

Memoire of Nourollah “Norman” Gabay

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Translated by Elham Yaghoubian

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, Europe, 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 facilities. 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 compounded 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 ארבים זה לעה," which means "All Jews are responsible for each other." However, it should be said, "כל הולעערבים זה לעה," 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, 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 cartoon 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.