

# Album Leaves

## The Memoirs of Norman “Nourollah” Gabay

### Third Leaf

*Edit & English Translation by Payman Akhlaghi*

لطفاً نسخه فارسی این برگ از آلبوم را بیشتر در صفحه آغازین این فایل ملاحظه کنید.

Plenty of good and bad people can be found anywhere in the world, but crying out aloud when the matter has something to do with religion, for those with a strong faith who but lack in intelligence and common sense are the most dangerous of people. Also, what they believe in is the content of their religious books, parts of which are extremely inciteful. These faithful but ignorant individuals believe in such books, and absent all reason, they may commit even the most dangerous acts to apply those writings.

I was 8, or maybe 9. I went after school to my father’s store in the central Bazaar of Kashan. My father took a look at me, and said, “Nourollah, dear! Do you know Agha Asghar, the tailor?” “Yes!” I said. “Please go to him, and ask him to make you a nice suit. I’ll go later and pay for it.” I grew wings and flew away in joy. I went straight to the tailor, and I told him, “Asghar Agha! My dad said that you make me a new suit, jacket, pants and all! He’ll come by later to pay for it.” Asghar paused for a moment, then he said, “Come with me to my home to take your measurements.” Thus, he left his shop, and I followed after him.

Many decades later, I still have a vivid memory of the main gate of the house. He opened the gate, and we walked into the courtyard. Then he placed me like a chicken in a dark cellar, shut the door on me, and left me there all by myself. As he walked away, he said, "Stay there, till I'll come back!" The cellar had a window, which rose from the ground level of the yard. If there was a chair or a sturdy box to step on, I could see around the courtyard and the building surrounding it through that window. As it was, I could see as much that while he stood in the courtyard, Asghar started talking to a man, who was taller than him, and stood on the roof across from the window. They were too far from me and spoke too softly to be heard clearly, but I think I did overhear the words "luck" or "omen", or the phrase "it brings bad luck" as they were talking. Although, I'm not truly sure whether it's been some lingering misperception in my mind, or indeed they said so in their conversation. I still felt no fear, since I saw Asghar Agha as a familiar person. I was there alone in the dark, for what felt a long time, until Asghar returned, opened the door to the cellar, left the main gate open, and told me, "Get lost!"

I stepped out of Asghar's house into the alley. I don't remember what my father said, once I had returned home. However, I have no doubt that the tailor had an evil intent, and on that day, this poor innocent child was just fortunate to be spared alive. Maybe it was the man on the roof, who reminded Asghar that, "Shedding the Jewish blood brings bad luck, and someday, it'll befall you," and thence, convinced him to abandon his wicked plan.

Several years passed by. My family and I had moved to Tehran, and I was working in the Grand Bazaar of the city. I had made friends with a teenage boy, whose brother had a store next to the company where I worked. At lunch break, my friend and I would sit and talk on the bales of fabric, while having our meal. We looked about the same age, although he was maybe 2 or 3 years older than me. One day, he said that they were selling bare land for housing development in the Sefid-Khak or "White Soil" area, later known as Tehran-Pars, and each lot was going for as much as 1,000 toumans of the time. I could afford that sum. He added, "My older brother Majid and I will be driving there to take a look, and to buy ourselves a piece. Majid has his own car. You too come with us!" I agreed, and after work, I left with the two brothers. On the road going east from Tehran known as the Khorasan Road, somewhere in today's Tehran-Pars, the older brother stopped the car. My friend pointed to the distant, and said, "The lot is behind that

hill!” We left the car, and set out on foot for the hill. I was walking a few steps behind them. The dusk had settled. We arrived at a hillside that stood in the middle of nowhere, when suddenly, as if somebody had warned me, I was overtaken by fear. I trusted my instincts, and while the two of them continued to walk on, I turned back quietly, headed for the road, and took a bus home.

The following day, my friend asked, “Nourollah! What did happen yesterday? Where did you vanish all of a sudden?!” “Nothing!” I said. “Just my stomach began to hurt. I decided to go back early. I didn’t want to disturb you two.” As God is my witness, some time afterwards, that same young man said during a conversation, “Anywhere we can get our hands on it, we shed the Jewish blood!” Yes, the very person whom I considered my friend uttered those terrible words.

Unfortunately, we lived in such an environment, and we couldn’t always tell apart the fake friends. As a wise poet put it beautifully, “We can hardly tell the foe disguised as friend from the true friend; the wick lies at the heart of the candle, yet it’s the candle’s worst enemy.” Sadly, God knows what horrible end many a poor soul suffered, for even as I recall, several people went missing for good in our time, and no one would ever know what happened to them.

Today, as I ponder those memories, and as I consider their undoubtedly religious roots and aspects, I’m convinced the more strongly, and I repeat myself, Crying out aloud when telling between Good and Evil comes to hang on the good and the worse words of the religion! To emphasize again, those who believe whole-heartedly in their religious books, but who are deficient intellectually, they’re more dangerous than any bombs. My utmost hope is that we shall never and under no circumstances have to deal with such people. It won’t make any difference what their particular brand of religion is, for even though every religious group has its share of wise members, none is without a sizeable ignorant bunch.

Thank you.

Norman “Nourollah” Gabay

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For free copies of this and other writings by Norman “Nourollah” Gabay, please visit his website at [www.BabaNouri.com](http://www.BabaNouri.com) . The website is home to an archive of the author’s articles, essays, notes, and books in Persian and English, including *An Invitation to Reason*, *A Dictionary of the Kashani Jewish Dialect*, and soon, *Be Up to Date* (in progress).