



were an integral segment of our society and a part of our history. That is, it was a stratum of our society that gave rise to this movement. The “Why” and the “How” of this issue are questions that must be explored by historians and researchers. However, the need for answers to these questions, and the need for discovering our own historical identity, is a matter that pertains to all of us Iranians.

In the midst of all this, the role of degar-andishan, particularly the activists on the left, in highlighting and exploring these questions, should be more evident than other segments of the society, since they are farther away from religious prejudices and closer to the essence of this aspect of our history.

At this time when we are thinking of building a memorial for the mass killings of 1988, it is also timely to ask ourselves: Why is it that in the past we never thought about raising a memorial for the Babis and Bahá'ís of Tehran who died through public execution, often at the hand of the masses and by the most barbaric and gruesome means?

My purpose at this juncture is to raise this question: What happened that we closed our eyes to the reality of the public mass killings of the previous century (the 19th century) which took place on the foundation of Othring of fellow Iranians?

Consider what Nabil has written:

The fourteen disciples of the Bab, who had been captured, remained incarcerated in the house of Mahmud Khan Kalantar ... Tahirih was also confined on the upper floor of that same house. Every kind of ill treatment was inflicted upon them. Their persecutors sought, by every device, to induce them to supply the information they required, but failed to obtain a satisfactory answer. ... Convinced of their powerlessness to bend their will, they referred the matter to Mahmud Khan, who, in his turn, submitted their case to the Amir-Nizam, Mirza Taqi Khan, the Grand Vazir of Nasiri'd-Din Shah. ... Mirza Taqi Khan immediately issued a peremptory order threatening with execution whoever among these fourteen prisoners was unwilling to recant his faith. Seven were compelled to yield to the pressure that was brought to bear upon them, and were immediately released. The remaining seven constitute the Seven Martyrs of Tihran.

Nabil then goes on to offer a description of the execution of these seven individuals before a congregation of people, which clearly expresses their firmness in their convictions to the last breath.

In other parts of the book, Nabil reports in detail the suppression of the followers of the Bab and the persecutions visited upon their families.

Identifying suspicious individuals through those already seized and mass arrests — much the same as happened during the first decade of the Islamic Revolution — also occurred at the height of Bahá'í persecutions:

Men, women, and children in the capital trembled at the ruthlessness with which the enemy pursued their victims. A youth named Abbas, a former servant of Haji Sulayman Khan, and fully informed, owing to the wide circle of friends which his master cultivated, of the names, the number, and the dwelling places of the Bab's disciples, was employed by the enemy as an instrument ready to hand for the prosecution of its designs. ... He was taken through the streets of Tehran and directed to point out everyone he recognized as being a follower of the Bab. A number of people whom he had never met or known were in this manner delivered into the hands of the Hajibu'd-Dawlih's assistants — people who had never had any connection with the Bab and His Cause. These were able to recover their freedom only after having paid a heavy bribe to those who had captured them. Such was the greed of the Hajibu'd-Dawlih's attendants that they specially requested Abbas to salute as a sign of betrayal every person whom he thought would be willing and able to pay large sums for his deliverance. They would even force him to betray such persons, threatening that his refusal would be fraught with grave danger to his own life.

It appears that the history of *degar-andishan*, at least from the period that Nabil has narrated, is one that has been consigned to be forgotten. Nabil's account is a part of history that dominant suppressors have managed, with considerable success, to remove from our collective memory. If we had known about this history, perchance a few decades ago we would have thought of building a memorial for those who suffered execution merely on the grounds of their religious belief. And if we had raised such a monument, perhaps it would have then served as a moral barrier to such waves of barbaric brutality as have occurred ever since.

However, it is a source of joy that some of our historians are undertaking a thorough reevaluation of that period (the 19th century Babi movement). Nonetheless, those of us that are apprehensive of the loss of our collective memory and worry that our present generation's history will be forgotten as well, must look back on the past with much greater care and humanity — and greater use of the scholarly tools of history — and fight against forgetting all those “Other” martyrs of the past. The time has come when through careful reflection such questions should be asked: How does historical forgetfulness occur and through what mechanism have we been separated from our recollection of history?

#### On the Side: A Point with our Bahá'í Friends

Before all else, as an Iranian, I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation for the precious historical treasure house that the Bahá'í community has preserved for our nation. Under the most difficult circumstances of oppression and suffocation, the followers of the Bahá'í Faith have labored to safeguard the writings of their religion and documented history of this land, and have ensured that these records have been shielded from the destruction of blind prejudice.

The time has come for all of us to exert efforts to widely disseminate these

writings. Even though up until the present the preservation of these documents has been due to the labors and efforts of the Bahá'í community, the truth is that these historical records belong to all humanity and every member of society has the right to have access to them. Fortunately, by now a number of Bahá'í libraries are available on the worldwide net, which provide access to many of the Bahá'í sources, including Bahá'í Reference Library and the vast collection of H-Bahai, which are most treasured. However, printed books still remain the easiest way to read.

This copy of the Nabil's narrative, which I received through the kindness of a Bahá'í friend, was published by the Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Iran for the third time. This book, however, has not been printed by a publisher outside of Iran, and is not available to the general public. Necessary corrections have not taken place in the text, and proper annotations have not been made to its content. Nor is it evident that experts in the field of history have critiqued, evaluated and correlated it with other historical accounts, or closely scrutinized its details.

Nabil's narrative was first translated from Persian into English, then from English into Arabic and finally from Arabic into Persian by Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari. According to Dr. Abbas Amanat in his introduction to the second printing of *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran 1844-1850*, the original manuscript of this book in Persian is kept at the Bahá'í World Centre. However, as a researcher, after three decades, Dr. Amanat has not been given access to this text on the grounds that a room is not available for researchers at that Centre.

At this historical juncture, all of us Iranians are with one another. We all have the right to know, and we all bear the responsibility to answer the right of others to know. We must take each other's hands and trust one another, so that we may preserve our collective memory and rescue from the clutches of oblivion these heinous historical events and the identities of those who suffered as result of these crimes.

This is the only sure way that will prevent such atrocities from being committed again in the future.

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