
Chapter 13

First Attempt to Leave!

It was Friday night, the evening before my scheduled flight. I was confused, yet hopeful; cautious, but willing to take chances. I packed my suitcases and prepared to leave my dad's home. Early on Saturday morning, we left and headed toward the airport.

All my sisters were there to see me off. We did not know what the outcome was going to be that night, except to trust God for my rescue and hoping that He would cover the eyes of those authorities for me to slip by. I checked in my luggage and after saying goodbye to all my sisters and in-laws and my nieces and nephews, I proceeded toward the exit and passport check. Three of my relatives were with me to make sure that everything went smooth.

There was much comfort in knowing so many people were praying for me, but I was still a little anxious and concerned. All kinds of things were going through my mind, but I tried to remain calm. The officer stamped my exit passport, and I saluted good-bye to Nader and a couple of my relatives who came as far as they could to make sure of my departure. But, I had not walked more than 200 feet

when I heard someone calling my name through the loud speaker and echoing through the hallway:

“Mr. Saiid Rabiipour!”

My heart sank when I heard my name. Then I heard my name being called again, “Mr. Rabiipour!”

Then I saw a man headed in my direction, holding a two-way radio in his hand. Part of me wanted to keep on going, but I stopped because I did not want to create a scene. He then asked me if my name was Mr. Rabiipour, and I acknowledged that I was.

He asked for my passport. I gave him my Iranian passport, which was used to leave the country. Then he pointed his index finger at me to follow him and asked me to identify the officer who checked me out at the passport booth. I pointed to the officer who checked me out. He then voided my exit by using another mark on my passport, and told me that I did not have permission to leave the country until my name was cleared from his computer.

He kept my Iranian passport and gave me a receipt with instructions on the back to go to the passport office on Africa Avenue in order to get my passport back. I attempted to show him the copy of the presidential amnesty letter I kept with me, but he was not interested in listening to me or seeing anything. Then he went to the KLM agent and requested to have my luggage returned to me and proceeded to cancel my flight.

Nader and my other relatives were still there when they heard my name being called. They tried to intercept and beg on my behalf but to no avail. It took quite a while to get my

luggage back, and finally we left the airport. It was 4:30 in the morning when we got back to my parent's home.

Was I disappointed? You bet you.

Why didn't God answer my prayers?

Why didn't He allow me to leave the way He allowed Apostle Peter to get out of prison?

Should I get angry at my Father since He chose not to do what I wanted?

This is one of the reasons many Christians stumble in their walk since they don't get their prayers answered the way they wished and for His protection on earth. In fact the Quran makes mockery of People of the Book (Jews and Christians) for being punished by saying, then where is your God to protect you if you are called His children!

So, should we stop praying all together since we may not get our prayers answered the way we wished?

Oh no, prayers reflect our humility before God the Father. He has already done everything that needed to be done to redeem His children. We need Him no matter what our circumstances may be. He is worthy of our worship and praise regardless of our condition.

So, I thought to myself that perhaps my Father had a different plan for me. So, I thanked Him and patiently waited for His next move.

The next day we went back to the Navy base and found out that the commander of the personnel department rejected the financial settlement from the budget and credit department for the second time and for the same reason.

It was so obvious by then that they were treating me like a ping-pong ball, paddling me between the two departments of the Navy. We did not know what to do except to try to knock on every door for help for the possible answer.

I thought about getting a lawyer, but was told that would drag things out even longer. It would be much faster if I went after it myself. Frankly, I did not have much money or time to rely on others, which is why we were attempting to do the running around ourselves. With that in mind, we visited the finance department to check on the method of disbursement of the money thirty years ago. We were told that the person who was familiar with files that far back was Mr. Javadi.

We waited for him to return from his break and he welcomed us into his office and ordered some hot tea. He was not feeling well that day but he was there working anyway. He was a man with a gentle attitude, soft spoken and seemed to be very meek. He listened to us carefully as we explained our problem to him. He said that there was no meaning in what they were doing to us. We asked him about my file and details of how the expenses were paid during those years. He told us that all files from 1988 and before were voided and destroyed. He even checked with someone else in the same department and both said the same thing.

He suggested that the only place that they may have any records kept that far back was the Central bank, but he

would have to call them some other day in order to find out the answer for us. He said he would also like to speak with Col. Mirshekar to see how he could help solve our problem. So we left with the hope that we would hear from him soon.

Day 22

On April 26, after twenty two days, my struggle was not improving much. They still had me stalled between two departments in conflict with each other. One was demanding to change the so called “mission expenses” to be calculated at the rate of thirty years ago while the other would say that they could not do that unless they had an order from their own department head, which both were part of the Navy base. So we were stuck between a rock and a hard place without any answers.

Col. Ansari was no longer working on my case. His boss, Col. Mirshekar, told him that from now on Capt. Hassanvand and he would handle my case. He told me that Col. Ansari did not know anything about the conversion of the money when I questioned him about the figures he gave me. Apparently Col. Ansari objected to his boss about the changes in figures, but was told to leave his office and that his work was finished on my file. Whether they were telling me the truth or not, I wasn't sure. Obviously, the judge who had earlier advised me knew all about the conversion of money and the tactics that were used in cases like mine. There was at least one unresolved case that we discovered ourselves and noted the case number as a reference.

The following day was the Prophet Mohammed's birthday, another holiday. According to some Muslim Imams, the

prophecy of his coming is mentioned in our Holy Bible. One of my sisters also brought that to my attention and asked, “Doesn’t the Bible talk about Mohammad?”

The Quran also makes the same reference in **Sura 61:6**

“And remember, Jesus, the son of Mary, said: “O children of Israel! I am the apostle of God (sent) to you, confirming the Law (which came) before me, and giving glad tidings of an Apostle to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad.”

Note: Ahmad is understood as Mohammad by Muslim Scholars.

Of course there is no such a statement in our Bible and Jesus would not have any reason for saying that since He is the end of the law. Jesus came to free mankind from the law, through grace. Muhammad would put us back in the law again, which would make no sense at all!

There are two other passages in the Bible which Muslim scholars think are referring to Muhammad. They are:

1) Deuteronomy 18:15 “The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me (Moses) from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear,” And again in verse 18, “I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.”

Since the Quran is allegedly a recitation of what the angel Gabriel recited to Mohammad, Muslims considered that as God’s word being put in his mouth and prophecy being fulfilled. But he is an Arab and a gentile, not a Jew! (A small twist in language)

2) *John 14:15-18, “If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you”.*

Muslims consider Mohammad as the “spirit of truth” and a helper, who came after Jesus. Therefore, they think that the above verses are talking about Mohammad.

Just for the record, a Baha’i friend of mine pointed to the same passages in the Bible as a reference to the coming of their Prophet Baha’u’llah, after Mohammad.

So, I asked my sister if she thought the Prophet Mohammed was with her forever, and she said “NO.”

Does Mohammed live within you? She said “NO”

Then the Bible is not talking about Mohammed, for he died and was buried, and his tomb is in the city of Medina, Saudi-Arabia. But what the Bible is talking about is the “Holy Spirit” or “Spirit of truth”, who lives within His children.

While in Iran, I always had a handbag with all the necessities such as extra cloths, toothpaste, toothbrush, my notebook and my Bible with me. Every day after going places, I spent my time at either my sisters or parent’s house. I felt like a nomad going from one place to the other!

The first three weeks of my vacation was good, but two months was a bit uncomfortable for me, especially since my focus has changed. My Mom and Dad were in their old age and I did not want to cause them too much work by being there all the time. Sometimes I even had to witness their disagreements over mostly simple issues, and they wanted me to take sides with them, which was not easy for me to do.

Suffering from arthritis, my Dad complained a lot about his legs. He kept himself close to a heater and we occasionally would help him with a massage, applying some ointment on his knees. My Mom's back was also giving her a hard time sometimes, yet she never quit working or cooking. They kept their heater on high all the time. I had to keep a window partially open and stay close to it for fresh air unless I wished to be in a sauna!

My sisters had teen-age daughters and I did not want to intrude on their privacy. They were all very nice to me and made me feel right at home. I would try to teach them English, played cards, or watched TV while in their homes. They often watched me reading my emails coming from my wife and friends, and frequently saw me as tears were running down my face. I would share with them the importance of my relationship with my wife and family and the value we had for each other. I would try to show them how the love of God had affected my life by my actions and conversations while living among them. None of my sisters have ever seen my wife, yet they were in love with her because of my relationship and the way I talk about her to them. I tried to show and tell them that our marriage relationship is after the example of Christ for His children.

One day we had gone downtown window-shopping. After walking around for an hour or two, I suggested for us to walk back home. They agreed. My sister's feet were hurting as a result. Later that evening, I offered to show my brother-in-law how to give his wife a foot massage. Boy! That felt good to her! Now every time we talk over the phone, I ask if Ali (her husband), is still massaging her feet, and she laughs about it!

On Thursday, April 28, we all went to a park in Karaj (not far from my parents' home) to have a picnic. My Mom cooked as usual and we all played, ate, and rode the ferris wheel at the park. I always shared the love of God with my family, whether in the park or at the house or on our way to the navy base. I never blamed anyone for my situation, even the people at the navy base, just the system in which they were operating under.

I had a great time with my visits, delicious foods and fellowship, but my time was up and I needed to get back home to America where I belonged. Nader and Ali tried very hard to keep me busy, and made sure I was having a good time by taking me sightseeing or to other places.

One day we made a trip to Beheshte Zahra (Zahra's heaven), which is a huge graveyard. I remembered that place from my childhood when it was dusty, smelly, hot, and hardly any trees or flowers. You did not wish to stay there for a long time. Now the place was exceptionally clean and beautiful. The streets were paved and clean. There were flowers and trees everywhere and the tombstones were kept clean making this a very desirable place to bury your loved ones.

My brother Parviz was also buried there, so we went to see his grave and I prayed for him and remembered him before the God of Mercy and Grace. He was only a year and half older than me and was very close and dear to me. During the summer he would take me to work with him and other places, such as picnics, movies, etc. I could not help but remember all the good times we had growing up and tears filled my eyes as my heart cried for him.

I also saw the graves of many soldiers who died during the eight year “Iraq-Iran war” which took place between 1980 and 1988. There were a total of 188,000 soldiers, militia, and civilians killed. They were all decorated beautifully with pictures and flowers. Many of them were young people. Families who lost their loved ones were there with trays of home-made cookies or other pastries to give to the people in honor of their dead. It is customary to accept the cookie and then pray for the soul of the person who has passed away, since Muslims believe in ‘purgatory’. I suppose this action brings peace to the one who is offering the cookie and honor on behalf of the dead, similar to putting flowers on the grave.

On another day, we made a trip to “Imam Zadeh Davood” which is located north of Tehran. He is the brother of Imam Reza, the 8th Imam of the Shiite Muslims. We went there to pray and to do some sightseeing at the same time. I did not have any problem going to other locations to pray, for I always carry the Holy Spirit within me and pray “in the name of Jesus”.

I remembered the words of the Apostle Paul, saying into my ears: “I have become all things to all men that I might by

all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you." (1 Cor. 9:22-23)

On our way there, we stopped at a restaurant by the road to use the restroom. We saw a nice waterfall and stopped to take some pictures. Two attendants there took care of the place and cooked for those who wished to eat there. I opened up the conversation with both of them and told them where we were going. One of them asked me to pray for his sister. She was having some internal bleeding and was very sick.

I asked him where he lived.

He answered that he lived in a city called Zanjan, which was about five or six hours away from where he was.

I asked, "Do you have a family"? He said, "Yes, I have a wife and some children."

"Why are you here?" I asked.

"For work, there are no jobs there where I live", he responded.

"How often do you see your family?" I asked.

"I work here five days out of the week and then I go home for two days." He answered.

I asked for the name of his sister and wrote it down on a piece of paper so I would not forget to pray for her, the man, and his family.

During this time, I never made any suggestions as to where to eat or what to do. Whatever decisions Nader and Ali made was fine with me. I believed that God was in control of my situation and my whereabouts, and my conversation with the man at the restaurant was not by

accident. God knows everything and sometimes He uses us in a way that only He will receive the glory!

On our way back, we stopped at the same restaurant for lunch and I gave both of them a tip for good service, and to help the one from Zanzibar with his trip to see his family. It is not customary to give tips at most restaurants there, but I wanted to do that for them. I wanted to show them the unconditional love and compassion since I was in need of it so desperately myself. I felt at peace for them, but for some reason or the other, my stomach was like a knot about my own situation due to the uncertainty of my future.

On our way back home, I could not help but think about my own dilemma. I just could not understand why the navy personnel were giving me a hard time. I somehow felt that I should talk to them directly in order to get to the bottom of the problem. With that in mind, I decided to see Col. Mirshekar, the commander of Personnel. So one morning while we were there at the Navy base, we went to his office. Col. Mirshekar, Mr. Javadi (from the Finance Dept.) and two other men were also sitting in his office. Mr. Javadi was there for the same purpose as I was, wanted to ask him about my situation.

After saying hello, I asked him boldly why he was causing problems for me.

He responded, "What problem?"

I asked him about the conversion of the money.

He said that the order was from the leader of the country and he was only following his order and there was nothing he could do about it.

I said, “Sir, I have my job and my family to go to and do not have time to stay here. “Then he responded. “That is not my problem.”

I said “Sir, you said that if I come forward on my own and introduce myself, you will take that into consideration and work with me. Besides. Col. Ansari, your assistant, gave me the amount of the settlement and I even had to borrow that, but now you are changing it.”

He told me that it was an order from his superior and that the money for the ‘special missions’ had to be converted to the way it was paid and Col. Ansari did not know about this change.

- I said “Sir, my file shows that the money was paid in Rials, not in dollars.
- You have said that you requested for the clarification of that order almost a year ago, but you have not received the answer to that yet.
- You are attaching a file that belongs to someone else to my file, even though that file has not been resolved yet.
- Lastly, your budget and credit dept. will not change the amount.”

After hearing what I had to say, Col. Mirshekar said that he was only following orders, and I should speak with his boss, General Ghots. He said if he wants to change the order, then that would be fine with him.

At that moment, I realized that Col Mirshekar only wanted to give me a hard time, along with most everyone

else I had dealt with. If he really wanted to help, all he had to do was pick up the phone and call General Ghots.

Later, as I was pacing in the personnel building, a colonel approached me wanting to know who I was and what I wanted. When I told him my problem, his response to me was that Iran was not a poor country and the navy did not need my money. With that thought he went directly to Col. Mirshekar to ask him to help me to get back to my home country. But Col. Mirshekar refused to even to listen to him. He would not waiver at all. He tried to get other people involved but to no avail. He then said he was sorry that he could not help me. I thanked him for trying. He seemed to be such a nice person, but he just didn't have the right amount of authority.