



Banned

Oil on Canvas

16 x 20 in

Banned

Paris, 2005

On a metro station bench, a young woman of captivating beauty is consumed by profound sadness and disbelief. Her contemplation turns to the recent string of events that have unfolded before her in the past few months. She, who had climbed the steps of progress, one after the other, with unwavering optimism and tireless endeavor, ponders how everything has slipped through her fingers. Could it be that it was all a misstep from the very start?

Bearing the weight of being prohibited from work and dismissed, she arrives at the disheartening realization that she is considered dispensable and undesired. In a fleeting moment, the allure of self-destruction, of surrendering to the train's embrace, brushes against her thoughts. They had warned her that buying even a morsel of bread would be a struggle, and as she now counts her coins to secure a loaf in Paris, she suspects their triumph. Shabnam Toluei, a thriving director and actor in the theater and cinema and a playwright and screenwriter, had her creative journey in Iran halted solely due to her differing belief. In her childhood, just after the revolution's victory, her father's salary was severed, plunging her family into economic hardship. During her adolescence, being a Baha'i led to her expulsion from school, and in her youth, she was prevented from studying her favorite field – art – at the university.

Yet, after relentless perseverance, she was able to acquire a degree in film directing from a distinguished cinema institute, where film and theater industry luminaries imparted their wisdom. Though denied permission to direct films, her boundless talent opened her way toward the theater, where she achieved laurels with two awards in her inaugural appearance. For a decade, her existence revolved around the stages of theater, gradually venturing into cinema and television. Throughout these ten years, she garnered accolades five times across various performing arts categories and was twice crowned Actress of the Year in Theater. Shabnam's popularity and adoration burgeoned day by day as she graced the screens of a beloved television series. This, in turn, drew the attention of surveillance authorities of the broadcasting organization, who sought to control her. Pressured and threatened, they demanded the renunciation of all her beliefs if she wished to continue her craft. Yet, she remained resolute, refusing to capitulate to their coercion and unwilling to engage in deceit and hypocrisy. Finally, a directive was disseminated to all artistic and cinematic institutions, declaring Shabnam Toluei forbidden from participating in creative endeavors.

Her friends and fellow artists reproached her, urging compliance and a return to work, but such a life was incongruous with her convictions. Ultimately, with all avenues sealed off, she was compelled to leave Iran.

Her moral choice and unwavering refusal to yield to the unjust demands of authority cast her into months of desolation and tumultuous existence. However, a glimmer of hope unexpectedly illuminated her somber path. A distinguished artist extended an invitation, heralding the resurgence of her artistic life. Now she has achieved years of success, armed with her 113 extraordinary talent and unyielding dedication. She shines once again in the theater, on the screen, creates films, and ...



Wanderers of Love's Abode

Oil on Linen

18 x 36 in

May 1979

How sorrowful is the plight of forced migration! With tear-filled eyes and hearts burdened by anguish and suffering, we bid farewell to our beloved homeland, bereft and on foot, uncertain where to seek refuge. Ultimately, we found solace in the deserts of Mahyar, near Isfahan, thanks to the benevolence of our Bahá'í friends who erected tents in that bare and dry stretch, providing us with essential provisions for temporary habitat. Yet, enduring three months in that parched wilderness, devoid of basic amenities, proved an arduous ordeal. Deprived of electricity and running water, we faced tremendous challenges maintaining proper hygiene. Despite the Bahá'ís' regular water delivery through tankers, the absence of bathing facilities or a designated place for cleansing presented significant hardships.

The news of Mr. DastPish's untimely demise cast a pall of sorrow upon us all. His grieving wife, overcome with anguish, vented her distress by clawing at her face, leaving it marred with blood. Seeking to offer relief to her mother, her six-year-old daughter nestled her mother's head upon her lap, but the child was at a loss for words; she and her three siblings had lost their father. Amidst these trying months, a remarkable young woman, barely seventeen years old and pregnant, courageously gave birth to her child within the confines of the same tent, devoid of any trace of comfort or convenience. Yet, the determined spirit of the Bahá'í community persevered. Some individuals baked bread, while others crafted carpets to sustain their livelihoods, often grappling with hardships in their cooking. However, the remarkable dedication to children's education will forever remain ingrained in our collective memory, with specific individuals shouldering this responsibility. I am left pondering the reasons behind humanity's unwitting oppression of our fellow beings due to differences in beliefs and how we allow ourselves to uproot and displace individuals from their homes in such a callous manner.

Extracted from the recollections of a resident of Kata village.



Stranger in Her Own Home

Oil on Canvas

12 x 16 in

\$5,000

Late November 1981

It has been almost two months since the day my husband was taken into custody. He now finds himself imprisoned in a damp and odorous basement in Monkarat7 prison, surrounded by thieves, drug addicts, and hardened criminals. Consequently, his health has deteriorated significantly. In the afternoon, the guards forcefully barged into our home again; their intrusion was not the first. True to form, they ransacked our belongings, their voices echoing with profanities. They forcibly removed my frail elderly mother from her room, confiscating whatever caught their interest.

As I once knew, the world no longer holds value or meaning for me. All that was once cherished now appears trivial and insignificant. My sole pursuit is to secure peace and freedom for my beloved husband. After taking what they desired, one of the guards bellowed, "Everyone, vacate the premises; I intend to lock and seal the door." I protested, questioning their motive, as the apartment rightfully belonged to me, an innocent individual untainted by criminal activities. To my defiance, he responded, "You must leave." Yet, I stood resolute, firmly declaring, "I shall not be moved." He promptly contacted the prosecutor, who affirmed, "She must leave." I retorted, "This is my home, and I shall not be displaced." He coldly retorted, "You understand that your husband's life rests in my hands." Subsequently, he dialed the detention center, connecting with my husband, and urged, "Tell your wife to comply; you are well aware of what I am capable of." He then handed the phone to me. My feeble and ailing husband spoke, his voice strained and weak, "My dear Pary, please, do as they say." Astonished, I inquired, "Hossein dear, are you

instructing me to abandon our home?" Softly, he replied, "What choice do I have? I am but a captive...a captive..."

My heart was engulfed in flames. Memories of his affectionate countenance, resilience, humility, and sharp wit flooded my mind, now reduced to a state of severe illness and fragility within that foul-smelling, damp underground cell. I then uttered, "Hossein⁸, my love, I shall heed your every word solely for your sake." Gathering a pillow, a blanket, and a few items of clothing, I reluctantly departed our home. My brother took charge of my elderly mother's medication, securing it within a bag alongside a few garments and dragging her down all five floors while carrying the heavy burden of sorrow within his heart. They sealed the house, inscribing upon it, with messy penmanship and on a soiled piece of paper, the words: "This dwelling is sealed under the authority of the prosecutor." Additionally, they confiscated my car from the garage. In a single moment, I had lost everything I held dear in my life, and from that point forward, I resided at the foot of the staircase, just outside my former home, enduring the harshness of the cold for a grueling 27 days and nights...

⁷ The activities of the "Monkarat Office," whether it is involved in the interrogation and torture of political opponents, and the relationship it has with the hezbollahis and the komitehs. Author: Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Canada, 1 July 1998.

⁸ A few months after this occurrence, Mr. Hossein Vahdat Hagh was executed by firing squad in Qasr Prison in Tehran, and all five floors of their apartment building were confiscated.

Extracted from the memoirs of Mrs. Paridokht Khaze (Vahdat Hagh)



Three Generations

Oil & Mixed Media on Canvas

16 x 12 in

Observe Cell 12, where my mother and I found ourselves confined within Adelabad prison in Shiraz. Its walls, composed of filthy green concrete, were complemented by pink bars, and at the far end of this dismal cell stood a solitary metal bed, securely fastened to the floor, furnished with foam mattresses and a meager collection of military blankets designated solely for prisoners. A tiny window is barely permitting air passage. At the tender age of 19, I, besides my mother, who was 44 at the time, found ourselves detained within these walls due to the crime of embracing different beliefs. Within the confines of this cell, the very air bore witness to the distressed sobs radiating from the walls and doorway, reminders of the recent executions that befell numerous friends who were similarly condemned for their contrary convictions. So suffocating was the weight of their enforced separation that, at times, it became difficult to draw breath. Within this vile environment, I am aware, in the very depths of my being, of the profound implications of religious prejudice and ignorance. I know how swiftly everything can crumble when love, peace, and unity among humankind are absent. And now, after 33 years, my daughter, stands at the same tender age of 19 as I once did, confined in solitary confinement within Evin Prison, falsely accused of the same crimes. With a heavy heart, I ponder how many generations will witness the sorrowful repetition of religious prejudice in Iran. These recollections stem from the memories of my mother.



Poppies of love

Oil on Canvas

12 x 16 in

There was once a woman green as the spring , who planted her hands in a garden . And another woman , red as her heart who plucked light from the bars of a prison . And now here I am with my own patch of soil , growing a garden in this small cell , with poppies of love for each pane¹⁴

Love defines her very being. She adores poetry, music, and the essence of life itself. Her verses overflow with the purest form of affection. Despite enduring the hardships and limitations of imprisonment, she fearlessly speaks of love. It knows no boundaries within her heart, extending its reach to all people worldwide, fostering a longing for love and unity. Patiently and faithfully, she has weathered the unjust years of her confinement, becoming a patient rock and the sympathizer of her cellmates. She has become a mother figure to incarcerated young women and a compassionate caregiver to older adults. Through her experiences in various prisons across Iran, including Qarchak and Rajai Shahr, she has witnessed the anguish and suffering of women trapped in addiction, poverty, and corruption. Selflessly, she has dedicated herself to their physical and mental well-being. Revered inside and outside the prison, she is affectionately known as "Mother Mahvash," perfectly capturing her exceptional qualities and demeanor. Mahvash Shahriari Sabet, a 70-year-old educator and Bahá'í poet stands among the seven former leaders of the Bahá'í community in Iran. Previously, she endured a decade of unjust imprisonment and now finds herself again in Evin Prison, entering her second decade behind bars.

Before the Islamic Revolution, she pursued studies in psychology and served as a teacher and later a school principal. However, following the Revolution, she faced dismissal from her position. Eventually, she was elected to the board of directors of the Bahá'í Online University in

Iran, where she taught psychology and management. Before her most recent arrest, she spent ten years of her life, from 2007 to 2017, incarcerated in prisons controlled by the Islamic Republic of Iran due to her religious beliefs. It was during this period that the majority of her poems were born. Some of her poetic works, such as "Raha," "The Tale of Love," and "Mara to Dar Nazar Avar," have been published abroad, as they remain banned within Iran.

A selection of her poems, published under the title "Prison Poems," has been translated and published in English, receiving widespread acclaim within the global literary community. Recognizing her talent, the International PEN Association in Denmark and Austria honored her as an honorary member.

¹⁴This poem "The Garden of Imagination" is an excerpt from Mahvash Sabet's book, "Prison Poems." 142 In 2017, PEN International awarded her the esteemed "International Writer of Courage" prize. Furthermore, she has been bestowed the prestigious literary accolade "Words on Borders" from Norway. Inspired by her verses, renowned award-winning musician Lasse Thoresen, inspired by her words, created music that he performed at a music festival in Norway.



The Dream of Freedom

Oil & Mixed Media on Canvas

16 x 12 in

June 12th, 2016

In my solitary confinement, aside from the interrogator, my only interaction with the outside world was with a female prison guard known as Narges. Yesterday, as Ms. Narges opened the cell door to deliver my lunch, she remarked on my cheerful demeanor and observed my exercise routine and singing. She mentioned I stood apart while tears overcame the other women in prison.

Today, I was led from the interrogation room to the prison yard, where we were given a brief respite of fresh air for 20 minutes daily. The yard had a square roof, with a rectangular opening in the center that allowed glimpses of the sky. I had caught sight of it sneakily in previous days, peering from beneath my blindfold. Holding my hand from behind the chador, Narges guided me, blindfolded, down the stairs, our journey unfolding in the darkness. It felt like we descended three floors as she pulled my hand firmly, assuring me that I wouldn't stumble. She sometimes intentionally quickened her pace, pulling on my hand and causing me to take three steps at once. However, there were moments when she moved so silently and slowly that my foot would not reach the next step. Finally, as we reached the end of the stairs, she released my hand. I heard the distinct sound of an iron lock being pulled, and she turned me around as if I were positioned behind a closed door. (I suspect the prison yard was connected to its entrance through a corridor.) She instructed me, "Go to the prison yard," before forcefully pushing me forward. Blindfolded and unable to see, I inadvertently collided with the wall on my second step. In that deliberate act, a wave of despair washed over me, and I felt the urge to cry. It was a moment of confusion and ambiguity, as Narges would alternate between kindness and an unsettling malevolence. I recalled her words from the day before and grasped her intention. She sought to break me, to witness my tears.

I began singing a song to regain composure and suppress my tears. As I did, the years of my life flickered before me like scenes in a movie. Throughout my existence, I have longed to stand on a stage and fill people's hearts and souls with joy. Yet, not only was I a woman in Iran, prohibited from singing, but I was also a Bahá'í and now trapped in solitary confinement, ostensibly due to owning a bridal shop, but indeed because of my divergent beliefs. Since childhood, I was inundated with tales of my father, mother, grandmother, aunt, friends, and family members being imprisoned. The confines of those spaces, the interrogations, and the cells had become etched within me, woven into the fabric of my being. They were not foreign events.

I had deliberately chosen a path in life that would keep me far away from this place and this yard, forsaking my dreams out of fear. Subsequently, I embarked on a journey to establish a bridal shop, serving the young women of my country, sewing and crafting the clothes of their dreams. Yet, as I held back tears and embraced sorrow in that poignant moment, it felt as if I stood before God—a rendezvous that marked both the beginning and the end. Beneath the blue rectangle of the sky, with faint rays filtering through the blindfold, I made a solemn promise to my Creator. I vowed to endure and persist in all my ideals, values, and 95 dreams. At that very instant, I recited a prayer passed down to me by my father, envisioning myself adorned in the most exquisite gown, and intoned the words aloud... so loudly that my voice echoed throughout the yard.

These reflections are derived from the memories of my cousin.



Difficulty of the Journey

Oil & Mixed Media on Canvas

16 x 12 in

I don't know where and how to tell about the lives of the Bahais, full of pain and suffering at the beginning of the revolution. Newly married, we left Shiraz and settled in a village near Kerman to serve. Not even two months had passed when we heard that my 18-year-old sister, mother, and many other Baha'is from Shiraz had been arrested. We remained in the dark for several agonizing months, burdened by daily anxiety and worry. Eventually, they were transferred to Adelabad prison, and we were granted fleeting moments to see them behind the glass every Saturday. Each Friday night, my spouse and I embarked on long journeys, enduring worn-out buses permeated with the suffocating scent of cigarettes, traveling back and forth between Kerman and Shiraz for brief reunions. With my pregnancy, this arduous voyage became even more draining, painful, and detrimental to my well-being. Yet, we had no alternatives. In hasty court sessions, all the Bahá'í prisoners were sentenced to death, leaving us uncertain if each visit might be our last. Most of the time, news of their executions reached us only after our return. My spouse borrowed our neighbor's motorcycle, and together, filled with anxiety, worry, and tears in our eyes, we visited the telecommunication office, desperately seeking news about them. Within those few months, 16 people were executed in just two days, aside from individual or group executions, while the rest still faced death sentences. I was 8 months pregnant when the doctor prohibited me from traveling, leaving me grappling with conflicting emotions.

On the one hand, I harbored excitement and eagerness for the impending birth of my child, preparing myself for its arrival. On the other hand, I simmered with anger, frustrated that my pregnancy prevented me from visiting. Until one blessed day, a relative arrived in Kerman, and fully aware of the journey's perils, I implored them to take me to Shiraz, uncertain of how long I

would be deprived of seeing my loved ones. During that meeting, tears streamed down my face without ceasing

In September 1983, we embarked on our journey back to Kerman, pausing to alleviate our fatigue. Problems, calamities, pain, and suffering sometimes envelop a person, making a monotonous, ordinary, and even tiresome existence desirable. For a brief moment, I closed my eyes. The burdens of the path, the distance from my loved ones, the anxieties of an uncertain future! I abandoned myself to the wind of fantasy and yearned to open my eyes to an ordinary, uneventful, everyday life besides my family, eagerly awaiting the birth of my child.

These memoirs are adapted from the recollections of my aunt.



The Prison Angel, 2022

Oil on Linen

18" X 24"

The Prison Angel, prisoners knew him by this name. This was the title of a kind, compassionate and calm doctor who served the prisoners, especially the patients, with a cheerful face and a tireless spirit.

Dr. Farhangi was voluntarily assigned as the doctor of the 3rd Ward of Evin prison, and he took care of prison patients with the help of the blood pressure machine that his beloved wife had

brought to the prison for him with a lot of effort.

One of the prisoners said "If it wasn't for him, we would be dead. Because he gave us strength and relieved the internal pain and suffering of the prisoners. He visits all the patients every night and gives them medicine."

Another says "Every morning, Dr. Farhangi filled a plastic bag with medicine and went one by one to the rooms of Ward 3, which had 14 rooms in total, together with a security guard and gave medicine to the patients." Everyone respected and had a special interest in him. He was brought to prison because he was a Baha'i. Every time he returned from the interrogation, he said "They will ultimately execute me."

A person who had devoted his whole life to the service of humanity was shot on June 23, 1981 after spending 502 days of loving service in prison. His life full of service was ended.



The Most Bitter Farewell

Oil on Lenin

20 x 24 in

Saturdays within the confines of Adel Abad prison are arguably the sole source of happiness and significance, primarily due to the precious moments spent with our families during their visits, restricted to a mere eight minutes behind a partition. Our visitation privileges have been segregated from others, a favorable circumstance as it allows us to observe complete families through the glass barrier. Having endured grueling and painful interrogations, we all received death sentences following brief fifteen-minute trials, where the judge posed a single question: "Will you choose Islam or execution?" Just last

week, the prosecutor arrived at the prison and proclaimed, "The verdicts have been confirmed, and unless you repent, I will execute everyone."

Saturday, June 18, 1983, The scorching weather adds to our discomfort as we lack any cooling device within the prison. Even worse, the water supply has been severed for a week, causing distress among all inmates. Today's visit will be different, for we must bid farewell to our families due to the prosecutor's words. This might be our final encounter. Around 4:30 in the afternoon, we entered the visitation room. Unusual for our regular visits, the families arrived with flushed faces, apprehension, sadness, and tearful eyes. Just two days prior, six men were martyred, including Tahirih's husband, Nosrat Khanum's son, and Roya's father. As we departed from the visitation area, the guards halted us, and the warden summoned us. I was the first one called. The warden held a paper in his hand and asked for my name. Realizing my name was absent from the list, he requested me to stand beside him. On that paper, in two distinct columns, he had inscribed the names of the Bahá'í men and women condemned to death. The names of the executed men were marked out with a red pen. It dawned on me that these were the names of my beloved ones, the individuals they intended to execute. In astonishment, I gazed at their names. My friends followed suit, presenting themselves one after the other. The warden would inquire about their names, and they would respond with a smile. I merely looked upon their cherished faces and then sought their names on the list, mirroring the warden's actions. No one could truly comprehend the emotions I experienced during those moments. I knew that in moments I would lose the dearest people in my life. I understood that this would be my final glimpse of them. Yet, I could only follow them with my eyes as they were led toward the guards' recreation room, unable to react. After a while, another friend stood beside me. As the warden concluded his tasks, he ordered us to return to our cells and proceeded to the room himself. I turned my head towards the room, where Shirin leaned against the ping-pong table, conversing with others facing her. Suddenly, she glanced at me, and I lowered my head as a gesture of respect and farewell. She responded with a smile and a wave of her hand. Words fail to capture the depth of my feelings during those heart-wrenching moments, the saddest of my life. I couldn't even embrace them or bid them a proper farewell. In those dreadful moments, I felt the life drain from my body, and walking became arduous. I was like a corpse. Oh, how I wished I had gone with them. Later, I discovered they were transported by ambulance to the military's solitary confinement, where they were hanged in the middle of the night. The ambulance driver recounted, "They prayed collectively during the journey, and Shirin's prayers resonated with beauty and agony." He was deeply moved. The warden growled, "They remained steadfast until the end, and we killed them." These young, educated women and girls lost their lives at the hands of ignorant and intolerant individuals merely for holding different beliefs. May their memory endure. This painting is drawn from my mother's perspective in that poignant moment. The women were Akhtar Sabet, Mahshid Niroumand, Zarrin Moghimi, Izat Janami (Ishraghi), Shirin Dalvand, Tahereh Arjomandi, Simin Saberi, Mona Mahmoud Nejad, Nosrat Ghofrani (Yaldai) and Roya Eshraghi



The Fragrance of Meymand

Oil on Canvas

16 x 12 in

A captivating tale unfolds in the enchanting village of Tangriz, nestled in the heart of Fars province. It begins with the arrival of a beautiful baby boy, blessed with captivating blue eyes, into the humble abode of a family of farmers and school owners. They bestowed upon him the name “Azim,” a tribute to the legacy of his revered grandfather. This family flourished in both wealth and wisdom, basking in the embrace of abundance and cultural richness. ‘Azim, adorned with extraordinary intelligence and remarkable talents, possessed an insatiable thirst for unraveling the mysteries of the spiritual realm. During his youthful years, his soul embarked on a profound journey guided by the verses of the Quran and the profound teachings of mystical literature. Immersed in deep contemplation, he sought enlightenment by conversing with kindred spirits. Through these sacred encounters, ‘Azim found solace in embracing the Bahá’í faith.

Radiating purity and grace in every word and deed, ‘Azim reveled in the euphoria of this spiritual awakening. His heart overflowed with joy and enthusiasm, compelling him to share his newfound truths with friends, classmates, and cherished kin. Alas, this celestial enlightenment became a thorn in the side of those ensnared by narrow-mindedness and prejudice. Fueled by ignorance, they unleashed their wrath upon ‘Azim and his beloved family, subjecting them to unrelenting torment and persecution.

Weighed by adversity, the family reluctantly bid farewell to their ancestral lands, selling their homestead and agricultural fields. Seeking solace and sanctuary, they sought refuge in the embrace of the village of Maymand. However, the malevolence that plagued their lives followed them unyieldingly, refusing to grant them respite.

April 11, 1992's fragrant breath ushered 'Azim's return to Maymand. Having settled in Shiraz to pursue his studies, he journeyed back to his cherished family, intent on sharing in the joyous celebration of his brother. Spring was in full bloom, adorning the village with a tapestry of Damask roses, their sweet aroma permeating the air. As the night drew its veil, the revelries concluded, and 'Azim retired to his brother's abode. In keeping with his custom, he immersed himself in studies before succumbing to slumber.

The ethereal tendrils of the morning light illuminated the awakening world, 'Azim's brother heard the sound of an engine and then the sound of a door, but through the thick veil of weariness, he paid no attention and went back to sleep. Upon awakening 'Azim was nowhere to be found. Anxiety gripped the hearts of his loved ones as they discovered his possessions undisturbed, a silent testimony fueling their suspicion that he was kidnapped. Desperate and fearful, they embarked on a tireless quest, scouring every nook and cranny, hoping to unearth the faintest trace of their cherished 'Azim. Frustration mounted as their endeavors proved fruitless.

His family advertised in the local newspaper, imploring anyone with information to inform the family. Whispers carried on the winds, acquaintances painting a haunting tale of the people of Tangriz, who had tormented him, orchestrating his disappearance. Three days before 'Azim vanished, these same tormentors had descended upon Maymand, relentlessly inquiring about his whereabouts. A glimmer of hope emerged from his sister's recollection as she described an enigmatic car, veiled by tinted windows, lurking near their home in the early dawn. A concerned neighbor came forward with a startling revelation, recounting the sight of 'Azim being forcefully seized by unknown sentinels. Their encounter resonated deeply as 'Azim's words echoed in their ears, "Tell my family that the committee has taken me," a cryptic message. An anonymous caller reinforced the anguish, declaring 'Azim's imprisonment. Yet, the family's relentless pursuit of answers within the confines of the prison walls proved futile; their pleas met with denial and silence.

Time passed, leaving in its wake a trail of sorrow and despair. It was only after a considerable period that a shred of evidence emerged—a solemn discovery of 'Azim's military identification tag, an artifact that had faithfully accompanied him, safeguarding his identity, concealed within his pocket. It was found amidst the labyrinthine expanse of the mountains that bridged Maymand and Tangriz, a landscape adorned with countless subterranean water channels and wells. A somber procession traversed these treacherous terrains, a sorrowful pilgrimage in pursuit of their beloved son's mortal remains. Yet, the cruelest ironies persisted as their endeavors failed to yield the closure they desperately sought.

'Azim, a paragon of handsomeness, kindness, sincerity, nobility, and righteousness, fell victim to the perils of religious fanaticism, all stemming from his unwavering devotion to his evolving beliefs. A malevolent shadow engulfed his radiant spirit, forever altering the course of his destiny. Abducted and ensnared in the clutches of a sinister plot, his family remains haunted by the veiled mysteries that shroud his ultimate fate. May the divine tapestry of time unravel these enigmatic secrets, lifting the burdensome veil of ambiguity that eclipses their path. The

poignant account is inspired by the memories of one close to 'Azim, preserving his memory and plight for generations to come.



The Last Visit

Oil on Canvas

16 x 12 in

Once again, I felt an undeniable pull drawing me to their prison just a week before their martyrdom. I spent two and a half hours in jail with the prisoners in Hamedān in their cell. Strangely, the presence of the prison itself was imperceptible. It was as if I had stumbled upon the most joyful and vibrant gathering rather than a place of confinement. And how long they had been there! I struggle to put into words the flood of emotions that engulfed me, and even with pen and paper, it feels impossible to capture the entirety of those feelings. Their serene expressions and beaming smiles radiated nothing but waves of contentment and surrender to the Divine Will. It was inconceivable to think that they were incarcerated. Their cell was meticulously tidy and clean, with their bedrolls neatly bundled against the walls. They laid their blankets on the floor for me to sit on, offering me sweets and tea. They proudly exhibited their meticulously crafted handicrafts, created with skill and delicacy. It was astounding to witness such artistry and beauty from individuals who, outside of these walls, had scarcely a moment to spare for such endeavors. It begs the question: what kind of thoughts and emotions could give rise to such exquisite beauty, if not those of rarified serenity and elevated sentiment? Their entire being overflowed with love—for their Beloved and fellow humans, the very individuals showing nothing these days except harshness and cruelty. It was as though these individuals had transformed, only driven by a desire to kill and destroy.

Whenever I spoke of my colleagues in Hamedān and their Spiritual Assembly, a profound sense of pride in our relationship welled up within me. The prayer book they painstakingly transcribed

by hand in prison, signed by all of them, and sent to me, stands as a testament to our deep love and connection, which I would proudly display to everyone. I shared the same bond with their wives, children, and relatives—an unbreakable extension that seemed to have existed since the dawn of creation. It was one of the blessings bestowed upon me by our revolution.

These words are excerpted from the diary of Mrs. Jinous Nemat Mahmoudi, a respected figure as the head of Iran's Meteorological Organization and an active member of the Bahá'í community. Tragically, she was arrested on 12/13/81 and executed by firing squad on 12/27/81. Similarly, the seven Bahá'ís of Hamadan met the same fate, executed by firing squad on 06/13/81 after eleven months in prison.



Mothering

Oil on Linen

18 x 36 in

May 14th 2008

They raided her home for the third time and forcibly took her away, marking the beginning of a long and arduous ten-year journey filled with challenges and hardships for her and her family.

Fariba Kamalabadi, a prominent figure in the Bahá'í community, possessed remarkable qualities. As a psychologist, she was diligent, wise, and profoundly understood various issues. Fariba approached every task with meticulous perfection, utilizing the most suitable methods. Despite her remarkable abilities, she remained humble and kind-hearted, bringing solace and comfort to those around her. Her compassion and dedication to serving others always placed her at the forefront.

Her daughter Taraneh, who had already experienced her mother's imprisonment twice before age ten, would again taste the bitterness of separation at thirteen. Throughout those years, she could only communicate her feelings, emotions, and moments of joy or sadness to her mother on one designated day each week for a limited number of minutes. Taraneh yearned for her mother's embrace and intimate conversations, but all she could receive was Fariba's love and affection displayed through knitting and handicrafts.

Initially, Fariba endured two years and four months in solitary confinement. In that cramped and dim prison, she made the most of her limited options and grew a plant from the end of a carrot stalk in a small water container. As that plant thrived and blossomed, Taraneh received the most precious birthday gift—a tangible manifestation of her mother's love and genuine care.

Years passed by, one after another, and once again, Taraneh was deprived of her mother's presence during a critical decision in her life—the choice of a life partner. Fariba's sole advice to her daughter was to create a warm and harmonious environment filled with unity, love, and service to humanity. Great efforts were made to have Fariba attend the wedding ceremony, but the authorities opposed her presence, even for a brief period accompanied by an officer. With a heavy heart, Taraneh proceeded with the wedding, and her mother, behind prison bars, was only present on the wings of her imagination during that momentous occasion.

After the birth of her daughter's first child, Fariba managed, through immense effort, to secure a five-day furlough and embrace her beloved grandchild. Ten years elapsed, and finally, with her release, the house was filled with joy and happiness. Unfortunately, the festive period was short-lived. Four years later, the storm struck again—prison, solitary confinement, false accusations, and a ten-year renewed sentence.

On July 31st, 2022, during her first visit after solitary confinement, Fariba made a single request to her daughter: to pass on her natural right of mothering that she could not perform with her own daughter so that she could become a mother figure to the youth imprisoned alongside her. True to her sense of responsibility and overflowing love, she became a mother to all the incarcerated youth, nurturing and guiding them with unwavering care.

The letters in the painting “Mothering” (Right to left) The first letter:

My beautiful Taraneh,
... In prison, to struggle against the worry that lest my life pass in vain, I even count my minutes for various activities. Anyway, don't underestimate knitting because it has thousands of techniques... For me, knitting is my connection with the outside world. It is the declaration of love that I have for you. I'm giving my love and talking to you through each and every strand. Here I tell the children: here [in prison], knitting is my only way of mothering, and I only mother through knitting (and, of course, praying). Of course, I think that no one has ever mothered as beautifully as I have and has not been able to do such mothering in colors and different sizes.
Love you,
mom

The second letter:

My sweet dame, kind Taraneh, Alláh' u' Abhá Happy Birthday. You will probably receive this letter the day after your birthday. But I have no way to congratulate you on your birthday, and of course, this is your seventh birthday that I am not with you, nor can I congratulate you on your birthday. During this time, you have changed from a 13-year-old teenager to a 20-year-old dame... I have heard that dear Sima will surprise you and celebrate your birthday. I hope you have a memorable celebration, like your birthday party in the last year before my arrest. I don't know about you, but it was very memorable for me. I had invited all your school friends – whom I didn't know – secretly from you through their numbers on your mobile phone and requested them not to tell you anything at school. One of your friends who had not received the invitation told you at school to give her phone number to your mother, and you didn't understand what she meant. That night I entertained your friends and played with them a little, and you were a little embarrassed and ashamed. But you were happy the day after your birthday when your friends told you what a cool mom you have. During these years of my absence, dear Ms. Eshraghi was your cool mom, and sweet Niusha and Nilofar were your cool sisters, and now dear and kind Sima...

Love you both,
mom

3/3/2015 Please deliver it to the family in the visiting room.

Thanks

Kamalabadi

The third letter:

My dear Taraneh and Farid Alláh' u' Abhá, Today, when I am writing the letter, it is Tuesday, November 18th, at 9:30 a.m. you will receive my letter on Sunday, November 23rd, just one day before your wedding ceremony. I use this opportunity to express not only my consent but also my utmost joy and happiness for the eternal union of both of you, dear ones of my heart and soul. You know I tried my best to be present at your marriage ceremony somehow, but it seems that God's will has not placed my presence at the most magnificent ceremony and moment of your life, and we are all satisfied and grateful as always...

Love you,

Fariba

11/18/2014

The fourth letter:

...contrary to the imagination of what the outsiders think (has anyone ever addressed you with this term? "outsiders") that a person has so much time in prison that they don't know what to do with it, many of us here have little time. For this reason, every moment of my knitting (in addition to my other tasks) is adjusted by the hour and minute, and I set a time for myself. For example, I have to reach the edge of the sleeve before afternoon tea, at 5 o'clock. So I have to knit 5 centimeters by 11:15...



Divested

Oil on Linen

20 x 24 in

When the most cherished individual in your existence is forcefully taken away, I struggle to conceive of a more significant and sorrowful calamity. Words fail me to express the depth of my emotions at that moment; only those who have experienced such a situation can comprehend. My beloved husband, Ghodratollah Rohani, a highly accomplished senior attorney within the judiciary, a man of great kindness, a cherished member of our family, a profound thinker, erudite and studious, whose every thought and endeavor revolved around serving humanity and striving for justice in society, was apprehended, along with some of the friends, on Sunday, December 13, 1981, solely due to differing beliefs.

On that fateful day, when he did not return home, we were overcome with distress and anxiety. It was a time when the likelihood of those detained ever returning was nearly impossible, as they were swiftly executed. My husband's mother, burdened by a heart condition, suffered a seizure due to overwhelming sadness and anxiety, her sorrowful sobs echoing. Discovering the gravity of the situation, my ten-year-old daughter stood on the balcony in the chilling cold until the early morning hours, weeping and desperately hoping for her father's safe return. My six-year-old son experienced nosebleeds from the weight of anxiety, tension, and tears. As for myself, cradling our four-and-a-half-month-old son, I navigated this turbulent ordeal with fear, worry, and deep concern. The state of my being during those times is self-evident.

Nearly two weeks had elapsed without any news of his whereabouts. We remained unaware of the prison he was confined to, the circumstances surrounding his arrest, the time it occurred, or his condition, until we received the devastating news that, fourteen days after his detention, on Sunday, December 27, 1981, he and all his companions were executed by a firing squad. At that moment, our world collapsed. They did not release his body, personal belongings, will, or even

attire to us. Nothing, absolutely nothing, not a single thing was returned to us. Moreover, they ordered the seizure of all our assets. Immediately, my husband's law office and our expansive, meticulously maintained garden in Kashan were confiscated and sold. The deed of our home had been in the name of our two children from the start. After two years had passed, I was summoned to the prosecutor's office and subjected to countless interrogations and trials. Throughout this time, we faced incessant harassment and pressure from the government, who ultimately decided to seize our household possessions. In May 1984, in the early morning hours, a dozen individuals stormed our house, commencing the collection of our household items as per the order of confiscation. Until noon, they continued their task, loading the articles onto a truck. Then they departed for prayers and lunch. In the afternoon, fifteen individuals rushed into our home. This time, they arrived with a large truck and a trailer truck equipped with a door to facilitate the removal of our possessions. Once again, the process of collecting our belongings was recommenced.

We had a mirror adorned with a bronze frame of golden hue on the wall. Mistaking it for gold, they attacked the wall with a pickaxe to remove it entirely. My young son expressed sadness, saying, "Mother, I like this mirror very much. Tell them that if they want a mirror, they should go and take one from the bathroom instead, not to destroy our home."

Upon the bookshelf, I noticed my son's small toy. He was now two and a half years old. He adored this toy because it played a beautiful melody when wound up. I took the toy and handed it to him to keep him occupied. Suddenly, an agent approached us, angrily seizing it from my son and declaring, "The confiscated items are forbidden (haram)." He then placed it in a box. As one of the individuals entered, he attempted to detach the chandelier above the table. Concerned, I hurriedly interjected, saying, "Oh, wait! Let me turn off the electricity first. The electrical wire passes through the chains, and there's a risk of electric shock." The young man glanced at me briefly, his hands lowering. He sat on the floor, hugging his knees, and concealed his face with his hands. The others inquired, "What's the matter? Get up and help." He sorrowfully replied, "I curse (spit on) the bread we eat. We have killed her husband, and now we are taking away her furniture from under the feet of her orphaned children. Yet, she is concerned about my life, ensuring I don't suffer an electric shock. I will no longer cooperate with you."

Rising, he settled onto the rolled carpet and lit a cigarette. Calmly, he said, "I know where they are taking these items. I will provide you with the address. Come tomorrow, and purchase whatever you desire most." I gazed at him, incredulous, and replied, "What are you saying? I have lost the dearest person in my life. They didn't even return my husband's remains to me. Now you suggest I come and repurchase the furniture you are forcibly taking away from us. Is this rational? I am not a person of worldly wealth. These belongings were ours until now, and they shall be given to those more deserving than us. Those who are in need of this furniture." Tears welled in his eyes as he spoke, "What did you imagine? Did you think these possessions would reach those who are deserving?"

On that day, they stripped away all the belongings from this house that was once brimming with love and happiness. It was where my children played and laughed alongside their father, and each item held cherished memories. Yet, in an instant, the house stood empty, devoid of its former warmth. Ultimately, I departed empty-handed with my three children, seeking refuge in my mother's home.

Excerpt from the recollections of the wife of Mr. Rohani.



Forced Abandonment

Oil & Mixed media on Canvas

16 x 12 in

November 29th, 1982

In the final month of autumn, a grave event unfolded. During this time, numerous Bahá'ís, including my mother and sister, were apprehended in Shiraz due to their differing beliefs, leaving us uncertain. One evening, an abrupt knock echoed through our home, and as we opened the door, we were confronted by three individuals. Two of them carried guns, while the third, their apparent leader, had a knitted hat pulled down to his eyebrows. With authority, they instructed us to gather in the hall, proceeding to ransack our home.

My four-year-old son, Arash, sought refuge on his father's lap, visibly shaken by the presence of their firearms. To calm his fears, I gently reassured him that these guns were merely part of their attire and posed no harm to anyone. Meanwhile, amidst their search, one security personnel caught sight of a camera tripod nestled among the garments in a closet. Mistaking it for a weapon, he expressed concern. Seizing the opportunity, I assured him that no weapons existed within the home of a Bahá'í. Curiosity compelled him to inquire, "Why do you oppose guns?" I replied, "Because we detest war and despise the taking of lives. My faith revolves around purity and love." Unfortunately, he listened to my words with

contempt and animosity, leaving me with a silent wish that their hearts might one day be freed from prejudice and self-interest.

After several hours of rummaging through our belongings, seizing books, photo albums, and frames, they abruptly ordered my husband, then me, to get dressed and accompany them. Their sudden demand caught me off guard, and I questioned, "Me? What should I do with my child?" Their response was to show me my sentence. Overwhelmed, my mother-in-law wept on the floor, imploring them not to take me and questioning what she was to do with her grandchild.

In a desperate plea, my husband begged them to spare me. As I hastily dressed, Arash cried inconsolably. Finally, the guard with the knitted hat relented, stating, "Fine, you needn't come tonight, but you must promise to come the day after tomorrow." He extracted a written commitment from me before they took my husband away. The atmosphere in our home turned somber. That night, I cradled Arash, seeking solace in sleep, and slept beside him. His innocent queries persisted, "Where did they take Dad? When will he return?" I answered his every question with wisdom, preparing him for the prolonged separation from his father and me.

Come morning, my father relayed the news of numerous arrests. The following day, accompanied by our neighbor Mahshid, who had two young children, aged four and six, and 26 whose husband had been detained on the same night, my father and I went to the prison. Upon entering the reception area, the guards subjected us to insults, targeting our beliefs, until eventually declaring, "You are under arrest." The children, who had been happily engaged in play until that point, abruptly burst into tears, clinging tightly to us. The guards forcibly tore them away, leading them out of the room to be handed over to my father. Even as they blindfolded us and led us out, the echoes of the children's cries lingered, haunting our hearts.

My aunt shares these recollections.



If the Walls Could Speak!

Oil on Linen

20 x 20 in

In the heart of Shiraz, amidst the ancient and enchanting city, lies an alley known as Shamshirgarha. This narrow, stone-paved street is adorned with houses that showcase the timeless beauty of old architectural styles, and its inhabitants are characterized by their genuine warmth and kindness. Among these dwellings existed a small and unassuming historic house revered by the Bahá'ís for its profound significance, as it had been the house of the Báb. However, the winds of change swept through the alley following the Islamic Revolution of 1979, as Ayatollah Dastgheib and Ayatollah Rabbani Shirazi commanded the demolition of the house and all the homes belonging to the Bahá'í community in that vicinity. To coerce the residents into leaving, the government resorted to cutting off their water and electricity, inflicting numerous hardships upon the inhabitants of Shamshirgarha Alley. Daily tasks such as bathing, cooking, and utilizing essential appliances became difficult, and many other difficulties beset them.

Initially, it was the common folk returning from Friday prayers who, stirred by emotions, descended upon the house armed with shovels and pickaxes, eventually joined by bulldozers to carry out the systematic destruction. As the house of The Báb crumbled and the excavation deepened, the street level sank to such an extent that some required ladders to access and exit the remaining homes. The once pristine path transformed into a muddy and soiled passage, passed through by resilient children on their way to school and determined adults commuting to work.

Undeterred by these trials, the inhabitants clung tenaciously to their homes, even after demolishing the walls: they resorted to draping curtains over the now-empty space,

symbolizing their unwavering resilience. Only when the inevitable destruction of their homes became apparent did they bid tearful farewells to their neighbors, gathering their meager belongings and seeking shelter elsewhere. Zarin Moghimi, a longtime resident of the alley, penned a letter to a friend months after the water and electricity had been severed, shedding light on the dire circumstances: "As I write this letter under the feeble glow of a lantern at 9 p.m., our water and electricity remain disconnected, casualties of the alley's destruction. The damage inflicted is extensive. The side of the alley leading to The Báb's house has been reduced to ruins, revealing a wide, hollow void where an arch and narrow passage once stood. I ventured outside moments ago to witness this devastation. Almost nothing remains of our beloved alley, but rather a mound of dirt, open space, and partially crumbled walls. It is an eerie sight. A peculiar sensation overwhelmed me as I walked amidst the ruins, as if even the stones and soil exuded an aura of love. Oh, if only these walls could speak! What tales would they share from the depths of their hearts? Strangely, I dwelled in this alley for years, yet the walls, stones, plaster, and soil never conversed with me as they do tonight... The destructive machinery labors until the early hours of the morning... How I wish you were here to bear witness."

And so, after several months of relentless upheaval, every house within Shamshirgarha was leveled to the ground, erasing any trace of the once-beautiful, stone-paved alley and its 76 cheerful, compassionate inhabitants. This melancholic tale marks the sorrowful demise of a cherished and familiar passage, forever etched in the memories of those who resided in Shamshirgarha Alley.

Taken from the memories of one of the residents of Shamshirgarha Alley.

P.S. Zarin Moghimi, Ehsan Mehdizadeh, Soheil Hooshmand, and Korosh Talayi – all depicted here – were executed by the Islamic Republic



Tears of Rose Water

Oil on Linen

20 x 24 in

May 9th, 2019

Once again, the resplendent spring had arrived. As always, I woke up in the early morning, captivated by the birds singing and the fascinating fragrance of blooming roses⁴ that permeated the air.

As a child, I was fond of this particular time of year, especially the ethereal scent of the roses. Over the years, our fathers have meticulously distilled these aromatic blossoms into rosewater, ensuring their captivating essence could be cherished in all seasons. I firmly believed that our labor was among the most delightful jobs.

However, in the afternoon, our tranquil existence was abruptly disrupted by the sudden arrival of a cobalt-hued pickup truck bringing numerous Intelligent agents. They descended upon our humble village, launching an assault on our homes, rosewater production facilities, and warehouses, confiscating all we possessed. Everything was taken away, from the pots to the intricate machinery used to extract rosewater and even the precious gallons of freshly crafted rosewater. These agents sealed off our warehouses and workshops, warning us that we could no longer continue our craft and exercise our right to create rosewater.

Regrettably, this was not the first time we had endured such persecution. At the outset of the Islamic revolution, the authorities forbade us from plucking the flowers, asserting that since they utilize rosewater in Islamic religious ceremonies and as Bahá'ís, we are considered impure⁵ and unfit to partake in its production. The flowers languished upon the ground for several years, as we were unjustly prohibited from harvesting them.

Eventually, after relentless persistence, we were granted permission to collect the blossoms under a new condition: we were required to abstain from touching the dew on the rose petals with our "unclean" hands, so we waited to touch them until the moisture had evaporated entirely. Nevertheless, we found solace and joy in our ability to cultivate the most exquisite roses in the area.

Alas, the tale of our rosewater prohibition recommenced a few months ago. A devout woman had lodged a grievance with the Imam of Friday Prayer⁶ in Qom, asserting that rosewater.

⁴ Rosa × damascene (محمدی گل) (Latin for damascene rose), more commonly known as the Damask rose. The flowers are renowned for their fine fragrance, and are commercially harvested for rose oil (either "rose otto" or "rose absolute") used in perfumery and to make rose water and "rose concrete". (Wikipedia)

⁵ In Islamic law, najis (Arabic: نجس) means ritually unclean. According to Islam, there are two kinds of najis: the essential najis which cannot be cleaned and the unessential najis which become najis while in contact with another najis. Contact with najis things brings a Muslim into a state of ritual impurity (Arabic: نجاسة najāsa, in opposition to ṭahārah, ritual purity). Ritual purification is then required before religious duties such as regular prayers are performed. (Wikipedia)

⁶ The Imam of Friday Prayer (Persian: جمعه امام), or Imam Jom'a (Jumu'ah), is the person who conducts the Friday prayer in Islam and preaches related sermons. (Wikipedia)



Well

Oil on Linen
18 x 24 in

In the early morning, when I was a mere ten years old, I was engrossed in playing with my friend in our alley. Spring was nearing its end, marking the start of final exams. Meanwhile, my sister and two older brothers immersed themselves in their studies, preparing eagerly for the final exams.

June 9th, 1990

On that eventful day, my friend suggested, "Call your brother to come out and play with us." With a sense of responsibility, I replied, "No, he has an exam." Undeterred, my friend persisted, urging me to seek out Afshin and ask him to come out. I had to go home and ask Afshin to play with us. Out of his genuine affection for me, he obliged.

During those times, our preferred amusement entailed wielding a modest slingshot we had made from several wooden pieces as we honed our marksmanship skills.

In due course, Afshin grabbed his slingshot and came outside. A few minutes passed, and my friend led me away, going towards the farthest side of the village in playful pursuits. We spent two hours in our amusement before I finally returned home around the stroke of noon. My mother, fraught with concern, anxiously inquired, "Where is Afshin?" Somewhat apprehensive, I responded, "he was not with me; I don't know." Fear, worry, and anxiety pervaded my mother's face as she uttered, "He has yet to return home."

My heart sank within me. Promptly, we all hastened outside, scouring every nook and cranny, hoping to find a trace of him. Yet, no trace was found. A mysterious impulse guided me towards the village well, even though I knew that Afshin, at the tender age of twelve, had been

wellversed in its perils since childhood. We had never dared venture near its vicinity. Nevertheless, my steps persisted, leading me toward that ominous well.

Upon reaching the vicinity of the well, I saw Afshin's little slingshot floating atop the water's surface while my brother's lifeless body lay motionless in the depths below. Overwhelmed with grief, I uttered a heart-wrenching cry and returned to our home.



Destruction of Bahai Cemeteries

Oil on Canvas

16 x 12 in

It is the autumn of 1981, a time marred by tragedy for this family as they recently lost their 19-year-old son to illness. Under normal circumstances, one would expect the family to lay their beloved young man to rest, despite their grief and pain, supported by the presence of friends and acquaintances reciting prayers to bring solace to the grieving hearts and minds. However, unfortunately, none of this could take place.

At that time, the government had recently seized the Tehran Bahá'í cemetery. Those who worked there were arrested, the ambulance was confiscated, and access to people was severely limited. When a representative of the Bahá'í community approached the mayor seeking answers, he attributed it to orders from higher authorities. Several doctors sought an audience with the Minister of Health, Dr. Sami. When confronted with what should be done with these unburied corpses left in the hands of grieving families, he responded callously and mockingly, telling them to “go throw them in the vat.”

With a 12-year-old daughter, a 7-year-old son, and an 80-year-old grandmother, this grieving family had no choice but to purchase ice daily and place it on their young child in the bathroom to slow the decomposition. Each morning, they would carry his lifeless body to the municipal office using an expensive rented pickup truck. They cried, pleaded, and begged permission to bury their son, but the officials didn't even allow them inside the office. The government had devised a form for cemetery clients that explicitly asked for the deceased's religion, and if the answer indicated they were Bahá'í, the request would be denied. Additionally, a law was in place stating that anyone who buried their deceased loved one in their yard, the desert, or any other location without a burial permit would be deemed a murderer and face the death penalty.

As days passed, four to be exact, the family realized that their son's body had begun to decompose, and they resided on the third floor of an apartment building. They were forced to remove the tiles from their home's floor to create a temporary burial spot. However, the tiles were pushed up in the early morning due to the body's bloating, presenting the family with a painful and distressing sight. Rarely has history witnessed such cruelty, where a body is denied burial in its homeland due to a difference in belief.

This account is derived from the recollections of someone close to the family who witnessed their unimaginable suffering during this dark period.



Egregious Oppression

Oil & Mixed Media on Linen

16 x 12 in

Resembling an unwavering mountain, he exudes an aura of composure and dignity. Despite his advanced age of 75, his intellect and memory remain formidable. As one of the impromptu leaders responsible for the social affairs of the Bahá'í community, Jamaloddin Khanjani has

received a ten-year sentence in an unjust court. Since the revolution's inception, he has consistently faced persecution from the government, enduring multiple imprisonments, the confiscation of his factory, and the arrest of his family members, among countless other hardships.

Within the confines of the prison walls, he serves as an exemplary role model, offering guidance and solace to fellow inmates who seek his counsel for their problems and concerns and enjoy his companionship. His conduct and words inspire respect and admiration.

March 10, 2011.

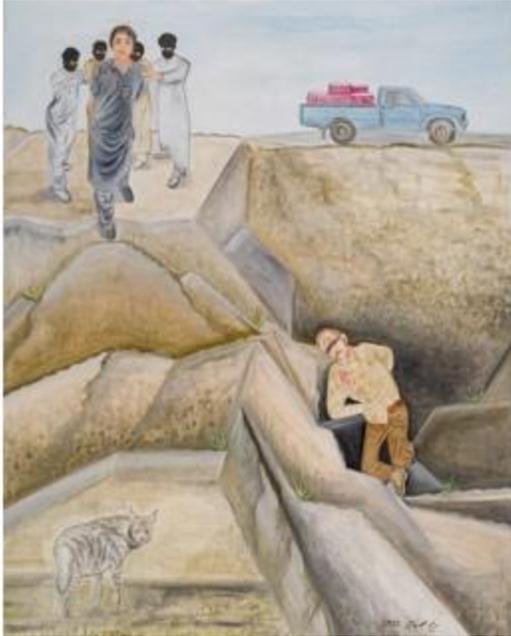
Mr. Khanjani finds himself in the third year of his imprisonment. Unfortunately, his beloved wife, Ashraf Khanum, a kind and patient woman who has been his unwavering companion and support throughout all their difficulties and hardship, is gravely ill. The intense stress and emotional pressure she has experienced since the beginning of the revolution has affected her well-being, particularly in recent years. Regrettably, she has been unable to visit him for several months.

Despite the family's persistent efforts to secure even a brief furlough for him, allowing him to be by his wife's side during her illness, even for just ten minutes, their plea is consistently denied.

However, fate takes an unexpected turn today. During a visit from their daughter Emilia, she delivers the heartbreaking news of her mother's deteriorating condition and the doctors' dim prognosis. As their meeting concludes, Mr. Khanjani returns to his cell, filled with worry, sorrow, and deep contemplation. Suddenly, he is summoned to visit once more. Observing Emilia's tearful eyes and sorrowful countenance, he realizes that his dear wife passed away mere moments ago. Both overwhelmed by grief, they weep together. He is distraught, deeply affected, and mourns the loss of his beloved friend without having the chance to bid her a final farewell. Their profound love and affection intensify the anguish he endures. Despite the efforts of his family and the weight of his sorrow, he is forbidden from attending his wife's funeral, confined to offer his prayers in her memory within his prison cell.

Around eight thousand individuals from across Iran attend her funeral. The cemetery is adorned with bouquets and floral arrangements, yet the absence of her devoted husband recognized as the oldest prisoner, remains a conspicuous void in the ceremony.⁹

⁹ At the age of 85, Mr. Khanjani was released from prison after serving ten years of imprisonment without a single day of furlough.



Flight

Oil on Canvas

16 x 20 in

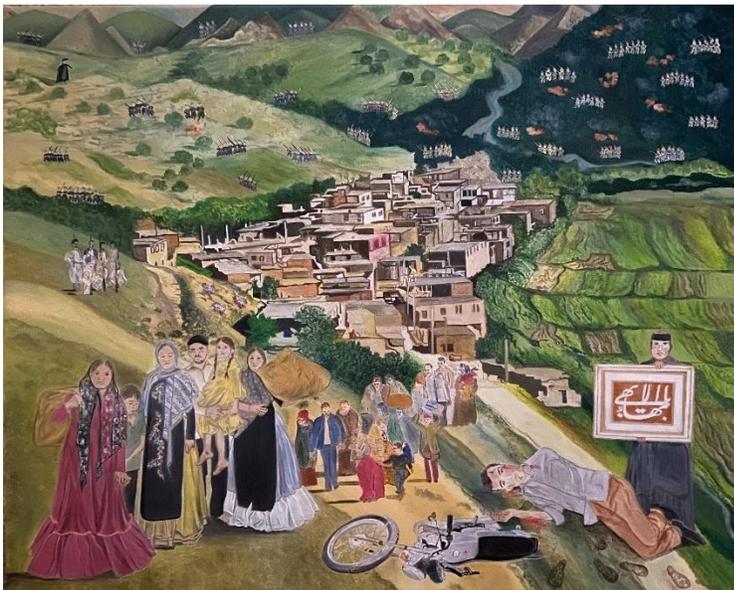
He possessed a serene and gentle nature, radiating innocence and vitality. At the threshold of his youth, Peyman brimmed with countless dreams for his future. Loved by all, his name resonated fondly. He resided within the Sistan and Baluchestan province, specifically Saravan, with a warm and friendly family. His father, Roholamin Sobhani, was a diligent, just, and honorable merchant, leading to his thriving business. Sadly, his steadfastness invited persecution from narrow-minded zealots and extremists, resulting in his repeated arrests.

April 18th, 1986

As spring adorned the surroundings, fifteen-year-old Peyman found himself in the final days of high school. Upon returning home that day, he discovered his father loading merchandise for a customer. He lent a helping hand as usual before embarking with his father in their blue Toyota pickup truck to the designated destination. However, armed men intercepted them upon stopping, swiftly blindfolding both, securing their arms behind their backs, and commandeering the vehicle. After some time, they arrived at an unfamiliar desert adjacent to a mountain. Forcibly made to walk, their blindfolds were eventually removed. Roholamin voiced, "You have mistakenly taken us; we have never harmed anyone. We are Bahá'ís." In response, their captors declared, "Precisely, for this reason, we have a mission to end your lives." The father pleaded for his son's release yet received the retort, "We cannot because he has seen us." Subsequently, Roholamin's hands were bound, his eyes blindfolded, and he was callously thrown off the mountaintop. Peyman, stricken with fear, anguish, and a profound sense of injustice, helplessly witnessed his father's murder. And now, it was his turn.

In a similarly heart-wrenching manner, they cast him down from the opposite side of the mountain, ruthlessly terminating his brief existence. The anguished family launched an exhaustive search, scouring every corner throughout the evening until, at last, a hunter discovered Roholamin the following day. Given the severity of his injuries, he was promptly transported to a hospital in Tehran. Seven days and nights elapsed until Peyman's decomposed remains were found on the other side of the mountain. His decomposed body had been ravaged by wild animals so mercilessly that it was deemed unfit for his mother to lay eyes upon. Several months later, Roholamin, despite bearing numerous wounds, managed to recover a semblance of life. He now knew his son's killers and had seen their faces. Urging the police to pursue justice, he was met with indifference as they declared the case closed. Can we dare envision an end to the traumatic narrative of oppression endured by the Bahá'ís in Iran?

These recollections are excerpted from the memoirs of the sister of Peyman Sobhani.



Lovers' Migration, 2021

Oil on Canvas

16" X 20"

Behold the province of Boyer Ahmad, which witnessed my birth and holds the moving tale of our sorrowful coerced migration from the enchanting village of "Kata." Within this narrative lie the accounts of days and nights burdened with anguish, affliction, and dread. The callous Imam Jom'a of Yasuj, known as "Malek Hoseini," declared that the shedding of Bahá'ís' blood, the seizure of their belongings and properties, and possessing their wives and daughters were all permissible. With these words, he incited the prejudiced and ignorant individuals inhabiting the

neighboring small villages to torment and persecute the Bahá'ís. Seeking solace from fear, the Baha'is residing in these neighboring hamlets, with empty hands and bare feet, sought refuge in our village, where most of the population were adherents of the Baha'i Faith. However, at the behest of the Imam Jom'a, "Habib Bahador," the commander of one of Boyer Ahmad's tribes, armed several hundred individuals from his tribe and dispatched them to "Kata" to expel the Bahá'ís from the village by sowing terror and instilling fear. Our village found itself besieged for several agonizing days. Our sheep fell victim to their violence, and the constant discharge of their firearms planted panic within our hearts. Consequently, we were compelled to abandon our beloved birthplace with tearful eyes, empty-handed, and carrying with us indescribable grief.

Meanwhile, Mr. "Shiroo (Shir Mohammad) Dastpish," despite being subjected to death threats, assumed the responsibility of safeguarding our lives and resolved not to leave the village until all the Bahá'ís had departed safely from Kata. Once all the Bahá'ís had exited, he mounted his motorbike, intending to reunite with his family and leave the village. However, he suddenly found himself confronted by the malicious villagers, who sought to take his life. On May 12th, 1979, he met a martyr's fate, alone and oppressed.

These recollections are drawn from the memories of one of the villagers of Kata, etching the harrowing tale into the annals of our shared history.



To the Point of Death, 2020

Oil & Mixed Media on Lenin

16 x 12 in

November 1982

She epitomizes bravery, determination, and resilience. Within the confines of the Shiraz Intelligence Detention Center, she is revered by fellow inmates as "mother." Her figure is slender and elegant.

Her unwavering beliefs have held her captive in this place for close to a month now. The interrogators relentlessly coerce her, employing the menacing threat of cable beatings to extract false confessions. Yet, she remains resolute, committed to speaking nothing but the truth. Whenever the sound of prison doors being unlocked echoes through the halls, anxiety grips the prisoners, their breaths withheld in fear. They know it is the interrogator seeking to claim another victim. His voice thundered from behind the door that fateful night, calling her name: "Mehri Vahdat-Hagh, come out."

A hand, holding a black, filthy, reeking blindfold, emerged from the other side of the door.

Having left the ward, the interrogator seethed with anger and malice as he uttered, "I have asked for, and received, a sentenced for you of a hundred lashes." He then handed her over to Mrs. Akhtari, a female officer. Leading her to the basement, Mrs. Akhtari thoroughly examined her clothing, ensuring no hidden layers provided extra protection. She instructed her to lie, chest down, on the cold metal bed, wrapping the chador tightly around her body and securing her hands and feet. Summoning the officers, she called upon Abdullah, the tormentor. With every strike of the cable upon her back, Abdullah bellowed, pausing after each set of ten blows lest her back become numb. Amidst these pauses from the brutality, he hurled insults, shouted at her, and implored her to confess to falsehoods. Yet, her piercing screams only affirmed her unwavering commitment to telling the truth. Fifty lashes were administered in this merciless fashion; the officers then left the basement. Mrs. Akhtari untied her limbs, instructing her to lie on her back. Mistakenly perceiving a glimmer of compassion, she tried to muster the strength to move, but her body refused to respond. In an act devoid of mercy, the officer forcefully seized one of her hands and feet, yanked her closer, struck a powerful blow to the chest with her free hand, threw her on her back, and bound her once more. Mehri, in anguish, cried out, "Why again?" To which the officer, filled with fury, retorted, "Now you'll comprehend." The men returned, this time whipping the soles of her feet. Throughout the ordeal, their shouts filled the air, interwoven with curses. After every ten strikes, they paused, tightly rubbing the head of the whip against the soles of her feet to be certain they had not gone numb. When they saw her toes curl uncontrollably, accompanied by her screams, they knew the sensation had returned and continued their merciless flogging. Yet, amidst the cries and with closed eyes, she caught glimpses of her mother, offering prayers and shedding tears while others prayed for her well-being.

A hundred lashes were completed. She was freed from the bed and commanded to stand as slippers were placed before her swollen feet, a gesture meaning they were to be worn. Her swollen legs and feet prevented her from putting them on her feet. Grasping the slippers reluctantly in her hands, she laboriously ascended the basement stairs, her stature bent as if a

sack filled with stones had been placed on her back. They escorted her to a solitary cell. The fellow prisoners laid her on a blanket, but her body convulsed uncontrollably. They put their blankets over her, holding her tightly to alleviate the intensity of her bodily convulsions. They pounded on the door, saying, "She is dying, come and take her." Enraged and frustrated, as if he had been bothered in the dead of night, the interrogator demanded the reason behind the commotion, saying, "When she dies, we'll take her body."

Despite enduring immeasurable pain and suffering, she found solace in her resilience, knowing she had defied their tortures and steadfastly resisted false confessions.

Adapted from the memoirs of my mother.



Love Sacrificed

Oil on Canvas

12 x 16 in

Within his gaze, a realm of love and friendship surged. Houshang Mahmoudi, a true Iranian soul, embodied openness, generosity, broad-mindedness, delicate emotions, playfulness, and incredible bravery. His genuine interest lay in the ancient and national treasures of Iran. With boundless spirit, profound expression, vast knowledge, and a special affection for children and youth, he dedicated years to producing television programs in Iran. Moreover, he directed and performed in radio programs and presented theatrical plays that addressed people's concerns and offered solutions. Under a widely acclaimed pseudonym, he penned captivating short stories for Iranian magazines. Driven by an unwavering passion for education, he established the Nobakht School, where thousands of disciplined and positive-minded children and adolescents entered the wider society. He accepted students of little means and even provided the means for their education abroad.

He wielded an elegant pen, his poetic temperament reflecting his inner emotions' tender and delicate nature. His mystical state, imaginative thoughts, and exquisite orderliness left a lasting impact on others. His collection of poems, composed while waiting behind red lights when driving, holds a fascinating allure, inviting readers to delve into its pages. Additionally, Mr. Mahmoudi founded a film production company, crafting documentaries showcasing the sacred Baha'i sites of Iran and shedding light on various subjects. He pursued his studies at Tehran Law School. During the revolution, he was a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Iran. When the Baha'i community was deprived of their fundamental rights, this injustice pained his heart like no other. Consequently, following the revolution, he penned numerous letters to authorities,¹⁰ raising awareness of the injustices inflicted upon the Baha'i community. Fearless, he considered himself legally responsible for a defenseless society confronted by an oppressive government.

On August 21, 1980, at 3:30 pm, they attended the National Spiritual Assembly meeting, and at 5 o'clock his family was informed that armed individuals from a group known as "Zarbat"¹¹ had arrested him, along with eight other members of the Assembly and two colleagues. Since that day, despite the tireless efforts of his spouse and other families, the fate of those ten individuals remains unknown. The location of their imprisonment and the date of their martyrdom has never been revealed.

The future shall forever preserve his true humanity, genuine love for human society, and unwavering commitment to defending against oppression.

¹⁰ Rulers of Sharia Law

¹¹ Task Force



Tightness of the Cage

Oil on Linen

20 x 24 in

October 1981

The autumn arrival cast its cloak upon the city of Urmia, igniting a chaotic commotion. Fear and dread permeated every corner as security guards launched an early morning raid on Bahá'í households, spanning a vast expanse of the city. Their intrusive searches and subsequent confiscation of possessions were followed by the apprehension of male residents, incarcerated within the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp. (IRGC) prison, while women and children were confined to the home of a fellow Bahá'í.

I, too, found myself among those unfortunate souls arrested that fateful day, entering the residence of Mrs. Imani under cover of night. A surreal ambiance pervaded the once grand, impeccably ordered two-story home, which had always been a welcoming haven for all. It had been transformed into a prison, an interrogation chamber crawling with guards. A strange fear gripped me. What was unfolding within these walls? A guard opened the door, sealing it with a lock and chain. Guards stationed themselves atop the roof and balcony.

Within the corridors and upon the staircase, I encountered men either slumbering or standing guard, surrounded by an absolute silence that initially led me to believe I was the sole occupant of this house. Yet, as I proceeded, I entered a room where several women and children were held captive.

In the depths of night, a baby's cries resonated from upstairs, revealing the presence of even more individuals confined within this home.

At 8 a.m., the door to the room swung open, presenting me with a sight forever etched in my memory. A guard, clutching the keys to the rooms, stood alongside my dear friend, Mrs. Imani, the mistress of the house. She had always been a young and captivating woman, her attire the essence of elegance. Now, a veil shrouded her head, its end fastened around her waist. Fatigue and sorrow drained the color from her expression, and she bore a large round tray. Breakfast had been brought for the incarcerated women. Stepping forward, she placed bread and tea for each individual. Bereft of the freedom to speak, her face conveyed a deep affection and love that went beyond a thousand words.

Gradually, I ascertained that approximately 35 to 40 Bahá'í women languished within this house-turned-prison. Upstairs, three mothers with infants aged one month, four months, and ten months shared a single room. Additional individuals were confined within the kitchen, while a solitary 13-year-old boy occupied the bathroom. Three women, blindfolded, resided in a room adjacent to the living area, while other women and children were locked away in lower-level chambers.

One of the detainees recounted her story. Upon hearing of the arrest of the husbands, she implored her spouse to flee, herself seeking refuge in her friend's house alongside her three- 36 year-old daughter and four-month-old baby. Her husband, too, had deserted their house, and they also had a ten-month-old child and a five-year-old daughter. The children's grandmother had recently arrived from Tabriz. The midnight hour struck, and the children slumbered when the doorbell's piercing ring shattered the tranquility. Looking through the window, they viewed several guards, their faces concealed behind masks, invading through the door and perimeter wall. The courtyard reverberated with the forceful pounding on the door. The friend's five-year-old child, gripped by terror, sought solace in her grandmother's embrace, who lovingly whisked her away to a different room in order to spare her from the distressing scene of the guards' assault. After the exhaustive search concluded, my friend and I were escorted to prison with our infants, and I left my three-year-old daughter with my friend's grandmother. I was concerned for her. For most women in prison, their husbands were in IRGC prisons, or their children were alone outside. These issues greatly intensified their worry and suffering. The only food that nursing mothers could give to their infants was bread and tea, as they had stopped producing milk due to stress. After a week, my 4-month-old girl was not surviving and fainted due to severe weakness. She was taken to the hospital because of my pleas and begging, and the doctor prescribed ampoules, intravenous rehydration, and milk powder for her. Upon return to the home, which was our prison, the guards didn't allow the IV to be connected to my daughter. Luckily, one of the Bahá'í women was a nurse, and she attached the IV to the baby's little hands, who recovered after a few days. Every morning, Soltani and his colleagues, who all had masks, interrogated us. They called people by name, took them out of their rooms, and questioned them for around 2-3 hours. At night at 12 a.m., they turned on lights, woke everyone up with shouting, and took them out of their rooms. The children, who had already not slept well, were crying. The guards yelled at us to make our children quiet. The city's mayor sat around the upstairs dining table with armed guards. Then, the so-called guidance session

started, which usually lasted until 3 a.m. Often the women gave him logical and firm answers, which only made him angry. Finally, after 14 nights, when one of the women answered his accusations, he angrily shouted, "O dark hearts, the light of faith will never enlighten you; you will be punished!" Immediately the guards all stood up and pointed their guns at us, we all felt that they were going to shoot, but no one made the slightest move to indicate any sign of fear and helplessness. After displaying our indifference, as if they only wanted to test and scare us, they put their weapons on their shoulders and, along with the city's mayor, left the room. We were scheduled to be relocated to the large city prison the next day. Taken from the memories of one of the imprisoned women in Urmia.



Goldaneh Becomes a Unique Pearl

Oil on Canvas
16 x 12 in

In the wake of the Islamic Revolution's triumph, many fervent and uninformed villagers, incited and backed by religious scholars, ventured to harass and afflict the Bahá'ís for their divergent beliefs. Their dwellings were reduced to rubble, their possessions looted, their livestock and farmlands ravaged, and they were subjected to relentless physical torment, coercing their exodus from ancestral homes.

The year was 1982.

Within the village of "Kondes Ben," the plight deepened to a degree where there were no supplies for sustenance, livelihoods languished, and even the livestock hungered. Consequently, Goldaneh and her family resolved to forsake their abode. In the waning days of summer, they sought refuge in the resplendent village of Rowshan Kuh, a haven predominantly inhabited by Bahá'ís. They aspired to pursue animal husbandry and embrace a tranquil existence there. Alas, their bigoted and malevolent kinfolk remained unyielding, persistently menacing Goldaneh, coercing her conversion to Islam under threat of death.

December 24, 1982

Following her duties of tending to the livestock and preparing a hasty lunch, Goldaneh toiled outside their modest cottage, eagerly anticipating the arrival of her spouse and young grandson. Suddenly, a band of Muslim men, her relatives from Sadat Mahalleh, launched a brutal assault wielding clubs and sticks. Constricting her with an available rope, they silenced her life, dragging her motionless body close to her humble home. Dousing her with gasoline, they engulfed her ephemeral existence in a pyre of anguish before vanishing.

A weary and famished seven-year-old boy approached his grandmother's dwelling, unwittingly confronted by the conflagration's inferno. Hastening toward the cottage, he bore witness to his grandmother's body, still ablaze in certain areas, while the anguished cries of sheep and calves, themselves aflame, pierced his heart. Overwhelmed with tears and desperate screams, he darted toward the woods to alert his grandfather. On a subsequent day, the arrival of forensic experts and law enforcement sought to unravel the intricacies of Goldaneh's tragedy. The Goldaneh family persevered relentlessly to unveil the culprits and pursue justice. Yet, entangled within the pervasive influence of the village's clerics, the perpetrators eluded their rightful retribution; the authorities declared the case closed without a perpetrator named, leaving the wounds unhealed.

That bitter and haunting scene shall remain forever etched within the memory of Goldaneh's grandson, the innocent first witness to the fateful tragedy that transpired.



Love & Blood

Oil & Mixed Media on Lenin
16 x 12 in

In the vast canvas of life, each creates their unique narrative, painting a masterpiece filled with moments of triumph and adversity, joy and sorrow; a person can be their own hero. These stories become valuable lessons that shape our existence.

His calm face, which constantly held a smile, his magnanimous behavior towards those who needed the most, his geniality and kindness, and his unceasing service to society were wellknown to all, both those close to him, as well as those more distant.

Amidst the scorching summer heat, Sohrab Habibi and his daughter returned home from a challenging mountaineering expedition. The fatigue of the trip had not yet faded when a group of guards stormed their house, subjecting it to another exhaustive search. Without warning, they arrested Sohrab and whisked him to the most formidable and squalid prisons within Iran, leaving his bewildered family consumed by sadness and confusion. In his absence, questions lingered in their hearts: Why? What crime had he committed? And what future awaited them? Six more of his friends were also arrested on the same day.

For eleven long months, they endured the harshest and most inhospitable conditions within the confines of a cramped cell with little air flow. For the first four months, they were deprived of contact with their loved ones, fresh air in the prison yard, and even the fundamental dignity of bathing. Yet, even amid this suffering, the news of their love and compassion for their fellow prisoners became known. Their absence was felt keenly by friends, acquaintances, neighbors, merchants, intellectuals, and the medical community. They were remembered not for any wrongdoing but for their selfless service and unwavering integrity in both word and deed.

On the eve of the New Year, while the world embraced the joyous arrival of a fresh chapter, they stood before the court, receiving a verdict of innocence and freedom. However, their hopes were dashed a few moments later as they descended the courthouse steps. Their verdict was abruptly changed, and they were cruelly returned to the prison's suffocating embrace. The efforts of their devoted and tormented spouses to secure personal visits and prove their innocence were not finished.

Then came June 13th, 1981.

The city was engulfed in an eerie crowded atmosphere as people hurried everywhere. Whispers of the execution of seven Baha'is reverberated through the air. The hospital courtyard overflowed with a sea of mourners, where the only sounds that permeated the somber silence were sighs, wails, and the resounding chants of "Allahu Akbar" (God is great). Their eyes no longer shed tears; they were crying blood as grief permeated every corner of the city. Shops shuttered, streets stood empty, and the entire community, who had witnessed their seven fellow citizens' sincere activity for years, accompanied their fallen brethren to their eternal resting place.

The brutality inflicted upon their bodies was so severe that it defied any attempts at cleansing. Sohrab Habibi bore the scars of burns across his waist and half of his body, while visible marks of torture and stiletto knife wounds marred his body everywhere. Mr. Khoazein's chest lay

broken and shattered, while Dr. Vafai's body displayed the brutal aftermath of being torn apart, and both shoulders, elbows, and fingers of Soheil Habibi were broken. Dr. Naeimi's body and forehead bore unmistakable stiletto knife marks, Hossein Khandel's stomach lay empty and pierced, and nine bullet holes were visible in his heart. Witnesses attest that Mr. Motlagh, who had observed their torment, met his end with nine bullets piercing his heart, mercifully sparing him further physical suffering. His eyes, however, remained open, forever fixated on the horrors he had witnessed— per experts, a testimony to the shock that had seized his soul.

Until their final moments, the resolute Muslims of Hamedan united in spirit and raised their voices in unison, chanting "Allahu Akbar," standing in solidarity with the martyrs' families. Baskets and bouquets of flowers were offered to these seven pure and sincere men. Sighs and the pain of their families seemed to have reached the ears of the sky when, at noon in the summer, a storm of sadness rose so high that it twisted the trees.

Seeing her father's tortured body, Sohrab's daughter remembered her last visit and his advice; he said to her with a deep and penetrating look and bright eyes, saying goodbye: "Remember that you have a mission in this world. Find your main role. Remember to not forget about serving the society and help the needy in whatever position and status you are placed in...." And now she believed that her father, in all those difficult and exhausting moments – beyond human endurance – in full courage and the utmost stability, played his prominent role beautifully in the last moments of his life and recorded his name in history. Peace be upon him.

Taken from the memories of the daughter of Sohrab Habibi.