

Album Leaves

The Memoirs of

Norman “Nourollah” Gabay

First Leaf

Edit & English Translation by Payman Akhlaghi

لطفاً نسخه فارسی این برگ از آلبوم را در فایل همراه ملاحظه کنید.

Foreword

Every step in life can make a memory, and each memory could be worthwhile, useful and instructive, in its own right. Many a memory which may look trivial at first, yet offer other people a valuable lesson, an effective solution, even a breakthrough experience. Thus, after years of writing and publishing my essays and articles, I decided to put in words a selection of my memories, edited and translated by Mr. Payman Akhlaghi, and to have them published every week, so far as possible, in both Persian and English, partly in the invaluable Persian magazine *Payam*, but also via email and on my website at www.BabaNouri.com for the benefit of those interested in my thoughts and writings. I hope this endeavor will be received kindly by the esteemed reader.

Sincerely,

Norman “Nourollah” Gabay

December 2021, Los Angeles

Album Leaves

Memories and Experiences

First Leaf

In the final years leading to the 1979 Revolution, when I still lived in Iran, we were buying goods from an Iranian company mainly owned by a royal Prince. Two or three years into doing business with them, they called me and said, “We’re looking for a Jewish economic mind for our company, and we’ve chosen you for that purpose. We’re inviting you to be our next CEO, and a shareholding partner.” My first reaction was to turn down their offer, but they were insistent, encouraging, and persuasive, until I had agreed to becoming their Vice President. I also wrote them a considerable check as my investment share, which made me an equity partner. They gave me a luxurious room for my office, complete with two secretaries, and I began work as their VP. I worked with them for the following eight months, during which time the company showed an enormous profit.

I traveled to Belgium to purchase goods for my own company. I found a fine merchandise, which was also suitable for the said company. I bought 10,000 meters (10,936 yards) of the fabric for my own business, and ordered as much for that company. The tariff rate on the imported goods was 200%. Both orders arrived at the same time in Iran, and I paid the 200% tariff to the customs on my own order, which probably amounted to about 400,000 toumans, or nearly \$59,000 of the time. (In the immediate years before the Revolution, a dollar was exchanged for nearly 68 to 70 Iranian rials, or 6.8 to 7.0 toumans. The high tariff rate was meant to promote the domestic production of similar goods.) However, as I studied the permit papers of the other company, I was surprised to learn that their order had been released by the customs for a much lower amount, say, a mere 20,000 toumans, or about \$3000. I asked the person in charge of the customs at the company about the issue. He simply said, “They called from the top, and we paid 20,000 toumans.” That made me think. I paced my office for a few minutes, as I reflected on various aspects of the matter. I made up my mind. I went straight to my superior, the

company CEO, and I told him, “My children called me from America. They’ve asked me to fly to them as soon as possible. Please accept my resignation as the VP and as an equity partner. Also please kindly refund my investment share.” The CEO of the company responded to me in his evidently provincial accent, “You thought you could just walk into my office, grab your eight million plus the 800,000 toumans profit for the past few months, and vanish?!” I explained, “But I’m not asking for a single penny of the profits! Please, just refund my initial investment, so that I could leave.” Those words put his mind at ease. Without a moment’s hesitation, he asked the head of accounting to write up my statement, have me sign it, and hand me the check. He was happy that I had forgone my share of the profits, and my due rights. They prepared the statement, and I signed it. They also rushed the refund check to the CEO, which he signed. The whole affair barely lasted for two hours. I left the building, and walked into a bank to deposit my check. Then I returned to my own office.

Many seasons passed by. Five years after the Revolution, in the city of Vancouver, Canada, I ran into the accounting manager of that same company. “Oh, Mr. Gabay!” he said. “You knew that the Revolution was coming soon! Why didn’t you say something?” “How so?” I asked. He explained, “That year, you let go of that enormous profit and income, just took back your initial investment, and left the company for good. Everybody was laughing behind your back, not the least our CEO, who was overjoyed by the affair. I’m just curious to know why you didn’t give us as much of a hint about the looming Revolution.”

I said, “You see, back then, I had no idea about the Revolution, nor was there any sign of such developments. I did what I did for a different reason. I am Jewish. I thought to myself, should someday that customs’ permit come to the surface, if it were revealed that only a small fraction of the dues, merely 20,000 toumans as opposed to 400,000, had been paid to release the goods, I’d be the first to be arrested and sent to jail. This humble, this very innocent Jew who had nothing to do with that affair, would be the first to blame, unjustly and unfairly, for all kinds of wrong which I had neither committed, nor was aware of. I told myself that I needed neither that money, nor the risk. My decision had nothing to do with anybody else, nor with any potential revolution. Everybody should know his place, and appreciate his own particular position. Anyone who doesn’t understand his situation, he’d be 100% doomed to fail.”

This episode reminds me of a conversation we had with the late Mr. Dokhanian. Once in a small friendly gathering, he said, “The Jews of Kashan were the first group to leave Iran during the Revolution!” To which a friend responded, “If the late Hadj Habib Elghanian, rest in peace, was a bit more cautious, too, he wouldn’t return to Iran in those dangerous times, he wouldn’t face that terrible end, and we wouldn’t lose that beloved member of our community.” (To clarify, the present author was born in Kashan. Mr. Dokhanian’s humor was in reference to the popular stereotype of the Jews of Kashan as “faint-hearted” people. And as most readers know, the late Habib Elghanian was a prominent Jewish figure who was unjustly and brutally executed soon after the Revolution by the Iranian regime.)

Caution is quite different than **fear**. Let people call you “timid!” as much as they want to: their mockery won’t matter. To be careful, that is the first rule of life.

Wishing you the best,
Norman “Nourollah” Gabay
December 2021, Los Angeles

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