

Memoire of Nourollah “Norman” Gabay

Preface

Every stage in life has the potential to create a lasting memory that can be both enriching and educational. Even seemingly insignificant memories can reveal valuable lessons and transformative experiences for others. With this in mind, I have decided to collect a selection of my personal memories, edited & translated by Elham Yaghoubian, and publish them in the biannual publication, Payam. These memories will be published in both Persian and English, allowing a wider audience to benefit from the experiences and lessons they impart. I also plan to make these memories available through email and on my website. I hope this initiative will be well-received by esteemed readers.

Norman Gabbai, Los Angeles, December 2021

Leaf No 1

Translated by Elham Yaghoubian

A few years prior to the Islamic Revolution in Iran, I used to trade with a company belonged to a prince from the royal court. After a few years, the company contacted me and offered me a job as the managing director. After much insistence, I accepted the offer and became the vice president of the company, invested a

share, and became a partner. They told me that they want an intellectual Jew for this position. Initially, I declined their offer to become the vice president of the company. However, after persistent persuasion and encouragement, I finally agreed and even invested a share in the form of a check. I was given a luxurious room with two secretaries and worked as the deputy managing director for eight months, during which the company had a substantial increase in revenue.

During this time, I traveled to Belgium to purchase items for my own business and stumbled upon a product that would also benefit the aforementioned company. I ordered 10,000 meters of the product for myself and the same amount for the company. The customs tariff was 200%. Both orders arrived in Iran simultaneously and I paid the 200% tariff for my order, which amounted to 400,000 tomans. However, upon reviewing the customs clearance license for the company, I was shocked to find out that they were cleared to pay only 20,000 tomans.

Upon inquiring with the company's customs officer, I learned that they received special treatment and only paid 20,000 tomans. This discrepancy caused me great concern and after much contemplation, I decided to resign from my position. Finally, I approached the managing director and informed him that my children had called from the States and asked me to join them immediately.

I requested to resign from my position and receive a return of my invested share in the company. Initially, the managing director expressed surprise and remarked if I had been dreaming of taking 8 million and getting away with it. However,

after explaining that I didn't want any profits, he was relieved and instructed the chief accountant to document my request and provide me with a check. We transcribed the agreement, signed it, and I received the check. The entire process took no more than two hours. I cashed the check and returned to my office.

Several years later, when I met the head of accounting in Vancouver, Canada, he asked why I left the company. The staff had assumed that I had prior knowledge of an upcoming revolution, given that I had renounced the entire profit I could have earned in the company. I explained that my primary concern was my own safety. If the issue with the customs license came to light, and it was revealed that only 20,000 tomans were paid instead of 400,000, as a Jew, I would be the first one wrongly accused and so I was afraid of being unjustly arrested. My decision had nothing to do with the Revolution, but rather with my own personal safety. I chose to return my investment and not take the risk. Everyone must assess and be aware of their own situation. Failure is inevitable for those who don't recognize their position.

This memory reminds me of a conversation with the late Mr. Dakhanian. He said in a gathering, the first group to leave Iran during the Revolution were the Jews of Kashan, to which a friend replied, "If the late Haj Habib Elghanian was cautious, he wouldn't have suffered the same fate." This humor points to the stereotypical depiction of Jews in Kashan as cowards.

Cautiousness is not cowardice. Regardless of what others may say, caution is a critical aspect of life.

Memoire of Nourollah “Norman” Gabay

Leaf No 9

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The big cities of Iran all have bazaars, and these bazaars have an extraordinarily captivating atmosphere. These bazaars have an Iranian-style school of thought similar to the universities, in that people from all classes and social statuses work in the bazaar environment. Dating back to ancient times, the Muslim clerics (ruḥanīyyūn) have received support from the bazaaris, and for this reason, there has always been a solid rapport between the bazaaris and the mullahs. As a result, the bazaaris have had and still continue to have, significant influence over the country's politics.

Up until 1925, in the era before Reza Shah Pahlavi (1878—1944), Jews did not have the right to own shops in the Iranian bazaar. I recall that there was a section in the bazaar named "Bazaar-e Gabrhā," meaning "Zoroastrian Bazaar." Although Zoroastrians were not actually fire-worshippers, they were labeled as fire-worshippers (ādash-parast). After 1925, Jews in Iran were offered the right to own shops in the bazaar. They became very active and successful in the field of commerce, thus influencing Iran's economy.

After the Mosaddegh era (1882—1967), the price of the dollar increased, and this destabilized the country economically. The Chamber of Commerce invited some merchants in for consultations, along with those who had trading concessions. An individual by the name of Haji Mirza Bagher Esfahanian, who it should be noted did not have a good relationship with the Jews, stood up in the crowd and declared: "If you want to fix the situation, put a Jew in charge!"

From time to time, there were conflicts between Jews and Muslims in the bazaar, and in some cases, these conflicts escalated into disastrous situations. One of these cases entailed a Jew collecting some water from the pump at the head of the caravanserai pond. However, the residents of this caravanserai did not allow Jews to collect water. In many cases, these kinds of disputes would arise based on false accusations. For instance, sometimes it was the Muslim bazaaris themselves who had taken water from the pump, though they insinuated that the Jews had done it.

Our office was in the proximity of the caravanserai ponds. One day during Ramadan, two brokers came to our office. Since they knew that lunch was about to be served in the closet of the Jewish shops, they went to the back, cut a watermelon, and ate it, and left with the rosary in their hands. At the same time, a fight broke out over a Jewish boy who had drunk water from the water pump. A very tumultuous atmosphere arose because of this. In the meantime, my eyes fell upon the same two men who had left our office only minutes after they had finished eating. Together with a large crowd, these men were shouting anti-

Jewish slogans. I dared to address these two men in the crowd. I went ahead and called out to them: "Now look at me, and then chant your slogan!" Upon hearing this, both of them lowered their heads in shame and left the raucous crowd shortly after.

In another instance, Mr. Masjedi's son uttered something inflammatory to others, and had the police not intervened, it could have easily resulted in someone losing their life. Throughout various cities, incidents like this were common in the bazaar environment. All kinds of people from all walks of life worked there: honest people, but also liars, and among them of course, a number of anti-Jewish fanatics. Additionally, these kinds of altercations would often take place among Turks, Persians, and other groups who sometimes performed ceremonial mourning processions in the bazaar.

This brings to mind a proverb that takes its roots in the bazaar. This is the idiom called *būgh-e sag*, which literally means "dog trumpet," which in vernacular Persian means "very late." For the sake of the bazaar's security at that time, dangerous dogs were often unleashed into the bazaar after midnight, following the sounding of a horn. For this reason, the term *būgh-e sag* is used to refer to the late-night bazaar environment.

Among other memories of the bazaar, the memory of Haji Hasan's caravanserai is quite remarkable, as both Jews and Muslims set up their shops there. There was a big warehouse (*bārandāz*) there, and this public warehouse was a storage space where people kept their wholesale goods. One year, mice were found in this warehouse, likely due to the groceries being stored there. However, no matter how hard they tried, they could not

get rid of these rodents. Finally, an elderly village man came up and promised to eliminate the mice. He asked for some empty jars, and proceeded to put about 10 mice in each jar. After a few days of extreme hunger, the mice started eating each other. Yet, a few strong mice survived from each jar, and after a while, the man released these remaining mice into the warehouse. In this way, the old village man succeeded in getting rid of the mice. The memory of this old man reminds me of the way terrorists are raised these days. I will elaborate more on this topic in the coming chapters.

Memoire of Nourollah “Norman” Gabay

Leaf No 10

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One day when I was standing in front of my store, Ārmān, a young man with a thick Yazdi accent approached me and asked, “Are you, Mr. Arman?”

Back then, some people knew me as Mr. Ārmān. After I confirmed this, he continued:

“Mohammad speaks highly of you. I am a well-digger by profession. Today when I was working on the well, I prayed to God that you, Sir, would accept me as your employee. Mohammad himself was Mr. Afshar’s employee and a native of Yazd city.”

I asked about his full name and he responded: “Ali, Ali Kargar.” I agreed that he could start work the following week.

He was an honest man, and I liked the Yazidis, as I historically had quite a positive experience working with them. Ali worked for us for nine years. He introduced us to his brother, along with his brother-in-law and some of his other fellow

countrymen, with the idea of them working for us. We ended up hiring all of them. We had a very agreeable and professional relationship with them that was satisfactory for both sides.

Back then, Mohammad used to sleep in the store at night. One night, Ali came to me and said that his wife was about to give birth and had asked for permission to leave. I accepted that he could take a break. Coincidentally on that exact night, a thief ransacked the entire store. The next day, we went to the police station to report the theft. Mr. Khatibi, the head of the police station, ended up ordering Ali's arrest. I disagreed and explained that the robbery was not his fault. Mr. Khatibi accused me of lying and colluding with Ali, which was very upsetting to me. Khatibi finally agreed that if I were to guarantee that it was not Ali's crime, I could write my testimony and sign it. So, I did accordingly.

A few days later, we received a phone call from the Yusefabad police station informing us that they had confiscated a truck with a load of blankets and other goods and that they believed it belonged to us. I immediately left, and instead of driving my personal vehicle, I went to the Yusefabad police station with a coworker in a shop van. I recall that the name of the person I spoke with was Colonel Irandoost. After examining the truck and the items therein, I realized that it was in fact our store's stolen goods. I told the worker who accompanied me to put the items in the van as soon as possible and if he needed to, to ask the other workers for assistance. Subsequently, I entered the police station and declared that the stolen goods belonged to us. We were told that we should go to the criminal police

department so that the situation could be clarified through a necessary investigation.

It occurred to me that if the goods were sent to the criminal police department, gaining them back would likely be a tedious process. So, I came up with an idea. I “explained” that the goods had been taken away by the truck, under my permission. The agent, who was growing annoyed with me changing my mind, saw no other solution than to release the goods along with a receipt.

I immediately returned to the central police station to inform Colonel Khatibi, the man who had accused me, of both the discovery of the goods and of Ali's innocence.

During that time, I never gave up on helping Ali in any way that I could. I trusted him and was glad that he was equally content working for us. I also assisted him in buying a house. His wife gave birth to a son named Behrouz. One day in the presence of my wife, he told me that Behrouz was sick and had no hope of surviving. Every son delivered by his wife up until that point had been met with early death. When my wife saw Ali's son, and despite how dirty and unhygienic he was, she embraced him and took him to see Dr. Golban. After prescribing some medication, Dr. Golban reassured everyone that there was nothing to worry about. As Behrouz's condition improved, Ali repeatedly emphasized his gratitude, telling us: “Behrouz is yours. Behrouz belongs to this lady (my wife). This lady has saved him.”

One day, after nine years on the job, Ali informed me that he could no longer work for us. As much as I was trying to figure

out what the reason was, I just could not make sense of it. We settled the accounts with him, and he left with thankfulness and gratitude. Back then, Ali was friends with one of our neighbors, Mr. Yousef Masachi. I asked Yousef to inquire about Ali's reason for leaving. After a few days, Yousef reported that Ali's answer was that "he no longer wanted to break bread with Jews." After all the help and support I had given him, this statement hit me quite hard.

Unfortunately, beliefs like these are very deeply rooted. A common reason for having these beliefs comes from reading the religious scriptures, which reminds me of a joke related to this topic:

An influential Arab and an Israeli meet on a plane. To mock the young Israeli, the Arab asks him to bring him a cup of coffee. The young man does not object and fulfills his wish. Upon returning with the coffee, the Israeli realizes that although the Arab remains silent, he has peed in his shoe, which was under the seat. At the end of the flight, the Arab asks: "What do you think will happen at the end of this war between us, the Arabs, and you Israelis?" The Israeli replies: "As long as I urinate in your coffee and you in my shoes, our problem will remain unsolved."

In reality, these problems will persist as long as their sacred religious texts refuse to accept Jews and Judaism. This will likely continue to be the case until the day people wake up and realize that all of these writings are nothing but lies. People come and go, but these books remain. Thus, generation after

generation of individuals will read them and continue on with these kinds of doubts and animosities.

It is reasonable that the Jewish religious texts make no mention of other religions, especially in light of the fact, that there being no prior belief in the era of Judaism's emergence. I hope that one day the world wakes up and finds that life is nothing but love and that without love, life is no better than hell.

As the great poet Sa'di once wisely said: "Humankind reaches a point where he envisions nothing but God."

In my opinion, God means love, and the manifestation of God in human life is nothing but our conscience. Hence, a human with a conscience always carries God within himself. The big cities of Iran all have bazaars, and these bazaars have an extraordinarily captivating atmosphere. These bazaars have an Iranian-style school of thought similar to the universities, in that people from all classes and social statuses work in the bazaar environment. Dating back to ancient times, the Muslim clerics (ruḥāniyyūn) have received support from the bazaaris, and for this reason, there has always been a solid rapport between the bazaaris and the mullahs. As a result, the bazaaris have had and still continue to have, significant influence over the country's politics.

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Leaf No 16

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Life is comprised of a collection of memories
some of which bring joy and others bring sorrow

We are all travelers on this journey, passing by each other
and leaving our marks.

All that remains, in the end, is the goodness we leave
behind.

I have always been highly interested in participating in international exhibitions. These exhibitions provide an opportunity to learn about innovations, gain knowledge from

experiences, and gain new ideas. That is why I have encouraged my children to participate in these exhibitions since they were teenagers.

Even when I was in Iran and my children were in America, I would send them tickets to attend exhibitions around the world in cities such as Frankfurt, Hanover, and Birmingham. On occasion, I would also attend exhibitions in Iran myself. One such exhibition I remember attending with my wife was the annual Frankfurt exhibition, which I consider one of the best of its kind.

In 1967, I heard about the international exhibition named Expo 67 held in Canada, so I took the opportunity to fly there. During my layover in Frankfurt, Germany, I encountered a relatively tall, brunette man on the plane who introduced himself as Kohen. When he heard my last name, Gabay, he was overjoyed and had a big smile on his face as if he had met a long-lost relative. However, when I asked him about the reason for his trip, his eyes filled with tears, and he began to weep. I asked what was wrong, worried if I might have unintentionally upset him. He told me his life story was a tragedy and shared it with me during our long journey. Through his openness and vulnerability, I was able to offer him a listening ear and support, even if it was just for a brief moment during our travels.

Kohen revealed to me that he was of Egyptian descent and had previously been a wealthy and successful person with a high social status in Egypt. However, after Gamal Abdel Nasser came to power, he, along with many other Jews, most of whom were in a good economic situation, were expelled from Egypt on Nasser's command. Kohen shared that he had been in business

for 17 years with one of his closest Muslim friends from his school days and had a very close partnership with him. Their friendship was strong, and in Kohen's words, they were "like one soul in two bodies." Their families were close as well, with their wives and children having spent most of their time together. However, when Nasser gave the warning and ordered Jews to leave Egypt, Kohen and his friend were forced to abandon their luxurious life and leave their homeland without any support or resources. That was a heartbreaking story for Kohen, as he had to leave behind not just his material wealth, but also his lifelong friendships and memories.

Kohen was not allowed to take anything with him when he was expelled from Egypt, so he instructed his wife to place his diamond ring and all of his jewels on the windowsill of their house and left, hoping that his old friend would take care of his property. He called his partner and best friend, who he trusted with everything, and told him where he had placed his jewelry. However, to Kohen's shock and disappointment, his friend coldly replied, "Gamal Abdel Nasser is too lenient towards Jews. He should not expel you; he should annihilate you all." This response was a devastating blow for Kohen, who had placed his trust and faith in his friend. It was a cruel reminder of the reality of the situation he was faced with and the loss he had suffered as a result of the expulsion.

He recounted how he was compelled to board a plane with his wife and young daughter, leaving behind a broken heart. The pain intensified when, during a layover in Cairo, his daughter spotted a doll in the hands of another child and expressed a

desire for one of her own. He and his wife were reduced to tears, realizing they couldn't even afford food. At the invitation of a friend, he then traveled to Canada to investigate the possibilities of living there for his family, leaving his daughter and his wife with her family in London. The man's account was deeply moving, making the "Story of the Beehive" feel even more poignant.

Today, when I reflect on this, I realize that people can sometimes be unaware of the unpredictable nature of life. What the Egyptian man considered one of the saddest moments in his life, may have had a positive impact on him and the 850,000 Jews living in Arab countries who faced a similar fate. Today, these Jews, who were forced to flee and leave behind their homes and possessions, have largely resettled in countries such as America, Europe, and Israel, and are living far better, more peaceful lives than the populations in these regions that they came from, who often face war, poverty, and dictatorship. These Jews not only saved themselves but also ensured a better life for future generations. Many were able to receive education at top universities and build successful careers. As the Arabic proverb states, "Al-khayru fī mā waqa'," meaning "Everything happens for a good reason."

Anyway, my trip to Canada was memorable. Unbeknownst to me, my late nephew Manouchehr had also flown there. At the exhibition, I met a friend named Mr. Ahmad Ostovar, who was one of the heads of Mr. Lajwardi's company. Mr. Ostovar and I both stayed in a private house that was rented out to travelers, as all of the hotels in the city were fully booked. I had a room on

the second floor and he was on the first floor. The place was nice and clean.

One morning, I went to take a shower and got into the tub, turning on the hot water. Before I had a chance to turn on the cold water, I slipped and fell heavily into the tub. The water was getting hotter and hotter, and my body was burning under the scorching water, but I was unable to get up or move. I was desperate, but thankfully, Ahmad heard the sound of my fall and came to my rescue. When he opened the door, I shouted for him to turn off the water because I was burned and unable to move. He pulled me out of the tub with my blistered body.

There is a Hebrew expression, "כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה," which means "All Jews are responsible for each other." However, it should be said, "כל בני האדם אחראים זה לזה," meaning "All humans—not those who pretend to be human, but those who are truly human—are responsible for each other and are the guardians of each other's well-being." This is what determines the essence of humanity, a common human identity that takes precedence over religion, homeland, or race. If this meaningful sentence from the Talmud were fulfilled, our world would truly be a paradise.

Canada was a beautiful country that left me fascinated with its nature. However, the "Story of the Beehive" continued to linger in my mind and prevented me from considering migration. The same beehive that bound Mr. Kohen, the Egyptian Jew.

Later, I took a trip to Belgium, a country in which we did a lot of business. It was a civilized country with committed merchants and high-quality goods. I have many fond memories from my

time there. Belgium and the Netherlands were both civilized countries, and their proximity to each other was an added advantage. The Netherlands, along with Denmark, stood up to Germany during the Nazi era in support of their Jews, which made a lasting impression on me.

During this trip, my eldest son was with me. We visited a textile and curtain fabric factory that we had been working with for years. While walking with the sales manager, I asked if it would be possible to have a meeting with the factory's director. He replied that by chance, the director was at the factory that day and he could arrange a meeting with Mr. Joe, the head of the factory.

When we entered Mr. Joe's beautiful and luxurious room, he greeted us and pronounced my surname, Gabay, with a fine accent. Europeans usually struggle with the pronunciation of my name, but Mr. Joe was different. When he saw my surprise, he laughed and revealed that his first name was Israel, which explained his ability to pronounce my surname correctly. He was, in fact, a Jew. During our conversation, Mr. Joe paid special attention to my son who had beautiful, reddish hair, and mentioned that his wife, who was the head of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Iran, would love to meet us, especially my son. He extended a unique and warm invitation for us to have lunch at his house, which was highly unusual in European customs.

We met Mr. Joe's wife, who was a dignified and honorable lady. During lunch, we had a delightful conversation and she shared her memories with us. She spoke of a meeting in 1972-1973

where representatives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle were invited from all over the world, and she was in charge of the management. During the meeting, two Iranian intellectuals, Abraham Moreh, the son of the blind Rabbi, Haim Moreh, and Mr. Habib Elghanian were also in attendance. In his speech, Abraham Moreh compared Galut (the Jewish diaspora) to a dog that sits quietly but suddenly attacks. Mr. Joe's wife corrected him, saying that his comparison was incorrect. She then shared a better analogy, comparing the situation of Iranian Jews and other Jews living in other countries to that of a hunter being chased by a beast. The hunter finds refuge in a well, holding himself by putting each foot on one side of the wall. He sees a predator above him and poisonous snakes below. While he tries to hold himself, he discovers a hole in the wall and a beehive inside. The honey gives him the strength to sustain himself in the well. She explained that the Iranian Jews and other Jews living in other countries were in a similar situation, enjoying their honey, which is their income and economic status, without realizing the dangers that lurked above and below them.

I was deeply impacted by her words, especially in the years before the Islamic Revolution. I had lived in New York for 9 months in 1955, but did not have a pleasant experience and decided to go to Australia. I thought all of America had the same culture. However, Australia did not appeal to me either, and eventually, I immigrated back to the United States in 1969. After obtaining my green card in 1971, I bought a house in Orange County and established a factory in Anaheim, California. While this decision proved to be wise, I made a mistake in my approach. I had intended to move from Iran to America gradually

while still maintaining my business there. Soon, I realized that my plan was flawed as I was trying “to hold two watermelons with one hand”, meaning I was trying to gain two things at the same time, which is impossible. Now I understand that I should have focused solely on America.

Our first production was impacted when we discovered that China was producing the same product at a lower price and introducing it to the market. I decided to close the factory and move the equipment to our factory in Iran. I hired Mr. Mehrara, who used to work for a carton company, to manage the factory, and I returned to America. Mr. Mehrara proved to be an excellent manager, honest, trustworthy, and knowledgeable. However, he made a mistake by dismissing many of the employees in the first days of his management. My late father, who was not involved in the company, was deeply upset about the dismissals and without letting us know, he asked Mehrara not to come to work again to avoid confrontation with the workers.

When we found out that Mr. Mehrara was not showing up at the factory, we became concerned. Despite our attempts to contact him, he did not answer, so we hired another person who was not suitable for the job. Unfortunately, when we learned about it, it was too late, and we had to pay a high price for this mistake. The lack of physical presence and the new management's lack of responsibility were the main reasons. My late father always reminded us that the eyes of the owner are more effective than the workers' hands. In the end, it's true that nobody can scratch your back better than your own finger.

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Leaf No 68

Translated by Elham Yaghoubian

As a writer, I believe in the power of truth and the importance of accuracy in my work. I take my responsibility as a writer very seriously, as the words I put down on paper can have lasting consequences. That is why I strive to always write the truth, even if it is uncomfortable or unpopular.

I value the opinions of my readers and critics, as they provide me with valuable insight into the impact of my writing. I appreciate those who take the time to read and review my work, and I am always open to constructive criticism. I believe that a wise critic can be a writer's best friend, helping to identify areas of improvement and make the writing stronger.

Despite what some may believe, I am not against religious texts or holy scriptures. Rather, it is superstitions that I take issue with. I believe that people should question their beliefs and challenge the ideas they hold to be sacred. This does not mean that I am against religion or spirituality, but rather that I believe in the importance of critical thinking and questioning.

My writing can be found on my website, where I have made it available in both Persian and English. I hope that my work is meaningful and impactful, and I am grateful to those who have helped me bring my words to life. Over the course of my writing career, I have written over 300 articles and three books, always striving to be truthful and respectful of others' beliefs.

As I near the end of my journey, I invite you to share your thoughts on my writing. Whether you agree or disagree with my ideas, I would be honored to hear your feedback. My children will continue to share my work after I am gone, and I hope that

my writings will continue to inspire thought and critical reflection long into the future.