts of nature consist of living creatures which follow the same closed circle, except man, which is sophisticated and blessed with the power of speech and free will. Our speech and language led us to progress, and confusion. The result of misinterpretation and our free will led us to reason and ignorance, which ultimately led to war and evil. Some ethnologists have tried speculating the nature of early man; the original hunter-gatherer, the caveman, so to speak. They have investigated likely uniformities in his behaviour in search of happiness and of what was natural for him, because he is, as our forefather, as close to our nature as we