

IN THE NAME OF GOD



CHRIST IN THE NIGHT OF GLORY

The story of Supreme Leader's presence at the homes
of Armenian and Assyrian martyrs
in the years 1984 to 2015



Translated under the supervision of PROF.Fazlollah Nikayin

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S A H B A

Tel: +982122773360

www.sahbabooks.ir info@sahbabooks.ir

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Introduction

Is written by Prof.Fazlolla Nikayin

The Iranian supreme leader, Sayyed Ali Khamenei, has since the year 1983 (at this time he was the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran) been frequently visiting the families of Iranian martyrs. Of course, most of these were the families of Muslim martyrs, but a significant aspect of these visits was his meeting with the families of our Armenian and Assyrian martyrs, heroic martyrs from among these two small communities in Iran, who fought bravely and selflessly in defense of their patriotic country and in the path of God.

This book is about Mr. Khamenei's visiting these latter groups that usually took place about Christmas and the Christian new years.

We cannot describe the incredible atmosphere of these intimate, affectionate, kind and emotional meetings in a few words; one must read them all. We may, however, say that the readers often find, when reading them, that tears fill their eyes: they are not tears of pity but of human love, admiration, empathy and appreciation. The other outstanding feature of these meetings is that most often the grief-stricken atmosphere in the house gradually changes and the begrieved family members, especially the mothers of the martyrs, are really consoled and feel a greater pride for their sons who fought and died in a patriotic, rightful cause.

And this translation into English from the original Persian will be sent to Arme-

nia, Lebanon, Europe and the USA for the further knowledge of Armenians (and Assyrians) who were living in Iran since ancient times. As an example, Darius the Great -521-486 B.C- mentions the names of two military commanders of this who were dispatched to certain areas to quell rebellions there (Behistun, Kermanshah, account by Darius carved on a cliff in cuneiform script in 3 languages: Old Persian, Elamite and Babylonian.)

We say no more and ask the readers to go over the narration about these meetings to note other sweet-bitter but sublime features we failed to describe.

Fazlollah Nikayin

Preface

First scene

Jesus Christ chose the name “Peter” for “Simon” from the moment he declared his faith in God. “Peter” means “rock”. No one, even Simon, understood the reason for this naming that day. Months passed, and Peter gained a higher degree of spirituality in the presence of his master. One day, in a gathering of all disciples, Jesus Christ told him: “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*”.

The period of the earthly prophethood of Jesus Christ lasted not more than three years. When he transcended to the other world, Peter carried on his message to spread the religion of God, despite facing radical enemies. The mundane Jewish rabbis of Jerusalem were happily thinking that they had already crucified Jesus Christ brutally in front of his disciples and followers, and that the peril of this new religion would no more threaten their prestige and position among the “Sons of Israel”. The situation however, turned out to be otherwise.

The disciples, who had met Jesus twice after his ascension, believed he was alive; so their faith and determination for propagation had strengthened and this made the rabbis so angry. Peter was standing in the middle of Jerusalem’s temple, fearlessly speaking about Jesus Christ and his being alive. The officers

* New Testament, Matthew’s Bible/ chapter 16, verses 18 and 19

attacked these assemblies repeatedly and expelled Peter and the rest of the disciples fiercely out of the temple. Yet, after some minutes, some people would gather in another corner and one of the disciples did continue speaking for them. The dignity of Peter, and God's blessings on him, had bestowed upon him the power to heal some ill or paralyzed persons. These incidents resulted in the increase of people's fondness towards him and the strengthening of their belief in Jesus Christ.

The rabbis of Jerusalem could not stand this situation. They put the disciples and their believers under severe pressure. Saint Stephan was the first disciple who was martyred. The rabbis held a show trial for him and sentenced him to be stoned. This sentence was carried out in a most cruel way. The second martyr was Jacob, John's (Yuhanna's) brother. The Emperor of Rome had previously appointed Herod as the governor of Jerusalem. Herod wanted to win the hearts of the Jewish rabbis and so he started arresting, torturing and tormenting the Christians. He arrested Jacob to put an end to propagation about Jesus Christ and ordered his officers to cut his head off. This happened 11 years after Christ's ascension.

Herod's next victim was Peter. He arrested Peter and announced that he would be hanged a day after the coming Jewish feast. The night before, Christians held some secret prayer meetings in certain places to save Peter. Herod ordered 16 guards to watch Peter in jail until hanging deadline.

The feast was over, and they were supposed to hang Peter the following day. Some Christian men and women gathered at the home of Mark's mother. Mark was one of the disciples. They were praying for Peter's life when suddenly they heard knocks on the door. They were first afraid that their secret gathering might have been discovered. They were all silent looking at the door. A girl named "Roda" walked towards the door and asked: who are you? The one behind the door said calmly: "Open the door, my daughter".

Roda froze where she was standing. The voice was familiar to her. Her surprised face became happy gradually, and she said loudly: Peter! This is Peter himself! The people inside said: are you crazy, girl? Yet she insisted on what she said. The one behind the door was knocking again. Finally, they all stood up and rushed

to the door. Despite Roda's insistence, they wondered how it was possible that the person behind the door would be Peter, as he was in Herod's jail. One of them said something that made the hopeful hearts saddened: definitely they have killed Peter and it is his soul coming to us. They had the same illusion, even after they opened the door and saw Peter's handsome face. Peter came in and described what had happened to him: I was asleep in the jail. My hands were tied by two chains to the floor. Two guards were watching me. Some of them were behind the closed door of the jail. Suddenly I felt somebody was tapping on my shoulders. I saw two divine angels standing above me. They told me to stand up. The chains were loosened as I stood up. They told me to go with them. The guards were asleep. The doors automatically opened as we reached them. Now we were outside of the palace. That was the time the angels left me and I realized that I wasn't dreaming. They were there to save me*.

The following day, there was great uproar in the jail. The guards swore that Peter suddenly disappeared, but no one believed them. Eventually, Herod condemned all of the 16 guards to death. He could no longer remain in Jerusalem, and so he left the city.

Gradually, the disciples started to have missionary journeys to spread the message of Christ to all Jewish and non-Jewish people. Most of these journeys took place in the regions of Ancient Rome and they had to be clandestine journeys**. The Roman rulers, on one hand, had relations with Jewish rabbis and the wealthy, as they didn't want Christianity to spread among the Jews and, on the other hand, they were worried that believing in this new religion, which was slipping from the Jews' hands, may become widespread among the European people, as every divine, justice wanting religion could shake the foundation of their cruel reign.

* New Testament, messengers' testament/ chapter 12

** One of the apostles came to Iran; Saint Tadeous had travelled a lot in Mesopotamia and northwards to Armenia for many years to propagate God's religion of the time. Finally, he was martyred by some cruel ruler and was buried in a village near Chaldoran in Western Azerbaijan province. In the year 301 (A.C.), the king of Armenia converted to Christianity, and the people followed Saint Tadeous's way.

According to a narration related to the fifth Imam of the Shiite, Imam Mohammad Bagher: there were six nights in which there was blood under every stone taken from the ground; the night Aaron, Moses' brother was martyred; the night Yusha-ibn-Noon was martyred; the night Christ ascended to the heaven; the night Simon-ibn-Hamoon (Peter) was martyred; and the nights Imam Ali and Imam Hossein were martyred. (Kamel-az-Ziarat/ chapter: ما استدل به على قتل الحسين بن علي عليهما السلام في البلاد)

During these apostolic journeys, Saint Peter was arrested by Roman soldiers. This time they took him to the capital and to Nero, the Roman emperor, and condemned him to death. Saint Peter was crucified and martyred in the year 64 (A.C.), 31 years after Christ's ascension.

Several centuries passed since Peter's martyrdom. Melika, the daughter of one



The picture of Saint Peter being crucified, drawn in the year 1482 (AC)

of the rulers of Eastern Roman Empire, whose mother was a descendant of Saint Peter, was taken to Baghdad as a slave during the warfares of Muslims against Romans. Imam Hadi (pbuh), the tenth Imam of the Shiite, took this dignified lady to his household and adopted her as a daughter-in-law. Imam Hadi's son, Imam Hassan Asgari, became the Imam of the Shiite after Imam Hadi's martyrdom. The son of Imam Asgari and Lady Melika (Melika was referred to as Narjes at the Imam's home), is the 12th Imam of the Shiite and the last inheritor of the Messenger of Islam.

This blessed son is called Imam Mahdi (pbuh), the savior of humanity who is supposed to appear, before the Last Day, to establish divine reign and justice

throughout the world, and to abolish oppression and godlessness. According to Islamic beliefs, Jesus Christ will accompany Imam Mahdi at this final uprising. According to some narrations, Dajjal (anti-Christ), the arch-enemy of this sacred ultimate battle, shall be killed at the hands of Jesus Christ.

Second Scene

Five years passed since Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) had become the leader of Islam. The pressures of sanctions, brutality, torture, and murder upon the small and vulnerable society of Muslims was intensifying every day. The order to emigrate was announced. Yet, the question was: where to?

Prophet Muhammad said: You must go to Ethiopia. There's a just king there. After this order, Jafar-ibn-Abi-Talib, Imam Ali's brother, was chosen as the leader of the migrants; he was not in danger as his father had a special position in Mecca.

The people of Ethiopia were followers of Christianity. They were called "Nasrani" (Christian) at that time. Najjashi, the king, was also a Christian. The teachings of Christ had taught him to be just, not to be cruel, and to shelter innocent people who would come to him as refugees.

Muslims, who numbered fewer than a hundred, sailed to the Red Sea coast secretly. Some were single, and some had families accompanying them. As prophet Muhammad had predicted, Najjashi welcomed them and let them live freely there and worship God in their own religion.

Immigrants were in good conditions. Amr-Aas went to Ethiopia as the representative of the leader of the Quraish tribe to bring the Muslims back. He was renowned for his craftiness. So, first he went to the counselors of the King's Court and offered them bribes and gifts. Then, he went to Najjashi and after bowing down flutteringly, presented him with exotic gifts, and then started slandering the Muslim immigrants: these are stubborn, rebellious young men who have abandoned the religion of their ancestors and insist on their ignorance. The leaders of Quraish beg you respectfully to send these subversive elements back to Hijaz*. The bribed counselors sup-

* History of Islam's prophet; Ayatollah Abbas Safayi Haery. First volume.

ported him immediately to convince Najjashi to expel the Muslims. Surprisingly Najjashi said: they will be under my protection unless their guilt is proved to me; call them to come here. Knowing the manner of the Muslims, Amr-Aas wanted to solve the problem at this very first meeting. So he told Najjashi that those young men are so arrogant that they would not even bow down in the presence of Your Majesty.

Jafar, together with some other Muslims were brought in and saluted the King loudly. The courtiers said: why don't you bow down? Jafar replied: our prophet taught us not to bow down except before God. He also has said that in paradise you will be welcomed by salutation. So, we did salute you this way. Najjashi smiled at hearing this reply and asked Jafar about Islam. Jafar started describing the conditions of that "Age of ignorance": idolatry, necrophagia, cruelty and murder, renouncement of kindred ties, burying infant girls alive and harassing neighbors. He then added: Our prophet invited us to worship God, to be just, kind, pious, not to lie, not to take the orphans, possessions, to perform prayers and to pay Zakaat.

Najjashi, who was quite, asked: do you have anything in your mind about what your prophet has brought? Jafar, in a beautiful accent, recited some verses of the Sura Mary about Jesus Christ's birth and Mary's innocence and what Jews accused her of. Najjashi and Christian scholars present in the court were most impressed. Najjashi, with tears in his eyes, said: undoubtedly the source of what has been revealed to your prophet and Christ is the same. Now Amr-Aas had to employ his last trick. He cunningly told Najjashi that these people say that Jesus is not the Son of God. The monks and scholars raised their eyebrows and made noises of objection. Najjashi was now worried. He looked at Jafar and asked: what do you say about this? Jafar, Imam Ali's brother, fearlessly explained the Islamic belief: Jesus is God's servant, His messenger, His spirit, and a Word granted to Mary.*

The monks were not satisfied but Najjashi was pleased and said: this is the true belief. Consequently, Najjashi expelled Amr-Aas from his court with contempt and went on: I won't let you touch these young people even if

* History of Islam's prophet; Ayatollah Abbas Safayi Haery. First volume.

you offered me a mountain of gold. They will be in my protection as long as they wish*.

Third Scene

Friday, 29th of dey, 1357; January 19, 1979

It was the 40th day after “Aashura”. That day was very different from previous years. It was more than a year after people held “Arbaeen” demonstrations for martyrs. The number of people martyred for the victory of the revolution was increasing: Tabriz rose up for the martyrs of Qom; Yazd and Ahvaz and Jahrom for the martyrs of Tabriz; 20 cities for Yazd and Ahvaz and Jahrom; these demonstration continued until the 17th of Shahrivar when many people in Tehran were murdered, there was a demonstration for Tehran’s martyrs in Kerman, etc. Finally these courageous bloody incidents bore fruit: the Shah had to escape; three days before the next “Arbaeen”.

That day there was a different mood in the city. Even “Saint Sirkis Church” on Karimkhan Street enjoyed a higher spirit. Some were busy writing placards in Armenian and Persian languages. They showed them to their bishop to get approval. The first placard read: we want freedom, independence, and national and territorial integrity for Iran. Another read: There is constant alliance of the Iranian nation against East and West Imperialism.

All this enthusiasm was the result of resisting suppression and the Shah’s dependency on world powers, and suppression of the people for many years which affected all the people, whether Muslim or Christian. A modest, honest clergyman rose against this regime and all its powerful supporters, and became the leader of the Revolution. Some days before Arbaeen, Imam had sent a message to the people from exile in France that encouraged all Iranians to come out and struggle:

“In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful

* This incident was the first friendly circle between Muslims and Christians during the early period of Islam; it continued after the Hijra and spread Islam in Hijaz. In the Holy Quran, it was referred to as the friendliness and kindness of Christians and Muslims in Sura Ma’edeh, verse 82 as follows:

«وَلَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُمْ مَوَدَّةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصَارَىٰ ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَشِيسِينَ وَرُهَبَانَا وَهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ»

And indeed you will find the people saying “we are Christians”, the closest people in being friends with believers, because some of them are scholars and religious who don’t become godless.

It is the day of Arbäeen. Our awakened people have seen so many gainful Arbäeens. During these years, following more than 50 years of brutal kingdom of Pahlavi's dynasty, we have faced so many disasters and internecine barbarity; 50 years of bitter and painful memories; it got worse in the last two years, which made our brave nation to move against autocracy and colonialism.

Our martyrs followed the manner and behavior of the Holy Martyrs of Karbala. The recent Arbäeen of our brothers is the reflection of the Arbäeen of those brave men. Their pure blood put an end to Yazid's cruel reign. And our brothers' blood destroyed the brutal kingdom. This year's Arbäeen is extraordinary and unique; it is the national and religious duty of the people to walk and demonstrate enthusiastically in this Arbäeen.

Our great nation, throughout Iran, will bury this regime through their demonstrations. They will declare their opposition to the illegal "Royal Council" and their advocacy of the "Islamic Republic" again and again".

There were rivers of angry determined people in every street, joining one another in the streets, struggling to eradicate the Shah's regime as Imam had told them.

There were groups of demonstrators on the Arbäeen who shouted slogans wherever they went, and the rest of the people welcomed them and accompanied them. There were motivated Christian youth, carrying placards, who shouted slogans against the Shah's reign. They carried another interesting slogan apart from "down with Shah", it read: Christianity is our religion, our leader is Khomeini.

During Imam's presence in France, journalists, ordinary people, and Iranians in Europe kept meeting him and listening to his speeches. One day, four Iranian university students who were Armenian came to his temporary residence in Neauphle-Le Chateau village. There were journalists there, each asking a question. Then one of the Armenian students asked: what happens to Armenians if your revolution succeeds and you establish your Islamic regime? The Imam's kind look at this young Iranian-Armenian was the best reply.



Then he said: “Armenians living there, who have been living in Iran since ancient times have the same rights. After the revolution’s victory, all will be free and they will be treated with utmost justice”.

In Neauphle-Le Chateau village, Christians received a flower spray from the Imam at Christmas Eve. The Imam had asked what people usually give to each other as present, and the answer was “flowers”.

Eventually, after some 15 years, Imam Khomeini returned to Iran on February 1, 1979, so that the people would take the final steps to destroy the cruel regime in the presence of their brave leader. The biggest national welcome in history was there: Millions of ordinary people were waiting in Tehran streets to meet and welcome the Imam. There were also some dignitaries and representatives of different groups waiting at Mehr-Abad Airport. Mr. Khamenei was at the “welcoming headquarters”; he was in charge of the publicity Committee. Mr. Motahari had asked him to deliver a speech at the welcoming

* Imam’s Sahifeh, fifth volume.



ceremony*. The airplane landed, all were waiting to see the Imam. There were some Christian clergymen wearing special gowns, who stood near Mr. Khamenei; they were the representatives of Christians in Iran who wanted to express their feelings towards Imam Khomeini.

Fifteen days had passed after the victory of the Revolution and the Imam was still staying at the Alavi School in Tehran. Different groups of people came to meet the Imam and declare their loyalty to the Revolution. That day, Mr. Ardaak Manoukian, the Armenian bishop, together with the Armenians' Council of Caliphate, were guests of the Imam for some time. The Imam told them: "This movement, I hope, will benefit all religions, and minorities living in Iran. I know all stratas of the people in Iran, Muslims or non-Muslims, suffered during the reign of this Shah and his father. And we all know that Islam has always respected minorities. I respect them too. They are parts of our nation. I hope that the Just Islamic state will bring good for them too and that they live here in welfare, freely, and properly under the protection of Islam***".

* It was supposed that the Imam's arrival would be on Friday, 6th of Bahman. Thousands of people were waiting in Behesht Zahra (Tehran cemetery). Everything was ready for Imam's arrival and his speech. But Bakhtiar, the Shah appointed prime minister's communiqué, ordered the Shah's army to lay a siege at Mehr-Abad Airport. In Behesht Zahra, Mr. Beheshti delivered a speech for the angry people. Then Mr. Khamenei wrote a communiqué and read it for the people. In this communiqué, the people were asked to demonstrate the following day. That demonstration paved the way for the Imam's return. (The book "Names Description" by Hidayat-allah Behboudi).

** Imam's Sahifeh, sixth volume.



Fourth Scene

Everything was going well for the so-called “New Global Order” by the big powers, which were based upon cruelty and suppression, but then something happened that spoiled their calculations. In a country most dependent on foreign powers, a revolution came about contrary to all predictions and equations. During an age when it was supposed that religion had been forever put aside from politics, a religious revolution had succeeded to form a religious government. Finally, during the period when all had to connect to a big power to progress and stay powerful, a revolution happened and its slogan was independence from the East and the West; a regime was founded that was not dependent on the world powers, but in fact stood against them and questioned their legitimacy. The Revolution and its political order seemed so dangerous to the big powers that they impalpably allied to eradicate it. Coups, terrorism and disturbances bore no fruit. They then resorted to military action against this newly-founded regime. The agent for this plot was at hand; Saddam Hussein, a ruthless, power-seeking man, who had recently become the ruler of Iraq.

The imposed war against Iran began. The domestic conditions were unstable

and the army, saved from The Shah's suppression, was not in good form and so if the people would not fight and stand against the invasion, the enemy could succeed. The Iranian people however, kept their faith and stood against all powers.



It is natural that when a country is engaged in a long, extensive war, the young people go and fight. But what makes the imposed war on Iran different is the way that these young people see the war, how their families reflect on the sacrifices of their young, beloved ones and how a family who has lost their sons feel about them. These are the clearest manifestations of their outlook towards the war. Here is when the difference between a war caused by the arrogant powers and a defensive war on the basis of values and the valour of the martyrs manifests itself, such was the scene of the war in Iran in the 8 year-war and the magnificent scene of patient, resisting families who had lost their dearest ones.

The picture becomes touchingly more significant when it involves members of the small Christian minorities in the face of the martyrdom of their youth.

In the course of the war, there were some 48 martyrs, 105 wounded and 35 war prisoners from among the small Armenian –Christian minority. There were also some 30

Armenian men, women and children who died during air-attacks and bombings. The same kind of sacrifices were witnessed among the yet smaller Assyrian-Christian minority; more than 30 of them were martyred defending their country in the unjust,



unequal war imposed on the Iranian nation for they considered themselves as part of this oppressed nation and the war as a national question and they did whole - heartedly participated in the war effort. Apart from these efforts, the Armenian were also most active in the war's relief work; they did set up a headquarter for this purpose from the early days of the war under the supervision of their religious authority. They began this important task by issuing this statement:

Our dear fellow-Christians; as you know our beloved Iran is presently at war, a war that has been imposed on us. In these sensitive days all Iranian are selflessly engaged in the holy defence of our patriotic country.

We too, as all Iranians, have the duty to take part in the holy defence of Iran's territorial sovereignty, therefore it was decided that we also extend our financial assistance to the war efforts at this juncture. We are certain that our people will, as in the past, fulfill their duty of guarding the security and territory of Iran and shall generously give their help at this crucial moment.



Afterwards, the Armenian financial assistance went on and their caravans of material commodities were continuously sent to the war-front. On the other hand, as most of the Iranian-Armenians were skilled repairers and specialists in technical fields, they carried out effective service at the war-fronts as far as various equipments and machinery were concerned.

The 5th Scene

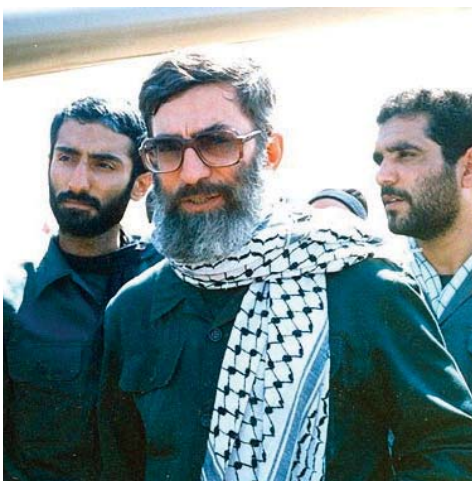
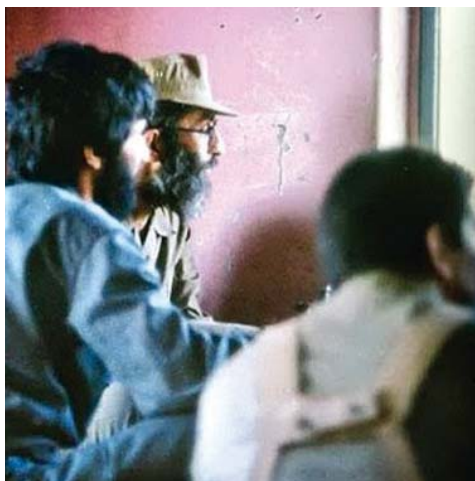
This was a most beautiful scene: an Armenian spiritual leader next to a Muslim spiritual leader, one was the arch-bishop of Tehran Armenian community and the one next to him, the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in other words, His Eminence Ardaak Manukian and Ayatollah Khamenei, they were talking very intimately. The Archbishop had brought with him a cheque representing the Armenian's financial assistance for the war effort. The president had warmly shaken hands with him saying: *Today I am meeting a Christian spiritual leader, and there is nothing between us but friendship, we both walk the an same path and towards the same goal. I never forget a scene at one of war-fronts in Ahvaz. I was speaking to our soldiers in one of the trenches. Then a soldier addressed me and said: I am Armenian, I really felt good that Armenians were fighting shoul-der to shoulder with their Muslim brothers. He fought so selflessly alongside Muslims; he never felt alone among so many Muslims. The Muslim soldiers also never felt that he was an outsider, both fought for the same goal.*



During those days of hardship the Iranian Armenians proved how they felt about the imposed war on their fellow-countrymen: at the beginning of the Christian year 1982, they decided not to celebrate the new year in respect for thousands of families whose sons had been martyred during the war as victims of Saddam Hussein's crimes. Ayatollah Khamenei was the first person who valued this significant action by the Armenians.

In his message concerning the Christian New Year he said:

I congratulate this new year, which commemorates the blessed birth of Messiah, Mary's son, the grand prophet of God, to all Christians in our country and to the true followers of Jesus Christ and wish the best of happiness and salvation by asking the Word and Spirit of God to help them. The new year begins at a time when millions of people who thirst for justice, peace and love to pray for the realization of Christ's promises in the future ...in our country the blood of many of our people including the Christians were shed in the defence of our land ...Now the Iranian Christians have decided not to celebrate the new year in sympathy with families who have lost their loved ones during this war ...I, in the name of the Iranian nation, express my appreciation for this kindness and insight and I hope that under our Islamic state and the rule of the Quran, the new year will be a year of happiness and progress for the Christian community, and I wish happiness and success for all Christians throughout the world.



In the early months of the war, Mr. Khamenei together with Dr. Chamran asked the Imam to allow them to visit the fronts, but this period was not long as, after the assassination attempt on his life, the Imam did not allow him to go to the war-fronts or even visit the provinces neighbouring Iraq.

This prohibition lasted until the adoption of the cease-fire communiqué, but, as there was another assault against Iran by a mercenary organization, he decided to visit the front. During these years, however, he was leading the people's resistance to continue to support the war-effort as a true soldier of the Imam and the revolution; Ayatollah Khamenei started his program of visiting the families of the war martyrs as from the year 1984 and in this very year, he visited a few families of the Christian martyrs on the occasion of the Christian New Year.

The Iranian Christians are mainly Armenians and Assyrians and there have been martyrs from among both communities. The Leader of the Islamic Republic has visited the families of either group on a yearly basis. In these visits the Leader has listened carefully to their emotional statements and grievances and has sympathized with them and prayed for them. Addressing the elders he has talked about Christianity and Christian history and with the young ones, he has asked them about their activities, their education and Jobs and our Christian people have truly appreciated these intimate, personal meeting with the Leader.

About this book

We in the Sahba Institute started a blessed endeavour to shed light on the leader's presence at the homes of the families of the Iranian martyrs, something that has continued for the last 25 years. There are many beautiful and valuable lessons to be enjoyed in the reports of these visits.

We named these series of books "Sunshine at the Landing Site of Angels"; that is in fact how the leader named these blessed homes. The first book in these series was titled "A Host from Heavens". The book narrates what went on in the homes of five martyr families in Mashhad, Khorasan province.

"Christ in the Night of Glory" is the title of the second book in these series. It is about the Leader's presence at the homes of the martyrs in the Iranian, Christian communities which contains many a sensitive, interesting and attractive point.

These books could only be published through the help and cooperation of “the section for people’s communications” at the Office of the Leader.

This section existed when the Leader was the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran and after the demise of the Imam, and the Leadership of Ayatollah Khamenei, it was named “the office for people’s communications” headed by one of his trusted former pupils, He, together with the faithful, hard-working staff in this office have selflessly tried to become the examples of what Imam Ali recommended in his famous letter to Maalik Ashtar; O Maalik, for those people who need you, do appropriate some of your time or hold special sessions to sit with the people so that they could express their complaints and opinions fearlessly and openly for I myself heard the Holy Prophet saying that the Islamic umma would not be a proper, flawless society if the down-trodden or ordinary people could not voice their wants fearlessly. (Nahjolblagha, Letter 53)

All our documents, observations and what has been recorded testify that from when the program for visiting the families of martyrs began, all attempts in this respect and the collection of documents and other materials, except for security matters, were all performed by this office in the best forms. Thousands of photos and documents and many hours of recordings and films were collected and arranged and classified in the best possible ways. The preparation and collection of such an immense archives were carried out by the staff of this office, not as official duties, but faithfully and sincerely for God’s sake. Here, we in the Sahba Institute, should express our thanks and appreciation to Sayyed Ali Moghaddam, the head of the Office for People’s Communications, as each time we had the chance to meet him, he did enhance our spiritual insight and gave us brilliant advice to carry out the work in serving Islam and the Islamic community. God bless all those who serve Islam and Muslims and may God Almighty bestow his blessings on the Leader of the Revolution to continue his exciting meetings with the families of martyrs.

In all the houses of martyrs we did witness the effects of the assistance and favours extended to them by the Martyrs Foundation and other charitable organizations; may God bless them to further their good work.

Apart from the available documents and records, we had extensive conversa-

tions with the members of the martyr families in order to obtain information about the martyrs, their opinions and their ways of life prior to the meetings with the Leader. We are most grateful that almost all of the families welcomed us in very intimate atmosphere and freely talked about their martyrs.

Some three years before the publication of the present book, we found out that someone had bought many copies of our previous books concerning the Leader. The name of the purchaser was Hamlet Toumanian, obviously an Armenian. We contacted him and it was the basis for a good friendship. Mr. Toumanian, 40 years of age, is a grand master of chess. He had already studied all our books and had even distributed them among his Armenian and Muslim pupils. All this showed that he was a great enthusiast of the Leader and the Islamic Revolution. All this led to his becoming our advisor in the preparation of this book and our guide and consultant about the Armenian community and coordinator of the interviews. He was also kind to write down the story of one of those visits at the home of an Armenian family. We do hope that our friendship and cooperation with him will last for a long time.

Although the narrations about these visits are in the forms of story-telling, they are all based on documents, records and recordings. This is important, as some years ago, a newspaper published an account about one of such visits by the Leader which was totally a figment of the writer's imagination about a martyr whose name was not mentioned! So, it is worth noting again that all accounts published in this book are absolutely documented.

Our narrations are arranged in a chronological order, that is, starting with the first martyr in the war to the end; this way it will be noted that there were Armenian (and Assyrian) martyrs throughout the war. Therefore there were meetings with the families of the martyrs both during the presidency and leadership of the Leader.

Unfortunately in the case of some visits there is not sufficient records, photos or recording; therefore we had to base our reports in these cases on our interviews with the family members. In a few cases we could not find any information or addresses of the martyrs. We hope that we will be in a position to get more information about such cases for future publications.

We are indebted to our dear Armenian fellow-countrymen who acted as liaisons with the Armenian families of martyrs: Mr. Avanes Karapetian (the brother of martyr vigen Karapetian), Mr. Varuzh Yasaian (martyr's brother), Mrs. Rubina Madadian (wife of the martyr Nourik Mahmoudi), Mr. Razmik Tourusian (martyr's cousin), Dr. Varuzhan Babumian (martyr's son), Mr. Vartan Davidian (of the Armenian Khalifate Council), Mr. nerva Nersesian (martyr's nephew) and Miss Ariyela Karapetian (niece of martyr Karapetian and martyr Davvidian).

We are equally indebted to our Assyrian fellow-countrymen who acted as liaisons with the Assyrian families of martyrs:

Mr. Yonan Bet-Kalya (the Assyrian representative at Islamic National Assembly, Mr. Peter Lazar (cousin of martyr Ordushahi). His Reverend Moghaddas-Nia (of the Evangelical, Assyrian Church in Tehran) and the mother of martyr John-George John-David. Finally our special thanks go to: The editors of the Armenian newspaper, Alik, the staff at the Documents center of Martyrs Foundation and their Public Relation Office, The Military Office for Martyrs Information (esp.Colonel Majid Sheikhian), District 2 of Tehran Municipality, the internet site Saajed (Mr.Hussein Salesi) and The Urumia Association of Assyrians (Mrs. Dnial).

We thank God Almighty to be able to breathe in an atmosphere perfumed by the breaths of martyrs and the scent of the supreme Leader. We hope that God may help us to continue our humble efforts in the path of our martyrs.

Sahba Institute

December 2014

Chapter 1

The year 1980

One

The good news of coming back

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The Family of **martyr** Galust Babumian

Visit Date: 1989/12/28



The Photo of

Martyr Galust Babumian

Martyred during Ahvaz Aerial Bombing

Martyred on 1980/10/9

Galust says good-bye to his colleagues at the Oil Company and carrying a file of official document goes out of his office; the company building is almost deserted for most of the native residents have fled out of fear. Galust had been with the Oil Company for some 30 years at the Computer Department. He was most active during the days of Revolution and workers strikes and now at this critical juncture his presence and experience were crucial for the administration of the company and the continued flow of oil for the country. He surely missed his old mother, his wife and his son and daughter, Varuzhan and Talin. They had to leave the city some 20 days earlier. He had sent them to his brother's house in Tehran when the war started. The previous evening he had telephoned his mother who insisted that he should return to Tehran as soon as possible: "My dearest son, the Iraqis will capture Ahvaz in a short time, and then you can't imagine what they will do to you. Those Iraqi Baathists are not like the Iranian Muslims. Yesterday our neighbor Zahra Khanum said that these people were the descendants of those who murdered Imam Hussein and Abolfazl, his brother. My son, you are not a military man, so you must come to Tehran soon." Obvious motherly sentiments! And he had said: "Okay I'll come to Tehran soon." Indeed he was telling the truth as he had been ordered to take some important documents that very evening by train. But the mother did know that he was going to Tehran for one

day only and had to return to Ahvaz the following day as the refinery in Ahvaz was under constant fire and he had to be there to help. He had somehow comforted his mother but how about the children? Varuzhan was about 10 years of age and Talin was only 6. How sweet she was, as when speaking, he would mix up Persian and Armenian words in a most pleasant, childish way. After his phone call, he picked up the children's photos that were in a frame.



Tears came into his eyes but when he watched the television narrating what was going on during the 17th day after the war and showing columns of fire and smoke above the refinery installation, he was upset and angry and became more determined to continue his work in Ahvaz after the one-day visit to Tehran.

The train station was extraordinarily crowded: The war-strikes, frightened people who were leaving their own city with sacks and bundles on their backs and shoulder, and the soldier and officers and people's militia who had arrived to fight the invading enemy all moving in and out the station. Galoust had not yet got on the train when he heard loud sirens and then he saw an Iraqi plain circling

the sky. There were no anti-aircraft guns in the city and so the plane flew over the people and dropped his bombs.

Galoust only saw some black spots coming down from the fighter-plane; three bombs exploded in front of the station. Galoust realized that he could not move, the very last images in his eyes were the picture of his children Varuzhan and Talin and his wife and his mother.



The people wandered about like locusts, the train which was to take them to Tehran was in flames and the station building was half-destroyed.

The first person who noticed Galoust found out that his face and the upper parts of his body were all burnt out. He was horrified, he had never seen such sights, he did not want to believe that he was murdered. He said: oh, dear Muslim! We'll soon take you to hospital, God willing you'll be all right. My name is Qassem, what's yours, do you hear me? But Galoust could not utter a word.

Blood covered him and the pavement about him. Qassem tried to find out his identity by searching his clothes and his pockets. Before everything he torched a cross around his neck and the identification card in his pockets. "Oh, My God,

you're a Christian, Mr. Galoust? And cried out: May God damn Saddam Hussein!" Varuzhan and his uncle were waiting for the arrival of Ahvaz train at the Tehran Railway Station, but no train appeared. They started asking the officials about this delay and found out that the Ahvaz train station had been bombed and so no train would arrive from Ahvaz. The 10 year-old Varuzhan could never imagine that he would never see his father again. Finally they decided to go home and wait for a phone-call from Galoust himself. But the telephone never rang till midnight. The children and their mother had fallen asleep. Hasmik suddenly started crying and shouting in her sleep. She had a nightmare of a plane flying low about to hit her and the children. She was sweating badly and the frightened children held each other's hands. The uncle's wife and the grand-mother brought her some sugared-hot water and tried to comfort her. It was hours into morning when the telephone rang. Hasmik put her hand on her heart and the uncle answered the phone. And they all began to cry and wail! Hasmik was stunned and she kept calling her husband until the following day: Galoust, Galoust, Galoust...surprisingly Galoust in Armenian Means "the good news of coming back" but he did not return.

Later she said: "From then onwards I had to be both a mother and a father to my children and the motivation of children's education gave me strength. Galoust's mother and brothers helped me tremendously and supported the children". Galoust's mother, since that fatal year, had always spent Christmas at his tomb for some 9 years, but she passed away a few weeks ago before the 10th year of her son's martyrdom and was let to rest next to her son.

The year 1989 began almost 7 months after the demise of Imam Khomeini and still a sad atmosphere ruled throughout Iran, The Armenians say: even we as Christians cannot believe The Imam's departure; We are all heart-broken by seeing the young combatants who have just come back from the war-fronts; anyway, we don't celebrate Christmas this year too, because of Galoust's mother.

The visit

It was Thursday when we were informed that some high official would visit us if we happen to be home in the evening. I informed Galoust's brother and my sister's husband and asked to come to my place in the afternoon. Varuzhan and Talin were not happy at the news as they were very busy with their exams. Var-

uzhan is studying medicine and Talin has high-school examinations. They both study well as they know how much importance I attach to their education. When Varuzhan succeeded in his medical studies and became a medical student, I felt that all my efforts in the absence of Galoust had born fruit. I was spiritually elevated and congratulated him. He is also very proud of his success and says that in the process of his acceptance, there was no discrimination between the sons of Muslim or Armenian martyrs. Talin went to a friend's house to study together and Varuzhan went to his college as he has to pass a microbiology exam.

We are impatiently waiting for our guest. We had already heard that the President had visited some Armenian homes in previous years. We guessed that our guest this evening may also be the President. But we found out our guest was the same President who also had now become the Leader after the Imam's demise. I was now very upset for the absence of the children, for if they know this, they would have certainly stayed at home to meet him.

Ayatollah Khamenei arrives and says '[salaam](#)' to all of us and then he, together with Galoust's brother and my brother-in-law and some of his companions sit down in our guest-room.



Name of us is able to say anything and the Leader, sensing this, starts speaking and asks: *Is this gentleman the father of your martyr?*

And he points at Galoust's photos on the wall. As most Armenian martyrs were young soldiers, The Leader thinks that this older man must be the father of the martyr. I say calmly: No, this is the photo of martyr himself.

I see, says the Leader; *he is the martyr*.

Yes, I say.

_ Are you the wife of the martyr?

_ Yes.

It was so difficult for me to speak. I had never spoken to an ordinary Muslim cleric but now the highest spiritual authority is sitting in front of me. I was standing and I intended to go to the kitchen to bring some tea. But the Leader does not allow this and says: *please sit down here*.

I say "thank you" and sit down on the couch on the right side of the Leader. I have strange mixed feelings: of happiness, of shame and of pride. I wish Galoust would witness this scene, oh, I am sure he sees us.

_ How are you, lady?

_ Fine, thank you.

_ Where was Mr. Galoust martyred?

_ Ahvaz

_ When was he martyred?

_ 17th of the month of Mehr, that is, three weeks after the war began.

_ Was he employee there?

_ Yes, he was.

I loved to talk about Galoust's character and morals but I can't, oh, if my heart was not beating so fast.

The Leader then asks about the relationship of the two persons, sitting next him, to the martyr.

We answer that one is the martyr's brother and the other is his brother-in-law.

Then the Leader says: *May God bless your martyr and make this New Year and the birth-anniversary of Jesus Christ most pleasing to all your family.*

We all thank him.

The Leader then says: [please tell me about your husband's occupation.](#)

He was an employee of the Oil Company in Ahvaz and he was martyred there.

He then asks about the occupation of Galoust's brother and the brother-in-law and then turns to me and enquires whether I own my own house and also about the children. The Leader is most pleased that they both are students and that they follow their education enthusiastically. From the corner of my eyes, I look at Galoust's photo and smile.

[_ Your children, are they sons or daughters?](#)

_ One son and one daughter.

[_ Aren't they around?](#)

_ No, we weren't told that you would honour us with your visit; they would have definitely stayed at home.

[_ You're right, it is the rule not to give exact information.](#)

I smile and think to myself that if we were informed as to who our guest is, then all of our friends, relations and neighbours would have come to our house! I further explain that both my children are at present very busy with taking exams.

[_ What does your son study?](#)

_ Medicine.

[_ I hope that he will succeed to become a good doctor, and your daughter?](#)

_ She is at high school.

The Leader looks around the rooms and says: [Here I don't see anything showing that it is your New Year.](#)

Galoust's brother explains: Our mother has recently passed away.

[_ I see. My God Almighty, through his boundless mercy, bless all those who are gone and may God reward you and your family.](#)

I then go to the kitchen to pour some tea and I hear that the Leader is talking with the brothers about the New Year, about the Armenian community, our churches and our representatives in the Parliament.

It is obvious that the Leader tries to create a warm, friendly atmosphere because he felt that it was not easy for us to say things. I notice that Mr. Khamenei's information and knowledge about Armenians and about Christianity is far deeper than many of us!



I come out of the kitchen carrying the tray of tea-cups but one of Leader's companions takes it from my hands and serves all in the room. I bring another photo of Galoust and give it to Mr. Khamenei. In this photo Galoust is very well-dressed and smiling.

I say: This is another photo of our martyr.

_ I see, what is his full name?

_ Galoust Boboumian.

_ What age was he?

_ Forty-eight. He started his job with the Oil Company at the age of 18.

Therefore he had worked there for some 30 years.

After I utter these words, I feel as if I was choked, I don't want my weeping to be seen. So, I go into the kitchen pretending I was going to bring something to serve my guests. Therein I allow my eyes to be wet with tears.

On the Leader's side, the conversation is about the Armenian bishop and the differences between the ceremonies of Armenians and the Assyrian Christians.

I am waiting to calm down but before that the Leader says: [Well, tell this lady to](#)

come and sit with us for a while, we must be shortly leaving, but this lady constantly goes into the kitchen! Tell her we're about to leave.

Quickly I gather myself together. I go back. The Leader has drunk the tea together with a piece of cake, I say I went to bring them some fruits but he asks me to please sit down and adds: We don't want to be served. The purpose of our visit was to sit down with you for a few moments to relieve you of the grief caused by your husband's sacrifice to give up his life for this country's ideals. I should truly extend my condolences to you. Our visit should serve this purpose. You should not be troubled to serve us.

I, together with Galoust's brother and my brother-in law are all most impressed by Khamenei's simplicity and humility.

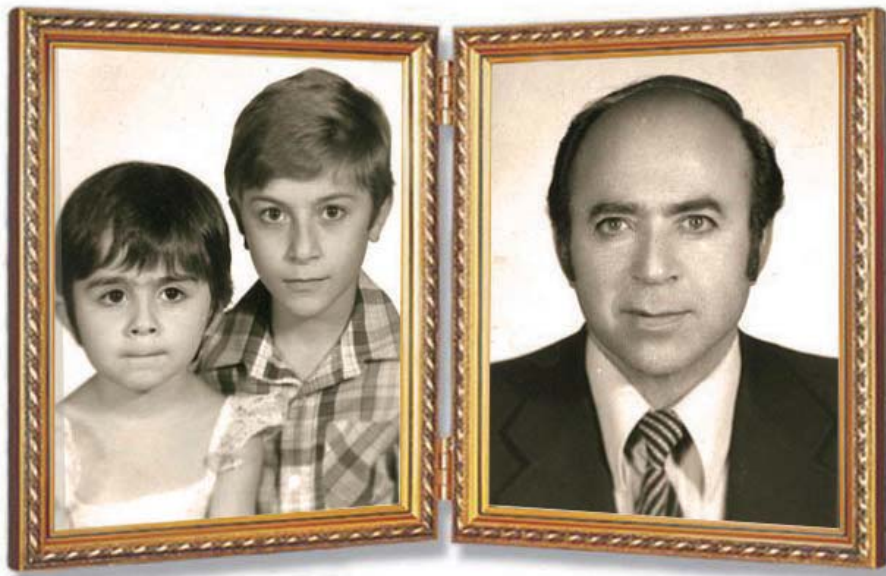
The Leader and people present in the room were talking about the churches throughout Iran. Mr. Khamenei tells us about his visit of our church in Jolfa, Isfahan. He says: I visited the Armenian Church in Jolfa. It was in the year 1958 when I travelled to Isfahan from Qum. I visited two churches there .One of the two churches was huge and very beautiful; its gong was located in the middle of the yard. In the smaller church a burial ceremony was being held. Two other theological students also accompanied me. Before entering the church, we asked a church servant whether we were allowed to go in and he said "no problem!" Of course people there could tell that we, wearing turbans, were not Armenians! They treated us in a most friendly way. We stayed there till the end of the ceremony. There are many churches in this city.

Galoust's brother explains: The exact number of churches there is 12 and the big one you mentioned is the Central Church.

Finally the Leader says: Well, lady, may God give you more patience and reward and success in your life so that you will be in the position to bring up your children and turn them into valuable, efficient and skillful persons. I hope these children could be examples of serving our country and may, in showing affection and love towards you, take the place of their father, God bless you all. These words and prayer by the Leader impresses me and I say "Amen" in my heart.

The Leader then rises from his chair and says good-bye to all of us. His behaviour and manners were so simple and intimate that now I was no more anxious and

my heart had calmed. Now I wished that this visit could have gone on for hours. I wished I could tell him more about Galoust's character and Varuzhan's similarity to his father but there was no more time as he was leaving when such thoughts went through my head. At the door I thank him many more times. I wanted to go out of the house following him but the Leader's companions tell me not to, because they do not want to attract attention. After the Leader's departure, we were all silent for a while as we could not believe that, a few minutes ago, the highest spiritual authority was drinking and conversing intimately in our house. I take out a small photo of Galoust from my purse and gaze at it for a few minutes. Now I'm only wondering what to say to my children when they came home.



Varuzhan comes home about 11 p.m. I tell him: How are you, doc.

- _ Do you know what you missed this evening?
- _ What's happened, mum?
- _ Didn't I tell you we are receiving a guest this evening.
- _ Well, what could I do when we have difficult exams. Anyway, who were the guests?
- _ You won't believe it, Mr. Khamenei was here in person. I was heart-broken you were not present. I don't think you'll ever meet him so close.

He looks at me in wonder. I think whatever he had studied flew out of his mind.
But he comes to me and embraces me.



Dr Varuzhan Babumian, Son of the martyr - October, 2014

Two

Meeting

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The Family of **Martyr** Yermi Yagoub

Visit Date: 2002/12/8



The Photo of

Martyr Yermi Yagoub

Martyred during Ahvaz Aerial Bombing

Martyred on 1980/10/9

“Oh, father, father, father, my dear kind, selfless father, everyone tells me how a wonderful, good person you were.

Why don't you come back to me, when I have become paralyzed in your absence? Don't you want to know how I am, how I miss you. Oh father, can you hear me at all? Perhaps you're just sitting motionless in that photo-frame and watch tear-drops falling down from your daughter's eyes?

Your daughter had just finished her university studies in the field of architecture and had just passed the age of twenty when this evil accident happened to her. All limbs in the right side of my body are numb. If a needle is pierced into these areas, I won't feel it. I never know how this happened, no, even the best specialists do not know.

Only Raam-Il, my elder brother, who had telephoned mother from aboard, had said: “It's because of her constant thinking and grief about our martyred father, that is the root-cause of her illness.” Some doctors are of the opinion that such an illness could only be the consequence of intense psychological suffering and chronic nervousness. Well, if all this be true, how can I stop thinking about my father? Thinking about a father whose name, after 21 years, is still on the lips of all Assyrians of Iran as a great, selfless martyr. Almost all of our families know about my peculiar illness and many come to meet me but I am not in the mood

to talk to them. There's only one person whom I'd like to meet, I just want him to come back alive, to talk to me, to ask about my health, to tell me about our common memories and to comfort me. But my mother says: it is impossible, so don't talk about it anymore!

I am sitting in my wheel-chair with a photo of my father in my hands; I am complaining about my father's absence. These days when I have to sit in a wheel-chair, my desire to see him again is more intense than ever. A few days ago I happened to hear the loudspeakers echoing the voice of people taking part in the Moharram Mournings concerning the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. A man was reciting some poems about Ruqaya, the daughter of the Imam and in it he kept repeating: oh, father, father, father! When I heard this, I cried and wept loudly and addressed my father saying: You left us; you never thought that your daughter needs a father!

I was only two- months old when my father was martyred. I, my mother and my brother and sister were in Tehran and my father was working in Ahvaz. It was the early days into the war and Ahvaz was being bombarded vehemently by the Iraqi aggressors. My father was an electrical engineer in charge of the Ahvaz General Department of Electricity. Most employees of this Department had already left Ahvaz but my father believed that he should stay there and serve the people. He said that now the people needed him more than before. Although he was the head of the Department, he used to go to his office at 7a.m. and worked there as an ordinary employee till midnight. He did not have the time to come to Tehran and see his new-born baby. He only had asked mother to name the baby 'Rodrina'.

On 27th of February, which was a Thursday, he was near his office when Iraqi jet-fighters dropped numerous bombs on the city. He lies on the ground but one of the the bombs explodes not far from him; he is lit by several shrapnel pieces. When people take him to hospital, he is still alive. Dr. Alavi, a friend of his, tries to save him by a quick surgical operation. Before the operation, my father had managed to say to him: Take care of my children and tell them I love them very much. This was the very last sentence uttered by my father when he was still in this world.

The Visit

When I met that gentleman, I was a little less than 9 years of age. It was Christmas Eve. He had come to congratulate us on the occasion of our new year and hear our words about father. When he arrived, only my mother and I were at home. Ramona and Il were away. I don't remember where they had gone. I had seen him many times on the television. Yes, he was then the President, Ayatollah Khamenei. I don't remember much about this meeting, I only remember that I sat very close to him as he sounded to me as a kind father. He touched my hair in a loving manner. But later two photos taken at this visit were given to me; these photos revise the dim memory of that evening. To me it feels like it was my own father touching my hair.

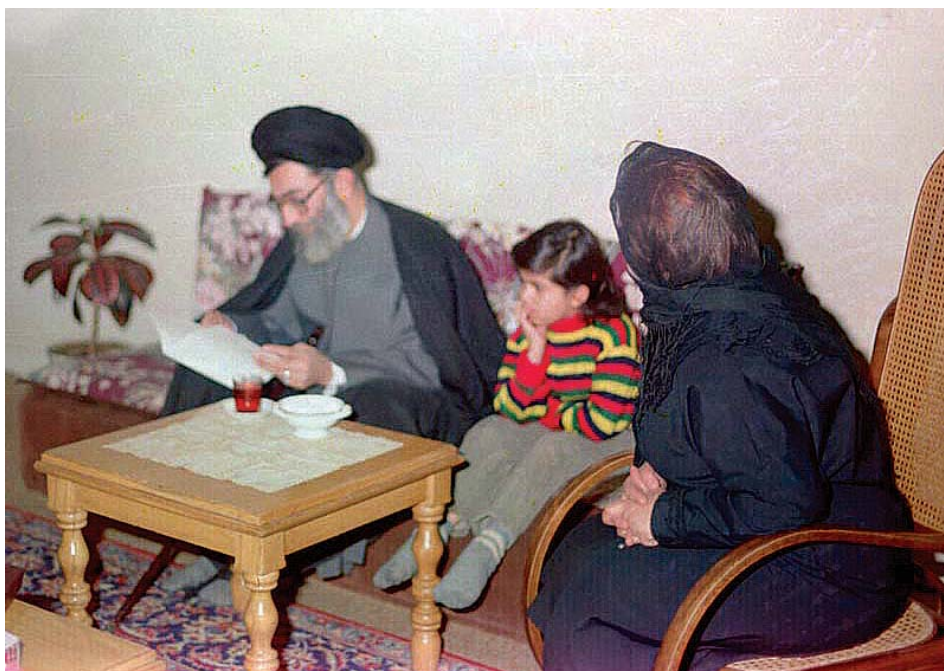


Now the grown-up daughter of the martyr, who is badly ill, kept saying that she wants to see the same gentleman who met her when she was a child. But the mother tells her the gentleman is now the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran and that he is too busy and has no time to come and meet you for a second time. I kept insisting and finally my mother telephoned the Leader's Office shamefully

and explained the situation and her request. Some weeks pass by and there is no news, so my mother said: I told you, the Leader is too busy to come to meet you; you must stop awaiting it. But I said I feel in my heart that he will come to us one of these winter evenings.

All of a sudden, this morning, the telephone rang, some people would like to come and see you this evening. In my wheel-chair I go around thinking that these visitors are the representatives of the Leader to tell him how you are. Despite all these thoughts, I chose a beautiful scarf and pretty overcoat. My mother is really anxious for she does not know how to deal with my hopes; she raises her hands and says: O God, let my daughter not be disappointed! Now the door-bell is rung, some people come in; they are talking in their walkie-talkies in low voices. Then one of them turns to me and says: No, we are not here to enquire after your health and report it to the Leader, because the Leader will be here in one or two minutes!

I don't hear the man anymore; my heart is beating fast and my eyes are full of tears. I look at my father's photo and say to him: thank you, now I know you're always thinking of me.





Just before Ayatollah Khamenei's arrival, my elder sister, Ramona who is a physiotherapy doctor embraces and kisses me. She is truly happy because when Mr. Khamenei visited us for the first time, she was not at home and since she has always been very sorry.

She used to tell me: you're lucky, you sat next to him and he touched your hair. But now after some 13 years she will have the chance to see him so closely.

Our mother's feeling may not be described. She still does not believe that Ayatollah Khamenei, despite all his preoccupations, is visiting us for the second time. No, she can't believe it. She is grasping her cross and thanking Holy Mary. The moment Ayatollah arrives, the spectacle of each person in the room is most interesting: my mother has her hands on her chest and has tears in her eyes, my aunt has her hands stretched down and stands in a very respectable manner and I, I rise up in my wheel-chair with great difficulty but I am happily smiling.

My mother says to the Leader: We are most indebted for the favour of your visit. The leader looks around and says: *Well, Well, is this the girl who is a little unwell?*



It is the first time in two weeks that I am standing in my wheel-chair; I have some extra strength at this moment. My mother says 'yes' to the Leader's question and I say 'Hello' to him.

For a few moments he looks at me kindly and smiles and says: *God willing, you're better?*

And I say: Yes, I'm alright.

And he says: *praise be to God, I hope you'll always be well.*

I again think of my father and say in my heart: Oh, Father, you don't know how cheerful I was when he asked about my health; I wish you were here too, perhaps you're seeing all this.

Ayatollah also asks about your sister and then enters the sitting-room. My mother sits next to the Leader and I ask my sister to take my wheel-chair just opposite him. The Leader says: *We decided to come and see you all as well as visiting your sister, If God will, He shall grant you patience and rewards, tolerance and strength of heart.*

Then the Leader asks my mother how it was that your daughter had this sort of paralysis.



And my mother describes the circumstances concerning the deterioration of my health and I listen to their conversation attentively.

My mother is a veteran nurse, a first-rate nurse in many hospitals; it was in fact in one of these hospitals when my father fell in love with her, with Miss Rouny Beth Oshana, my mother.

My mother did not abandon her job as a nurse even after my father's martyrdom and continued her work during the 8 years of war and constantly took care of the wounded in the war who were in need of special attention. And after the war she continued her work as an instructress in nursing cares in order to pass on her experience to the younger generation of Iranian nurses.

After my mother's explanation of her continuing good work and the hardships she faced while bringing up children at the same time, the Leader who had attentively listened to my mother, said: *Well, I hope and pray that, God willing, your daughter will be in perfect health and that God Almighty will do away with your grief and worries. Of course such hardships in life are divine tests. Surly divine tests are not like worldly experiences.*

The worldly tests are like examinations in schools and universities; in these

tests the aim is to find out if the student has properly studied the relevant courses. But in divine tests there is another dimension: they help you to get to know yourselves better and to find out about one's true quality and essence, and the strength and capability in one's mind and heart; these divine tests somehow resemble sports events: they include both exercise and tests; I mean that as far as divine tests are concerned, if you don't lose your patience and your trust in God, you shall go one step forward spiritually. This is the essence of divine tests.

Certainly there are some people who never learn any lessons from such tests and events and so they never get any closer to God. They may suffer the same as the faithful, but the faithful have their trust in God to comfort them and relieve them. That is the difference. The unfaithful have suffered the same but have gained nothing spiritually. Such tests happen for all people, in different forms. Your daughter has faced one form and for others, some different forms. There are people who suffer no physical defect or shortcoming, but they are involved in so many spiritual, financial problems or face circumstances that put intolerable pressures on their minds, hearts and nerves; that's why some of these people commit suicide. Some of such people abandon their ordinary lives in



wilderness and absolute confusion. Such situations are much harder than those faced by the faithful. When you look at the lives of people, you realize that everyone suffers from same problems.

There are others with physical defects but have no financial ability to treat them, or cannot purchase the necessary medicaments and some people who have no one to care for them or nurse them.

When Ayatollah Khamenei mentions those who have no nurses, he points at my mother as a good example and I am so proud to have such a caring mother. I was always proud of my mother but now, after the Leader's comments, I feel most delighted to have such a mother. Then the Leader turns to me and says: *I came to see you many years ago; do you still remember that meeting?*

I reply: oh, yes, yes, that day was the happiest day in my life.

How old were you then? He asks.

My illness has also made it difficult for me to utter words properly but I try hard and answer: Eight or nine.

The Leader shakes his head and says: *Yes, that's life, and time flies, yes it was some 13 years ago when I visited you for the first time.*

The Leader, who has an alert mind, does not want to only talk to me, so he turns



to my sister and talks to her for a few minutes about her profession and later he asks my aunt about the Assyrians living in Hamedan province. A little boy is sitting next to the Leader; he is his grandson who has accompanied him in this visit. It's very sweet to me to watch him next to his grandfather.

The Leader then asked my mother about Churches, the Christian-Assyrian religion and the number of Assyrian community in Tehran and after my mother's comments, he turns to me again and asks: *Do you have any pain, my daughter?* And I say: "No, I have no pains," as I meant to relieve a father from worrying.

_ How did you learn to walk by the aid of crutches?

My mother explains that she has no senses in one hand and therefore she cannot manage to walk on crutches.

The Leader adds: *I see, your right hand has no sense exactly like my right hand!* He then raises his hand and smiles and asks: *Do you like to hear the story about this?* Yes, of course, I say.

The Leader then gave us this account about that accident*: *After that assassination attempt when a bomb placed in a tape-recorder exploded in front of me, the right hand became paralyzed and for some long time it did not move at all and it was swollen all over. Later on I noticed that there was some movement in my right shoulder. The doctor told me to try to move my hand when walking. Gradually the space for movement became a little wider. After some time I found out that I could bend my hand from the elbow. Those days my first daughter was born by the Grace of God. This girl was most precious to me and later she used to come to me at the Office of the President. I noticed that I could embrace her even with this senseless hand. Once my doctor saw me when I was holding her. He encouraged me to do this more often and said: This child will help your hand to become O.K.! He continued: When you hold this girl, because you love her, you do bear the heaviness. This was to be true, so I frequently held her in my arms and carried her here and there. Gradually my right arm became stronger. Now my hand, from the wrist to the fingers has no sense, it only looks like a hand! Very little things it might perform. Well, it's a hand any way! And I recommend to you that you could also do things through exercise, practice and patience.*

* After the assassination attempt on Mr. Khamenei, he lost senses in his right hand and suffered a long time because of severe injuries.



From the moment the Leader mentioned his sufferings after the assassination attempt and his inability to do things with both hands, I lowered my head, looked at the carpets on the floor while deeply impressed with his account of the incident. The Leader asks me again whether I have any pains anywhere in my body and I say that I have some pain in my right shoulder. He then prays for me and says: *I too bore intolerable pains. For a few years I did have very severe pains. There are all sorts of pains. I hope and I pray to God that your pains will lessen and we will be witnessing your complete health.*

He then starts drinking his cup of tea which Ramona had brought while he was talking.

After drinking his cup of tea, he enquires about my maternal uncle who was a skillful surgeon. He was such a noble, gentle person: The Assyrian community elected him by some 99 percent of votes to be our representative in the Parliament (Majlis) as well as in the Constitutional Assembly of Experts.

The Leader says: *This Mr. Beth Oshana who was in the Majlis was your brother?*

My mother says proudly: Yes, he was my brother!



The Leader says: [yes I knew him, he was such a knowledgeable, kind gentleman, yes I was acquainted with him.](#)

Towards the end of the visit, the Leader said: [well, the purpose of our visit was to extend our affections once again to the family of a respected martyr and to you all. And this time it was meant to see this daughter who has fallen ill thinking of her valued father. I again pray to God to relieve your pains, to grant you more trust in God, and more self-reliance to cope with existing problems, and if ever, there was anything I could do to help, please contact our Office personnel. We are always at the service of the martyr's families.](#)

When the Leader uttered these words, we realized that it was time to say farewell. My mother asks the Leader if I could be sent abroad for treatment. The Leader says that we have highly specialized hospitals in Iran, but if your problem is not solved in these hospitals, we would certainly help you go abroad.

Now Ayatollah Khamenei is gone and I have mixed feelings of happiness and sadness. I am happy that my mother, sister and aunt were so delighted to meet the Leader. And I'm sorry that he's gone. He was as kind to me as my father. It's only half an hour that he left us and I'm already missing him badly.

Three

The First martyr

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The Family of **Martyr** Zurik Moradian

Visit Date: 2011/2/17



The Photo of

Martyr Zuric Moradian

Martyred in Piranshar, West Azarbaijan

Martyred on 1980/10/11

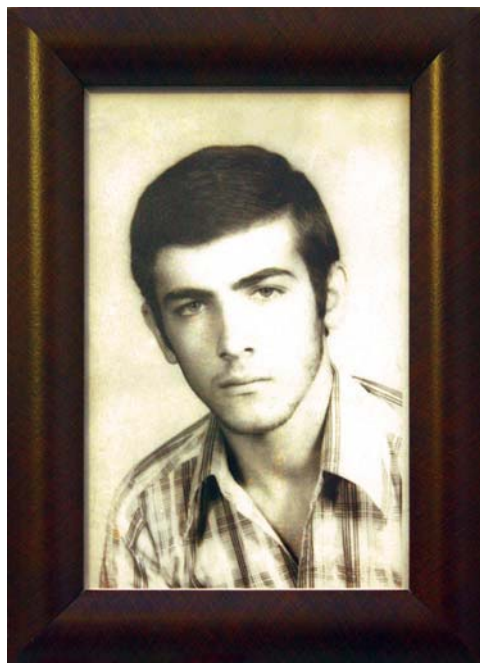
My husband and I never preferred sons to daughters. We believed that children were the gifts of God whether boys or girls. Of course, as a mother I wish I could have children of both sexes. This did not realize until 1960. Up to then I had given birth to 3 daughters. Now the fourth child was a boy; a handsome boy like her sisters. We named him Zurik.

I never found out if my husband loved him more than others because he never showed it. I found out about his depth of feelings for Zurik when, immediately after his martyrdom, he had a heart attack from which he never recovered. Other heart attacks followed and he was bed-ridden at home for some 16 years before he passed away.

I and my four daughters loved Zurik immensely. He was a very smart and studious boy. In all his years of education, he was always the best student in his classes. He was successful in the university entrance examinations. He even won a scholarship to go and study abroad. But he did not go.

He said: I don't want to go abroad, I want to first put on a soldier uniform and serve my own country.

But his father said: I never allow my only son to be a soldier. He, however, managed to obtain our consent for doing his military service. He started his military service some 9 months before Saddam Hussein invaded Iran.



He finished his 3-month training course in Shahroud and he then telephoned to say that he is to go to Urumia by train to continue his service.

When he was going to Urumia, we were nearing Easter and so I together with his father and sisters went to this city; we carried fruits, various nuts and painted eggs to celebrate Easter with him. But we could only see him once as the soldiers had to be on some sort military emergency. So we had to go back. But a few days later we received a letter from him. He wrote: Thank you very much mother, my friends in our garrison ate everything you had brought, even the coloured eggs! I thank you again. After a while he was transferred to Piranshahr, very near the Iraqi border. His father who was a truck-driver often went there to meet him. And Zurik, when he came to us on leave, told us how popular he was with his Muslim comrades.

He was in his 9th month of service when the war started.

The Baathist government of Iraq (the Baath Party was established in Iraq on the basis of nationalism and racism and anti-Islamism; the party came to power through a military coup) invaded Iran. It was then that I began to worry about him.



I knew he was a courageous person and would volunteer for any hard task; I said to myself that he would most probably be a martyr, some 15 days after the war, I had a bad dream: I saw that a bullet had hit his knee, but he said 'It's nothing important, mother.' I screamed and woke up.

In the morning I went out shopping. I noticed that a soldier was talking to some of our Muslim neighbours. I was thinking of Zurik and so I prayed that God will keep these soldiers alive for their parents.

At that moment our neighbours pointed at me and the soldier said: Salaam, excuse me, are you Zuric Moradian's mother.

First I was happy because I thought that perhaps he has some news or a letter from Zurik and I said: Yes, my son, I'm his mother, are you a friend of his?

The soldier, noticing my cheerful mood, lowered his head; he had a letter in his hand and asked me in a trembling voice: Excuse me, mother, isn't his father around?

When he said this, I remembered the dream I had the night before. The whole world was now turning around. I sensed that my son had been martyred. I screamed and fell down on the ground in the street.



It was only the 19th day into the war and now my husband and I had become the parents of the first Armenian-Christian soldier-martyr!

Zurik's martyrdom was most unexpected not only for us but also for our neighbours who were mostly Muslim. Many gathering were held for him in all Armenian Churches and even in the mosques in our residential district of Heshmatiye. All his comrades who participated in these mourning gatherings told us about his high morale, his cheerfulness and friendliness; he did always gave us more spiritual strength by his kindness and constant smiles.

When I returned home from a mourning session, the postman brought me a letter from Zurik, written the day before his martyrdom. He wrote: Dear mother, I'm fine, don't you worry about me. After my military service is over, I am going to have a shop and work hard, I won't let my father continue driving trucks and later we'll buy a bigger house and... He had given me all sorts of hope.

A few weeks after Zurik's martyrdom, the commander of his garrison came to see us. As Piranshahr was a cold province, I had already woven some thick shawls, socks and caps for him. I gave all these to this commander. He said: what shall I do with these, mother? And I told him: give it to one of the soldiers, for me they're all zuriks.

My husband, however, could not stand the death of his only son; he had a heart attack

and was hospitalized. After some time we took him back home but he was unable to work and had to lie in bed. Therefore I alone, without my son, had to face the problems of caring for this sick husband, the education of my daughters and the daily expenses. After the martyrdom of my son, the district municipality decided to name our alley after Zurik's name but my husband disagreed saying: I don't want to see my son's name each time I look up in the alley. Forty days after Zurik's martyrdom, his close Muslim friend, Mohamad Gerami was martyred and so they named the alley after him.

During the 16 years when my husband was alive, many times he dreamt of Zurik. In his very last dream, Zurik had asked: Why don't you make a move? And my husband had said: where to? Zurik had answered: Come to me, look, I have bought a big garden, look what wonderful red apples there are... Soon after this, my husband passed away. After his death, one of my daughters was sick with M.S. and for years I had to nurse her. I always thought that God is testing my faith through all these troubles and problems.

The visit

Now some 30 years have passed since Zurik's martyrdom. I have already prepared everything to serve our guests; I sit on a chair and think of the memories of these long years, of all the hardships I faced. Despite all those adverse events, I am thankful to God who gave me strength to bear them all.



This evening I am somehow happy in my heart. Since Zurik's martyrdom there have been very occasions when I was a little happy; rare occasions such as the weddings of my daughters and the birth of my grandchildren. Here and there I have heard that Ayatollah Khamenei has visited the families of Armenian martyrs but I never thought that one day he would take the time to come and visit me, because he is the Leader of Iran as well as the Leader to many freedom-loving Muslims throughout the world. How could he have the time to come and see me? Now my daughter enters the room and says: the Ayatollah has arrived in our street and soon he'll be here. I go to the entrance of the house because I want to be the first person to welcome him. Mr. Khamenei comes in smiling and cheerfully and warmly talks to me, to my daughters and my son-in-law. He says to me:

_ Are you the martyr's mother?

_ Yes.

_ And are you well?

_ Thank you, I'm fine, you're very kind.

_ Well, I hope you'll always be well.

I then say: Please come in, you are most welcome.

The Leader said: *May God bless your martyr.*

_ Thank you very much.

Then the Ayatollah sat on the armchair and my son-in-law, my daughter and I sat down on a couch on his side. He says: *My God almighty give you all patience and endurance, I was told that you have gone through many hardships.*

Then I say: My son was the first Armenian martyr.

_ Was he your only son?

_ Yes, I have four daughters, he was my only son.

_ I understand, and I heard that he was martyred during the first weeks of the war.

_ Yes only 19 days after the war started, he was in Piranshar.

My heart beats fast and my mouth goes dry. Talking about Zurik, even after some 30 years, is still very difficult for me. All these years, I have not had the courage to cook the kind of food he liked. The pain of a mother is always fresh, especially because he was the only son and was very young.



The Leader doesn't say anything for a few moments letting me be myself again. He then says: [your reward is with God, lady.](#)

I try hard and say: Thank you, I'm grateful.

The Leader points at a photo on the wall and asks:

[_ Is that his picture?](#)

_ Yes, yes.

Ayatollah Khamenei then tells us about the days of struggles against the Shah's regime and the period he was imprisoned in the Qezel-Qala Prison.

He says: [There I had become friends with an Armenian by the name of Avanesian. It was very interesting because he had volunteered to be in charge of our Islamic eulogy service for martyrs of the past.](#)

I say: well, yes, we're all Iranian. I myself go to the mosque and dedicate something for Imam Hussein.

The Leader adds: [Apart from being Iranian, there is something else. I have noticed that Iranian Christian have a soft spot in their hearts for Imam Ali and Imam Hussein. This is different from being Iranian, because, as you know, there are](#)

Iranians who have no faith in such affairs, but our Christians are different.

My daughter who is sitting next to me says: Well, you know, Armenian have lived in Iran for many, many centuries and they have special affection for Imam Hussein.

The Leader reaffirms what my daughter said and added: Yes, our Armenian Community is well-versed in Islamic faith and they especially have good feeling towards the Shiite people.

Ayatollah then says: Well, here are one of your daughters and your son-in-law, where are the other daughters?

_ One lives in Narmak district, far from us and the other who suffers from M.S. disease was sent abroad for treatment.

_ My God almighty help her and heal her, the Leader says.

_ Thank you. My other daughter has also travelled abroad; but two of them are here. And one of my grandsons, the son of my daughter present is now doing his military service.

The Leader then asks my son-in-law about this boy and he says: Yes, he has just completed his 3-month training course and is continuing his service.

And your occupation? The Leader asks.

_ I'm a consulting engineer. I've worked in Abadan refinery, in oil, gas and petrochemical fields. According to one of our colleagues, we make deserts to prosper and then go back to some other place! I've been in Bandar Abbas, Isfahan, Ahvaz and Abadan.

_ Your work concerned refineries?

_ Yes regarding oil, gas and petrochemicals. I was also at Khan-Giran.

_ In Khan-Giran?

_ Yes, there's a gas refinery there, altogether I worked for some 35 years. After 35 years I retired and for the last 5 years I've been active in the same fields.

While the Leader and my son-in-law go on talking, I and my daughter watch the Leader with fixed eyes, as if we still do not believe he is in our house and talking so warmly and intimately.

The Leader tells my son-in-law:

_ The more service you perform your reward will be the higher, be strong and do good work for your country. Fortunately today we witness big progress in the expansion of refineries. The fact that we don't have to import petrol is a great step forward. Today our production of Petrol exceeds the internal consumption, because in previous years we spent two, three and even six billion dollars in importing petrol. We have exported some quantities already. God willing, we will make more progress. And this is due to the activities of people like you. Such achievements echo in Iran and abroad. It has not only material benefits but helps the reputation of this country. In the past I often recommended to Iranian governments to build and expand refineries and each time they would talk of certain problems. Thank God this present government took it seriously and did a good job; of course they should also try their best for gas refineries.

Then my son-in-law told the Leader that certain projects in this respect are being carried out in Asaluye, in southern Iran.

Now I take some cake and dates, put them on a plate and offer them to Ayatollah Khamenei. I say: this kind of cookies are the specialty of Armenians and it's called "Nazok". I add: I was not sure if you would really visit us, otherwise I would have also prepared dinner.

This is fine, the Leader says and has his tea with a piece of cake, and continues his conversation with us and asks me if I have any occupation?

_ No, I'm only a housewife, I work at home.

_ What did your late husband do?

_ He was a truck-driver. He was often driving throughout Iran. After the martyrdom of my son, he had a heart attack and was bedridden for some 16 years before he died. All these years I took care of him and nursed him. Then my daughter had the M.S. disease and I nursed her for some 10 years.

The Leader consoled me saying:

_ wonderful. You've really suffered a lot during these years. Of course, these worldly sufferings will have their own rewards with God Almighty. No doubt God will recompense you vastly.



And I said: true, whatever is God's will, I must be thankful and I am thankful. We continued our intimate, friendly conversation with Ayatollah Khamenei and I wish that my other daughters would have been present in such a conspicuous meeting to see the Leader so closely.

Finally Ayatollah Khamenei said: [Well, lady, I am very pleased to have met you and your relations. The Ayatollah then, while offering a gift to me, adds: This is a memory-sake; its material value is not to be considered.](#)

I don't know how to thank him by words. Anyway, we all say that we are really grateful to him for visiting us.

My son-in-law says: The fact that you, in spite of all your daily preoccupations, granted some of your time to us is a great kindness.

And the Leader: [No, this is also a great task.](#)

Well, I am delighted to have met him and I feel a sort of indescribable happiness.

The Leader's last words were:

[- I pray to God that if He will, you will be happy, successful and blessed by God Almighty, good bye.](#)

Again something is choking me; this time it's the departure of this kind Leader. I want to go out saying 'good-bye' to him again but his companions tell me not to do so. I say: O.k. then let me see him going away from the window. It's interesting that our neighbours, below us or over us, none have noticed the coming and going of Ayatollah Khamenei!

Then I only look at him going away and pray to God for his health and long years of his life with wet eyes and say in my heart: oh God, keep him safe.





Mother of martyr Zurik Moradian . August, 2014

Four

The Nahatak area

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The family of **Martyr** Paylak Avedian

Visit Date: 1984/12/29



The Photo of

Martyr Paylak Avedian

Martyred in Dezful, Khuzistan

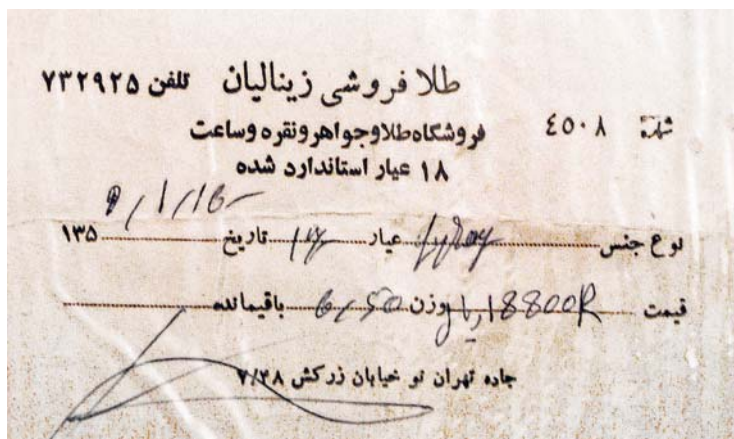
Martyred on 1980/10/15

I am the elder brother of Paylak, I have 8 brothers and sisters. He was the third child in the family, younger than me and one of my sisters. We were all born in Feraydoun- shahr, Isfahan and lived there. A few years before the Islamic Revolution our eldest sister got married and went to Tehran. I came to Tehran after her; a few years later, the whole family moved to Tehran.

My father was a farmer in Isfahan but when we came to Tehran he worked at a meat company called "Gushtiran".

Paylak helped father in Isfahan but in Tehran he worked at a very high-class restaurant. He was very good at public relations and he also spoke English apart from Persian and Armenian. He continued his English studies at a language institute in Tehran. Paylak was a very good-looking sportsman with a handsome body. All his photographs show this. He was a very talented person too. In the restaurant when he was free, he used to play the piano, and after some time, he played the piano very well without ever having had a teacher!

Most important of all, was his great kindness. All his wages were spent on gifts for brothers and sisters or helping with the everyday expenses of the family. In the same year when he was martyred, he had purchased some gold for our mother. My mother later put the purchase bill inside Paylak's album.



purchase bill

When she paged through the album, she would look at the bill and weep and say: "Oh my son, I love you, your whole thought was to make others happy" Paylak was interested in both traditional and modern sports and nobody could beat him in a wrist match.

When he was about to join the military, we all felt uncomfortable but my father was the exception. He was happy because he believed that now his son had become a mature man. He even bought a sheep and sacrificed it for him. He said to Paylak: when your military service is over, I'll myself find a proper girl to marry you!



Anyway, when he began serving in the army, there was no war. His training course was in Birjand and later he was sent to Mashhad. But a few months later when the war started, he was dispatched to a war-front in Dezful. Some of his comrades told him: we must desert the war-front, but he had refused and encouraged others to stay and fight for their country. He had told them: One day we'll all die, death is a thousand times better than a humiliated life under the aggressors, much better to die defending your country.

Paylak's another characteristic was his gift of leadership. Wherever he was the people around would willingly choose him as manager or leader. Of course he did not have the ambition to command and for this reason he had refused to become a regular officer and remained a simple soldier. He also used to read a lot of books to increase his knowledge. While serving in the army he took many photographs that showed him using all sorts of weapons; one photo even showed him driving a Tank! But in fact he never told us about his military duties; he sometimes joked and said: I clean the area with a broom!



On the anniversaries of the genocide of Armenians in Turkey, he was most active and prepared leaflets and placards about this horrible incident and many photos of the people demonstrating. He used to say: The Iranian Muslims have always been kind to Armenians especially when many of them migrated to Iran after being treated so horribly by the Turks and later by the Soviet Communists in Armenia. He sometimes commented: The Turks destroyed Armenian historical sites but the Iranians have always helped us to repair them.

He also collected all the pamphlets, letters and photos concerning the Massacre of the 24th April each year. In the year he was martyred he came to Tehran to take part in the 24th April demonstrations.

Two special days in my life that I never forget were: the day I was asked to go to the morgue to identify my brother's body and the day when Ayatollah Khamenei was the guest in our house.

This is how we heard about martyrdom: I was at home and so were my father and grandfather. A soldier came and asked us to go to the morgue to identify my dead brother; the three of us went there. The people there were all weeping and wailing. In a corner of the morgue, there were the bodies of 3 Armenian martyrs. The first body belonged to an Armenian whose family did not yet know about his martyrdom: a soldier had gone to meet his family and to give them the news but he had seen that a wedding ceremony was going on, the wedding of the martyr's brother! So he did not tell them about the martyr because the wedding would have changed into wailing and mourning. The second body was that of Zurik Moradian and the third body belonged to my brother Paylak. A bullet has pierced his left shoulder behind the heart ...well, let me say no more, in short Paylak and Zurik were among the first martyrs of the war against Iran. They were killed some 4 days in between but the bodies were transferred to Tehran at the same time. Paylak was martyred in Dezful and Zurik in Piran-shahr.

Let me tell you something about my grandfather: he was an Armenian priest and grandfather on my mother's side; his name was Asham Arakelian. You see them in this picture. As you see my martyred brother was really a photo-genic person. My grandfather was a famous priest, all Armenians knew him. After Paylak's martyrdom, he proposed that we set aside a piece of land in the Armenian cem-

etery called “Nahatak”, as if he already knew that many more Armenians would be killed in this war. If you visit the cemetery, you’ll see the Nahatak area in the middle of the cemetery.



The visit

The day, in fact the evening, that I’ll never forget is when Ayatollah Khamenei came to see us in our house. This was a very happy, sweet occasion, unlike the sad day when I identified my brother’s body. For me, he was a completely different Khamenei, not at all like what I had seen on the television on official occasions: He was so warm-hearted, intimate, friendly and loving, just like a very kind member of our own family.

In the morning my mother telephoned me and said: we have guests this evening, so come home straight after your work. That evening I first paid a visit to my fiancé’s house and when her parents asked about my parents, I remembered what my mother had said and rushed home. It was four years after Paylak’s martyrdom when the war was still raging. When I reached home, I noticed two unfamiliar persons at the entrance-door. I was asked who I was and then they let

me in. when I entered the house, I was really astonished: Ayatollah Khamenei, then the president, was warmly talking with my parents!

When I entered the reception-room, my father introduced me to the president saying: This is the elder brother of the martyred brother and eldest of my children. The president rose up from his chair respectfully and said 'salaam' in a friendly way. To us it was a memorable evening. Mr. Khamenei talked to all of us in turn. He asked my younger brother and sister about their schools, their education and their interest in books. He also explained to us how important the sacrifice of soldiers and fighters such as Paylak was for the future of our country. My mother brought a photo of my brother in a frame and showed it to Ayatollah Khamenei and he studied the photo with great interest, well, I may say again that I will never forget that evening.



Chapter 2

The year 1981

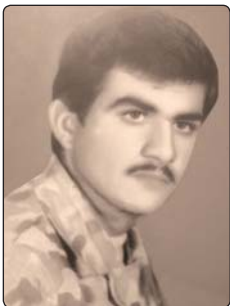
Five

Razmik

Ayatollah Khamenei visits

the Family Of **martyr** Razmik Davoudian

Visit Date: 1997/12/25



The Photo of

The martyr Razmik Davoudian

Martyred in Abadan, Khuzistan

Martyred on 1981/5/17

Since I was a child, I could tell whether a person was happy, angry or kind by his looks.

And today when I reached home, I noticed a suspicious-looking man standing in front of our house. I go towards him and ask: Why are standing here? He says: Are you a resident of this house? And after I say 'Yes' he asks: Are you a member of Davoudian family? I answer: Davoudian is the family name of my wife and this place is my father-in-law's house. He opens the entrance-door for me saying: Forgive me, I didn't recognize you. I ask him: But you didn't introduce yourself. He says: I'm a guest. I enquire again: well, if you're a guest, why are you standing here? He says: You just go in and you'll know why!

While entering the house, I say to myself: What sort of a guest is he who stands in front of the house like a guard! When I go up to the second floor, I see another person standing in front of the room who asks me the same question Davoudian's son-in-law, I answer.

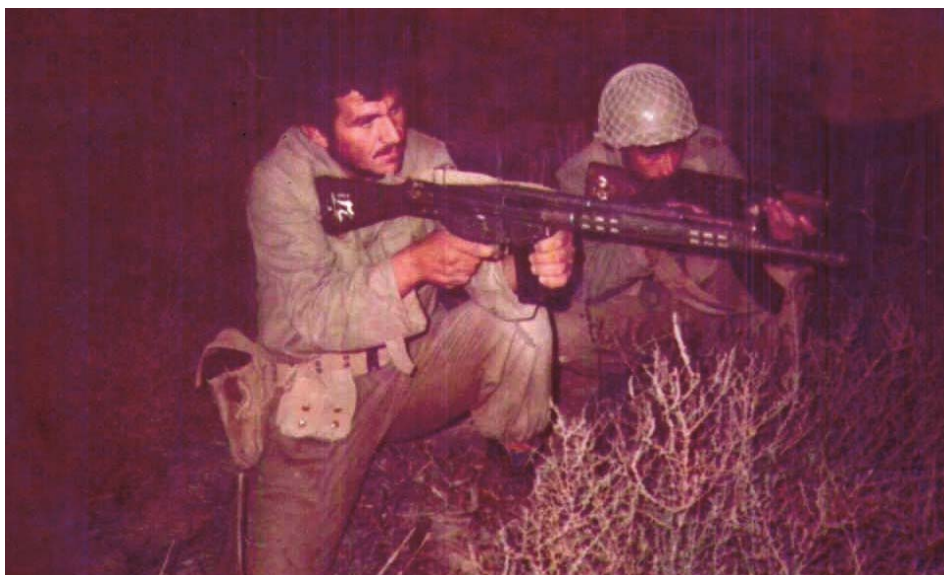
O.k., Please go in. three strangers are there too; they are standing next to my father-in-law, the father of Haikanush, my wife. Now Haikanush rushes toward me and I ask her: what's going on? Do we have guests? Before Haikanush's answer to my question, her father, who is only 3 meters away, introduces me to those special guests in a loud voice: This is my son-in-law, Avanes, and, turning

to me says: these guests are here to enquire about Razmik from us.

As soon as I hear the name Razmik, everything becomes clear in my mind: the guards, the suspicious looks and the guards questioning me. Then I take a few steps forward and ask: Is Ayatollah Khamenei going to visit us?

Now, after some 5 years, I still remember that significant evening vividly. Earlier they had telephoned and said: we would like to come and congratulate Christmas to you. Anyway, I accompany my parents-in-law to the front door. After a few minutes the door is opened and the Ayatollah steps into the court-yard. He, after saying 'salaam' to them, asks them to lead the way but my in-laws do not want to walk ahead of him. So he walks up the stairs and we follow him. Then he smiles and warmly talks to Haikanoush and she politely offers him an armchair. The Ayatollah, before sitting down, says to the parents of the martyr: [please come and sit down next to me](#). He first congratulates us all for Christmas and then ask Razmik's father to give him detailed information about his martyred son. He talks fully about him and whenever he pauses, Haikanoush and I help him to complete his explanation.

Well, Razmik, may God have mercy on him, went to war-fronts as soon as the war began; most of the time he was in Abadan and Khorram-shahr (these two strategic cities are joined by a bridge on the border of Iran-Iraq; their people



defended the cities for some 40 days with ordinary weapons) and he was martyred in the middle of the year 1981 in man -to-man fights with the aggressor soldiers. Many bullets had pierced his chest and its sides.

But before the war, Razmik was also very active in the struggle against the previous regime and after the victory of the Islamic Revolution was chosen as a member of the Majidiyeh District Committee and served as a revolutionary guard for some 15 months.

The very first days of the war, he volunteered to go to the war-fronts but he was told that he had 4 months before he could enroll. He had insisted that he couldn't wait 4 months to go and defend his country. He finally succeeded in serving as a soldier. He used to say: the enemy is in our lands, it's treasonous not to go and help the war-front at such critical times.

The very last time he came to us was at Easter of that year and even then he did not stay till the Easter celebrations and returned to war-fronts when, in his very last letter, he congratulated us on the occasion of Easter. He wrote:

My dear parents, how are you? I hope you're all well and in good health. Don't worry about me, I'm still alive. Hope to see you again. I congratulate the Easter to all of you. A few days ago we came to Abadan, it's very hot here, but these are passing periods because this oppressed nation needs our help". He added: "Dear mother, how are you, don't you ever worry about me, I'm quite well and I'm thinking of the day when I embrace you in my arms, that day I'd be the luckiest person on earth. He added: Dear father, solute my brothers Heros, Nariman, janik, Herand and Andre. I expect that Andre and Herand do well in their studies because their exams are very near. We fight here so that they could continue their studies to be useful for our country. I say salaam and salute my sisters Rozik and Haikanoush. Please remember me to all our relations and friends.

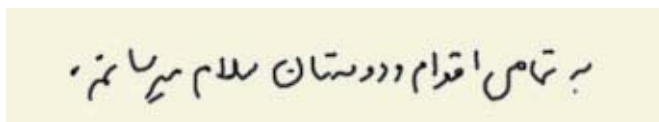
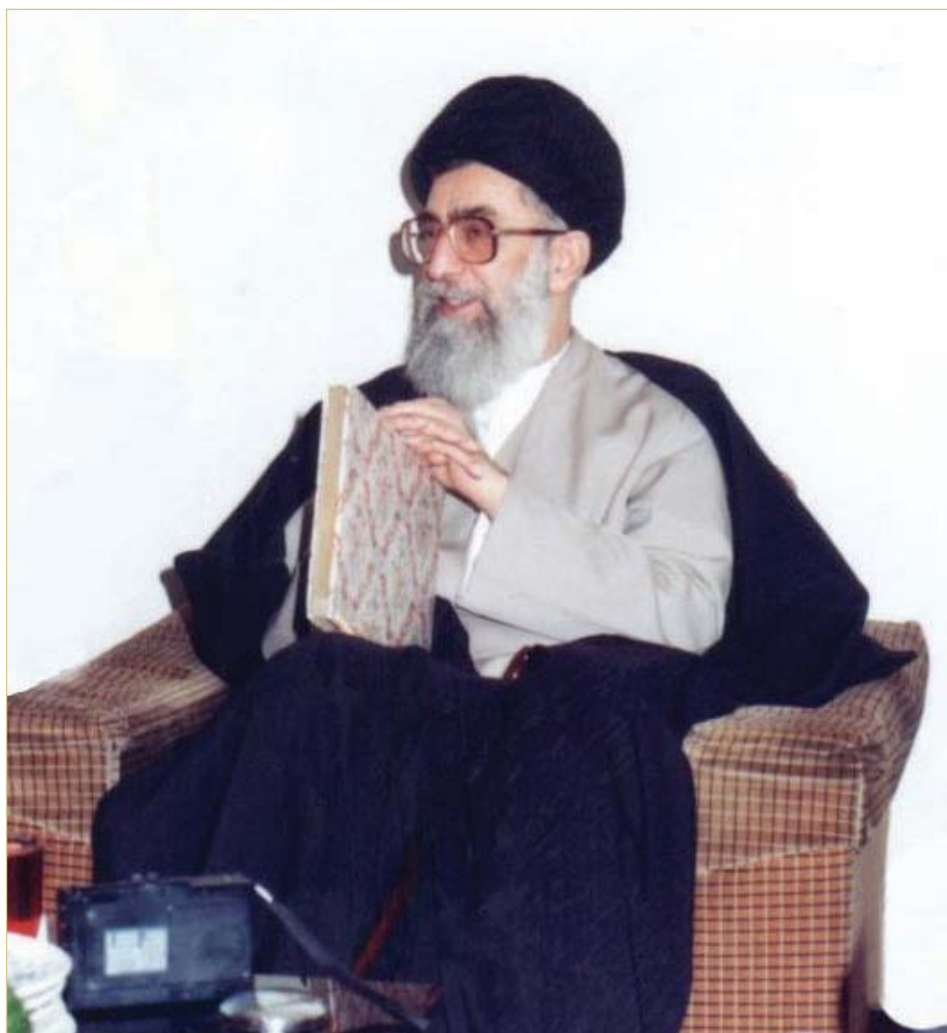


Image of a letter from the martyr to his family

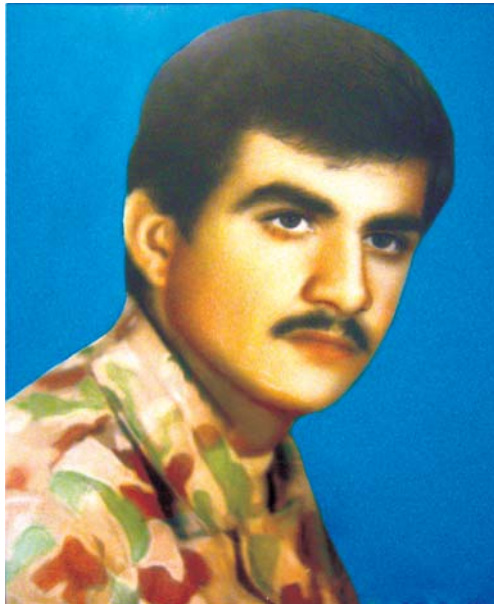
We missed Hussein during this meeting. He was only 4 years old when his father died. Razmik often brought him home, played with him and was very kind to him. When we asked Razmik why he paid so much attention to this child, he said: He's an orphan and being an orphan is tough. Hussein, our neighbor, who is Muslim has now married and has a child. And now, some 14 years after Razmik's martyrdom, he and his wife often visit Razmik's mother. I wish he was present at this meeting and would tell ayatollah Khamenei about Razmik's personality. Anyway, Haikanoush gets up and hands the album she has arranged with Razmik's photos to Ayatollah Khamenei.



And he, already touched by the narrations of Razmik's martyrdom, pages through the album and looks at the photos deeply. In the album, apart from photos of different periods in Razmik's life, there are his letters, his will and cuttings from newspapers about his martyrdom.

It takes him same time to look at the pieces in the album, so carefully and attentively as if he were studying some important, governmental documents; he reads the will word for word.

After such an intensive reading, the Ayatollah repeats the name: "[Razmik](#), [Razmik](#), [Razmik](#)" in a voice of great admiration.



Haikanoush and I explain the meaning of the word Razmik in Persian as "warrior or fighter" and Ayatollah Khamenei says: [Yes, it has the root of "Razm" in Persian](#). We now notice that the words Razmik in Armenian and "Razmandeh" in Persian have a common root; we hadn't noticed this before.

After this, the Ayatollah asks us about the Armenian language and script. And we tell him that our script consists of 38 letters of alphabet and that it is different from the Persian alphabet. The Leader also tells us that there are some Armenian elements in a few Iranian dialects such as Isfahani, Behbahani as well as Azerbaijani Turkish and cites some relevant examples.



Haikanoush says: We didn't know these facts.

Then tea is brought and the Leader picks the cup while Razmik's father, in reply to Ayatollah Khamenei's question concerning his occupation, says: I was a chef in the Italian Church on France Street.

The Leader asks: [Are your food and meals different from ours?](#)

- No, it's the same.

- [As an example, do you have Reshteh stew or Chelo-Gusht?](#)

- Yes, yes, we consume them all.

- [Well, you say you're a cook, a chef, then do you help your wife in cooking or not?](#)

We all laugh and Haikanoush says: Yes, sir, he helps a lot. Mr. Khamenei smiles at father and he says: [even my children know how to cook.](#)

I wish that this meeting would not end soon. The Leader asks: [Do you go to church regularly?](#) Father answers: Twice a week.

The Leader then turns to us and asks:

- [You young people, do you go too?](#)



I say: On Saturdays, we have a special program, so we go to church Saturday evenings.

_ Is there a church near your house?

_ Yes, there is one not far from our house.

_ Do you know how many churches there are in Tehran?

_ I think there are some 15 churches, I answer.

_ And Mr. Ardaak Manoukian, which church does he preach in?

_ He is usually at the Villa Street Church.

Then the Leader tells us about his acquaintance with Bishop Monoukian:

_ In the early days of my presidency, in 1981, he came to meet me. As you know he is a Lebanese Armenian, he came to Iran and was appointed as the Grand-Bishop of Iranian-Armenian Churches. I got to know him better then.

The Ayatollah asks about the 4-year-old girl who is playing in the room.

I say: she's called Ariyela whose paternal and maternal uncles are both martyrs

He then asks my mother: *This little girl is your daughter or your grand-daughter?*



My mother points at Haikanoush and says: she's her daughter. Then the Leader tells Ariyela: [Come, little girl and sit on my lap](#). Then he kisses her and touches her hair softly. Haikanoush, who has witnessed the Leader's interest in the Armenian language, says: Ariyela means "a lioness"!

He smiles and then says: [Well, our purpose of this visit was to say congratulations to you on the occasion of Christmas, to this father, the lady-mother, to you all, and to remember your martyr, though some 15 years have passed since his martyrdom](#) and then , with a smile, hands my mother-in-law a gift. We all thank the Leader for taking time to visit us. And finally he says: [My God bless you all and keep the rest of your children safe and sound. Good-bye to you all.](#)

Six

Christ in the night of Glory

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The families of **Martyrs**: Haiqan and Edmond Musesian

And martyr Gagik Toumanian

Visit Date: 1999/1/1



The Photo of
Martyr Haiqan Musesian

Assassinated in Tehran

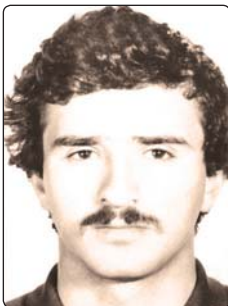
Martyred on 1981/9/3



The Photo of
Martyr Edmond Musesian

Assassinated in Tehran

Martyred on 1981/6/13



The Photo of
Martyr Gagik Toumanian

Martyred in Marivan, Kurdistan

Martyred on 1987/8/15

In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful

1. Indeed We sent it down*

Within the Night of Glory

2. And how could you have known

The Night of Glory

3. The Night of Glory does transcend,

Of months, a thousand

4. The angels and the Spirit,

By their own Lord's permission,

Therein come down,

Concerning every mission;

5. Salaam shall reign,

Till break of dawn

(Sura Al- Qadr, 97)

* The Quran.

It is a cold winter and streets are covered with ice and snow. Yet we are also nearing the end of the months of Ramadan, that is, the evening of the 23rd day when the possibility of it being the Night of Glory is stronger than the two previous occasions (19th and 21st). Thus this evening should be of great importance to all Muslims.

The most valuable month of the year is Ramadan and the highest night of this month is the Night of Glory, the night in which the Holy Quran was sent down unto the heart of the Prophet. In such evenings the faithful spend their time in prayers, Quran recitation and beseeching God, I am truly restless. It is the night when the future of mankind will be decided. And I wonder what goes on in the mind and heart of our Leader who has so many engagements regarding our country and the world.

I am at home, sitting on my prayer-mat when our telephone rings and I am told that the Leader is to visit the families of some martyrs.

What! Very strange, at such a night. The evening and night devoted to worship and prayers. Worried and Disappointed I go to my office to take some copies of the Quran with me but I'm told that it is not necessary. To-night people place Qurans on their heads. Why should we not take copies to the martyr families? I am informed that the families to be visited are Armenians. Now I remember that these days coincide with Christmas and the Leader usually chooses these times to visit the families of Armenian martyrs.

The car I am in drives behind the leader's car. We see people going to mosques

for the mourning ceremonies of Imam Ali's martyrdom and we are going to meet people who celebrating Christmas! I really feel bad but, when the cars stop, I see the happy, smiling face of the Leader and I am spiritually elevated. For some 40 years of my acquaintance with the Leader, his face and features have never become repetitive; on the contrary, seeing him, I become more humble and more patient.

Following the Leader we go up the stairs of the martyr's family's two-storey building; the martyr's house is on the second floor. This family has two martyrs, the father and the son who were both murdered in street fights by so-called Mojahedin-Khalq or the Hypocrites as the people call them.

A bewildered 20-year old young man, who must be both the brother and son of the martyrs, is standing at the entrance-door; he says 'salaam' and warmly shakes hands with the Leader. We enter the house and a lady, about 60 years of age, excitedly and repeatedly says: Welcome, welcome, you are most welcome, and guides the Leader to their guest-room.

The son still does not believe what he sees but the mother looks happy and smiles. But the son is standing at the door in unbelief and so I take his hand and say: Let's go in, the Leader is waiting. And he says: oh yes, yes, now I believe it, the Leader has come to meet us.

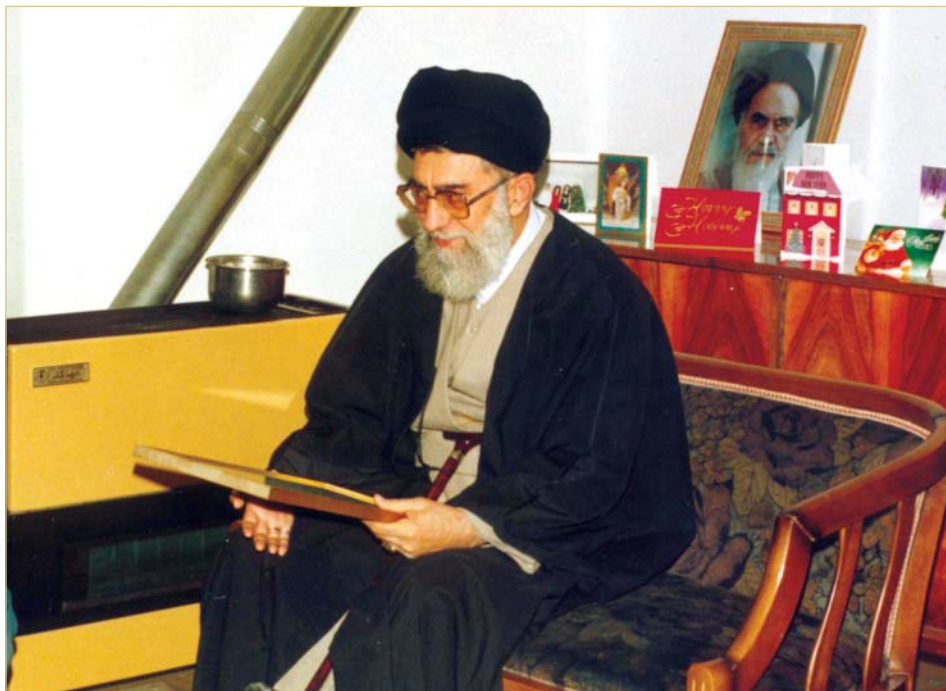
The Leader sits on an arm-chair with the mother on his left and the son on his right side. Opposite the armchair, there is a table, on which two photos of the martyrs in frames are placed, the two martyrs of the Musesian family.

It seems that the son is still anxious; maybe because he has been a shy orphan for years. Anyway, as soon as the Leader sees the photos, he wants to look at them closely and says: [Introduce them to me.](#)

The first photo belongs to the father of the family and the Leader asks the mother? [Was he martyred earlier than your son?](#)

No, my son was the first martyr, she answers.

The Leader then puts down this photo and picks up the framed photo of the first martyr of the family, Edmond Musesian. The Leader, always studies the photos of the martyrs carefully as if he has known them for long; this is a sympathetic gesture to families who only have the photos of their martyrs to remember them.



– Where was he martyred, dear lady?

– My son was murdered in the streets and my husband was assassinated in this alley where we live.

The Leader lays the son's photo on the table and picks up the photo of the father again and says: [May God bless you and grant you patience.](#)

He then asks: [What was your husband's occupation?](#)

He used to work in a taxi-agency. She then describes how her husband was assassinated: I telephoned my husband to tell him that a terrorist hideout was discovered in our alley and asked him not to come home or if he does, he should not be driving a car. But he had already left the agency. I wanted to go out and see if my husband was coming home, but some Revolutionary Guards member warned me and said that I would be in danger because soon there could be shootings between them and the Mujahedin terrorists. So I stayed inside the house, then I heard the sound of bullets fired from different sides. After the shooting and firing stopped, I came out of our house and sadly I saw my husband's car with him behind the wheel and blood all over the place!



After this account by the mother, the Leader, pointing at the photo of her son, says: **And your son must have been a student?**

The mother, even after some 17 years of her son's death, says in a choking voice: Yes, he was a student, the third year of high school, a year before he would obtain his diploma.

The Leader affectionately tries to comfort this mother's heart by saying:

_ God willing, these catastrophes you've suffered from, will be the means of your nearness to God Almighty and comfort your trouble heart. May the Light of God bring about God's mercy on you.

The mother comments: Yes, yes, but it's very hard.

Yes, I agree, says the Leader, **"These incidents are very hard to bear, especially when they happened within 3 months only".**

_ Yes, within 3 months or less than that, I faced two martyrdoms.

It's too hard to bear; I can feel what hardships you faced, especially in bringing up the children, the Leader comments.

The mother's face reveal what she has undergone and how older she has be-

come; to lose all your support and backing within 3 months.

The martyrs in this family were victims of assassinations; they were murdered in the most unfair, ruthless ways, they didn't even have the chance to defend themselves.

How shameless are those who constantly talk about human rights and, at the same time, allow such terrorist organizations to operate freely in their countries. This is more obvious in the case of Mujahedin terrorist organization which according to documented evidence and its own statements assassinated some 17000 innocent people throughout Iran.

The Leader then turns to the young man and asks: [Well, what do you do?](#)



The young man who is sunk in his own thoughts says: pardon me!

The Leader says in a kind voice:

[_ I wanted to know what you do these days.](#)

He replies, I left high-school after the 9th grade and started to work.

[Why didn't you continue your studies?](#) The Leader asks in a fatherly tone.

[_ There were problems.](#)

_ That is, you needed to work.

Yes, he says. He now looks more relaxed, and he looks at the Leader with kind interest.

The Leader adds smilingly: *there's nothing wrong with working; it's good to earn something for the family. Of course the purpose of studying is to be able later to do some good work. Obviously if you could study and learn more, it would have been better.*

Then the Leader asks the mother: *was the martyr your only son?*

_ No, I had three sons. One was the martyr. My eldest son got married and lives somewhere else. He was with us till last year but his child had grown up and there was not enough space in our house. So now I live here with my younger son.

The Leader looks around; the house is small but clean and cozy. He immediately asks: *Are you in contact with the Martyrs Foundation?*

Yes we are, I receive financial assistance from this Foundation, she says.

_ *Do you have any occupation yourself?*

_ No, I own this house but I have some heart trouble and a weak nervous system, so I can't have a job.

_ *Are you under treatment for these problems?*

_ Yes, there's a doctor I go to treat my nerves and another doctor for my heart; I use the pills and medicine they have given me to be in control of myself.

_ *God willing, you'll be in good health.*

It's Christmas and the atmosphere in the house is cheerful. There is a table on one side of the room on which you notice some bowls of nuts, plates of sweets and chocolates as well as different kind of fruits. Behind where the Leader is sitting, there is a shelf decorated with various things, postal cards, photograph frames and a small Christmas tree, all illuminated with small bulbs.

Now the Leader says a few words regarding Christmas: *I pray to God that you will all be blessed at this occasion of the birth of Christ Jesus. I know that your celebration of Christmas is not in late December but in early January of the New Year according to the Armenian Churches while the Catholics and some other denomination celebrate it in December.*



The tombs of Martyrs Musesian, Armenian cemetery, Tehran

The years I deliver a message on this occasion-because I don't do that every year- I try to deliver my Christmas message at a time when it may be well-received by all Christians! In doing this, I specially have our Armenian fellow-countrymen in mind.

The mother who's enjoying the Leader's comments and moves her head in confirmation and the young man listens to what he says calmly and interestedly. The Leader then, pointing at the young man, asks the mother: [how old was he when his elder brother was martyred?](#)

_ He was only three and now he's twenty.

The Leader asks the young man: [Do you remember anything?](#)

_ No, nothing.

_ [And that elder brother' how old is he?](#)

_ He's 39.

The Leader then asks him: [Do you do any technical work?](#)

_ Yes, I am a mechanic.

Ayatollah Khamenei looks at the rather rough hands of the young man and says:

Yes, I know, Armenians are very good at mechanics and related fields. You do have the hands of a noble worker.

The young man seems to like the Leader's comment and the mother is delighted.

- Are you quite skillful in your field?

- Yes, I am.

- Do you have your own shop or you help a master?

- Yes, I'm an assistant to the shop-owner.

- How about your wages, sufficient?

- 8 thousand Tumans a week.

- It is not much, 4 times 8 is 32 thousand Tumans a month?

And then as if weighing something in his mind, the Leader adds: Does that mean that the rates in your field are as you mentioned or your wages were less when you started?

The young man says, it used to be 2500 Tumans a week, but now, after 4 years of working, my wages increased.

The Leader says: Weekly payments are not customary in Iran. Is your master Armenian also?

- Yes, he is.



The Leader then says: *Well, God willing you'll advance in your work and become a master yourself.*

The mother of the family feels that meeting is about to end and she says: Allow me to pour you a cup of tea.

That's alright, the Leader says.

And again talks to the young man: *you don't seem to be married?*

_ It's early for me, now.

_ *It is early, as you say or, you don't have the means?*

Both, sir! The young man replies.

_ *Well, in what age do Armenians usually marry?*

The young man says: 23 or 24 and jokingly adds: If they could manage.

The Leader smiles when he hears the phrase "if they could".

Then the Leader, who is very keen on the youth continuing their studies especially in the case of the children of martyrs, emphasizes the importance of the greatest capital of the young people, that is, their youth. So he adds: *It is never too late to obtain more education and knowledge. You ought to do something about it. Some young people spend their days seeking short-lived, passing joys, such desires are not worth wasting your youth on. One should turn this capital into some skills, something valuable and lasting.*

While the Leader is talking, the mother brings tea and offers it to the Leader, he picks it up and thanks her for it and then asks: *Do you attend Church ceremonies?*

_ Yes, we do, on Sundays.

_ *You mean every Sunday regularly?*

_ Usually.

And then the Leader addresses the martyr's mother and asks: *How about you lady?*

_ Yes, I go every Sunday.

_ *Which Church do you go to?*

_ The one on Villa Street, near us.

The Leader then asks them about Arch-Bishop Ardaak Manoukian and if he is still preaching at this central Church on Villa Street.



All-in-All, it is a pleasant evening for this family and the mother and the son are eagerly looking at him and smiling. I take a look at my watch; it has taken a longer time than the Leader's usual visits.

Now the mother offering some sweets to the Leader, tells him about difficulties in her daily life such as the small financial assistance she receives from the Martyrs Foundation and her residence being too old and too small. The Leader looks around the place and saying in a tone of good humour: *This is a nice, cozy residence and there are only two of you living here!* But immediately after saying this, he turns to us and adds: *You follow this lady's affair and help her in any way possible.*

I write down the Leader's order not to forget.

After all these talks, the Leader drinks his tea and asks the mother: *have you cooked these cakes yourself or you bought them?*

The mother says in a rather embarrassed voice: I bought them. The Leader takes a piece and eats it along with his tea.

It's farewell time now and the Leader asks the young man about his forename.

He says: My name is Armen; and the Ayatollah repeat: [Armen, Armen Musesian](#) in such a tone that shows he likes the name.

Finally he gets up and gives two gifts to the mother and her son and says: [This is only for the occasion of “Eid”](#) (meaning a present for the New Year).

Both of them thank Ayatollah Khamenei for the gifts and especially for taking the time to come and visit them.

The Next Visit the Same Evening

We drive from Villa Street to Khoram-shahr Street, in central Tehran. At this house, two ladies come to the entrance-door to welcome the Leader; one is about 60 years of age and the other about 40: the mother and sister of the Armenian martyr.

Like our previous meeting, we go to their guest-room and Ayatollah Khamenei does not sit down before the martyr's mother and asks her: [Where are you going to sit down?](#)

The martyr's mother, who seems to be a few years older than the Leader, says: I like to sit next to you.

And the leader says: [please sit here](#); so they sit down on the sides of the same coach, and the martyr's sister next to her mother.

After they sit down, the sister brings the framed photograph of her brother, hands it to the Leader and says: this is my martyred brother. The Leader studies the photo and asks the sister: [Are you this lady's daughter?](#)

Yes, she says and adds: He was martyred in Marivan, Kurdistan in 1987.

_ [Was he in Marivan as a soldier?](#)

_ Yes.

The Leader then says: [May God grant you your rewards and bring happiness in your hearts. May God reward you for the hardships and sufferings you went through all this time.](#)

The sister shows the Leader another photograph and, with a choked throat, says: This is my other brother who died exactly one year after the martyrdom of my brother. He had gone to Mashhad to do something for the company he worked in. On his return, he was driving too fast in order to reach Tehran and participate in the mourning ceremony of his brother; there was an accident and he died.



The Leader now picks up the brother's photo and asks: [What a bitter accident! Was he the elder brother?](#)

The sister, with tears in her eyes, says: Yes, he was the elder brother.

The Leader repeats: [Indeed a bitter accident. How about your father?](#)

- My father died too.

Saddened, the Leader asks: [When was that?](#)

- 5 years ago.

- [So he was alive when his son was martyred.](#)

- Yes, but after the death of the elder son, he fell ill, some heart trouble and he was hospitalized for some time and died later.

The Leader says:

[May God Almighty grant best rewards to him, to your two brothers and all of you. Surely such worldly events have certain spiritual follow-ups; they do attract God's mercy and blessing. There's no bitter incident in this life for which God will not grant some sweet rewards.](#)

[That's how God's justice works. Any bitterness in life, if not caused by the](#)

person himself, will be rewarded by God properly. There are some incidents caused by men themselves but even then God, in his boundless mercy will forgive and grant rewards. This is God's tradition. And I pray that, God willing, you will all taste God's mercy.

He then asks: *Do you have other children?*

No, I don't, only this daughter, the mother replies.

Ayatollah Khamenei, clearly saddened, adds: *Two sons passed away!* And he looks again at the photos, closes his eyes and takes a deep breath and looks away for a few moments; I am thinking about what he just said: "God rewards according to his boundless Mercy."

In this meeting, the Armenian representative in the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Majlis), Mr. Vartan Vartanian is also present. Since finding out about the Leader visiting the families of the Armenian martyrs, he tries to attend these meetings whenever he can. I have heard that he belongs to the Armenian elite and is quite famous in the Armenian community. Vartanian who is sitting on the left side of the Leader, tells him about the sister's activities at the Armenian Ararat Club, especially in charitable projects and public service to the people. The Ayatollah asks the sister: *Apart from the activities at Ararat, what else do you do?*

_ I am a computer supervisor at a private company but the company is reducing its personnel at present; I'm still working there.

_ *Why are they reducing their staff? Is it because of economic conditions?*

_ Yes, our company has been making refrigerators for the last 6 years, but there were some problems in producing the necessary materials. We hope it will become active again.

The Leader listens to her with interest and she adds: This house we live in was given us by the Armenian Khaliphate Council with an inexpensive rent. Well, I work and we make a living and we have faith in God and we'll see what happens. The Leader, noticing the self-esteem of this family says: *I pray for you to be in more comfortable circumstances and not to face any more problems.*

The Leader then turns to us, his companions, and says: *It was so good to come here this evening and meet and talk to this respected mother and the family.*



I again remember that it is the night of Al-Qadr in which we should be performing our own rituals but Ayatollah Khamenei opines: How good it was to come and meet this family!

We're now about to say farewell to the family. The mother and the sister of the martyr, repeatedly and simultaneously, thank the Leader saying: Hajj Agha, we're most grateful, you really made us happy; you devoted your precious time to visit us.

No, not at all, says the Leader.

- it's my duty. Only I choose Christmas days to meet our Christian and Armenian citizens, I believe these are lucky, sweet days.

The Christmas being mentioned, the mother says something that touches me deeply in my heart:

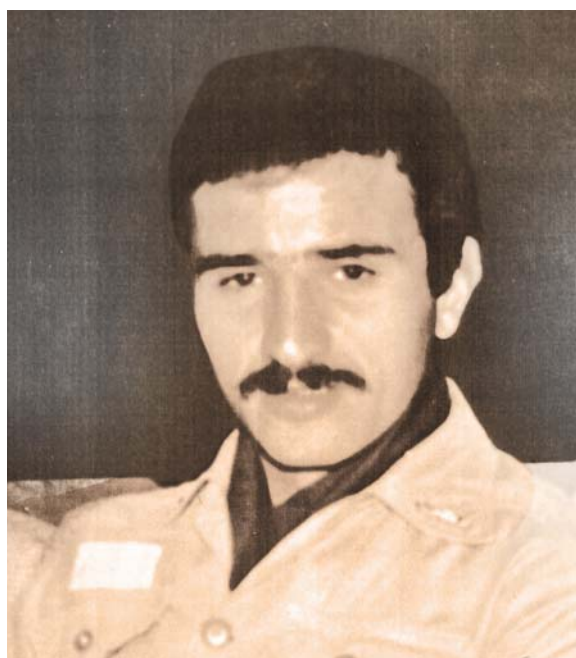
- As you know, our custom is to buy a Christmas tree for these times, but after my sons were gone, it's more than ten years that I did not buy a Christmas tree!

I look around the room.

No, there is no Christmas tree and this reminds me of the mothers of Muslim martyrs who, during the Iranian New Year celebrations, do not prepare the traditional “Haft Seen” items.*

The Leader is silent for a while and then, with a kind smile, says:

_ Nothing wrong with celebrating Christmas, try to be cheerful, your sons are already enjoying God’s mercy, particularly the one who went to the war-front to defend his country and his principles. As you know, the concept of martyrdom does exist in other religions also.



And then he adds: I should express my heart-felt affections and ties with you.

The mother and sister seem to be happy to hear these words.

The Leader then turns to Mr. Vartanian and asks: You’re still in Majlis, aren’t you?

_ Yes, I am and here I’m at your service, I had heard that you were closely familiar with the families of Armenian martyrs.

_ yes, it’s been years, some 16 years, I often go to visit these families especially around Christmas, and sometimes I also visit the families of Assyrian martyrs according to arrangements made by my Office staff.

* Seven items the names of which start with the letter “s” for the New Year

The Christian families I have met and sat with, as I said, were Armenian and Assyrians.

After this the Leader says:

- well, how is your Arch-Bishop Ardaak Manoukian?

- He has great respect and reverence for you and does pray for your health in our church gatherings.

The Leader's repeated mention of Manoukian in every such meetings shows how Islam respect and honours the dignitaries of other religions which has a long, historical background.

Vartanian then asks:

- Will I be allowed to print the news about this meeting in our Armenian newspaper?

- As you wish, here we are your guests and you may write about it if you like.

The sister now says: We haven't even served our guest with a cup of tea!

And she goes to the kitchen to bring tea.

The Leader, in the meantime looks around the room and a big picture in a frame on the far side of the room attracts his attention and so he asks: whose picture is that?

- It's a picture of our martyr.

- What a beautiful picture! Is it a photograph or a painting?

- It's a painting, sir.

What a beautiful painting! He repeats.

I look at the painting; it is an excellent painting and the eyes of the martyr are looking exactly in the direction of the Leader. Now everybody in the room is focusing on the painting, even the martyr's mother.

Mr. Vartanian says that the painter was one of the best artists at the Ararat Club; he also gives some more information about this Club.

Now the sister brings tea and the mother offers it to the Leader and the Leader looks at the tea-cup and says:

- your tea-cup looks so nice and tantalizing! One would like to have more tea in such a tea-cup!



The sister seems delighted at this; she must have bought the tea-cup set! The mother says: let me bring some sweets.
and the Leader says: [No please don't get up; I'll have it with sugar.](#)
But the mother brings sweets and the Leader drinks his tea with a piece of the sweets.

She says again how happy indeed she is for the Ayatollah's visit and he says: [I hope you'll always be happy.](#)

Now Mr. Vartanian shows a copy of the Armenian newspaper "Alik" to the Leader and adds that Alik is one of the oldest newspapers ever published in Iran, that in fact it is the second one after Ettela'at Daily.



He adds: it was first published some 70 years ago and today it is sent to some 40 countries.

The Leader looks at the newspaper and asks: [Does it have a Persian section?](#)

Vartanian explains: All our news and subjects are taken from Persian sources and many of our books are in Persian but the paper, containing items mainly for Armenian, would not be of interest to others, so it doesn't have a Persian section.

The Leader says humorously: [I didn't want our Armenians to forget their Persian!](#)

All present smile at the Leader's comment and Vartanian wants to say something about the Armenian script but the Leader says: [I know something about it. Your script is originally taken from Aramaic as well as syriac. Aramaic was popularly](#)

employed in ancient regions of Assyria and Chaldea, that is, in both the southern and northern parts of those lands.

Vartanian is surprised by the Leader's knowledge in this respect and says: I am sure many Armenian do not know anything about this. Vartanian then says: It is believed that Jesus Christ's language was Aramaic.

The Leader says: *Of course, the language of Christ's region was Aramaic and so it was, I believe, in areas such as Jerusalem.*

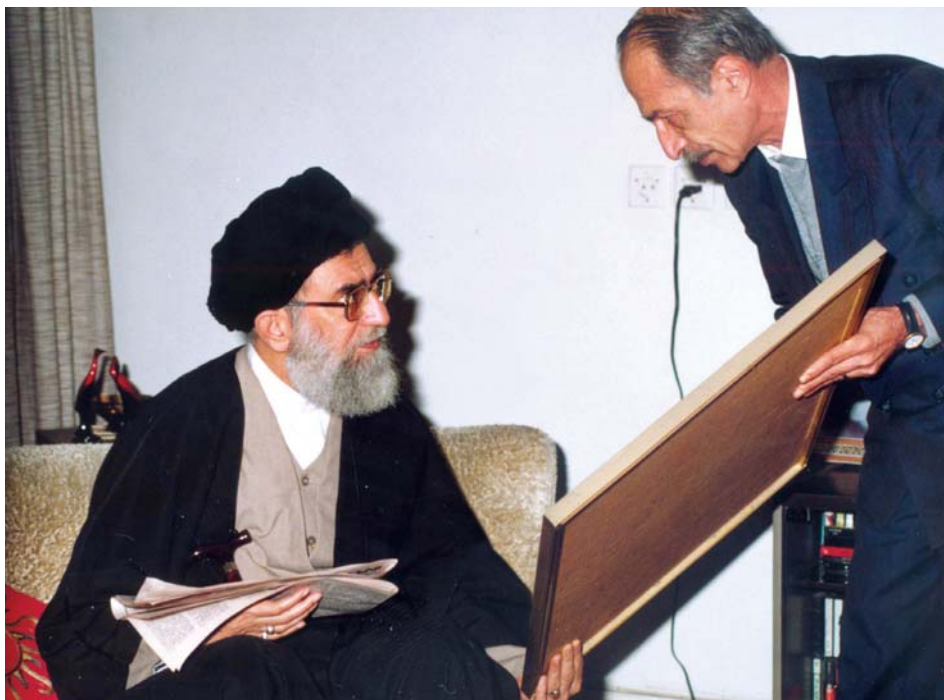
Then Vartanian shows the Leader a picture of a big church and says: Two of the disciples of Jesus traveled to Iran and one of them was called Tadeus and this church is named after him.

- You mean the famous church in Iran which is also called "Qara Kelisa"?

Vartanian hands the framed picture to the Leader and says: this church for Armenians is like the Vatican; in fact the Vatican itself was originally the burial place of another disciple. He adds: two of the disciples of Jesus were martyred in ancient Iran.

The Leader asks: *how do you pronounce the name of this church in Armenian?*

We say: San Tadeus.



_ I have heard that many people travel there for pilgrimage every year.

Yes, Vartanian says, and if Marand Airport is completed, many more people will visit this church.

The Leader picks up the newspaper Alik and says: [this is a nice, well-printed newspaper, although I don't understand it!](#)

The Leader then asks Vartanian: [Have there been great Armenian poets?](#)

Yes, there have been some good poets and the greatest was "Rafee" born in Salmas, northern Iran, he was also an excellent writer, answers Vartanian.

He then mentions the fact that the Shiite Iranians have great respect for this church and that in fact its protection and maintenance was the work of Iranians for centuries. He adds: once a year we visit this church but the curious fact is that no Armenians live in that region at all.



Vartanian's praise for Iranian reverence for this church reminds me of the fact that there is one church for every 500 Armenians in Iran.

Then the Leader describes the historical relations between Muslims and Christians in a precise but beautiful way: [According to the belief of Muslims, Jesus Christ, Holy Mary, Christ's disciples and their followers were the faithful of their time and tried hard to protect and spread their religion. In the Quran, Messiah and Mary have the greatest status. And these Christians who struggled on the part of the only rightful religion at that time and even gave up their lives for it,](#)

certainly were martyrs and in our belief they enjoy the highest degree of bliss in God's paradise, so does the martyr of your family. All Christian martyrs are, for us Muslims, as true saints.

The Leader went on to say: There are times when authorities in different religions compromise and agree to respect each other, some apparent mutual respect but there are religions which have a lot in common, they share their beliefs. This is true in the case of Christianity and Islam. I mean that belief in Messiah, in Holy Mary, may God Almighty bless them, and belief in the disciples who have been mentioned in the Quran repeatedly - they are mentioned together in general, not by their names- these are all parts of our religion, not outside it, and that's why they are revered and sanctified by Muslims

Then the Leader explains the reason why Christian Gospels differ from one another, a new explanation which even surprises Mr. Vartanian:

.. At present a film is being shown on our television called 'The Companions of the Cave'. It tells you a lot about the sufferings, tortures and martyrdoms of Christians in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. The Jews fought against Christianity for many years and Christians were badly suppressed in the Roman Empire; that was probably the reason that the Roman ruler had to turn to Christianity after the conversion of masses into this religion. What I mean is that Christianity, under those horrible conditions, had turned into an underground movement. No one dared to hold an open gathering. The differences you see in various Gospels such as Mark, Mathieu, Luke and John, are caused by such conditions. Activities were carried out underground; groups were far away from one another, they couldn't compare notes and had to resort to their memories.

Any way such events as the Companions of the Cave shook the foundation of the Roman Empire and Emperor Constantine had to convert to Christianity. Of course those historians, who have deeply studied the events, believe that Constantine's conversion was not sincere or genuine. It was a political decision because he realized that Christianity had so progressed that confronting it, would have destroyed his Empire, so he declared that he believed in Christianity! Thus Christianity originated from the East and

spread to the West, but the birth-places of Messiah and Mary, Zacharias and Yahya (John the Baptist) are in our own Eastern region; it has nothing to do with Europe or the West. But when the Romans converted to Christianity, they monopolized everything as if it belonged to them only! And today many people think that Christianity originated from Europe!

The Leader then adds: the very good relations between Muslims and Armenians have their roots in the intimate relation between Islam and Christianity.

Although this visit, like the previous one, is rather long but there is no trace of tiredness or dullness in the face of the Leader; and I say to myself: May this night of Glory last till dawn.

Finally Ayatollah Khamenei prays for the family and says: I hope you will all be happy in your hearts and I hope that your grief will bring about some more heart-felt spirituality because such suffering will attract God's help and mercy and we must all consider ourselves as receivers of His blessings.

After this prayer, the Leader gives two presents to the mother and the daughter; they both thank the Ayatollah and he adds: the value of these presents is not important; their value lies in their spiritual significance.



We are so grateful for your visit despite your preoccupations, the mother and sister say, and the sister adds: the fact that you were kind enough to come and visit us, has already made us happy, we couldn't believe it.

The martyr's mother also says: I am grateful for your visit, each time I go to church I pray for you, for your health and for your long, continuous leadership. The Leader says: [Thank you, if I might have made you happy by my visit, I'm happy too.](#)

Mr. Vartanian has the last word: Before you come here, I asked the mother what she liked to say to the Leader when he is here? And he points at the mother to say what she had in mind herself.

The mother, with tears in her eyes, says: We don't want anything; it's only me and my daughter and we don't have any small children. But if some people think they want to help us, I beg you that assistance is given to the families of martyrs who have children; then I would be satisfied.

This is touching and I think to myself that the mothers of martyrs are the greatest bounties of God on earth.

The Leader finally says: [I pray to God to grant us the chance to recognize our duties and carry them out.](#)

The Leader then gets up and says good-bye to the family of martyr Gogik Toumanian.

Now on the way back, I drive by many mosques and Husseinias and I hear the loud prayers devoted to this precious Night of Qadr. I'm going home to continue my rituals, but now I have a feeling very different from a few hours ago before the visits to the families of the martyrs, for I believe that I have participated in a most virtuous service.

What is really more valuable and virtuous than what we did in the last few hours? At a time when the enemies do their best to destroy Islam and the Islamic Revolution, the families of martyrs are invincible trenches to defend Islam: these families trained their young men to give up their lives in defense of their country and their Revolution. These families who underwent great hardships and pains with patience are as praise-worthy as their martyrs. And

the enemy tries to destroy these trenches.

Under such circumstances, our wise Leader, inspired by divine and Alavite teachings has realized that the most virtuous ritual at such occasions is to gladden and to warm up the hearts of those mothers whose sons defended the dignity, independence and freedom of our nation. I always questioned myself about the most valuable and virtuous ritual which could have affected the destiny of our nation and Revolution in the coming years? Now I know that the happy smiling of a martyr's mother, such as the mother of martyr Toumanian and her praying are among the best rituals of this blessed Night.

Օրաթերթ

ԵՄԿՈՍԵՆՏԻՆ, 11 ՅՈՒՆԻԱՅԻ 1999
69-ԻՒ ՏԱՐԻ, ԹԻՒՒ 6 (17665)
Հատվածատ՝ 200 ռիալ

آلیک

دوشنبه ۲۱ دی ۱۳۷۷
سال شصت و نهم، شماره ۶ (۱۷۶۶۵)
تکثیرات: ۲۰۰ هزار، ۸ صفحه

**ԲԵՆՈՒՆՆԵՐ՝
350 ՌԻԱԼ**

Խորհրդարանի նախի խնդիրներով
յանձնաժողովի փոխնախագահը յայտա-
րարել է, որ Իսլամական Խորհրդա-
րանում երկրի 1378 թականի բնակչի նա-
խագծին վերահասու գլխավոր յանձնաժո-
ղովը զաւիթ տարւոյ բնակիչն հինը 350
ռիալ է որոշել:

Այս մասին Ահմադ Նաթեղ Նուրին
(Շար. 8-րդ էջում)

Իսլամական Յեղափոխութեան Առաջնորդի Հայ Ընտանիքներին Շնորհած Այցելութեան Մասին

**Հանդիպման
Ներկայ
Պրն. Վ.
Արդղանեանը
Լուսաբանել է
Այսպ.
Խաննէիին
Հետաքրքրող
Մի Շարք
Հարցեր**



Թումանեանների բնակարանում



Մովսիսեանների բնակարանում

Օրաթերթին երէկայ՝ 10 յունայրի Հա-
մարի Ա հիււմ Հրատարակչած յուրով մեր
Համաձայն իրազեկ էինք դարձել Խալաթա-
կան յեղափոխութեան մեծարդոյ առաջնորդ
աչաթ. Խաննէիին նահատակ Հայրի բնա-
նիքներին շնորհած աջնելութեան վերաբե-
րեայ, որ ինչպէս անցնալ տարիներում այս
տարի եւս կատարել է Նոր տարւոյ եւ
Քրիստոսի Ս. Մննդեան տօներին աւիթի:

կուխիները, ինչպէս նաեւ Հանդիպման բե-
թացում Նկարահանած պատկերները, դրանք
ներկայացնում ենք մեր ընթերցողներին:

Իսլամական յեղափոխութեան միջնա-
րդ առաջնորդը, ինչպէս յայտնել էինք, նաեւ
աջնել է նահատակներ Հայկակ եւ Հոմոնը
(Հայր եւ որդի) Մովսիսեանների բնանիքին,
իրազեկ է դարձել նրանց վիճակին: Այս բե-
թացում բնանիքի մայրը տիկ. Մովսի-

Հոգատար ուշադրութիւն է ցուցարբերում
պատկան պատասխանատունների կողմից:

Այնուհետեւ յարգարժան առաջնորդը
երբ ներկայ է գտնւել նահատակ գինւոր
Գազին Թումանեանի բնանիքում, ուր նա-
հատակի մօր եւ քրոջ Նեո միայն շնորհաւո-
րական աջնելութեամբ ներկայ է եղել
Խալամական Խորհրդարանի Հիւսիսային
իրանահայութեան պատգամատուր պրն.

Image of a Armenian newspaper "Alik"

The news of Ayatollah Khamenei's Presence At the Home of Martyrs



Mother and brother of martyr Musesian



Mother of martyr Toumanian



Martyr Toumanian's tomb, Armenian cemetery, Tehran

Chapter 3

The year 1983

Seven

Volunteer

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The Family of **martyr** Emil Arjeron Azorian

Visit Date: 2005/12/27



The Photo of

Martyr Emil Arjeron Azorian

Martyred in Chazzabeh, Khuzistan

Martyred on 1983/2/26

My daughter telephoned me and said: father, get up and come to our house.

- Why, what is happening?

- We have guests.

- Well, what has it got to do with me; if you're alone, ask your sons and their wives to come and help you.

- No, father, Mishel and Sergei are both here, the guests come to visit us because of our martyr Emil, and the mother went to Tabriz this morning, so an elder person must be present at this meeting.

- Okay, I'll be there in about two hours.

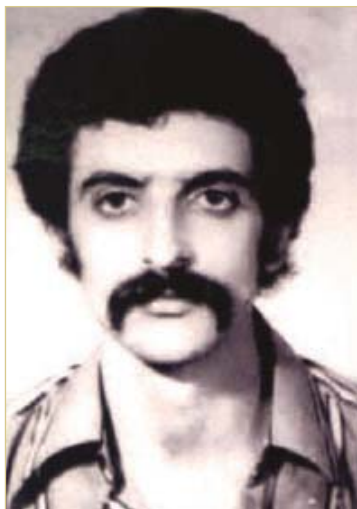
- No, my daughter says, the guests are on the way.

- Well, I come immediately.

The name of my son-in-law was Emil. He was martyred in one of the war-fronts some 23 years ago. At that time it was about 7 years after my daughter's marriage with him. I loved my son-in-law because he was a really gentle, chivalrous person. He used to drive a truck. He said we must help the people who are fighting in defence of this country. He added: there is great need to take food-stuff to the war-fronts. So he volunteered for this purpose.

He then drove to Mashhad to take a truck-load of food-stuff to the fronts in the south. He did not have to do this but he was determined to do this and said: It's

our duty to help with the war-efforts in defence of our country. Well, he did and he was martyred somewhere near Chazzabeh in the south.



I have been informed that Iraqi airplanes were dropping bombs on roads and highways, so Emil and his assistant get out of truck and run to hide behind a hill, but the area had been mined and both of them lost their lives when some mines exploded.

His mourning ceremony was attended by some of the members of the “Construction Jihad” and we held our ceremony at Majidiya Church.

A few days after his martyrdom, an Armenian lady who had seen his photograph came to us weeping after finding out that he had died. My daughter asked her how she knew him and she said: We are a poor family, my husband has died, and we were in very bad financial conditions.

He used to help us by bringing us rice, cooking oil and foodstuff every month.

My daughter told her: don’t worry; we’ll do the same for you.

Emil loved Imam Hussein and his brother, Abolfazl, and every year he helped with the ceremonies of Tasua and Ashura (the days when the Imam and his brother were martyred in Karbala.)

For this reason some groups belonging to the Jihad took part in his mourning ceremonies.

While walking towards my daughter’s house, not far from my own, all these

memories paraded in my mind.

When I got home, I noticed a few people standing in front of the house and inside it and I said to myself: If they're guests, why don't they go in!

I asked my daughter about this and she said that the guests have not arrived yet. Who are they? I asked, and she said that Ayatollah Khamenei was the guest.

I don't believe it, so I ask one of the men, and he assures me that it is true.

I become a little nervous as I've never met any government officials but the highest authority in the country is about to visit our humble house at the time of celebrating Christmas.

Personally I like Mr. Khamenei and before him I had great love and respect for Imam Khomeini because he was such a great, courageous person.

One of my characteristics is that I hated bullies even in our own district and Imam Khomeini was the man who stood up against the greatest bullies in the world, that is, the USA and the Soviet Union. Khamenei has also followed his path courageously.

One of the bullies is already gone and I hope that America will also collapse!

My daughter is preparing tea and sweets in the kitchen.

She is, in my opinion, more than a man: for some 23 years she has stood up against all hardships and brought up his two sons properly.

I go and kiss her cheek and say: May God bless Emil, I wish he was here and would witness your honour and dignity.

She looks away; she doesn't want me to see tears in her eyes and then she changes the subject.

At this time Sergei comes and says; the guest is about to arrive.

I want to go out and welcome the honorable guest but I'm told I'd better stay inside; they don't want to attract a lot of attention.

Until I saw the Ayatollah, I couldn't believe the Ayatollah has come to my daughter's place.

He says '[salam](#)' to all and warmly shakes hands with us' with his left hand.

I say welcome and Mishel and Sergei who say welcome to him.

One of the Ayatollah's companions informs him: These two are the sons of the martyr.

Ayatollah smiles at them in a warm, fatherly way, and even more warmly with my daughter.



Ayatollah Khamenei sits down on a two-seat armchair, I sat opposite him but very near and the Ayatollah tells Mishel, the elder brother, to sit next to him. Even on television I never witnessed anybody sitting so close to him!

Mr. Khamenei, when talking to Mishel, puts his hand on Mishel's knee. He then asks about our family and I introduce everyone present and add: And I am the father of the martyr's wife, unfortunately the martyr's mother travelled to Tabriz this morning. My daughter adds: If mother knew that you would be coming here, she would have never gone to Tabriz to visit her daughter. One of the boys says: If grandma was here, she would be delighted to meet you.

The leader says: [Please give my best regards to her.](#)



As I am the eldest person present, he starts talking with me first with a kind, sweet smile: [May God make your life more pleasant and reward you most properly and keep your daughter and your grand-sons in the best of health and happiness.](#)

I say: Thank you, our prayers are also for your good health to live long to lead this country.

The leader turns to Mishel and asks: [Well, what do you do?](#)

_ I run a shop.

_ [Why don't you study?](#)

_ I did study up to a point and started to work in a shop.



_ What did you study?

_ Business management.

_ Did you get your B.A.?

_ I couldn't finish the courses; the home expenses were high, so I opened the shop.

_ What sort of shop do you have?

_ We sell protein materials.

And after this, the Leader looks at Sergei and asks: **How about you, dear son?**

_ I received a computer diploma and now help my brother in the shop.

_ You could continue your studies, couldn't you?

_ Somehow I wasn't lucky.

My daughter says: they're both married.

The Leader asks: **where do their families live?**

_ They do not live with us.

_ Then you live here alone?

_ Yes.

_ So the boys are your guests this evening!

_ Yes, they have come to their mother's house.

And Mishel says: If they were here tonight, they would have been very happy; it is a great pity. The Leader says: *God willing, you'll be successful in life.*

He adds: *Do you have any children?*

The boys reply: Not yet!

The boys smile and the older people laugh. The atmosphere has become so intimate, the earlier anxiety is gone and we are talking to Ayatollah Khamenei as close friends.

The Leader says: *well, well, of course I like it when people get married in younger ages, I appreciate this.*

My daughter and I agree with the Leader and say: This way they'll manage to have a family earlier.

The Leader continues: *Yes, then they'll have to try hard and put their house in order.*

Then he looks at the photo and asks my daughter: *How old was he when he was martyred?*

_ He was 30 and we had been married for seven years.

_ *Which year?*

_ Early 1983 at the front in Chazzabeh area.

_ *Was he in the military?*

_ No, he worked in the Construction Jihad.

This juncture is the best part of our conversations, because each one of us narrates something about the martyr.

I say: He drove a truck loaded with foodstuff and he said that we shouldn't allow our soldiers and fighters to suffer from shortages.

Sergei said: He volunteered to do this risky job; he even once stayed with soldiers at the front and helped with preparing trenches.

My daughter says: Only to help with the war-efforts.

The leader says: *Commendable, may God give proper reward both to him and to you, especially to this lady who suffered much but managed to bring up two children.*

My daughter says: I am now quite happy, they couldn't finish their studies but they're very good, hard-working sons, this is enough for me.

True, says the Leader, *when you bring up good children, you yourself are the first person to be satisfied.*



My daughter also says: He had an assistant-driver, a man from Neyshabur; my husband had told him that he should go by himself but the man rejected this. He had said to my martyred husband: No, my blood is not worthier than yours. So they drove together and were martyred together.

Yes, those years, we had groups of Armenian mechanics at the fronts, says the Leader.

My daughter says: they were sent by the Armenian Council of Khalifate.

That's right, says the Leader and adds: I also have my own acquaintance with and memories of the Armenians.

I say to myself: What sort of memories could they be!

And the Leader continues:

... in the year 1963 I was in prison*, in the infamous Ghezel Qala prison; it was one of the most horrible prisons in the Shah's regime.

* During the Shah's regime, Ayatollah Khamenei was arrested and imprisoned and tortured 6 times. He served time in different prisons in Tehran and Mashhad and finally he was sentenced to be in exile in Inranshahr and Jiroft in southern Iran.

The prison had two sections called “single cells” and “public cells”. There was a young man in the public cells whose name was Gagik Avanesian. He was imprisoned for being an active member of the Tudeh (Communist) Party of Iran. I knew he was a leftist but I didn’t know he was a Tudeh member. My cell was a few rooms away from his. There were 23 cells in this section. Gradually Avanesian and I became friends. Among the prisoners there were some Arabs from Khuzistan. In the evenings of the month of the Ramadan, these Arabs would spread some blankets in the corridors to perform some rituals concerning this holy month. The widths of the corridors were about 1.5 or 2 meters. They used to ask me to join them and preach for them, and I, as a clergyman, joined them, and talked to them about Imam Ali and other Islamic subjects.

Avanesian had a folding-chair. At these occasions he would come and sit on his chair at a distance and listened to our religious ceremony; he seemed to like what we did and said, and we talked with each other a few times; he was attracted to my comments.

These ceremonies also required some expenses for tea, sugar and the like. Every evening one person would provide them. Avanesian came to me and said: I am a Christian but I like to provide the required stuff for one evening. I told him it was alright. One evening, after our rituals he said: For tomorrow evening I shall provide everything.

Any way gradually we were friends. He was a Communist but, apart from that, he was a very kind, polite, well-mannered and a good friend for me. Sometimes we were allowed to go to the yard to do some exercise; we did our exercises together. He knew good English and said he would like to help me improve my English.

Anyway, as I said, we were good friends. He was later sentenced to a few years of imprisonment, so, when I was about to be released, I went to him and said: Is there anything I can do for you when I am outside? And he said that his apartment was in Shemiran and that, if I could, it would be nice to pay a visit there and see if my wife needs anything.

So when I was released, I tried hard to find this apartment and after ques-

tioning a few people, I found the place; there were many stairs, I walked up and knocked at the door. An Armenian lady opened the door; there were also a few children about her. I said to her: I was in prison together with Mr. Avanesian, we were friends there. I've come here to ask you if I can do any service for you. The lady said in a very cold voice: No, I don't need anything! Here the Leader laughs and adds: well, maybe she was right: a clergyman has come to us and talks about politics, prison and the like; the whole thing was unusual in her view. She behaved coldly and didn't pay any attention. Then I went to Mashhad for a couple of weeks and when I returned to Tehran, I went to Ghezel Qala Prison to meet friends there including Avanesian. I had purchased some fruits, sweets, biscuits and cigarettes for them. They had come out of their cells to meet visitors but when I was there, they never allowed me to meet any visitors. To cut a long story short, after the Revolution, I came out of my house on Iran Street to do some errand and I saw an old man coming towards me. Well, many years had passed, some 16 years, since we were in prison together. I couldn't recognize him but he said; I'm Gagik Avanesian!

We were all most excited by the Leader's narration and the boys could not take their eyes away from him. We had completely forgotten that we have some guests and that we haven't offered them anything, so my daughter goes to the kitchen to bring something.

In the meantime, the Leader talks about the boys' names: Mishel, well, it's pronounced and written differently in various languages such as Michel, Mikail, Miikhael, and the French say Michel, pronounced as your grandson's name.

He also talks about my name Abraham which in Persian and Arabic is Ebrahim. Then my daughter brings tea in glasses and Mishel gets up to lay one in front of the Leader when he says: please bring me one in a smaller glass! We are really impressed by the Leader's simple, kind manners. Sergei offers the Leader a piece of creamy cake but he says: Thank you, I'll have it with a little sugar.

I take advantage of the moment and say to him what is really in my heart: Your stepping into our house, has blessed this place, I hope you'll stay strong and in good health for many years to come.

And the Leader says: [I hope that God Almighty will keep you in his protection and I pray that you all will be truly happy in your hearts.](#)

My daughter is standing to offer entertainments but the Leader says: You please sit down; my companions will do the job.

I take a look at his companions; they are mostly young, very simply dressed and I notice the photographer among them and say: Please take a photo of us with Ayatollah Khamenei; we want to boast that the Leader was with us once! The photographer aims his camera at us and the Leader smiles when he's taking the photo and then says to the photographer: [Don't forget to give it to the family.](#)

Then he goes on talking to the boy about their shop and their work and Mishel says: well, our job is somehow tough. And the Leader says: [Well, you also do tough jobs like your grand-father!](#)

Mishel adds: it's true, for after my father's martyrdom, it was grand-pa who took care of us, expenses and everything and I say: No, it was no trouble because you are such good boys and you are in good health, that's enough for me. The Ayatollah says: [Thank God, thank God, may God protect them for you.](#)

He then asks the boy about their church-going, and they say: we go once a week.



He then drinks his tea and again takes a deep look at Emil's photo and comments: The feeling that this martyr creates in others is most valuable, a young man, who has a wife and two children, goes to war-fronts to help, this spirit is something that must be revered by all, most valuable, we are all indebted to such personalities.

Mishel says: Well, one who is born and bred in this country is obligated to defend his country, his family and his honour by shedding his blood.

The Leader says: You're right but such things are easier said than done! For those who really practice them are valuable personalities; you may encounter a young man who is very knowledgeable but he possesses this spirit, this will and the strength to ignore many worldly attractions, not every person could afford it.

Now my daughter, the martyr's wife says: true, true, believe me, the night before his departure he said: I know I'll be the target of some bullets, some grenades or bombs. I turned to him and said: Well, if you're sure that something like that happens, then don't go, you don't have to. And he said: I swear to God, I cannot help going. Then he wrote his will and went away.

My daughter cannot go on, no one says anything for a few moments, we are looking at the martyr's photo. Finally it is the Leader who breaks the silence and tells everyone, including his companions: Why don't you have your teas?

And, then one of the companions hands him two small boxes and the Leader gives one to my daughter and says: this other one is for the martyr's mother who is not here.

I thank him and say: Your visit was the greatest gift we received.

The Leader says: their material worth is not important, they're as keep-sakes of our meeting with you. and then he gets up to say farewell.

He is about to leave and I already feel that I miss him. During the last minutes my affection and love for him has doubled and I feel that I like him as much as I liked Imam Khomeini.

Eight

The first house

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The Family of **Martyr** Vazgen Avanesian

Visit Date: 1985/1/1



The Photo of
Martyr Vazgen Avaneisian
Martyred in Dehloran, Ilam
The Spring of 1983

At night I always dreamt of Vazgen and during daytime I looked for him everywhere. For some 7 days and nights I was not myself. I could not feel or understand anything and did not know what was going on about me. Agha Gol gave me such a shock that I was like those who receive sound waves near explosion. Agha Gol was my paternal cousin and Vazgen was my younger brother. One day at about noontime I was repairing a car when he came and said: come with me, I went to purchase some parts for my car and I don't know about them as much as you.

I left the shop with my assistant and, in my mechanic's garment, got into his car. On the way we were busy talking to each other when I noticed that he has stopped in front of the Forensic Medicine Office. Come with me, I want to see a friend for a few minutes, said he.

I said: No, my clothes are not suitable, I stay in the car.

He said: No problem, let's go, we should meet this friend of mine.

Unwillingly I accompanied him, after we entered the place, I saw that it was so crowded that no one paid any attention to what I was wearing. He went into the morgue there and talked to some person and he took us to the section where they kept corpses in big refrigerators.

Agha Gol's friend had a piece of paper in his hand and took us to the side of a

3-storeyed refrigerator and, one by one, pulled their drawers out. I didn't understand what was happening; what's it all about! I only saw for a flashing moment that the face of the corpse in the middle drawer was that of my brother Vazgen! By seeing his face, I could not keep my balance, my eyes went dark and I fell down on the ground.

As I said I lost my mental balance for a week because of the way my cousin told me of my brother's martyrdom; he was dead and I was mad.

The way my father was informed was not less painful. My father used to sit on a chair in front of our house and chat with friends and neighbours. The same day I was informed of Vazgen's martyrdom, somebody was going to inform my parents about this. Father was sitting on his chair in the afternoon in front of the house when a man approaches him and asks: Do you know where house No. 8 is in this street.

- _ Here it is, my father replies
- _ Are you a resident of this house?
- _ Yes, I am, what's your demand, I am at your service.
- _ Do you happen to know Vazgen?
- _ Yes I know him, he's a soldier.
- _ What's your relation with him?
- _ My father says: why are you interrogating me? Tell me what you want.
- _ Well, I must know your relationship with Vazgen, says the man.
- _ Suppose I'm one of his relatives.

And the man suddenly says: well, he was martyred two days ago! His corpse is now deposited at the Forensic Medicine Morgue, so please try to contact his father and mother and tell them to go to that morgue to take away their son's corpse for proper burial.

Hearing this account, my father collapsed on his folding-chair, it was a partial heart-attack which made him to stay at home on a wheel-chair the rest of his life. Anyway, Vazgen's military service would finish in about 22 days' time when he was martyred at the age of 21. My father had five sons and two daughters but Vazgen was the youngest; he was very kind to all and so he was very dear to the whole family.



After the 3rd and 7th evenings of mourning ceremonies following his burial, I could not stay at home any longer and so decided to go to the war-front region in Khorram-abad where he was martyred. There when the military officials found out who I was and why I've come, a Jeep was put at my disposal together with a soldier to drive it. On the way to Vazgen's place of martyrdom, some bombs and shells exploded about us but fortunately none of them hit the car. Anyway, we managed to reach the place which was some 40 kilometers away from Dehloran. First I went to meet the commander of this garrison, that is, Vazgen's garrison. The commander was the person whom Vazgen always praised for his character. When I entered his room and as soon as he found out that I was Vazgen's brother, his eyes were full of tears and he actually wept. Then he pulled himself away from his desk and then I realized that he was sitting on a wheel-chair and that he had lost both his legs from the knees down! I sat next to him and he told me a lot about Vazgen, while weeping. I was silent and only listened to him and he, among other thing said:

– He was incredibly selfless as if his soul had separated from his body, as if

he was not living on the earth. Lack of sleep, tiredness and hunger did not matter to him. He worked as much as five people, he was restless, he was always on the move. I used to be the last person to go to sleep, but I often noticed that he was still repairing our telephones and the other means of communication. When I woke up in the morning, I saw him already working. Because of his constant labour, we never faced any defects or shortage in our communication system. As you know, good communication is vital for any military unit, it's as necessary as a walking-stick for a weak, old man.

He talked about Vazgen for almost half an hour with tears in his eyes. Then he pulled his drawer and gave me the booklet of Vazgen's off-days and told me: Now whenever I miss him, I page through this booklet and talk to him!

I managed to meet three other friends of Vazgen. Each of them wept when talking about him as if they had lost their own brother. Before coming here, I could not believe that he was martyred, no matter how hard I tried to accept it, but after I came and met his commander and his comrades, I became spiritually calm and could believe that he was martyred for what he believed in.

The Visit

A year later, about Christmas, when I came back home from work, I saw two persons walking in front of our house and when I was about to open the door, they came towards me and asked: Whom do you want here?!

I was really surprised: instead of me asking them what they're doing in front of my house, they ask me what I want here! Anyway I said: this is my house, my home. They then apologized and said: please go in. and when I entered the house I saw two other strangers talking to my parents. At this moment there was a ringing, the door opened and the President, Mr. Khamenei came in. I was shocked!

My parents stepped forward to welcome him. Of course the President's companions had already informed my parents and my brothers about his visit; it was only I who didn't know and was so surprised.

This visit was most unusual for us because, we had never heard that he visits the families of Armenian martyrs. In later years, many Armenians were aware of this but then, because our family was the very first to be visited by the President, it



was so odd. Even after the visit, when I told others that the President came to our house, nobody believed it!

Well, the President arrived and was our guest for almost an hour. My father who, after Vazgen's martyrdom, has been bed-ridden could not sit on a couch and sat on the floor and the President was about to sit next to him on the floor but my father insisted that he must sit on the couch. Anyway they talked with each other warmly as friends. That evening two of my cousins and a few of my nephews were also present in the meeting.

It was Christmas Eve and the President congratulated my parents on the occasion. He also enquired about my father's health, his course of treatment and what problems he has faced in this respect and later asked us about the character and personality of Vazgen and each one of us narrated our own memories of him such as his being a brilliant student, his scientific knowledge, things he made with his own hands and finally about the way he was martyred and how great was his burial and mourning ceremonies.

President Khamenei said to my father: [If you need anything, please tell me, we are at your service.](#) My father thanked him and said: Thank God, there is nothing

needed. God had granted me 5 sons and one of them was sacrificed in His path. My only worry is about those soldiers fighting in the battle-grounds, I hope they are not faced with any shortages.

Anyway the President expressed his condolence for Vazgen's martyrdom and congratulated us for Christmas. Then He spoke of Jesus Christ, his disciples, the early martyrs of christianly and thair status with God Almighty. He really surprised us with his knowledge about Christianity and told us new things that I had never heard; it was doubly sweet for me to hear about Christianity from his tongue. He finally added that our martyrs today are just like the Christian martyrs of the olden times.

He then offered two gifts to my parents and, in a humble voice, asked them to allow his departure. My father tried to get up in respect but Mr. Khamenei stopped him; then he sat down next to him to say good-bye.

We all wanted to follow the President into the street but his companions told us that this would attract the attention of people outside.

Thus the President of the Islamic Republic visited our family in our house in the simplest, friendliest way; not even our neighbours found out anything that he was in our house. it was a sweet, memorable evening. When he had left, the members of our family went on talking about his kindness, humbleness and affection till late at night. Our telephone was constantly engaged because our cousins and others wanted to give the news to their relatives and acquaintances. The following day we had guests from early morning till late at night! The neighbours, the close and distant relatives who had now learned that the President was our guest the night before, came to ask us about it because no one, up to this time, had heard of Mr. Khamenei visiting an Armenian house.

Our house was the first of many later visits.

Nine

Family visit

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The Family of **Martyr** Edik Nersisian

Visit Date: 1985/12/26



The photo of

Martyr Edik Nersisian

Martyred in Sarepol-Zahab, Kermanshah

Martyred on 1983/9/27

It's late in the evening but the lights in the Office of the President are still on. The President is presiding a meeting with the economic officials of the related ministries. The big television on the far side of the room is on but the sound is turned down. The officials who themselves are responsible for many shortcomings in the country are either blaming others for the bad, economic situation or only justifying themselves in front of the President. And the President, as usual trying hard to lessen the differences and encourage them to do something to solve the people's problems. All in the heart of the President is the people of Iran. He really likes to be among them rather than participating in such official sessions. Anyway, the President sometimes looks at the television which has a program about the martyrs of the Holy war. The appearance of this particular martyr family shows that they are not Muslims. A martyr's mother is being interviewed and he wishes that, instead of listening to those officials, he could hear what the martyr's mother was saying. But he's happy as he has already arranged to meet some of these Christian families, as in the previous year.

Markar, was now at home together with his parents to watch the interview with his mother to be broadcast on TV that evening. He had also made calls to his sisters Hilda and Ofilia and his brother Albert and to many relatives and friends to watch the program. In short, all Armenians in Taslihaat District and probably all

Armenians in Tehran were waiting to watch the interview with Markar, his sister and his mother, the martyr's mother. Markar was also the Captain of the Ararat Football Team and all Armenians knew him well.

Four days ago, reporters from the Iranian TV had interviewed the mother, brother and sister of martyr Edik Nersisian and last night, only a few minutes before it would be broadcast, the worst happened: lights went off in our district! This, of course was not unusual as during those war years it happened in many districts. Therefore almost all Armenians and people in Tehran did watch the interview except the martyr family! And this was really saddening especially to my mother who had so bravely said: it was our duty to sacrifice for our country and to be proud of our martyrs.

Anyway, since after the broadcasting of the interview, our telephone never stopped ringing. They all said how wonderful it was, how bravely she talked about her martyred son. The Armenian priest in our district, our representative in the Parliament and even the members of the football team Ararat praised my mother for what she had said and thanked her a lot. This continued today also. Many Muslims in our district came to our house to talk to my mother and praise her.

The Visit

Among those who came to see us there were some people we didn't know at all and we thought that maybe they were members of the People's Mobilization who helped the war-efforts. We talk to them but they say nothing about the TV interview. They only ask: Will the parents of the martyr be at home this evening?

_ Yes, they will, why?

_ Some officials would like to meet the martyr's family.

We think perhaps they are officials of the Martyrs Foundation and, having watched the interview, they decided to come and meet us.

Later in the evening the same two persons along with a few others knock at our house-door. They come in and we think that they are the guests. We welcome them and offer them seats but they say: the principal guest is yet to come, and after a few minutes they do inform us that the President, Mr. Khamenei will be here soon.

The martyr family couldn't believe it. Mother is exited and hastily tries to put the

house in order and she brings fruits and sweets and puts them on the big table in the room and rearranging chairs. The President's companions say to her: Mother, don't trouble yourself; it is not necessary to do these things. The companions have brought us a bunch of flowers and a framed picture of the Imam; Markar set them on the table. Now the door-bell rings and Mr. Khamenei enters. When our family saw the President in person, they believed it, but they're still thinking that his visit was arranged after last night, that is, after the interview was broadcast.

After saying salaam, the President sits on a chair on the far-side of the table and Markar and the martyr's father sit on his left and his companions sit down on the right side. There are 3 children among the companions whose faces resemble one another; they must be brothers, we think. But we don't know who they are and we don't want to ask about them. The martyr's mother is standing near the kitchen and Mr. Khamenei says: [please come and sit down here](#).

So mother sits next to her husband and says: Thank you, you're most welcome. Mr. Khamenei usually sits on the floor in Armenian houses. The Armenians who are better-off have furniture, but what is a must in all Armenian houses is a table, even in very poor families.



Well, it's Christmas time and the President has come to congratulate the occasion to the family of the Christian martyr.

Then Mr. Khamenei begins with: *May God bless these days for you and bless the dear martyr of your family who fought for his patriotic country; he is a source of pride and spiritual elevation for you in this world and the next world, I share your grief; he is as my own son.*

Then he asks: *Is this the photo of your martyr?* And he points at a framed photo on the table.

Markar gets up and brings Edik's photo in soldier's uniform. Mr. Khamenei looks the photo affectionately for some time and asks:

_ When was he martyred?



_ September 1983, answers Markar.

_ Was he a military officer?

Yes, he was a sergeant, served in Sarpol-Zahab vicinity, my mother says.

Markar gets up again and brings Mr. Khamenei a framed document and says: This was given us on your behalf.

It is a letter of appreciation; they were sent to the families of martyrs in the military.

May God grant you proper rewards, says Mr. Khamenei.

The father is old and looks broken and his face shows that he has worked hard in life and faced many hardships. His head is mostly down and speaks very little, but Mr. Khamenei tries to converse with him: *How many children do you have?*

– Four now, he answers.

My mother adds: We had 5 children; one son was martyred; now we have two sons and two daughters.

The President says: *May God keep them under His protection, and adds: you know that martyrs are also alive.*

The father says: oh yes, yes, yes.

The mother says: He gave up his life for his patriotic country.

May God bless your martyr and give him rewards, says the President.

He turns to the father again and asks him about his job.

He answers in a weak voice: I used to work in a sausage factory. Even uttering this short sentence makes him cough.

Mother who thinks what he said was not audible adds: he was a worker there.

Mr. Khamenei asks mother: *Is this gentleman your son?*

Mother who has an Armenian accent in her Persian replies: Yes, he is, my other son is not here, if he knew you'd give us the honour, he would have come.

– *Well, please say salaam to him on my behalf.*

The President then asks: *was the martyr married?*

– No, but he had a fiancée, and was supposed to marry later.

– *Where exactly was he martyred?*

At Sarpol-Zahab, he was an engineer in mine-finding, the brother says.

– *Mine-finder, it's important.*

The brother goes on: yes, he was also the deputy commander at his garrison and, because of his selfless, courageous activities the commander had promised to officially enroll him in the army after his two-year service was over.

Mr. Khamenei looks at the martyr's photo again and says affectionately: *commendable boy*, and adds: *After all, it is this sort of sacrifices that keep countries and nations safe, it's always been this way, that is, the best people in a nation sacrifice and give up their lives so that the whole society, all people living in*

a certain country could continue their lives. Here I may mention the Christian martyrs in the early stages of Christianity; your martyrs are our martyrs also because, as you know, Jesus Christ is our prophet too. And if those people did not struggle and sacrifice to spread Christianity, I mean, if it weren't for those martyrs, today there would be no news of Christ, the New Testament and Christian teachings; the martyrs sacrificed their lives and Christianity is alive today.

We are all impressed by Mr. Khamenei's knowledge of Christian martyrs and their importance, and mother who is touched by the President's comments says: Nothing in this world is obtained without sacrifices, nothing! And the president says: *excellent, bravo.*

Then the martyr's brother picks up a magazine from the table, shows it to Mr. Khamenei and says: It's a magazine that publishes the biography of the martyrs.

_ *That's interesting, what's its name?*

_ It's called "The Family".

He then adds: and this is a photo of the martyr.

Mr. Khamenei pages through the magazine and says: *And here is the account of the interview with your mother.*



The brother says: Yes, with her and with me and my sister.

The President, who is evidently impressed by the high spirit of the martyr's mother, says: *you possess a high spiritual strength, thank God; this type of spirit is a source of pride and elevation for all of us.*

It's my human duty, says my mother.

We are also proud to be living among people like you; this makes our responsibility heavier on our shoulders especially because of this greatness shown by you all. I pray to God to bless you and I hope you will be successful in all your affairs.

Our family is so excited at this warm, friendly atmosphere: they've forgotten to play host to their guests but Mr. Khamenei himself picks up one piece of cake and says: *Well, we have this piece of cake and then we go away.*

Marker shyly says: Please stay for supper.

And the President says: *I have to visit some other places.*

Marker feels that the meeting is coming to an end; he still has some questions to ask but the intimacy of the meeting overcomes his shyness and asks about the children present: Are they your children, sir?



Mr. Khamenei answers: [these are my own children and, pointing at his companions, adds: And they are my friends.](#)

Everyone looks at the children and the boys shyly gaze at the table, Maytham, the youngest is sitting next to Mr. Khamenei and on his side are Masu'd and Mojtaba. It is really a pleasant meeting for all of us, no standing on ceremony, very simple, intimate and familial with the presence of the children who are wearing very ordinary clothes; if we saw them in the street, we could never think that they were the President's sons.

Later we found out that Mr. Khamenei often took his very young sons with him when visiting the martyr's families. The reason for this behaviour became clear to us in later years when the sons of some officials went astray because they never had such close contacts with ordinary people in Iran; they could never feel the pains, difficulties and shortages in the life of the masses.

The martyr's brother who still thinks that the President came to see them after last night interview, as lights went off in our district; we couldn't watch the program; but all the people saw it except we!

Mr. Khamenei remembers the official meeting in his Office when he could only watch the television from a distance not hearing anything, then one of president's companions who'd seen the program said: It was a wonderful interview.

Mr. Khamenei says: [So it was this lady; she was wearing glasses.](#)

Mother says: Yes, yes. I was in a meeting, I could see the screen but the sound was turned down.

The brother knows that the President had not heard the interview and that he didn't know that the family he was meeting was the same; the visit had been arranged earlier.

The brother adds: Yes, the interview was with my mother and sister and myself, but we couldn't watch it.

Then Mr. Khamenei addressed one of his companions and says: [ask our own Public Relation Office for one copy of that interview and bring it for this family, note it down so you won't forget it.](#)

The brother says to the companion: You don't have to trouble yourself, only let me know and I come to pick it up.



Mr. Khamenei, with a piece of cake in his hand, says to everyone present: **why don't you are have some sweets?** So everyone picks up a piece.

Then Mr. Khamenei asks: **what was the first name of your martyr?**

_ Edik and he was an excellent university student.

The mother adds: He was actually excellent in many fields, among my five children, the martyr was unique.

The President says: **When one gives something in the path of God, it should be the best and you've done this.**

_ It was my humanitarian duty; I had the opportunity to be the mother of one martyr.

President: **May God give the best of rewards; we should never underestimate God's rewards.**

Markar: My mother really has a strong will and spirit.

President: **Thank God.**

Markar: My brother was martyred together with a Muslim comrade in his trench and when we went to the cemetery, my mother first paid respect to this fallen

comrade and then visited the grave of his own son.

President: *That's great.*

I am proud to have such a mother, says Markar, and adds: We truly thank you for your visit, we all were eager to meet you.

President: *Well, thank God for this opportunity to meet such a good and strong family. I didn't know that the lady we were supposed to visit was the same lady who was interviewed on TV, well, it was a fortunate coincidence.*

One of the companions said: One of the important things she said was: Don't you think that we are making these statements because we are being interviewed, no, we always say what we really think.

After this, the martyr's brother shows Mr. Khamenei some photos taken at the mourning ceremony for the martyr and he adds: My brother was both a university student and a teacher at Sughumonian High-school; he taught mathematics there for two years and then joined the army to do his military service.

President: *I understand, he has been an interesting personality from different aspects, and active on many fronts.*

The brother: As I said, he was the captain of our football team Ararat, my brother and I used to be active in sports.

Mr. Khamenei: *That's good work. He then, while picking up his walking-stick, adds: Well, we must leave you now. I am very happy to have met this lady and this family. I will carry the memory of your meeting for a long time for your strong will and spirit.*

Now everyone gets up.

My mother is truly happy; she smiles and says: we're proud to have met you, it was a great honour.

Then the President prays for the health and happiness of the family and says: *Let me give you something as a keep-sake, he hands some coins to the parents of the martyr* and adds: *these coins are made to honour our martyrs.*

The parents thank the President and he says: Goodbye, goodbye.

Chapter 4

The Year 1985

Ten

The Missing Martyr

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The family of **martyr** Zhani Bet Oshana

Visit Date: 1987/1/1



The Photo of

Martyr Zhani Bet Oshana

Martyred in Hur-al-Hovaiza, Khuzistan

Martyred on 1985/3/14

My mother, without noticing that I am already awake, talks on the phone in a low voice. I listen carefully to know what's going on. The very intimate way she speaks shows that she is talking to my maternal aunt Souri. She says that last night she had a dream: Zhani; was back!

Zhani was my elder brother. We were four brothers: I am Nilshon and I was born after him and Jonson is my older brother and Charlie was older than Zhani; I am the youngest. Now Zhani is missing and so we are three brothers.

Mother does not usually tell others about her dreams but aunt Souri is an exception, especially after she lost her husband in a car accident. So mother telephones her every day and talks to her very sympathetically. And when mother has nothing more to say, she talks about her dreams!

Two years ago Zhani, whose military service would have finished in about two months, was martyred at a place called Hur-al-Hovaiza Lagoon at Iran-Iraq border but his body was not found.

Since then my mother is waiting for some news and is often gazing at the entrance-door of our house. During this long year, she has often dreamt of Zhani but never before a dream about his coming back. So now hope has returned to her heart that there will be some news for sure.

I am now very restless. I walk here and there continuously. My mother, who



doesn't know that I know about her dream, is surprised at my behavior; so are my brothers and my father. Today is Friday and everybody is at home. It's about 11a.m. when the door-bell rings. I go to open the door, it's aunt Souri. A few others ring but none of them has anything to do with Zhani. At about 12:30 the house-bell rings, Jonson goes towards the door and, from behind the window, a person whose face cannot be seen talks to my brother. Then Jonson closes the door, he has an envelope in his hand: one of Zhani's comrades at the war-front has brought this letter. A day before his martyrdom, Zhani gave this letter to him to bring to us. He had told him: this is my will, take it to my family. But this friend was himself wounded and couldn't do it for almost a year. Today he has brought it: now the atmosphere in our family is perfumed with the scent of Zhani, as if he had really returned.

We all gather in a room, the father, the mother, the brother and auntie Souri. Auntie Souri says: All of you are not in a natural mood, so give me the letter and I'll read it to you.

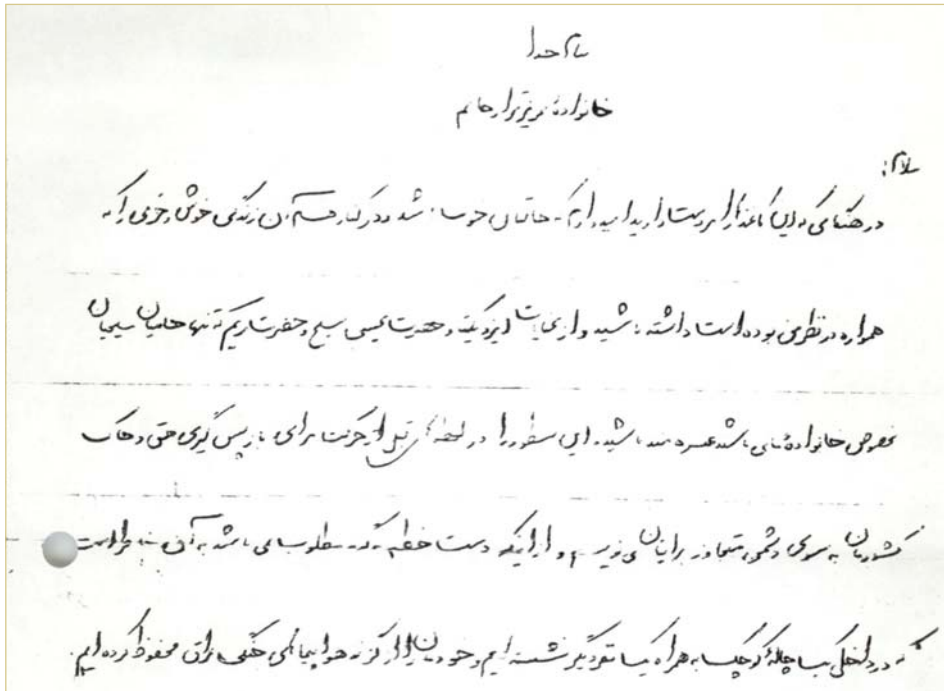


Image of a letter from the martyr to his family

Then she clears her throat and reads:

In the Name of God, my dearest family, salaam, when you have these papers in your hands, I hope you'll all be well and spent a pleasant life that I always had in mind for you and to be blessed by the bounties of God, Jesus Christ and his Holiness Mary. I'm writing these lines a few moments before we start an operation to take back our rights from an aggressor to our country. If my hand-writing is not very legible, well, you must know that I am writing it in a small trench, with a comrade, not to be hurt by the Iraqi airplanes that are bombing us. I meant to write a few lines to you all as I didn't want to go out of this world without telling you what's in my heart.

At this point my mother weeps and cries loudly and my aunt stops reading for a while for mother to become calm. And I close my eyes and try to imagine Zhani with his friend in a small trench while Iraqi airplanes fly over their heads.

Aunt Souri read on:



From left, first one: martyr Zani Bet Oshana

My dearest father...

(I look at father, his eyes are full of tears)

my dearest father, you always tried hard to provide us everything in a good, clean life. I thank you for all your efforts and hardships you faced and if sometimes I made certain requests not in your power, I do apologize; this was because of my childlike behaviour and I never intended to bother you at all. I wish you more success in your profession which is devoted to the betterments of the family's life and the happiness of us all.

Here father picks up a framed photo of himself together with Zhani and Jonson and studies it with tearful eyes for a few moments.

Our aunt goes on reading the letter:

My dearest mother, I don't know what to write to you about your motherly care and your efforts. I always wanted to properly show my gratitude to you and father; when I meant to help you, this damned war was imposed

on us and now at this war-front I really miss you very much.

My mother's weeping does not stop and my aunt, after reading the sentence: "I really miss you very much", has a lump in her throat and cannot continue. She is silent for a while, then she wipes her eyes with her sleeve and tries to read on:

Dear mum, I truly miss you at this moment; I'm sitting on a pile of earth now and remember the times you did not go to sleep and came to me to comfort me. I wish you were here now and I could hold your warm, motherly hands and kiss them over and over again. Anyway, I ask you to be still kinder towards my father and never let him feel lonely. You two, in old age, need each other more than ever.

Aunt Souri stops reading and looks at Charlie; he has his head down with tears in his eyes. It is evident that he's really missing his younger brother a lot.

Aunt Souri now reads:

My dear brother Charlie, oh, brother, how I wish to sit next to you and celebrate the end of my military service. Any way, you must be happy because your happiness makes me happy too. I ask you to always talk to all members of the family and entertain them. I ask you to get up at this very moment and kiss our mother's face. Thus, while I write this, I could imagine you in mother's embrace. This is the only request of your younger brother.

Charlie who's sitting near mother kisses her hands and mother embraces him and kisses his cheeks.

The letter goes on:

My good brother Jonson. All I want to ask you is to listen to our parents' advice more often. Always consult with elders in everything that you do and be sure that there's nobody better than mother, father and brothers who want the best for you. When you begin something, please try to finish it with success. Be sure that walking about in the streets will get you nowhere!

I am thinking if Zhani, at the war-front, if he also remembers me when aunt Souri looks at me and reads: "My younger, dear handsome brother, Nilson", when I

think of you, I'd like to jump and run and scream, oh, my noisy, jumpy.

active brother. Please continue your studies, don't let our parents constantly admonish you about this! You're now a grown-up person. Don't you ever be a source of worries and troubles for your mother, father or brothers and please wherever you go, tell our parents about it.

Hearing this, I promise him in my heart that I will follow his advice. The letter is nearing its end:

My dear, kind brother, do you want to know what I'm thinking right now? Well, I wish very much to be present at your weddings specially Charlie's wedding. Well, if this is not realized, please remember me at your weddings and be sure that I am remembering you also. And oh, my dear aunt Souriana;

when our aunt reads her own name, she put the letter on her heart and said:

May auntie be sacrificed for you! Then she went on reading: I know you lost your husband this year, but do not despair, that's life, you must try to be optimistic. I ask my own family to support aunt Souri in every way and help her in all her affairs. And now I must write down a few lines about the rest of my family: paternal and maternal uncles, their wives and their children: I do remember them and I apologize to them if I ever did anything wrong. I remember my other aunt and of course I pray to God for the health of my grand-father and grand-mother. Please give my regards to all my friends specially Eprim and Joseph and their families.

I follow the lines of the letter as my aunt reads them; now there are only two lines left which says:

I am absolutely sure that, if I am martyred, my soul will live happily in bliss and your prayers for me will help further. I only beg you all not to weep and wail too much because I am not worthy of your affections.

Your devoted son 1985/3/13

After this letter was read, I felt that I loved my brother Zhani a hundred times more than before. I get up, take his framed photo in my hands, kiss it all over and whisper to him: I love you, Zhani brother.



The Visit

It is winter and a very cold winter and so sleeping on the side of a warm large stool under which a stove is laid (Persian “Korsi”) is really enjoyable. Charlie is also lying down on the other side of the Korsi but then someone is knocking at our house entrance-door and Charlie says: Nilson, go and open the door!

I open my eyes and get up. It’s about 9:30 a.m. but mother is not at home; she has probably gone out to buy bread for breakfast. I open the house-door and a well-built young man says: Salaam and I yawm and answer him.

He says: excuse me, boy; I seem to have woken you up, and asks: is this the house of martyr Zhani Bet Oshana?

I say: Yes. And suddenly I think maybe he has some news about zhani and this wakes me up completely and I say excitedly: Yes, yes, it is, I’m his brother, have you found him?

No, unfortunately, but we would like to meet you this evening for an interview; are your parents at home?

I am disappointed and say: Father is on a Journey but my mother and elder brother will be here.

Okay, then we will come to see you this evening for half an hour, and then he says goodbye.

It's evening now and there is a knock at the door. Mother looks around to make sure everything is in place and then she says to me: Dear Nilson, go and open the door.

There is a young man together with a few others carrying flowers and boxes of cakes. They come in and say 'hello' to mother and Charlie, and apologize for taking our time at Christmas Eve. My mother warmly welcomes them as she always does with guests and thanks them for visiting us.

The guests sit down and mother brings tea after a few minutes and then one of the guests says: excuse us for being silent, that's because we are not your principal guest. Mother says: that's alright, we wait and we'll welcome anyone who comes.

A few moments later the door-bell rings and I get up to go and open the door but one of the guests says: My friend will open the door. I sit down and he informs me then that the principal guest is Mr. Khamenei, the President!

Hearing this, mother gets up hastily and goes towards the door and we follow her. Mother says welcome to Mr. Khamenei and kisses his hand which is under his cloak.

Charlie and I also say salaam in the corridor. Then we all sit on the chair around the table. Mr. Khamenei says a few friendly words to us and then asks my mother why she kissed his hand?

Mother replies: Sir, we Assyrians always kiss the hands of our priests and for me you are also a priest, that's why I asked you to allow me to kiss your hand.

Mr. Khamenei looks at the photos on the shelf and asks: [Is that one a photo of your martyr?](#)

I get up and bring the framed photo and hand it to him and he looks deeply at it for long moment while mother tells him about Zhani: when I say that Zhani was the best person in our family, everybody says that my statement is because of motherly love for him, but no, it's not so, truly he was unique in our family in every respect, his faith, his moral character, his studying, he was kind and he was loved by all, he went to church every week and was keen on his prayers.



I feel that my father and Jonson have really missed this meeting. Father is a truck-driver and last night he drove to kerman to deliver something; he will, at the earliest, be here the day after tomorrow, and Jonson travelled to Germany two months ago to continue his studies.



Mr. Khamenei, after consoling mother with some sweet, warm words and explaining the high status of martyrs in the sight of God, speaks with me and Charlie and whether we are studying or working and my mother is really delighted to meet the President in our house.

Charlie goes and brings tea; there are two platefuls of sweets and cakes which mother has baked herself and mother offers them to Mr. Khamenei and he first gives some pieces to us and then picks one for himself.

What has aroused my curiosity all this time is the very young boy, about 10, who is sitting next to me and on the opposite side of the President; he has very short hair like a school-boy and is very ordinarily dressed. And after I find out that he is Mr. Khamenei's son, I think if I were to see him in the street I would've never believed he could be the President's son. This sort of clothes were not usual for the sons of ministers or lesser officials! I wish I could take his hand, go to the street and play with neighbouring playmates and say: Look, this is the President's son, they came to our house and that the President himself is now meeting us in our small house.



Well, I am drowned in these thoughts when I notice that our guests are about to leave. I'm really sad that this visit is coming to an end.

Mr. Khamenei, before his departure, asks us if we lack anything in our daily life. Both mother and Charlie say: Everything is okay, we only pray to God for your health. And, despite this, Mr. Khamenei, gives mother the telephone number of his Office and adds: *If ever, there was anything you wanted, please ring this number.* And then he gives mother a gift.

Mother thanks him a lot and says: God protect you, I was delighted to have met you, we were honored. And Mr. Khamenei says: *I haven't done anything extraordinary; it was only my obvious duty.*

And then, without attracting much attention, he gets into a car and leaves us. A few minutes after the president's departure, all our neighbours rush into our house. I don't know how they've all found out that the President had come to our house. They ask various questions such as: which chair did he sit on? What did he say to you? What did we ask him for? And the like.

I meant to narrate everything the following morning in my school. But they all come to our house in the evening with their questions and say: Lucky you, Nilson, we wish we were in your place. I don't tell them about the president's son and save it for tomorrow at the school.



Mr Nilson Bet Oshana, martyr's brother - October, 2014

Eleven

Khomeini's soldier

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

the Family of **Martyr** Joseph Shahinian

Visit Date: 1985/12/26



The Photo of

Martyr Joseph Shahinian

Martyred in Husseinia Station, Khuzistan

Martyred on 1985/9/16

I am the brother-in-law of martyr Joseph Shahinian. I may say a few words about myself. Whole my life before the Revolution I was fighting the Shah's brutal regime and before the Islamic Revolution, I was arrested and thrown into the infamous Qezl-Qala Prison where I met Mr. Khamenei who was also imprisoned there.

One memorable incident, during those years, was my encounter with Mr. Hoveida, the long-serving prime-minister of the Shah: there was some musical concert in Tehran and Hoveida attended it. I was there too and I asked one of the officials for talking to him for a few minutes and he said: what for? I said: I have heard that the prime-minister likes Armenians, I'm an Armenian and I want to thank him for it. The official was impressed and arranged that I meet him for a few minutes. When I was introduced to him I said: I, as a representative of the Armenian community, would like to advise you not to treat the Iranian people so badly. You must hear their voices. Your regime is a police state but you'll never get anywhere by terror, torture and imprisonment. I am sure one day will come when you can't save yourself even if you spend millions of dollars.

He listened to me because he always pretended that he was an intellectual who could listen to his opponents. Despite this, he said angrily: it's a pity that you belong to a minority in Iran, if not so, I would have arrested and properly dealt with you! Then he ordered his guard: Kick this man out of the place!

Why did I, as an Armenian, oppose the Shah's regime? There were many reasons. One was the importance of "independence and integrity" of my country which had nothing to do with one's religion. The Shah was the absolute servant of the British and American governments. As you know, the father of this Shah was brought to power by the British and later his son, who had escaped because he feared the people, was brought back to power through an American Coup d'état; so he was absolutely indebted to them. He murdered and tortured a great number of our youth in order to protect foreign interests.

Let me tell you the rest of the story. Shortly after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, I found out that Mr. Hoveida, the Shah's prime-minister, was detained in Evin Prison in Tehran, I went to the chief official of this Prison and asked him to let me see Mr. Hoveida for a few minutes. Then I went into his cell and asked him: Do you know me? Well, I am the same young Armenian who predicted your fate and you ordered your guards to kick me out! Now, as I told you that day, you won't be able to save your skin.

Well, I was arrested and imprisoned eight times during the Shah's regime and so I got to know most of the people, who fought against the Shah, in different prisons



and one of those men was Mr. Khamenei whom I got to know in Qezel-Qala Prison. Although I am Armenian, I am more familiar with Persian poetry and literature and Mr. Khamenei who is well-versed in these fields did appreciate my knowledge of Persian literature, though at first he was really surprised.

One important characteristic of Mr. Khamenei was his agreeable behaviour and friendliness with all prisoners, whether leftist or rightist or belonging to different, political groups and he always tried to unite the prisoners despite their many differences.

Anyway when Joseph, my brother-in-law was martyred at one of the war-fronts, I was the first to be informed about his death. But I was told that he has been wounded and is in an Ahvaz hospital.

I was about to travel to Ahvaz when I was told that he had been taken to Tehran. I went to the address I was given and faced the dead body of Joseph in a morgue. It was very strange that he was martyred on 25th of the Persian month of Shahrivar because it was the exact date of my brother's death and the day I got married to Joseph's sister!

The Visit

One day my father-in-law contacted me and said: This evening we have some guests, I want you to come to our house. My parents-in-law understand Persian but cannot speak it properly. So when they have non-Armenian guests, they always ask me to be present as I know Persian better than Armenian! So I went there in the evening and a little later two or three people came to the house with flowers and boxes of cakes and they started looking around and I knew, because of my guerrilla activities, that they were making their security checks and so I was certain that an important official was to visit us. On the other hand, I had heard from my Armenian friends that the President, Mr. Khamenei, has already visited the families of some Armenian martyrs. So I told one of the men: is the President going to meet us? He jumped up from his chair wondering how I know. So I told him: don't worry, we all remain seated here, will not telephone anybody and do nothing. We just wait for his Excellency to arrive.

Then I told my parents-in-law about it but they couldn't believe it. My father-in-law was very sad when Mr. Khamenei's right hand was injured in an explosion.



Anyway, when Mr. Khamenei arrived we sat around a table just as members of one family and chatted in the most intimate, warm ways. He looked at me as if he knew me but did not remember it, so I said: Sir, remember Qezl-Qala Prison? Some 20 years ago! I used to sit under a willow-tree in the prison yard in the afternoons and sometimes you came to me to ask the meaning of an English word. Yes, I am an Armenian called Nurik who sometimes called himself “Nurallah”!

Mr. Khamenei was delightfully surprised and warmly smiled and then he embraced me like one of his oldest friends.

Anyway, as I mentioned before, I played the role of an interpreter in this meeting and Mr. Khamenei said to my parents-in-law: [you understand Persian, so you need some exercise to speak it!](#)

When we sat down around the table, Mr. Khamenei first asked for some photos of the martyr and then he looked at them thoughtfully as if he saw something in his face that we could not. Then he asked Joseph’s mother to say something more about the martyr and the mother said: I was a maid-servant at a school and whenever I came home I saw that I had no work to do because Joseph had



already done all the house-work; he even did our needle-work. He was friendly to all people and I don't remember that he ever sulked with anyone. His brother Zherik is paralyzed in both legs and he did everything for Zherik. And the first time he went to the war-front, he got up very early in the morning and did not wake anyone up because he did not want me to feel uneasy when he was leaving.

Then Mr. Khamenei asked her: [How were you informed about his martyrdom?](#)

The mother explained: A few nights before his martyrdom, I had a dream, I saw someone trying hard to enter our house and when he noticed that he couldn't do this, he took a long stick and smashed the light-bulb in front of our house. From that time I felt something would happen; and since his martyrdom, I truly feel there is no more light in our house.

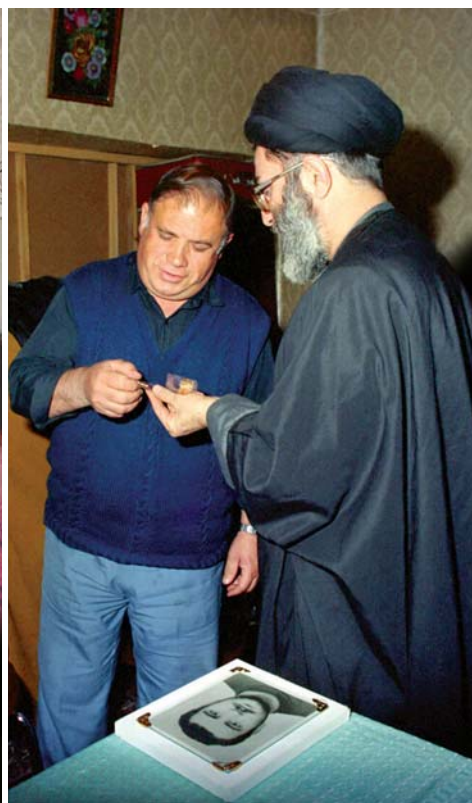
Mr. Khamenei then prayed for the mother and asked God to lighten the heart of this martyr's mother.

Then Joseph's father said: He was one of the snipers in the army; his shots never missed the targets. He was killed in a bombardment; otherwise, I think he would have survived in all battles. All his comrades and his commander who

came to see us said that he often told them he would like to be martyred. And I myself once asked him: what is this you always say and he replied: I am Imam Khomeini's soldier and will fight to the end.

I also told about his mourning ceremony and the great reception by the people, most of them Muslims, who wept and chanted: O Hussein, O Hussein, when carrying his body; it was an immense, heart-breaking mourning and I felt the earth was quaking under our feet.

Mr. Khamenei then asked Zherik about his illness, how it happened, and he described how it was that he had to sit in a wheel-chair and then he talked about his martyred brother: He was awfully kind; I loved playing football but I was not able. So he purchased a series of "small goal" football equipments and we played football at home while sitting. After his martyrdom, I often see him in my dreams. Last night I dreamed he was in a place full of trees and flowers and streams, very beautiful place, and he told me: don't worry; I'll take you with me to such a place.



Our so-called house the President came to was actually a poor-old basement flat which the father had rented. When he asked about the place, the President ordered the officials from the People's Communication Dept in his Office to follow the matter and help father to find a small, pleasant place in the same district, and at the time of departure, Mr. Khamenei said good-bye to Zherik in the kindest manner.

Then he offered some gold coins to Joseph's parents as keep-sakes.

Well, what I said is all I remember from that evening's meeting. The following day, when friends and neighbours came to see us they, as usual, did not believe that the highest authority in Iran after Imam Khomeini had come to our humble apartment in a basement. After a few days, when the photos of the meeting were brought to us and we showed them to our friends, they had to believe it! Well, thank God, the parents of the martyr are not in bad health. I remember that in later years, many reporters interviewed my parents-in-law and asked them about their martyred son. To sum up, I should say that Mr. Khamenei's meeting that evening was a night to remember for a long time.



Parents of martyr Joseph Shahinian



Son-in-law of the family of martyr Joseph Shahinian . November, 2014

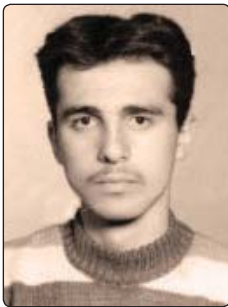
Twelve

Breath of Jesus Christ

Ayatollah Khamenei Visiting

The Family of **Martyr** Vartan Aghakhanian

Visit Date: 1985/12/26



The Photo of

Martyr Vartan Aghakhanian

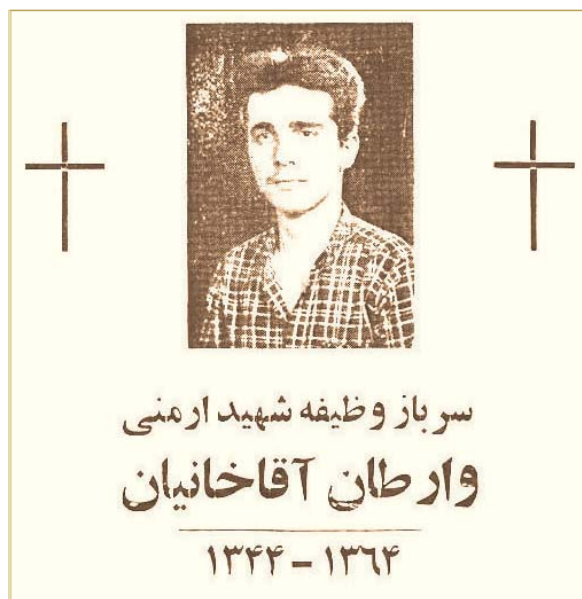
Martyred in Majnoon Island, Iraq

Martyred on 1985/12/9

It's Christmas Eve. The first family to visit is Uncle Gabriel's. Edmond went out to buy some cakes while I was readying myself for the occasion; I choose the darkest of my clothes, and a brownish head- scarf. It's true that it's Christmas time but Uncle Gabriel and his wife, Artoush, are mourning for their martyred son, Vartan.

Edmond is not back yet; perhaps the confectionary shop is crowded. I write poetry in Armenian and I am deeply fond of poems by Sa`adi, Hafiz and Saa`eb; they were great, Persian poets. Then the door-bell rings, so I close my poetry booklet, and go out. Edmond is behind the wheel in his car waiting for me. Sorry, Edmond says, there was a bad traffic-jam, and I say: It is okay, it's not late yet. Uncle's house is not very far from us. On the way, Edmond picks up a magazine and tells me: Here you are, your poems published in the issue of the magazine "Parvin". I read the article 'Hafiz and Jesus" and read it so carefully as if it was not written by myself! Now we have reached the uncle's house. Uncle Gabriel's house is really crowded; almost all the members of our family are here except my martyred cousin Vartan. Of course there are many photos of him on the walls but he himself is missing.

Sadness and grief overshadows the celebration of Christmas: the eyes of my uncle's wife are blood-red because of constant weeping and her voice is not audible.



The uncle's state is not much better than his wife; the absence of Vartan is written down in the lines of his face. They both have aged for some 15 years after Vartan's martyrdom 15 days ago.

Vartan was one of the best young men in our family and he was so good at his studies; he used to have excellent marks in his exams. But, none of us could understand why he left everything to join the army for his military service.

All his friends warned him: Vartan, this is not a Joke; it's real war, murder and slaughter! But he listened to nobody and started his military service.

In Uncle Gabriel's house, though it's Christmas, there are no flowers and no Christmas tree; there are only tears and weeping and wailing.

I, together with other female members of the family, have encircled my uncle's wife trying to console her but she seems to be in a sort of half-asleep. Well, did you expect otherwise? her -19 year-old, wonderful son is gone forever. She had so many sweet wishes for him, but he is now lying under tons of earth. I, as his cousin, felt my heart was cut in two when I heard about Vartan's death, well, and she, as a mother? I don't know what to say.

The Visit

The door-bell rings and my cousin who opens the door comes in with two strang-

ers who are not Armenians because they say “Ya Allah” when they enter. Apparently it had been arranged earlier for some reporters to come and interview my uncle and his wife and I wonder how they are going to talk in their grief-stricken condition, for it is only two weeks since Vartan’s martyrdom. The behavior of the two men is rather strange; they seem to be very worried as if they did not expect to see so many people in this house. One of them takes the uncle to a corner and whispers something in his ears. We notice that uncle’s face changes colour; it seems that the man has revealed a great secret to our uncle. He then approaches us and says: Soon we’ll have an important guest, I go to welcome him and you must prepare yourself to receive him properly.

I am truly surprised; who is this important guest for whom our uncle seems to be in high spirits again and is going towards the entrance-door to welcome him?! I am now so curious to know who the guest is; I can’t wait any more and ask uncle: Please, who’s the guest? Mr. Khamenei, the President, says he hastily. I am more puzzled now. For what reason should the President come to uncle’s house at Christmas Eve? I still don’t believe it: uncle has misheard, probably they are some people from the Iranian Television. But then, oh my God, this person who just entered the house and talked intimately with all of us and congratulated us on the occasion of Christmas, this person who’s now sitting at the table and intensely looking at Vartan’s photo is the President himself.



Yes, he is gazing at Vartan's photo and we are all gazing at him whose face is a friendly spectacle. He then, after his rather long studying of Vartan's photo, turns to us and says:

. God willing, this martyr in your family will be a great source of pride and honour for all of you, as he is for us too, May God Almighty grant to all of you, specially to this mother, a happy heart, clear vision and plentiful rewards in both this world and the next. We truly take pride in you, in this young martyr and the likes of him who courageously and selflessly defended independence of their patriotic country and their homes.



I have certain unforgettable memories about Mr. Khamenei. One was when he, as the Friday Prayers Imam, was delivering a sermon when a bomb exploded among the crowd listening to him. The waves from the explosives even reached the sermon tribune. The crowds were scared and they were about to run away when the loud-speakers announced: The President is determined to continue his sermon. Then he, with a saddened face but firmly, went on with his lecture and people became so calm and fearless as if no bomb had exploded among them a few minutes ago. I have always been proud of such a courageous, powerful President.

Anyway, now Mr. Khamenei asked our uncle about the way Vartan had been martyred and uncle says: It was 15 days ago, it happened in the Majnun Islands. His dead body had been taken to Tehran quickly.

Mr. Khamenei then praised the characteristics of the uncle and his wife for bringing up such children who also brought up someone like Vartan who was as brave and selfless as his parents. He added:

_ These children, these young men, in fact, these great men of our country, guaranteed the independence of our land. If it was not for these, our people could not preserve their integrity, their independence and unity. We are immensely indebted to these martyrs; not only the present generation owes them a lot, but also our future history will be indebted to them. And this goes for you parents too who brought them up. The martyrs were in the front-lines of battle and you were supporting them from behind.

Then the president addressed our uncle and said:

_ you and specially your wife, this mother, if you did not have the strength, tolerance and patience and if you were weak persons, your youth would not be that strong and courageous. It is your strength indeed that empowered them to fight so bravely and selflessly. That's why I say that the whole country is indebted to you.

Minutes go by after Mr. Khamenei's presence in this house and every minute our grief-stricken atmosphere changes and some happiness appears in everybody's face. Now Mr. Khamenei addresses the martyr's mother and says: *I would like very much to hear about your feelings and the way you were informed about your son's martyrdom.*

The mother tries to say something but a lump in her throat prevents it and tears run down her cheeks.

When Vartan's dead body was taken to Tehran, mother hardly managed to take a quick look at him, and now whenever she intends to talk about Vartan, she visualizes that moment and cannot utter a word.

Mr. Khamenei, noticing mother's sad mood, rapidly changes the subject and asks my uncle about jobs and his other children.

I have three other children, one son and two daughters, he replies.

The President says: [May God protect your children and keep them in good health and high morals; I pray for their prosperity in life.](#)

And then as he sees that we are still standing there says: [You ladies, why are you standing there, please come and sit down.](#)

At this juncture, while remembering his decisive, firm sermons, I realize that in this great man, there are other aspects: affection, kindness and delicate emotions. After we sit down, Mr. Khamenei says: [I guess you are relatives of one another?](#)

My husband Edmond says: Yes sir, we are.

And Mr. Khamenei adds: [You did well by coming here to wipe away the loneliness of the martyr's parents.](#)



One of us says: Yes, sir, it was our duty, the least we could do.

[_ Yes, it is truly a duty specially now at Christmas time when people are celebrating. You must do this in the coming years also.](#)

Then Mr. Khamenei, in a very attractive, sweet tone, talks about the sincere feeling of Muslims for Christ Jesus and the Christian martyrs at the early stages of the Christian faith. What he says is so interesting to me especially from the

tongue of a President who is a clergy man himself:

- what your martyrs have done these years, is comparable to what the Christian martyrs of early Christianity did. Those Christian martyrs do not only belong to you, they are our martyrs too. Jesus Christ himself is our prophet also. Muslims do revere Jesus and, as you know, there are numerous verses in the Quran concerning Christ and Holy Mary. We consider Jesus as one of the prophets closest to God Almighty.

Your early Christian martyrs, despite the suppression of the Roman Empire- an idol worshipping system- and despite the animosities of Jews in places such as Jerusalem and Old Syria, fought for their divine faith and resisted against all odds. In those days Christians could not express their opinion openly, and the Gospels, as you know, were transferred by the word of mouth for some 100 or 150 years, no one dared write down anything in this respect or carry any written notes. Through the fear of the Romans and Jews they were forced to read verses of the Gospels in underground hideouts. Thus many of these faithful people were murdered; they even murdered their women and children.

The Roman soldiers used to enter Christ villages and places of residence, forced doors open and murdered their wives and children; it was absolute savagery. But Christians resisted all hardships and, as a consequence, after some 2000 years, you do have Christianity today. This spreading of Christianity, this global expansion of your faith, is really the result of the sacrifices of those great martyrs. If it were not for them, today you would hear nothing of Christianity. And today similar sacrifices and selfless acts could keep our Revolution alive and preserve its integrity and independence. Yes these martyrs are great, valuable assets and I am proud of all of you, specially this lady-mother and your martyred son; you are truly a source of pride and glory for all of us.

When Mr. Khamenei is about to leave, the grief-stricken atmosphere in the house is completely changed; you don't see much sorrow and sadness on the faces. When he decides to leave, he goes towards my uncle and his wife and says: *Allow me to give you some keep-sakes in memory of our martyrs.* He first

hands some coins to my uncle and to his wife and then, in the warmest and friendliest manner, he says good-bye and leaves us.



I am now at my own house; it's about 2 in the morning. I am walking in my room, going in circles. The vision of what went on in Uncle Gabriel's house a few hours ago, does not let me go to sleep. What a wonderful evening it was!

Since Mr. Khamenei left us, I have been reciting a verse by Hafiz which is most descriptive of this evening's intimate meeting:

The burden of the grief which had our souls depressed

Was taken off by someone who possessed

The healing breath of Jesus Christ

I also composed a few lines of poetry about this marvelous visit following the rhyme and rhythm of Hafiz.

Chapter 5

The year 1986

Thirteen

Both the mother and the father

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The Family of **Martyr** Richard Ebrahimi

Visit Date: 1987/1/1



The Photo of
Martyr Richard Ebrahimi
Martyred on 1986/8/19

My mother who has faced hardships bravely for the last 20 years since my father left her, who never complained and stood firm like a mountain against all odds in our life, is now opening her heart to me, her only daughter:

You see, during these 5 months since the martyrdom of your brother Richard, I often visit his grave but I never saw any flowers or anything showing that your father has visited the grave of his martyred son, oh, I can't believe it.

She sighs deeply and stops talking; she doesn't want tears to accompany her words. I embrace my mother tightly. I think to myself: it's good for mother to weep and pour down tears but she, as always, silently sighs.

Well, twenty years ago we were a five member family living in Urumia: My parents, my elder brother Robert, my younger brother Richard and I, the only daughter in the middle.

Everything was going fine in our life when suddenly my father left us for no reason. He married someone and started a different life; Richard then was only three months old! So father left us and mother was alone; we had no income, no place to live, not enough food and we faced all sorts of difficulties. She managed, however, to bring up three children through her tireless efforts.

When she comes home, I kiss her hands and say: Mum, it's very cold outside, let me bring you a hot cup of tea.

She says: that's fine and then she asks me about Robert and Alem. I tell her they've gone out to buy some cakes and sweets.

That's right, it's for the guests, she explains.

I am surprised and ask her: Do we have guests? I thought they've gone out to buy something for Christmas!

She takes a sip at her tea and says: what Christmas, we're still mourning for our martyr, not only for him but for all martyrs.

At this moment the door-bell rings. I open the door. Robert and Alem come in. Alem, seeing his grandma, rushes towards her and says: Happy New Year, grandma. She embraces him tightly; since Richard was martyred, mother embraces her grandson more emotionally.

I want to ask Robert about our guests this evening but suddenly we hear a loud siren and the radio announces: this is an emergency siren and it means that aerial attacks are soon to happen. Please go into underground shelters.

Robert quickly switches off all the lights in the house and we hear voices of some people shouting: put your lights off! It's because such lights may guide Iraqi aircraft to bomb residential areas.

We sit down again. Mother is busy playing with Alem and I ask Robert: you didn't tell me we have guests this evening?

Nothing important, a few of Richard's friends will come to visit us, a few from among those hundreds who took part in his burial and mourning ceremonies.

I feel uneasy, not because I don't like guests, no, because I feel bad to receive guests in this damp, old basement place; especially because they are non-Armenian friends and comrades of Richard.

Robert who spots my unease tries to comfort me saying: Oh, my little sister, don't worry, they're ordinary people not the President of the Republic!

Of course after hearing the Red Alert siren, I felt better because I thought that under such conditions there will be no guests.

Now almost an hour has passed since we heard the siren when the door-bell rings. Robert jumps up; he had almost forgotten that we were supposed to have guests. While going to open the door, he says: Our guests, most probably. Meanwhile, I wear my head-scarf and go to the kitchen to prepare things.

From the kitchen I hear the voices of two guests. After a few minutes, I enter the room and say 'salaam' to our guests. The two young men, without looking at my face, get up out of respect and ask me to pardon them for having troubled us on Christmas Eve.

I separate Alem from mother and take him in my own arms. I'm about to go back to the kitchen when we hear the door-bell ringing again. I hear Robert saying in a stammering voice: Oh, please, co,co-, come in. I look towards the entrance-door to see who this new guest is. First I see a black walking-stick and then the person. Oh, my God, it's really Mr. Khamenei, the President!

I am really shocked for I cannot believe that the President has come to our poor house to meet us in such a simple manner, especially because it was only two hours ago after the radio warning not to go out! I again look at Robert; he seems to be shocked too.

The President, before sitting down, greets us all and even says 'salaam' to my little boy Alem. Mr. Khamenei has such a friendly, warm attitude that I, who used to take refuge in the kitchen, see myself sitting not far from him without being shy or anything.

Then Mr. Khamenei looks at Richard's painting and asks: *Is this the picture of your martyr?* And my mother replies: Yes, it's drawn by one of his friends.

After a few moments, he says: *You must be the martyr's mother.*

Yes I am, answers mother.

Then he looks at me and asks: *How about you, lady?*

I reply in a proud voice: I am the martyr's sister. I felt I had never been so proud of being a martyr's sister as now.

I look at Robert who is sitting in a corner. He still looks surprised and confused; perhaps his memories of Richard are revived in his mind. Richard was 6 years older than Robert but they had very close relations with each other; they often went out together and helped each other in every respect.

I look at him, wave my hand and try to tell him that there is nothing on the table for our guest. I want him to take care of Alem so I can go to the kitchen.

Mr. Khamenei now asks mother about the date of her son's martyrdom and mother says: A month ago.

Well, that is very recent then, says the President.

Mother, who has now found out how kind and friendly Mr. Khamenei is, begins to talk of her expectations: I expected that Richard's friends and some officials from the Defence Ministry or from the Martyrs Foundation would visit us on the occasion of Christmas as they did in his mourning ceremonies.

Mr. Khamenei says in a kind, fatherly voice: I apologize to you on this part. I am really touched; this President is such a simple, ordinary and humble person.

He goes on: Perhaps they were not informed but I ask you to accept my apology on their behalf.

Mother who is impressed by Mr. Khamenei's words says: I'm sorry I complained, you're my lord and I am nobody, but we mothers who have lost their dear children are hadly in need of consolations; they help warm our hearts again.

Mr. Khamenei looks at Robert, smiles at him and exchanges a few word with him and then tells mother: Well, may God Almighty protect these two young son and daughter for you and God willing, may this Christmas bring you blessing and happiness, I pray that your New Year will be a sweet, pleasant year for you.

Mother interrupts him and says: Excuse me but this year we are not celebrating Christmas.

She adds: We Christians believe that as long as this war continues, with bombings and killing of people, we should not be celebrating Christmas. Celebrations are for times when people could fearlessly get together, without the sufferings of the war and without wearing black clothes; then we should celebrate Christmas to be happy again at the birth of Jesus. But now many people suffer from the attacks by Saddam regime. The houses of some of our friends, who migrated to Kermanshah, were bombed and devastated. Of course even under such conditions we do have a symbolic celebration but not a real one, that is, we do decorate a Christmas tree and give friends some gifts so that the enemy would not think that we've given up all hope.

Mr. Khamenei carefully listens to mother's words with a smile; he lets her go on talking as if he just likes to hear our mother. This is apparent in what he says after mother stops:



... well, I thank you very much for your good and wise words. You are a cultured, thoughtful lady and this is a great source of happiness for us to see that the mothers of our martyrs are such well-educated, cultured ladies.

He adds: what you expressed was right and solemn, but on occasions such as the birth-anniversary of Christ and other religious or non-religious occasions, there are memorable moments to gladden the hearts. In my opinion there is no problem with such celebrations. As you know, dear lady, incidents such as losing one's children, sisters or brothers have always happened; these events have always been witnessed by humanity on a daily basis. We must find ways to dust off such sorrows from our hearts so that an ordinary life full of hope and happiness could go on. Ways must be found that the members of the martyrs' family could live as pleasantly as possible. As you said, real celebration of such occasions are when there are no wars, no devastation, no pains and no sorrow. Despite all this, such occasions as celebrating the birth of Jesus or remembering great men and women who served humanity are good events that make people happy. For this, I am myself very happy to have come to your house and visit you.

In my turn, I wish Richard was here and could participate in such a warm, intimate meeting but his memory is everywhere around us and Mr. Khamenei asks mother to tell him more about her martyr.

She then thus explains:

.. My son's faith was very strong; all people in our district would testify to this. He had never raised his head to look at girls. The day we went to the station when he was travelling to Kerman to start his military service, I told my family: this boy is so innocent, I'm sure he will be martyred! I was inspired that such a person has to be martyred; this was visible in all his movements, his behaviour with other people and his haste to perform what he thought was his duty. Whenever he was on a short leave from war-front, he seemed to want to go back as soon as possible. The last time he was on leave, I begged him to stay one more day because his sister was coming to Tehran the following day. I even suggested that I would get a sick certificate from a doctor I knew! But he said: mother, my job together with a comrade is to look for mines, if I don't go, this other soldier will have to carry out the job alone, mother, don't let me be so unfair. I swear to God he insisted so much that I finally let him go; I always felt he would be martyred.



When mother says that she knew he would be martyred, I remember that his military comrades said the same thing about him. They also said: He was working from 5 in the morning till 12 midnight, God knows that he didn't know the meaning of tiredness and days before his martyrdom he had volunteered to drive a truck loaded with tar and he did smear tens of kilometers of dusty roads with tar so that the enemy would not see the dust going up. They added: we often told him to rest a while and he replied that as long this Baathist-Zionist enemy breathes, I can't rest!

Another soldier told us: Once one of his Muslim comrades was martyred and his body lay in the enemy zone on the Iraqi side of the border. Richard went to the other side at night without informing his commander. He did carry the body back. And when his commander reproached him for this, he said: I am ready to be punished, but the body of Hussein was left in the enemy zone, I couldn't bear that, because I know that the mothers of martyrs would like to see the bodies of their sons. At his mourning ceremony, one of our neighbours took the loud-speaker, showed us a big picture of Richard and said: 10 days before his martyrdom, he came to me, gave me this picture and begged me to take care of his mother and sister if he was martyred.



The evening before his martyrdom, he telephoned mother and said: I owe Taghi some 50 Tumans; Taghi was the name of the owner of our nearest grocery. Mother had asked him: why don't you do it yourself when you come here on leave, and he had answered: Maybe it will be a long time before I come, so please pay him the money, he has a large family, and he needs it. Richard was only 20 years of age when he was martyred.

Wasn't he married? Mr. Khamenei asks and mother says: No, he wasn't married yet.

Then the President talks to Robert who's sitting next to me: **How about you, you were older than the martyr, weren't you?**

Robert says: Yes

And what are you doing now? Asks Mr. Khamenei.

I'm doing some metal work and a few days ago, I took part in an exam in computer efficiency and I was successful, I've already given them my document, we'll see what happens next.

_ What's your education level?

High school diploma, sir, he says.

_ Why didn't you continue your studies?

_ Well, sir, I had to provide for the family's expenses and now I'm 25 years of age.

_ How about you, lady, are you engaged in some sort of profession?

_ Not in an office; I do some weaving work, some tailoring and teaching different things, that's how I brought up these children.

How about their father, did he die before all this? Asks Mr. Khamenei.

And my mother says painfully: I wish he'd have died. No, 20 years ago he left us. This so-called father has not even come to visit his martyred son's grave. He's never cared how his children were being brought up. He's never once visited the grave of his martyred son, though he lives not very far from us in this district. For some 20 years he has never cared how we live in this basement, where Your Excellency is now visiting us.

Mother is silent for a few moments while, with the corner of her head-scarf, she wipes her tears and then she changes the subject, as if she feels that the narra-

tion of what she's has gone through, gives Mr. Khamenei a heart-ache and she doesn't want that.

She then adds: it's interesting for you to know that when Richard was joining the military, his older brother was supposed to come back after his military service in a month's time and we could all be together for Easter and the Iranian New Year. My daughter had also married. I told him: if you go, I'll be absolutely lonely. But he said: Mother, you could tolerate being lonely for a short while, but in the war-fronts those soldiers are also lonely, we must go and help and he did go away. So the two brothers never met each other again.

I look at Mr. Khamenei's face; he seems to be full of admiration for mother and then he says:

_ You're a brave mother; you're a selfless, tolerant mother. May God Almighty grant you His rewards. God willing, in exchange for the deep pain you suffer on the path of holy aims and ideals, He will enlighten your heart with great, spiritual happiness and that your life from now on will be a blessed life.

I also feel like talking to this kind President, so I say: You know my mother has brought us up in the face of numerous hardships and shortage of income. I remember that Richard liked to have a new wrist-watch, and mother, with difficulty, saved some 150 Tumans to buy it for him; she gave it to him the last time he came back on leave and he was truly happy to receive it. Richard said to mother: I want you to tie it around my wrist yourself. She did and she said: I hope I may do it again when you're about to marry. Well, mother's wish did not realize.

Mr. Khamenei consoled me with some warm, fatherly words and then he asked mother: *How old was your martyr?*

Twenty years, four months and four days, replied mother.

Mr. Khamenei is surprised by mother's exact figures and he says:

_ wonderful, how meticulous, this kind of memory belongs to mothers only.

My mother then said: you know, men usually make grand claims but it is really us mothers who go through every damn thick and thin!

The President and all of us laugh at mother's tough statement; the mother also laughs and tries to explain: Excuse me, sir, for my impolite way of talking; you

are like a father to all of us. I don't want to exaggerate but I brought up two sons. They went out early morning and came back about 7 in the evening; no one ever saw them wasting time in the streets. They went to school to study and worked in the afternoons. Everybody in our district respected them. Yet many men claim that it was they who brought up good children!

Mr. Khamenei listened to mother while drinking his tea, and then he said: [There is no doubt about the influence of mothers on children's behaviour and characteristics; mothers do influence the moral and social values of their children. Those so-called intrinsic characteristics of children are undoubtedly the products created by mothers. This is also true in educational tendencies of children. And this is truer in your case because you played the roles of both the mother and the father.](#)

This phrase 'both the mother and the father' uttered by Mr. Khamenei impressed mother very much.

Anyway my mother, having found an attentive kind listener, went on talking to the President more about her life and her children: I always wanted my children to grow up to be properly useful persons. Whenever I saw a guilty person with a policeman, I said: Richard, it's much better to be a policeman than a person engaged in vice. I advised my children to become useful people for the society, and serve their country.

Certainly, says Mr. Khamenei and adds: [Your enlightened way of thinking and your own character and personality have surely had positive effects on your children.](#)

He then looks at Alem and asks me in a sweet voice: [Is this little one your kid?](#)

_ Yes.

_ [What's his name?](#)

_ Alem.

He repeats the name Alem a few times and tells Alem: [you dear little kid, come here.](#)

Alem, who has a bottle of milk in his right hand, goes towards him and Mr. Khamenei takes his left hand kindly and asks: [How do such children learn Persian?](#)



They learn it fast through television programs, says my mother. She adds: And this child has learned Turkish too!

[You know Turkish?](#) Asks the President.

Yes, we do. So whenever I wanted to say something to my daughter and I didn't

want the kid to understand, I spoke Turkish, and as we frequently did this, he learned it too!

Mr. Khamenei then embraces Alem and kisses him a few times and then he gets up and says:

. Well, we mustn't take more of your time. Our purpose was to meet you in person and express our gratefulness to a martyr family and stress our debt to our valuable martyr. I hope our meeting will have some, even a little, effect in lessening your pains.

Mother says: It is definitely so; she repeats this three times.

Robert and I, in our turn, thank Mr. Khamenei for visiting us.

Then Mr. Khamenei gives two gifts to mother and says: *These are only tokens to remember our meeting on the occasion of Christmas.*

Mother says: Your coming here is much more valuable than any gifts; you have already illuminated our humble house.

Mr. Khamenei thanks mother smiling and says: *Farewell, may God always protect you in life.*

Now the President is gone and I don't know why I remember a line of poetry that Richard often sang loud:

Life is so nice and sweet,
You may give up your life for it!

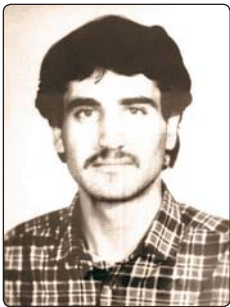
Fourteen

The revolution warms up the churches

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The Family of **Martyr** Yora Sardarian

Visit Date: 1995/1/2



The Photo of

Martyr Yora Sardarian

Martyred in Haaj-Omran, Kurdistan

Martyred on 1986/8/30

Brothers and sisters of the Armenian martyr write about him.

Vartan:

When a comrade of my martyred brother came to see us, he was most surprised because we were not mourning at all; there were no black flags on the walls of our house. He knocked at the door and said: Is Vartan at home. Among us, the seven brothers, I am not the eldest but people know me as the most outspoken and the most sympathetic of them! I went to the entrance-door and there stood William, Yora's very close friend. I embraced him and said: I'm very glad to see you alive!

He wondered whether to counter me with a Joke or tell me what he had come to tell me. Well, after some introducing words and unrelated narrations, he said: To tell you the truth, I think Yora was martyred about two weeks ago! I don't know why you have not yet been informed. Perhaps there was not a number-plate around his neck and his identity has not yet been certified. If you go to the front-zone he was fighting in, you may know the facts.

There were nine of us, seven brothers and two sisters and Yora was the youngest. The eldest brother was Shahin and I was next in age. So I told Shahin about this and he advised that we should not tell father anything about this and that we together with Vohen and Serzhik, my younger brothers, travel to the bat-

tle-zone and find out. Father liked Yora, the youngest, very much and he used to say that God had granted this youngest son to him so that he could be like his walking-stick in old age and take care of him. Yora himself was also the most handsome and the kindest among us; he had the highest respect for our parents too. So we didn't inform father and set out.

All the time on the way we worried lest his body be already buried, because then we couldn't take his body to Tehran; he was martyred 10 days before and this was quite possible.

But when we reached Haaj-Omran, we saw his body still deposited in the morgue. His friends and comrades said that he never stopped working and that he didn't know tiredness. Indeed when I looked at his dead body, his face showed that only now he was resting.

We owe the finding of his body to Imam Hussein because two days after his martyrdom, there were mourning ceremonies on Tasua and Ashura (Imam Hussein's martyrdom anniversary) and so they had not buried him; we thanked Imam Hussein again.

Yora was a master expert in preparing dynamos, and generators; he could repair and make functional all sorts of dynamos, coolers, cars, etc. when his daily duties were over, he would continue his work to repair military cars.

Vartuhi:

As I was born after Vartan, my parents named me Vartuhi which in Armenian is the female form of Vartan. My parents did agricultural work in Shazand, Arak province; they came to Tehran only in winters. So, in their absence I played the roles of both the elder sister and mother. I used to take care of him, send him to school and saw to his needs. Yora possessed two conspicuous qualities; he was both a really handsome young man and a very quiet, shy person.

When he joined the army and was sent to battle-fronts, he sent me letters in short intervals; he didn't want me to miss him too much. And whenever he came back to us on leave, he would describe what he had done and how once he had captured a few Iraqi soldiers alone!



He always did his own work and never let me wash his clothes or iron them. The very last time he went back, I sent a sack full of clothes and things, but after his martyrdom, when his sack was brought to us, I found out that he hadn't had the time to even pull the sack's zip open; everything was untouched!

The night before his martyrdom, I dreamed that he was standing on a hill; there was a big curtain there; he pulled the curtain across and I could see the other side where some soldiers were smiling and having a good time. I asked Yora: who are they? And he answered: the other side is the residence of martyrs; I also wish to join them!

Rafik:

From among seven brothers four finished their military service and came back home safe and sound; only Yora, the youngest brother never returned.

The Visit

Eight years had passed since Yora's martyrdom when one evening we were hosts to a great personality. It was Christmas Eve. We were told that some people would visit us to talk about Yora's martyrdom. That evening three of my broth-

ers, my parents and I were at home. The guests arrived but they were mostly silent and did not ask any questions. But suddenly we were informed that in a few minutes the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, that is, Ayatollah Khamenei, comes to meet us!

My parents were astonished and although the room was clean and in order, mother started cleaning and wiping things. My brother still couldn't believe it. If I was not an eye-witness that evening, I wouldn't have believed it either, but it was he in person who stepped in our house.

I remember that the Leader, after saying 'salaam' and enquiring after our health, asked us to show him a photo of our martyred brother. So father got up and handed him a framed photo of Yora. He studied the photo for a while and asked us about the date and place of Yora's martyrdom and asked us all to accept his condolences:



.. May God Almighty grant hopes rewards, to you parents, to you brothers and all your relatives, and may He bring happiness in your hearts. this young man, who went to war in the path of God, for his people and for his country, who fought bravely and was killed, was a great person and

performed a great job; this is called martyrdom. Departing from this world in this way is most valuable. He is a source of pride for the parents who brought him up and then let him sacrifice himself for his patriotic country. If we did not have such courageous, selfless youth and families such as yours, the independence of our country would not have been guaranteed and the Iranian nation would not be known as a great, independent country. If today our country is known for its integrity and independence, if our people can hold their heads high throughout the world, we owe them to these young men.

These are outstanding people who went to fronts to fight because they felt that their country was in danger. Of course, as you know, there are also some people who, when there is no risks but there are profits to gain, they say that they are ready for everything; in comfort they're ready! But when there are dangers and risks to life, it's only selfless, outstanding people like your son who defend their country and the nation. Well, I pray to God to grant you His proper rewards, make you happy and illuminate your hearts.

I still remember that in this meeting Mr. Khamenei spoke separately with each one of us asking our occupations, our status of marriage, our children, our church-going and the like. The most interesting thing to me was how patiently and meticulously he listened to our answers and how warmly he commented about them. Of course he talked to my parents more than each one of us. As an example, he asked father: *well, what's your occupation, dear father?*

- We used to do agricultural work and after that I worked in a factory for a few years, replied father.

- *Where do you come from?*

- We are residents of Arak province.

- *Are there many Armenians in Arak?*

- Well, I think there are 100 or 150 Armenian families there.

- *Where are they in that province?*

- Mostly in Shazand, because there are many factories there, oil, petrochemicals and related plants.



_ Is your lady-wife also from Arak?

_ Yes, we all come from there.

Then the Leader says: *That's interesting. I knew that we have Armenian in Isfahan, Urumia, Tabriz and Tehran but I didn't know that there were Armenians in Arak too. Well, I hope that the Armenian community, wherever they live in Iran, will be happy and prosperous.*

I also remember a sweet joke the Leader said. But I must explain it:

Before Mr. Khamenei's arriving, I had poured cups of tea for the Leader's companions and for all of us but when Mr. Khamenei arrived, we forgot to bring tea for him because of the exited atmosphere. Now in the middle of the meeting when Mr. Khamenei was talking to mother, my father who noticed there was no cup of tea in front of the Leader did slowly push his own cup of tea towards Mr. Khamenei. When the Leader finished his conversation with mother, he looked at the cup of tea in front of him and said humorously: *firstly this tea has gone cold, secondly it's not my cup of tea, whoever it belongs to must drink it and thirdly this is a large cup, if you don't mind bring me a cup half as much!*

Altogether Mr. Khamenei's meeting with us was so warm, intimate and kind that we all felt we were talking to a member of our own family; he seemed to have come to his own sister's house.

Another subject of conversation with us was a discussion about the condition of churches in Iran after the Revolution and our interest in them. At one point Mr. Khamenei talked about priests and preachers and commented: *Well, if a priest knows what to say, the youth will be attracted and would go to churches more often, but if he repeats some old stuff or matters the young could hardly understand, then he cannot absorb the youth.*

At this point I said: Fortunately after the Islamic Revolution, the atmosphere in our churches has dramatically changed; the young people's attendance has increased and it's daily increasing.

The Leader then said:

_ *This is a great aspect of a religious revolution. Although it is an Islamic Revolution, it has affected all religious beliefs and faiths. This is a global phenomenon, not only in Iran. The Iranian Revolution brought about the*

importance of religion and so you see now that there is a new outlook toward religion. As you may remember I was a member of our Revolutionary Council in the years 1979 and 1980. Then we heard news about the solidarity movement in Poland whose mottos were in support of the Polish church. This happened in a country where the Communist governments had fought the church and Christian churches for some 40 years but the new generation who was brought up under Communism, this new, young generation supported the church heartily. At the Revolutionary Council there were different analyses about this Polish movement. I was of the opinion that our Revolution had somehow left its marks on the Polish movement, in other words, our religious movement which attracted attention to the possibility of a religious state had that effect. What you said about increasing number of youth attending church ceremonies must be true. Of course there are all sorts of entertainments for the young people but going to church helps them spiritually.

When the Leader rose to say good-bye, we found out how warm and sweet his presence was because none of us had noticed the passage of time.

We all thanked him a lot for his visit and father thanked him more than others: You came to our humble house and illuminated it. May God keep you in good health for Iran, for all of us, we hope we shall continue to live under your pleasant shadow and may God grant you a long, long life.

I had never heard father speak so sweetly and fluently!

Finally Mr. Khamenei said: Our purpose of this meeting was to congratulate you on the occasion of Christmas, to congratulate you, your wife and the whole family as well as paying respect to the high status of martyrs including your young son who chose to fight for his country and was martyred; in one word, we come here to honour him.

The Leader, before departing, gave a precious gift to mother and said: this is just a keep-sake for you, madam, may God bless you and good-bye.

Chapter 6

The year 1987

Fifteen

Armenian Christmas Night

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The families of **Martyrs** Vigen Karapetian,
Herand Avanesian, And Herand Hakopian

Visit Date: 1993/1/5



The Photo of

Martyr Vigen Karapetian

Martyred at Dehloran, Ilam

Martyred on 1987/3/26



The Photo of

Martyr Herand Avanesian

Martyred at Kermanshah

Martyred on 1988/7/12



The Photo of

Martyr Herand Hakopian

Martyred at Fakkeh, Khusistan

Martyred on Summer of 1988

I had heard that the Leader of the Revolution visited the families of Armenian martyrs on Thursday evenings but this one happened on a Tuesday evening. I couldn't understand it because that Tuesday had no significance in my calendar. I also heard that the Leader himself had chosen the date. Later on I found out that this choice was due to the Leader's knowledge about the beliefs of the Armenian community, as we celebrate Christmas on the 6th of January; that Tuesday was the 5th of January, that is, exactly our Christmas Eve. The Assyrian Christians in Iran, who are Catholics, celebrate Christmas as the Europeans, that is, the 26th of December. I should add that the birth of Christ is also important to Muslims because they know Jesus Christ as the prophet of love and hope.

Thus this evening, the 5th of January is, as I said, the Armenian's Christmas Eve and the Leader has decided to visit the families of three Armenian martyrs. Armenians in Tehran live in different districts; so I think it was easy for the officials of the Leader's Office to find three Armenian families of martyrs who did not live far from one another.

Two or three ordinary cars carry the Leader and his companions without any pomp or formalities from His Office towards Damavand Street and unto Vahidiyeh District.

The car carrying the Leader drives through Tehran streets among thousands of

other cars and it stops at all red lights. The first place to visit is the house of martyr Vigen Karapetian. The car stops very close to the entrance-door of the house and the Leader gets out without attracting any attention.

First of all my brother and I, the elder brothers, came to Tehran. My parents, my sister and Vigen the youngest brother remained in one village because Vigen was about to finish his high-school studies and later they all came to Tehran because mother could not stay away from us, but I should confess that our time in the village was the best days in our life.

How we, in the first place travelled to Khakbab village after the Second World War, is a long story. Khakbad was a prosperous village near Khomein and Ali-Gudarz. We were the only Armenian family living there but my father was so revered by the villagers that even now, after so many years, whenever we go there, all villagers welcome us and praise Mr. Aghik, that is, our father. Father was a bone-setter with some knowledge of medicine and he was later chosen as the village-chief. Every day, many people with hands and legs broken or injured were brought to him from nearly villages and he was so skillful in his work that people in distant villages also heard about him and in these villages, if someone had his head injured, people said: you must quickly take him to Mr. Aghik, only he can fix it!

When such people were taken to our house, my mother welcomed them and brought them sweet and cakes but some of them, when they found out that we were Christians, wouldn't touch anything but mother was not upset, she would borrow tea and other things from Muslims and served them!

But the fact that we were Christians and they all were Muslims never created any problems as they all were friendly and intimate towards us; the only difference was that they were mostly Hajjis, Mashhadis or Karbalais (the persons who have gone on pilgrimage to Mecca, Mashhad or Karbala) and my father was Mr. Aghik! Father often went to Khomein to heal people and there he had heard how Agha Sayyed Mustafa, the father of Imam Khomeini, had been martyred at the hands of the agents of Reza Shah, the father of the deposed Mohammad Reza Shah. He had also once met the mother of the Imam and told us what a brave

woman she was. All this, of course, goes back to many years before the Islamic Revolution.

Well, as I said, we were now in Tehran. We were in the middle of the Iran-Iraq war and Vigen had reached the age for doing his military service. My mother was really worried about this; he was the youngest child and very dear to mother. He was also a courageous, fearless person and as from the beginning of the war, so very young, he used to say: I must go and fight this unmanly, coward enemy! My sister hid his identity card so he couldn't go to register for the military! But he had a copy of the card and registered himself with it. He spent his short training period in Tehran and in winter he was sent to Sherhani region in Ilam. It was about this time when our father passed away. It was a real hard job to tell Vigen about this. He did, however, asked for a short leave and came to Tehran for father's mourning ceremony. Almost all people in Khakabad took part in father's mourning and funeral sessions. When these ceremonies were over, mother told Vigen: I don't have the strength to bear another such heart-sore!

Despite this, he went back to his war-front; he said: I am needed there.

Months later, he came to see us again on a short leave. Whenever he was with us, we would all gather around him and he told us about his work at the war-front in his happy, humourous manner; he always brought smiles in our faces. Only when he narrated something about the martyrdom of his friends and comrades, there was a lump in his throat and he wept. After a few months, it was a year our father had died, and we told him we went to visit his grave but he said he was too busy and couldn't come to Tehran.

His 20th birthday was on the 3rd of Iranian month of Farvardin but only four days after this, he was martyred. I was told that he had been shot when he was on a guard shift and that I should travel to the area. I didn't believe this, so I didn't tell anybody about it. When I got there and saw him lying in the morgue, he didn't look like a dead person; he was like a person in a calm sleep; only he didn't answer me when I called his name several times!

The martyrdom of Vigen following the death of father broke my mother down. When the news reached Khakabad, all Muslim residents wailed and wept so much as if they had lost a brother and now if you travel to Khakabad, you will

see a large board with a photo of martyr Vigen Karapetian at the entrance of the village which was prepared and set up by the villagers themselves. Anyway those days after Vigen's martyrdom were really tough days for all of us.



mother and brother of martyr Vigen Karapetian , Entrance of Khakabad village

The Visit

Some 5 years have now passed since Vigen's martyrdom but my mother is still be-grieved; whenever she sees a soldier in the street, she says: May God protect him for his mother's sake, and then tears come into her eyes. During these years only the birth of two grand-children has made her happy and brought her back to life. Now it is Christmas Eve and we all have come to mother's house on the occa-sion; our maternal uncle is supposed to come soon because we are going to have Christmas supper at mother's house. Some people telephoned us and said: An important official is going to visit you this evening. We told them we have many guests tonight, but they said it would only be for a few minutes. It's early in the evening when some people come to our house and say: in a few minutes the Leader will come here to meet you!

I ask: Who's coming here?

And they answer: Mr. Khamenei, the Leader of the Revolution!

- Here, in our humble house?

- Yes, in your house.

- Why didn't you tell us beforehand so we could prepare things and invite a few more guests?

The answer was; the Leader himself wanted us not to let you know, so you won't be in some trouble, anyway, let's stop talking, he'll be at your house in a few moments!

I and uncle, walk to the entrance-door to welcome the Leader. He steps in with a few companions and it's so good that our uncle was here because he is a cultured, intellectual person and very good at mixing with all sorts of people.

The Leader sits at the table in our reception room and we, the mother, the sister and brother, the uncle and our son-in-law sit down around the same table. The Leader first asks mother how she is. We all in Khakabad speak Persian and have no Armenian accent in our speech. In fact mother speaks the Persian dialect of our village region.



Anyway mother answers: fine, I hope you will be in good health. The framed photo of Vigen is on the table; the Leader picks it up and looks at it and says: *this must be the photo of your martyr.*

Yes, I say.

- _ Where is your father?*
- _ Our father has passed away.*
- _ And this lady is the martyr's mother.*
- _ That's right.*
- _ Tell me when was he martyred and where?*

Mother is a little hard of hearing but she constantly prays for the health of the Leader.

I explain that Vigen was a soldier, how he joined the military, which places he served in and how he was martyred at Dehloran.

Then the Leader says: *May God bless you with proper rewards and I congratulate you on the holy occasion of Christmas.*

While the Leader speaks, one of his companions who's taking photos, asks me: Is your mother really Armenian?! He still can't believe it that mother speaks a local dialect of Persian so fluently. He adds: For many years we've accompanied the Leader in his visits of Armenian families and we never noticed anybody talking like that. I ask him: well, is it bad? No, he says, it's excellent.

The atmosphere of the meeting has become so intimate because of mother's simple manners and the Leader's friendliness and humbleness. Before his coming to our house, I was really anxious but I feel good sitting next to the highest authority in our country and one of the famous political and spiritual figures in the world. I'm not so at ease even with our own priests and bishops.

The Leader went on: *This young man of yours, who defended his home, his patriotic country and was martyred in his prime of youth, is a great source of pride and honour for you, for all your family and for all of us in this country; such young people are truly great and we should all be proud of them.*

What he says touches us all and I feel that the face and features of Vigen are changing for the better all the time.

He asks about our exact relationship with the martyr and when I introduce our

maternal uncle, he tells the Leader: I don't really know how to thank you for coming to our house; your presence here has really made us happy.

The Leader says: *Well, it's really our moral duty to express our gratitude to these families who sacrificed their dear children for their country. I always take advantage of this occasion of Christmas celebration to pay a visit to some Christian families to congratulate them on this occasion and to console them in the absence of their martyrs.*

My mother thanks the Leader again and adds: I don't know what to say, my tongue is tied!

Uncle says: Yes, it's our Christmas Eve and we have guests. Actually I wanted to go out and buy things for dinner, but your companions asked us to stay and we did, out of respect, but we didn't know who the guest was. So your surprise visit is a great pleasure for all of us.

The Leader thanks him and says: *We do not intend to take much of your time at your Christmas Eve and I'm supposed to visit a few more Christian families this evening.*

We all would like this pleasant meeting to continue and we don't care anymore about our own Christmas celebration and I say a few words to convey this.

Mr. Khamenei then says: *May God bless your Christmas and I hope you'll be happy from now on; may God Almighty bring happiness in your hearts.*

Mother says: I hope all people will be happy; I thank you very much for your kindness. Then she sighs and says in her dialectal Persian: Of course a martyr's mum'll never be cheered.

The Leader says: *Well, I understand you, but God could favour you with His rewards because all these worldly pains and tragedies are not hidden in the sight of God.*

Mother says: May God always protect you, you're right, it was my fate.

Mr. Khamenei then says: *May God keep these young men for you. Because of the war, we have families in this country who lost two, three or even four sons in the path of God; there are many of them.*

It's true, I say, we have a neighbor whose two sons were martyred: Sayyed Mohsen Husseini and Qaasem Husseini. My mother is friends with Mrs. Husseini and she has really helped my mother spiritually.

Mother now serves tea together with cakes and Mr. Khamenei has his tea with a small lump of sugar. Then he asks our uncle about his job and he says: we have a small, metal workshop; there I work together with my brother and my son-in-law, and he adds: I have also worked in some educational institutes.

Mr. Khamenei, who is drinking his tea, asks: [Do you always flavour your tea with cinnamon?](#)



I think to myself: Perhaps he doesn't like it, but he adds: [No, I don't dislike it, but I'm told it's not good for me!](#) And I say to myself wishfully: Next time he comes to see us; we'll serve him tea without cinnamon!

When the Leader asks us if we face any problem, we tell him: no problem, we only wish a long, healthy life for you. But before saying good-bye, Mr. Khamenei again asks us to tell him of any problem, I inform him that my brother and I run a car agency but because of certain obstacles we are about to close it down and the Leader orders one of his companions to note it down and try to remove the obstacles and then he gives mother a gift and tell her: [it's only a keep-sake for our meeting this different evening.](#)

Well, we are now left with our sweet memories of this touching visit and, if it were not for the gift to mother, nobody, including our guests tonight, would believe that the Leader of our country was in our house an hour ago!

The Second Visit , the Same Evening

Mr. Khamenei leaves the house of martyr Karapetian and steps into his car. In our district all people know each other and if some of them felt there were strangers in our house, they thought they were some non-Armenian guests.

The next destination is not far from the Karapetian house. Inside the Companion' car some talk about the martyr's mother and her Persian dialect saying: if it weren't for some Christian signs and symbols in the house, we would have thought that we were in the wrong house!

After a few minutes, the Leader's entourage reaches the house of martyr Herand Avanesian.

Narration by Herand Avanesian's Father:

By driving my Taxi through the crowded streets of Tehran and taking passengers to their various destinations, I somehow managed to bring up my children. In my youth I did some technical jobs but I enjoyed driving so much that I ended up to becoming a taxi-driver. It may sound strange or funny to some people that someone enjoys driving in Tehran with a population of some 12 million! But when I started driving in 1954 most people did not have cars and you could still see horse-drawn coaches in the streets. Traffic jams or congestions did not have any meaning for us; so I used to enjoy driving. But nowadays when I come back home, I'm dog-tired physically and spiritually.

Today I decided to stay at home to help Lusik, my wife, with preparations for Christmas Eve but I don't know much about a housewife work; so my wife sometimes tells me: Grigor, go drive your taxi because when you're at home, you only add to my chores! Yes, my name is Grigor, after the name of Saint Grigor who in 301 AC. declared Christianity the official religion of Armenia after the conversion of the royal Court.

Anyway, I'm staying at home to help and it was good that I did because someone

telephoned and asked in Persian: Will you be at home this evening, we want to come and see you for a few minutes.

I said: Yes, we'll be at home, it's our Christmas Eve but why do you want to meet us?

- It's for the sake of your martyr, Herand Avanesian, are you his father?

My heart sank by hearing my son's name.



but then I thank God that I stayed at home because Lusik cannot speak Persian properly but I have talked to thousands of people in my taxi for so many years that sometimes I feel I speak Persian better than Armenian!

Anyway, now I think: who's coming to meet us this evening? Perhaps some people from television and for an interview about Herand. But why this evening, this Christmas Eve? I couldn't go on guessing so I busied myself with cleaning paintings, framed-photos and other things. Then I think: If they're from television, I'll tell them to come a few days later.

My thoughts are stopped by a knock at the door. There are two persons; one of them is the one who telephoned this morning; I recognize this by his voice. Politely they ask me some strange questions that smell of security matters. I become a little angry and tell them: Have you come to our house to ask such questions.

They try to calm me down by saying: We are not the principal guest, he is on the way. This makes me more confused and so I object: Well, why didn't you come together, what the hell is going on?

One of them takes my hand kindly and says: Because your guest is the Leader, Mr. Khamenei; Who?!

Mr. Khamenei, they say.

Somebody on his behalf? I ask.

- No, he himself will come to your house in a few minutes.

You must swear to God you're telling the truth. I say the same thing to the other person too.

The first person talks on his walkie-talkie and says to his friend: I think they're near and he goes towards the entrance-door; he also says to me: If you want, go and inform your wife.

What shall I say to her? I think; I don't believe it myself that the highest authority in Iran is coming to the house of an Armenian taxi-driver on Christmas Eve!

I tell her and she says: Perhaps they're having us on!

- No, I don't think so, they're polite, serious persons and one of them spoke something on his wireless thing.

- Ok, let them come, we welcome them, why are you so worried?

I should say that Lusik is a statue of calmness and her calm and patience sometimes bother me! She says: you know I don't speak Persian well, so calm down, speak nicely and tell them what a great boy Herand was.

Now we hear some noises at the door, so my brother and I go to the door, and when the Leader steps in and says 'salaam' to us, I have to believe that it is Mr. Khamenei.

We also say: Salaam, you're welcome.

How are you? Asks the Leader

- Well, fine, thank you

The sweet, friendly smile on his face takes away all my anxieties. The Leader comes into our reception-room and he and his companions sit down around the table. I quickly go and take Herand's photo and put it in front of the Leader and say: this is Herand in his soldier uniform. My brother looks at me saying: let me

sit down comfortably, don't hurry. He is right; I haven't told the Leader who I am. But the Leader guesses this and says: *you are the martyr's father, aren't you?*

_ Yes, sir.

Then Mr. Khamenei looks around the table and asks: *where is the lady-mother?* I had forgotten her! She's probably gone into kitchen; so I say: She'll be here. The Leader adds: *Please tell her to join us.*

I'm still standing. Mr. Khamenei says: please sit down. He then takes a look at Herand's photo but it seems that he's still waiting to see the martyr's mother. Now my wife comes and sits down and Mr. Khamenei says: *How are you lady?* Merci, my wish is your health, she says.

The Leader then says: *May God grant proper rewards to you and bring happiness into your hearts for the sake of this lost son, how old was he?*

I show his identity card to the Leader and say: he was twenty-two.

_ *He was a soldier, wasn't he?*

_ Yes, he was.

The Leader looks so intensely at Herand's photo as if he was a dear, close relation of his.



I explain: He was a coach and trainer in gymnastics and when he was on leave he told us that at the war-front he performed some strange, gymnastic acts to make his comrades laugh and be happy.

The Leader asks: *Your family name is Avanesian, I think many Armenian have the same surname.*

– I’ve heard this surname often

then he thinks for a few moments and says: *Now I remember, when I was a prisoner in the Qezel-qal’a prison in 1963 there was an Armenian inmate called Avanesian.*

I think deeply but I don’t recognize such a political activist in my own family.

– *Well, what’s the meaning of Avanesian?*

I answer: I don’t know, I never thought about the root of my family name!

– *When was he martyred?*

I don’t remember the exact date but I think it happened in one of the operations towards the end of the war.

Mr. Khamenei then consoles me and my wife with some kind words.

My wife thanks the Leader and I say: we’re indebted to you for your visit. Mr. Khamenei then congratulates us on the occasion of Christmas and my brother serves tea to all and while the Leader is drinking his tea, I say a few words about Herand’s character: After his martyrdom, we found out that once he had been wounded but he never told us about it; he worried that we may prevent him from going back. Bullets had injured his right hand badly but we didn’t know. His commander had given him leave of sickness, but he did not come. We only found out about it after his martyrdom. I continue: Herand’s brother was a top mechanic and when he came to Tehran on leave, he would bring lots of mechanical parts and repaired them with the help of his brother and would take them back to war-fronts. Once, when he was on leave and we were having supper, his elder brother warned him: You must be watchful, don’t take risks and don’t put yourself in danger. He was angry and retorted: Is my blood bluer than all the others who are fighting for their country?

The Leader listens to me very attentively and several times said:

– *Wonderful, great, praiseworthy.*

And then he comments about the values of martyrdom which puts my heart and my wife's heart at rest; he says:

- These young people who face martyrdom in defence of their country and its independence are most valuable; they also bring about new values for their families. If it was not for their selfless sacrifices, we could not know what would happen to our country. It is because of their valour and courage that our people could raise their heads high; anyone who did contribute something to preserve the integrity and independence of this country, shares their values and you, as families of martyrs, certainly share their values. He then asks us: Do you have other children?

- Yes, four children now.

- Sons or daughters?

- Two sons and two daughters.

- Are they living with you?

- No, they're all married.

- What's your own job?

- I'm a taxi-driver.

- I see, how do you find the traffic in Tehran?

- Well, as you know, it's bad, but well it's a profession and it's some public service.

You're right, says Mr. Khamenei, it's really difficult to drive in these crowded streets, yet, as you say, it's public service, helping people to reach their destinations, it's important, as walking in these streets is meaningless!

I say: it's some thirty-three years I've been doing this job.

Mr. Khamenei repeats: thirty-three years! How about your brother?

- He has a metal repair-shop.

Right, he says and adds: Many Armenians are in technical and industrial jobs, repairing engines and the like.

My wife gets up to bring some sweets and cakes; the Leader notices this and says to her: please don't trouble yourself.

My wife says: Oh, no trouble; her voice is a mixture of respect for our guest and sorrow in remembering Herand.



Then Mr. Khamenei talks about churches in Tehran, in our district and our priests and asks some questions and tells us about his meeting with Bishop Manoukian years before. I get up and bring a framed photo of the Bishop taken before the Revolution. Mr. Khamenei is very interested and asks me about all the people in this photo and then he asks us some questions about the Armenian community in different cities of Iran. While we talk, I am thinking that if tomorrow I tell other taxi-drivers and friends about the Leader's intimate meeting with us, they all think I'm a liar.

Anyway, now the Leader says: *Well, our intention was to congratulate you and your wife on the important occasion of Christmas, and to pay our respect to your young martyr.*

I say: I pray from the bottom of my heart that God will keep you in the best of health and he says: *You all have your share in defence of this country and preservation of its independence; I came here because we are indebted to you all.*

— You were most kind to have come to our humble house and we hope that, as a result of all sacrifices by our young people, we will one day have a prosperous Iran worthy of those selfless acts.

If God will, if God will, says the Leader; it will be so.

Then the Leader gets up, he gives a gift to my wife and says: this is a keep-sake of this evening's meeting. My wife cannot say anything and I say: it was very kind of you, you're really so kind.

And the Leader says: it was our moral obligation, nothing else.

I don't know what to do next, I want to embrace him but I don't dare to, I only thank him again saying: you were must kind, taking the trouble of coming to our house, may I be sacrificed for you!

The Third Visit , the Same Evening

The next family lives not far from the previous one. They are the family of martyr Herand Hakopian; their house is located on the opposite side of the Avanesian house in the same street, so the Leader crosses the street on foot and walks to the entrance-door of Hakopian family.

I am a sister of martyr Herand Hakopian. Our father who was a truck-driver died in a car accident in Khorram-Abad. He had six children, four daughters and two sons, Edward and Herand. Herand was the youngest child. He joined the military in 1986. In the periods between two leaves, when he came to see us, mother was half-dead. She used to say: After your father's death I cannot bear the death of another family member, I pray to God to take me away before such an accident; my only wish in the world is to witness Herand's wedding! Well, he was martyred and mother's wish never materialized; instead we found an endless sorrow.

Anyway, that year he was supposed to go to Isfahan on leave to see our eldest sister and then come to Tehran. But there was no news from him; a week passed and mother was almost dying of worry and anxiety. We telephoned everywhere and called on some places the military told us. They only told us that there has been some tough operations in Fakkeh (in Ilam Province, near Iraqi border, where he served) and that they had no more information.

We were also told that perhaps he had been wounded and taken to some hospital for treatment. We went to numerous hospitals to no avail; mother was sick



Image of Martyr Herand Hakopian mounted on the alley that bears his own name

and tired and almost half dead. She wanted to go to provinces and search for him but we didn't let the old woman do this.

Almost 40 days had passed when we found out that the son of our neighbor Herand Avanesian had been martyred. After the burial and mourning ceremony of Avanesian's son, my brother, Edward and Mr. Avanesian, the father decided to go to Fakkeh and find out something about Herand. After a few days, he returned but he was so grief-struck that he could not speak a word.

Mother kept asking him: Did you see Herand? Is he alive? Where is he now? Why don't you answer? You're killing me!

Finally he could not remain silent and started weeping loudly; I had never seen him weep and wail so tragically. More than being a brother, he was Herand's closest friend. Now we felt he was about to give us some very bad news. Mother and I began to weep too. With tears running down my cheeks, I asked: Has he been martyred? He only nodded his head in confirmation.

I asked again: did you see his dead body?

He cried and said: No, I didn't.

I was stunned and tears in my eyes went dry but mother went on weeping and wailing without noticing anything around her. I took my brother's hand and looked at him in a way that made him calm; I asked: what do you mean then? You didn't see his body, so how on earth are you sure he has been martyred? Some of his comrades and friends had witnessed his martyrdom, he replied.

– Why didn't they deliver his body to you?

My brother did not say anything; his head was down thinking hard.

I asked again: Please answer me, dear brother.

He could hardly utter more than two quick sentences: there was a hasty retreat in that operation; they didn't have time to collect the bodies of their martyrs.

I couldn't believe this; then how was I to tell mother? That day was the worst day of my whole life. She couldn't believe that her son had been martyred; she was always waiting for his return. In the winter of this year we were informed that a film about Iranian prisoners of war in a military camp was discovered in Abadan and it is going to be screened in Ahvaz. Mother insisted that we should travel to Ahvaz to see the film. The quality of this film was really bad, faces were not clear and most of them resembled one another because all heads were shaven and they were wearing prisoner's uniforms .but in the middle of the show, seeing one of the young men, she cried: this one is my Herand! That film kept mother hopeful that Herand was alive.

Since the year 1989 when POWs were exchanged, we took part in the welcoming ceremonies; she kept asking the released prisoners if they did know anything about Herand but they said they knew nothing about him. And mother, little by little, was convinced that her son would never return alive; and after this, she only wished that his body would be found so she could go to a tomb-stone in the name of Herand and shed tears over it.

The Visit

Now some 5 years have passed since Herand's martyrdom and we have all come to mother's house to help her with the celebration of Christmas Eve. But in the morning Edward received a phone call saying: You have guests this evening, they want to meet you and talk about your dear martyr. Edward is my nephew who is

two years younger than Herand and was most friendly with him. He came from Isfahan to Teheran to take care of mother. This grandson of my mother is the only hope of mother in life and if she doesn't see him for a few days, she would be dead.

Well, we are all together this Christmas Eve and I had forgotten about the guests who were going to visit us when the door-bell rang.

A few moments later, I hear Edward saying: Please come in, you're welcome.

In our house, nobody has said: Ya Allah before coming in!

We go to wear our clothes and wear our head-scarfs because the guests are supposed to be Muslims.

Inside the room, I hear the guests saying to Edward: your guest is on the way and he'll be here in a few minutes. They ask questions I don't understand and dislike them: How many people are here? How many telephones do you have? Are there any other people supposed to come here? I don't understand what the meaning of such questions are! So, I go to the kitchen to help mother when Edward comes in and says: Mr. Khamenei is coming to visit us in our house!

I want to tell him: don't be funny, but his reddened cheeks are not indicative of any joking; then I think: Maybe he's mistaken. So I go to the reception-room and ask those two guests: Is what my nephew says right? They say: 'salaam'; I am a little ashamed and say: Oh 'salaam'; excuse me, I'm confused.

One of them says: No there's nothing to be shocked about, lady, the Leader is going to pay a visit to your family; he must be in your street now. He then together with Edward walk towards the entrance-door and the other person, pointing at the arm-chair beside the television above which my father's photo is hung on the wall, says: well, this is a good place for the Leader to sit.

I only have enough time to tell mother and then, yes, it's him, Mr. Khamenei, the Leader in a white robe, a walking-stick in his hand and a smile on his face.

He says 'salaam' to all of us and sits on the big arm-chair and tells us: [Please, sit down.](#)

First of all, the Leader asks about Herand, his missing body and the relation of every one of us with the martyr.



I and Edward try to answer his questions: He was only 17 years of age when he volunteered to do his military service, one year earlier than the legal age. We often told him that he did not have to go now but he didn't listen to us. a few of his friends had already gone to war-fronts and he liked to join them. He first was sent to Kerman to pass his training course, later he was sent to Andimeshk and Fakkeh. When he returned from Kerman, he said: there were some 25 Armenians there and they called us 'the Armenian brigade'! We go on narrating about how he was martyred and why his body was not found; we also told the Leader about his lost contact with us and how we heard about his martyrdom. We add: Because he was, after our father's death, the only bread-winner of the family, he did not have to do military service at all or he could remain in Tehran. But he decided to go to the war-fronts.

The Leader asks mother about the circumstances of my father's death, and I say that mother does not speak Persian well.

The Leader asks: [How was it that she never learned Persian?](#)

She tried to learn and she also attended the classes set up by the Literacy Cam-

paign but after Herand's death, she was so grief-stricken that she even forgot the little she had learned.

_ Well, if you sometimes speak with her in Persian, she'll remember.

Then Mr. Khamenei says some important things about martyrs, their families and their high values for the society (I hope mother understood parts of his statements):

_ These families whose young men fought for the independence and integrity of this country have special rewards with God and they are respected and valued by the people.



These young men fought for high ideals, some were martyred, some are missing, many others were wounded, many lost some limbs; they all will be equally rewarded by God.

We have great respect for you, our feelings for them are not only expressed by our tongues, no, we respect and value them in our hearts, for this lady-mother whose son is missing or has been martyred, we have great reverence. It was for this reason that I came here on the evening of Christmas, that is, the anniversary of the holy birth of Christ Jesus, to congratulate you on this occasion and also express our sympathies in your sorrows.

I hope this Christmas God will bless you and bring happiness into your hearts and may God make you happy for the sake of Christmas and as a further reward for your martyr. I know that hearing such events is very hard and bitter but there is absolutely no doubt that God will bless people

with rewards if they consider these accidents on God's account.

I should say that I often thought of Herand but after Mr. Khamenei's comments I think differently, I am really proud of him now. Later in the meeting, our conversation was about Armenians in Faridan, Isfahan, because we are originally from Faridan and we still own some agricultural land there; the Leader is very interested about our roots and history and we give him some information about it. At this point there is a knock at the door and one of the Leader's companions goes and opens the door. We are surprised for it's Mr. Davood, our neighbor who lives in the apartment above us and who owns the house; he is a well-educated man and he is good at conversation. Above all he's a generous and kind gentleman who, since the death of my father, has taken care of us and sometimes he did not ask for any rent. Well, the coming and going in our house and voices have attracted his attention, he found out that Mr. Khamenei has come to our house. He comes in and after saying 'salaam', he adds: it was my duty to come and say welcome, we really thank you, you're so kind, we are proud of your presence on this Christmas Eve.

The Leader said: I hope, God willing, this Christmas celebration will be a blessed occasion for you and all Armenians. He adds: Armenians in our country are gentle people; they are hard-working people, they have always served this country.

Mr. Davood says: it's not extraordinary; all Iranians must serve their country.

The Leader comments: it's not a question of being extraordinary, this means something above normal, ordinary procedures, we don't expect that. As long as people's services are performed shoulder-to-shoulder, in a normal way, for the progress and construction of this county, it must be appreciated and Armenians have always acted this way.

Mr. Davood says: we all have good, free and comfortable life in Iran, in the Islamic Republic. A few years ago I was in England. There was a friendly meeting of British retired lecturers and professors who were discussing about the civilizations of West and East and their focus was on the lines of minorities in the Islamic lands. When I informed them how free we were in Iran, culturally, socially and religiously, most of them were surprised because they were not familiar with facts, they only generalized! I told them that in Iran, we are, in most aspects, freer than in Armenia.

Mr. Davood used to be a book-binder in Tehran many years ago and he started talking about this profession with the Leader and if given the opportunity, he would go on talking for an hour! But Mr. Khamenei looks at my brother's daughter and asks her school, her studies and her interests. It seems that the education of children is highly important to the Leader.

This unforgettable meeting is coming to an end; I don't like to look at my watch! Finally Mr. Khamenei says: *Well, we shouldn't bother you anymore; we meant to convey our feeling to this respectable lady; also to congratulate you on the occasion of Christmas and to praise your courageous, selfless martyr.*

Mr. Davood looks at mother and says: yes, he is a source of pride and honour for us.

The Leader continues: *For her and for all of us too. This lady's son is not only a source of pride for her, but also for his family, for his country and for his nation. All those who fought enjoy this high position. All people honour him, so do we. I hope God Almighty will protect you and make you happy.*

The Leader then hands mother a gift and asks: *Would you allow us to leave?* Well, then, with your permission, I say good-bye.

Mother is just looking at the Leader but Mr. Davood says: We wish to be in your presence for a longer time.

And Mr. Khamenei says: *Well, it was you who came late; we came much earlier than you!*

This humorous remark brings smiles to everybody's lips at these final moments. My brother and I follow the Leader to the entrance-door and his image at the door when leaving us will remain in my mind for many years to come.

I would like to add a few more sentences to my narration: the car carrying the Leader drove through the Vahidieh District without any pomp and people in this district could not imagine that the Leader of the Islamic Republic had been a guest at three Armenian houses the previous evening. Also last evening all Armenians were busy with preparations for Christmas Eve and news of the visit did not spread. But tomorrow at our church gathering there will be great commotion about this; I am sure that the three families visited do not know about oth-

ers. However, I witnessed at the church that the mothers of martyrs Avanesian and Hakopian embraced each other while tears were running down their faces. And the brother of martyr Vigen Karapetian gathered the youth around him and narrated the event of the Leader's visit in detail. That Christmas of ours, with the presence of Mr. Khamenei, was totally different from other such occasions.



Mother And Brothers of Martyr Vigen Karapetian - November, 2014



Martyr Herand Hakopian personal belongings: Shohada museum, Taleghani street, Tehran

Sixteen

Signs of God

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The Family of **Martyrs**: Albert Allah-Dadian
and Vahik Baghdasarian

Visit Date: 2005/12/27

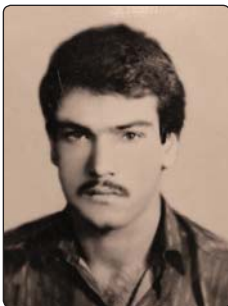


The Photo of

Martyr Albert Allah-Dadian

Martyred in Soumar, Kermanshah

Martyred on 1987/7/25



The Photo of

Martyr Vahik Baghdasarian

Martyred in Dar-Khovein, Khuzestan

Martyred on 1984/3/4

For several years I've accompanied the Leader whenever he goes. Describing such a duty is really difficult; after many years our duty has become a normal one; it's always full of worries and anxieties. I ask myself: You know whom you're accompanying? Whose safety and security you're charged with? One of the most influential personalities in the world and an enemy of the world's arrogant powers. Yet Mr. Khamenei's patience, coolness and trust in God helps us be calm. He has often told us: You do your job properly; all affairs are in the hand of God Almighty.

From among these duties, perhaps the sweetest and most attractive are the times when Mr. Khamenei visits the families of martyrs begun from the first time he was President, especially while the war was going on. There were numerous visits and I remember that they did not stop even when we were being bombed or missiled. We were worried lest the same area we were visiting could be bombed but the President insisted that we should not fear; while he sat calmly with the families of martyrs and talked to them intimately, we, the companions and guards were absolutely restless.

During all these years, we had the authority to select the families; of course he had previously given us some guidelines and parameters for our selection. During his trips to Iranian provinces, we had to plan the programs in such ways that the President could visit some families of martyrs.

But there is a special time and that is Christmas, when according to Mr. Khomeini's orders, we must select some Christian families of martyrs; the atmosphere of such visits is completely different from that of the Muslim families we visit during the year. And this evening we are to meet some such Christian families.

The first family to meet is the family of Allah-Dadian. I never imagined that an Armenian family could have a surname with the word Allah in it! I ask a companion, who was in Isfahan when he was young and was friends with many Armenians, whether such surnames existed there among Armenian families and he says: Yes, there I heard family names such as Allah-Dadian and Allah-Verdian and even in Armenia some girls are named 'Elah'.

Anyway, the car stops, I get out and ring the second floors of a white building, that is, the apartment of the family of martyr Allah-Dadian and the father of the martyr, recognizes my voice and says on the iPhone: You're most welcome. And I think silently: He's happy to meet me, but if he knew that the real guest is the President, how would he feel?

We only have 5 minutes to inspect all security conditions and tell the family who their guest really is! As usual, it's about 2 minutes before Mr. Khomeini's arrival that we inform them who their guest is.

Before this, we usually tell them that some officials or some people from the television are coming to interview them about their martyrs. We didn't tell them at all but Mr. Khomeini ordered us to inform them about his visits a few minutes before his arrival so that they know who this guest is and therefore will not be uncomfortably surprised when he comes.

Now four of us enter the house together with a bunch of flowers and a framed photo of Imam Khomeini. The parents of the martyr are at home together with a boy about 14 years of age and a man almost 40; this man could be a brother of the martyr or the family's son-in-law. Our security team inspects what is necessary and I, after some friendly conversation with the parents, tell them who their guest is. In my whole career, one of the most pleasurable moments has been the time when I inform the families of martyrs about their distinguished guest.

The father says: he's most welcome, upon on eyes. He then explains that during previous years many groups from the Martyrs Foundation, Mosques, the Council

of Armenian Khaliphate and many Muslim neighbors and friends have visited them. And then, as if he had been dreaming, asks me again: Who did you say was coming to meet us?! I answer: The Leader, Mr. Khamenei. He keeps gazing at me and I put my hand on his shoulder and add: He'll be here any minute, please go and inform your wife about your guest.

Now our photographers and the film-crew arrive and I tell the martyr's parents: Mr. Khamenei will be here within two minutes. They want to go to the yard to welcome the Leader but I tell them: you'd better be kind and stay here. But he doesn't pay attention and goes into the yard; I stand next to the mother. The father welcomes the Leader most warmly but as this talking continues, I begin to worry because securitywise, the yard is not a proper place for the Leader to be in.



fortunately, after a minute or so, Mr. Khamenei walks up the stairs, says '[salaam](#)' to the mother and enquires after her health. At this moment the young man who was wearing some casual sport jacket jumped into a room to change his clothes. He did this on his own because we, the Leader's companions, never recommend anything about their clothing. Anyway Mr. Khamenei comes in and sits on an armchair. One thing I have noticed in Armenian houses is that they all, whether rich or poor, have armchairs or couches and a big dining table; it seems to be an inseparable part of their living, they never sit or dine on the floor.

Like in all previous visits the Leader first asks for a photo of the martyr, looks at it intensely and then asks about how and where their son was martyred.

The martyr's father explains that his son was a ranger in the army and he was martyred in Soumar under the enemy's cannon fire. He adds: He was an intel-

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ligent, clever person; he was also a sportsman, a goal-keeper with the Ararat Football Club. He was a first-rate mechanic too. He loved to help other people in every way. When he was on leave and came to us and we asked him about the conditions at war-fronts, he used to say: Everything is okay, you mustn't worry about anything. When he finished his training period, he received an offer from the army to become an officer, because he was a most disciplined and hard-working person.

The Leader talks to each member of the family very intimately; he even asks the young man about his schooling and wish him good luck in his studies.



As now Mr. Khamenei knows that the other person is the family's son-in-law, he asks him: [Were you the family's son-in-law when Albert was martyred?](#)

I was acquainted with the family then but was not married yet, he answers.

[_ Where is your wife?](#)

_ She went out shopping; she didn't know you would visit us.

[_ And is this gentle boy your son?](#)

_ Yes, Haaj-Agha.

Most Armenians address Mr. Khamenei as Haaj-Agha; they all believe this is most respectful; they don't use it for other people. This behaviour is the reverse of what we Muslims do; we address everybody as Haaj-Agha! The martyr's father is also a peculiar person because he's wearing two silver rings on his fingers as is the custom with many Muslims. He now seems to be in a good, happy mood but when we first met him before the visit, he told us that he suffered from some sort nervousness. I could not imagine him to talk so openly and cheerfully with the Leader; he seemed like a young man, smiling and laughing all the time.

Mr. Khamenei asks him: [Apart from the martyr do you only have this married daughter?](#)

- No, Haaj-Agha, I have another son.

- [Where is that son now?](#)

He goes to work and comes back home at about 10 in the evening, and he adds, in a half-joking tone: He has to fill up our stomachs!

- [How about yourself, do you do any job?](#)

- No, my weak nerves don't allow me to do anything.

Mr. Khamenei is surprised and says: [What nervous system! But you look so young.](#)



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The father says again in a half-serious tone: I try to look young so our children do not feel bad! And he laughs; all people present in the room share his laughter.

Then Mr. Khamenei enquires about the health of the martyr's mother who has been sitting silently next to her husband. She seems to be a quiet woman and a little shy. Despite this Mr. Khamenei talks to her in a kind manner and asks how she felt about her son's martyrdom. In almost all such visits, the Leader pays special attention to mothers. She says: Albert had been at war-fronts for some 6 months when a soldier came to our house; he gave me a telephone-number and asked me to make a phone-call there; at that moment I felt that Albert has martyred.

The mother then goes on to inform Mr. Khamenei about the martyr's manners and characteristics: before joining the military, he worked in some repair workshops for Benz and BMW. He was the best mechanic at these places. Once he told one of his assistants to take care when repairing a very expensive car. Well, he didn't and he damaged the car very much. The owner of the workshop was angry but Albert told him it was he who did this and would pay for the damages which came to more than a month salary he earned. The mother continued to talk about her son and Mr. Khamenei listened to what she said attentively.



Then tea is brought to the Leader in a very big glass and he says smiling: [is all this tea for me! Please give me a smaller one.](#)

This reminds me of the first times we visited Christian families. When tea was being served, we didn't know what to do! But Mr. Khamenei would put a small lump of sugar in his mouth, pick up his cup and point at us all to drink our teas. Later some of these families told us: we had heard that, in the case of high official, it was the duty of some companions to drink or eat first, but with Mr. Khamenei, it was different, he started drinking and says to his companion to drink!

Now, because the martyr's mother told us what a master mechanic Albert was, Mr. Khamenei narrates his memories of the Armenian mechanics in the dangerous days of war and how meticulously and courageously they worked.

Here the martyr's father comments: May God prevent the repetition of those days. And Mr. Khamenei says: [well, I hope so but all worldly things pass away, so do pleasures and joys are not lasting, if they were, then they would become routine. Such is life; only those people will be salvaged who could put their passing lives into good uses to please God and serve his creatures.](#)

The son-in-law says: the service by the martyrs was their duty to their country. Mr. Khamenei, while confirming what was said, adds: [Of course, some people were conscious of this duty and acted upon it and others did not; it doesn't matter if they were Muslims or Christians. In this very area you live in, many Muslims never thought of joining the war-efforts but a number of Christians did, we have witnessed all sorts of people. Martyrs had insights and consciousness.](#) Then the Leader asks some question regarding their attendance in church ceremonies and the father has an interesting thing to say in this regard: Haaj-Agha, let me tell you that in our church we have special programs in all evenings in the month of Ramedan!

I had never heard such a thing and Mr. Khamenei was also surprised, but the martyr's father goes on: several times I have visited the holy tomb of Hazrat Ma'asoumeh (Imam reza's sister) in Qum as well as the holy tomb of Hazrat Abdolazim in Rey province; only I haven't yet managed to go to Mashhad.

The Leader, who is drinking his tea, stops to say: [Very good, such visits elevate one's spiritual relations. It would be interesting that you also go to Karbela!](#)

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I am surprised at this recommendation by the Leader; I was aware of Armenians' love for Imam Hussein but I never imagined the Leader recommend them to go to Karbela.

The father answers: Yes certainly, I will go when travelling to the area is possible. While Mr. Khamenei is drinking his tea, the father says something to his wife in Armenian which, of course, none of us understands and Mr. Khamenei says: it's a pity we never learned Armenian! Everybody in the house laughs at comments and the father says: [Armenian is an easy language to learn and explains this.](#)

We don't know when the meeting is going to end. In our visits to the families of Muslim martyrs, when the Leader starts writing a note on their copies of the Quran, we know that we would be leaving soon, but in Christian houses we can't guess when we will leave until Mr. Khamenei gets up to say good-bye.

Anyway, the son-in-law, after the father's comment about the Armenian language, says: our script is also ancient; it goes back to some 17 centuries ago.

[Yes, I know](#), says the Leader: [one of the ancient scripts going back to the scripts invented by the Phoenicians and other Semitic scripts such as Assyrian and Chaldean.](#)

The father now tells the Leader about a copy of the New Testament in Armenian which was given to him by their bishop.

[Do you often read the New Testament and the Bible?](#) The Leader asks.

– Yes, but we read them in Persian; it's easier and more comprehensible; reading old Armenian is difficult for us, uneducated people. Sometimes I compare some sentences in both Persian and Armenian to understand them better.

Mr. Khamenei says: [The translations of the Bible in Persian are very old, I don't know if there are any new translations. For many years, I have kept these translations, both the New and old Testaments in my library.](#)

The martyr's father says something to his son-in-law in Armenian and then, politely says to the Leader: I told him to bring that copy of the Evangel for you to see.

[That's fine](#), says the Leader.

The son-in-law brings a book and hands it to Mr. Khamenei.

Mr. Khamenei pages through the book and says: [is this the Evangel?](#)

– No, it's not. It's a different book called "The Breath of God"; it's in two volumes, the first volume covers events from Adam to the birth of Jesus

Christ and the second volume narrates event after the birth of Jesus up to the point he is alive...

Here the Leader interrupts the son-in-law and says: *Jesus is alive, we believe that Jesus Christ is still alive.*

The son-in-law is confused; he first says: 'yes, hundred percent', but then he says: Alive? From what angle?!

The Leader explains: *The Quran says they didn't kill the Messiah but that "Most certainly they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, only there was some likeness to baffle them (Quran: 157 ,4); those people who, on the basis of what Judas said, made mistakes, they couldn't find Jesus, someone else was arrested and "God Almighty raised him to himself" (Quran: 158 ,4). The Leader went on: Christians believe that Jesus was crucified and later he was raised to life again but Islamic teachings say that they couldn't kill Jesus, they couldn't find him and things were confused in their eyes, Jesus Christ was raised to heavens. That is the difference between Christian and Islamic narrations: and Jews believe that Messiah did not come into the world at all; they say he will come at the end of days.*

Next Mr. Khamenei rose and said: *It was a pleasant meeting*; the father thanks him again and again and the Leader says good-bye to all. I and our companion begin to leave the house.

The Second Visit , the Same Evening

The next family to visit is the family of martyr Bagh-Dasarian. On the way I remember that when the Leader was President, we at first did not have any list of Christian martyrs and we had to go to some districts in Tehran such as Narmak, Majidiyah and Vahidiah where Armenians lived to make enquiries in this respect or ask people whose surname ended with the suffix "-ian" and ask them about families of martyrs and they would tell they know some families whose sons were martyred during the war such as Avanesian, Azourian and Bagh-Dasarian. But I don't know why Bagh-Dasarian is so familiar to me.

Anyway, we enter the house; the parents and the brother of the martyr are at home. After saying 'salaam' and asking after their health, I talk to the brother about the Leader coming to visit them but he is not at all surprised and when he

tells his parents about it, they are very happy hearing it but not surprised, as if they were informed beforehand! The father is so happy; he kisses me and asks: Is it really true that the 'reverent father' is coming to our house?

Reverent father is how Armenians address their own bishops and priests. When I confirm the Leader's visit, he kisses me again, he is incredibly happy about this meeting. Then he begins talking about his martyred son's characteristics:

His name is Vahik, he was big-built as well as chivalrous, whenever he spotted an old man or old woman waiting in the street, he would take them to their home without charging them. He was also very well-mannered and polite. Whenever he came home on leave, the atmosphere in our house would completely change. Once he came at about two in the morning and went to his elder brother Robert who was in deep sleep, he made a lot of noise, woke him up and said to him: why are you sleeping, get up and eat some pomegranates! He had bought a box of the famous pomegranates in Saaveh. I think we all ate pomegranates till morning and laughed at the jokes and funny anecdotes that Vahik told concerning the goings-on in the war-fronts.

The father was continuing his narration of Vahik when he suddenly stopped and tears came into eyes. After a few moments he went on: The very last time he went back to the fronts, he said goodbye to all of us and went out of the house but he stopped in the street, came back and kissed my hands and his mother's hands again as though he was sure that this was the last time he could see us! And a few weeks after this he, while driving a jeep, went over an anti-tank mine and all was over.

I put my hands on the father's shoulders and spoke some words of consolation. I'm still thinking why the father and brother were not surprised when I told them about Mr. Khamenei visiting them. I say to myself: Maybe we've been here before, but I am certain we never came to this district and this house.

While I look around for further security checks, I see a big, framed photo of Imam Khomeini, the kind of photo that the Department for People's Communications at the Leaders Office gives out. I take the photo, go to them and ask: Has Mr. Khamenei ever visited you before?

And the answer is: Yes, but that was in our old house.

- _ Why didn't you tell us this?
- _ You never asked.
- _ Okay, I didn't ask but shouldn't you have told us?
- _ Be honest, if you were in our place, would you have revealed it!

I see that the brother is right, honestly if I knew that Mr. Khamenei was coming to see me, I wouldn't reveal that I have already met him.

I inform the accompanying team about this through my wireless and they say they'll be here in a minute and then, before I see Mr. Khamenei, I hear his voice: [Salaam, may we come in?](#)

After some friendly talk, the Leader says: [well, this is the second time we came to you!](#)

The martyr's father who really seems delighted says: last time I was not in Tehran and I was really upset about this and now I thank God that you came again. He then explains that he had once seen Mr. Khamenei for a minute: I was invited to a ceremony at the Officers College and I received a present from President Khamenei as a martyr's father.

He then adds: You're really welcome, may God always protect you, you're the apple of our eyes, you always remember the families of martyrs.



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The martyr's mother, who's just looking at Mr. Khamenei in admiration, seems to be not fluent in Persian and answers the Leader's enquiries after her health in broken Persian. Then the Leader asks about the age of their martyred son.

and she says: He was twenty-two, and adds: May the souls of all martyrs be content with your government's efforts. The Leader asks: [was he married?](#)

_ No, he wasn't.

Then the father says what a wonderful battery-maker he was; he managed to buy an old car, repaired it through his technical know-how and he gave this car to his brother saying: This is for you, I don't know if I'll be able to drive it. At the fronts he was always asked to engage in technical works rather than taking part in armed operations.

But Vahik was a man of war too. As an example, once his garrison's loud-speaker announces that our soldiers facing the enemy are under heavy fire and we need to give them quick support. Hearing this Vahik, without asking his commander, takes up his weapon, starts a car which did not have a switch and drives to the spot; he manages to save the lives of 8 soldiers and brings them back safely.

His commander grants him a -20day leave for his fearless act, but he doesn't accept it saying: in these circumstances, we should all stay put, we'll have leave when the war is over, now it's time to fight.

The Leader, after hearing what the father said and praising the martyr, asks: [What's your occupation?](#)

The father replies: First I was a farmer in Khomein, but after the Shah's destructive land-reform program, I had to come to Tehran; I worked with some meat distribution organization and now I am a card-bearing, first class butcher.

[I see](#), says the Leader

_ But now I am retired.

The Leader says: [Butchery and retirement? You can always do the butcher's job and there are always plenty of customers!](#)

_ No, sir, I didn't have a shop of my own, I was a first-class butcher with some sausage-producing firm.

[Well, what do you do, young gentleman?](#) The Leader asks the elder brother of the martyr.



- I am now selling what my father used to prepare! Sausages, minced and stuffed meat and the like; previously I used to repair generators, install equipment in factories but the circumstances led me to my present job.

Mr. Khamenei wishes the brother success in his occupation and then says to him:

You must value and revere the presence of your parents all the time.

The father puts his hand on his chest and thanks the Leader and says: I am really content and happy with all my daughters, sons, son-in-law and daughter-in-law; I have 17 grandchildren, one better than the other! I always remember God in every affair, even now when you've come to our humble house, I believe it's a sign of God, God has sent you to tell me how grateful I am that He remember me too.

It has been my duty, says the Leader.

As this is the last visit this evening, the Leader could stay a little longer. The martyr's brother explains how good and friendly the relation between Armenians and Muslim Shi'ites are, and how the Armenian community is respected in the Islamic Republic.

He adds: I have witnessed how our requests have been fulfilled earlier than others!

- Thank God you are pleased.



_ Yes we are pleased.

Then Mr. Khamenei asks one of his companions to bring the gifts and hands one to each parent and adds: [these are some small keep-sakes for remembering our meeting this evening.](#)

the parents both kiss the gifts and thank the Leader again.

When Mr. Khamenei gets up to go, he asks: [will you allow me to leave you?](#)

The martyr's father says smiling: What shall I say truthfully, I don't want you to leave!

The Leader says the same question to the mother: [with your permission, lady.](#)

The martyr's mother smiles and thanks him in Armenian.

The Leader then says: [May God Almighty keep you all under his protection.](#)

And thus the second meeting with the family of martyr Vahik Bagh-Dasarian comes to end.



Father And Brother of Martyr Vahik Baghdasarian - November, 2014

Seventeen

Chemical Martyr

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The families of **Martyrs** Piyir Maron-Adeh,

And Odishu Badel-Davood

Visit Date: 1991/1/12 & 1987/1/1

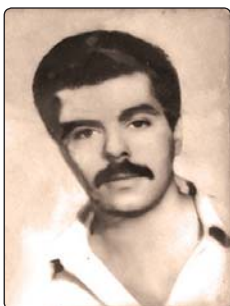


The Photo of

Martyr Piyr Maroun-Adeh

Martyred in Soumar, Kermanshah

Martyred on 1987/8/11



The Photo of

Martyr Odishu Badel-Davood

Martyred on 1983/5/18

Please, come and sit down, lady mother, how are you? The Leader asks.

- _ I'm fine, thank you very much.
- _ Please bring me a photo of your martyr, how old was he?
- _ Twenty years exactly.
- _ Was he your eldest son?
- _ He was younger than a daughter; I have another son younger than him.
- _ How about this gentleman?
- _ He's my son-in-law and this is my daughter.

The Leader then says: May God Almighty reward you properly. Your son fought in a good cause and was martyred; he fought for the independence of his country, his patriotic home, in defence of the Revolution and in fact in defence of the whole nation. Certainly it's hard for you, for a mother, it's a great sorrow, grief for a young man is heart-breaking, but if you are patient, you'll have great rewards with God Almighty.

The mother of the family and son-in-law are sitting on the left side of Mr. Khomeini and the brother and sister of the martyr on his right. And Branco, the 4 year old niece of the martyr is playing in the room. The martyr's mother seems to be very happy for this meeting but the martyr's brother and sister just look on and couldn't believe the Leader is there.



The mother seems to have known about the Leader's visit; since this morning when she received a call informing her about a guest this evening, she somehow felt that she'll have an important guest. Thus when, a couple of minutes before the leader's arrival, she was told that the guest was Mr. Khamenei, she was happy but not surprised. The brother and sister didn't know anything. Mother had telephoned his son at the Electricity Department asking him to come home earlier and the sister had telephoned her mother by chance to say that she and Alfred come to see her this evening. And when they arrived, mother did not tell them anything. Besides, it was Christmas time and preparations had already been made.

The Leader asks the brother who's silently sitting on an armchair:

_ Well, what do you do, dear son?

_ I work at a branch of the Electricity Department.

_ Why didn't go on with your studies?

_ I finished the first three years of my high-school but I couldn't continue.

The Leader asks the son-in-law the same question.

He says he works at a gas company.

Then Mr. Khamenei asks the martyr's mother, whose face looks older than she really is, [have you had any occupation yourself?](#)

_ No, I just keep and run the house.

_ [Where is the martyr's father?](#)

_ His brother was ill; he went to Qazvin to visit him. He's had to stay at home since 6 years ago because he was badly injured in a car accident.

_ [What was his job?](#)

_ He was a driver, he had his own car and then he had this accident.

_ [Is he now suffering from any bodily defect?](#)

_ No, only his sight is very weak. In that accident he received a hard blow on his head; it affected his brain and his sight. He was treated for 4 months at Imam Khomeini Hospital.

Well, we were told that martyr Piyir was a high-school student when his father suffered in that accident and he, as the eldest child, stopped his studies to work and earn some money, he worked in many workshops as a technical hand.

Then when he reached the age of 18, he said: I must go to the war-fronts to defend my country and my honour; as his father was invalid, he could be exempt from ordinary military service but he did not take advantage of this.

Now there is silence for some moments, because mother, after narrating about his husband and his martyred son, could not go on talking. Then Mr. Khamenei looks around the room and a framed photo of a child attracts his attention; he asks: [is this little one the martyr's photo?](#)

_ No, he's Branco, my grand-son.

The son-in-law gets up to bring tea and Mr. Khamenei says: [Don't trouble yourself, let's be together, we can go on without drinking tea!](#)

_ No, sir, it's some fine, fresh tea.

Mr. Khamenei then asks mother about her origin and about Assyrians who live in different places in Iran. She says that she's originally from Kermanshah.

_ [The martyr's name was Piyir, wasn't it?](#)

_ Yes sir.

_ [Could you tell us a little more about him?](#)

Mother, in a voice that is fading, says a few broken words: whatever I say, will not be enough, he was...a good, good...boy.

Mr. Khamenei shakes his head and says: **He must have been.** And he stops for a few moments for the mother to become calm, but she starts weeping loud and tears run down her cheeks and the sister and the brother, watching mother, begin to weep too: they have a common grief. The son-in-law tries to stop them but the leader says: **Let them weep, weeping is not a bad thing, weeping makes the heart lighter, the kind of weeping that makes you faint is not good but if one sometimes sheds tears, it is not harmful.**

Then Mr. Khamenei asks the son-in-law about their church in Tehran. He says: It is here.

_ You mean it is near?

_ Yes it's here!

Mr. Khamenei notices that he is a little confused and worries about three other people weeping; so he asks his companions; **What's the name of the street we're in?** They answer: it's Ghaffar Street.

_ I see, so your church is located in this very street.

Yes, says the son-in-law

_ Who's your priest, preacher or bishop in Tehran?

The martyr's mother who now feels better after her weeping answers: he is Priest Artur.

_ Does he also come from Kermanshah?

_ No, Haaj-Agha, he's from Urumia.

As Urumia is mentioned, the Leader tells them about his memory of meeting an Assyrian family from there about 5 years ago and so changes the atmosphere in the room:

_ We went to visit an Assyrian family years ago about Christian time, they were also from Urumia. They told me about their fasting traditions and that they were then fasting to beg God for the health of a new-born boy.

The martyr's mother says: they must have been Assyrian dervishes.

True, says the Leader, and adds: **they showed us the photos of some sheep they had sacrificed for this special boy, the very boy who was later sacrificed in the path of God.**

The Previous Visit

The visit remembered by the Leader goes back some 5 years when Mr. Khamenei visited the family of martyr Odish Badel-Davood at about Christmas 1987.

This visit turned into a warm and friendly meeting. Although the martyr's father had also passed away a few days after his son's martyrdom, the spiritual mood of this family was most firm and strong. The ones who did talk most with Mr. Khamenei were the martyr's mother and martyr's younger sister and brother.

The Leader began the conversation by asking the mother:

- Are these your children, lady?

- Yes, they are the martyr's sister and brother.

- Do you have any other children?

- Yes, I have two other daughters, they are married and live in Urumia, I had 5 children, Odishu was my eldest son.

May God Almighty keep them for you under His protection, prays the Leader, and then asks the brother:

- What do you do, young man?

- I'm a student.

- At which stage are you studying?

- The first year of high-school.

Then Mr. Khamenei notices that the sister is still standing and says to his companion: Why don't you bring a chair for this lady?

He then asks her: Well, what do you do?

- I'm also studying.

- What grade?

- Second year of junior high-school.

The Leader, who had already prayed for the martyr's mother, adds: May God protect and bless these children for you and bring happiness into your hearts.

He then says to the mother: You said the martyr was your eldest son?

- Yes, he was.

- Was he married?

- No, he was a dervish!

The mother sensed that Mr. Khamenei does not know much about 'dervishes'



in Assyrian tradition for he asked the mother: [Tell me exactly what this 'being a dervish' is in your Assyrian traditions.](#)

They all explained something about this but their explanations were not clear.

The Leader then said:

[_ You mean that you begged God to grant you this son and you vowed that he'll be a dervish up to the age of seven?](#)

Yes, yes, they reply.

[_ And one of the requirements of a dervish is that he should not marry?](#)

[_ No, only we never cut his hair for seven years, then when he reaches 8, we cut his hair, weigh the hair and give bank-notes of the same weight to our church.](#)

Then the mother brought a few photos of his son in different ages and Mr. Khamenei carefully looked at each photo.

Then she talked a little more about his martyred son: You know, he was like a prophet, he really worshipped God, he was also a patriotic person, he used to fast frequently.

[That is wonderful](#), says Mr. Khamenei.

She adds: I swear to God that we did not fast often, but he did.

Then the Leader asked the brother and sister about the Assyrian way of fasting: any particular month, how long?

The brother had already mentioned one case but his sister who often fasted like her martyred brother had a fuller narration:

[_ We have a -3day fasting in the name of the prophet Jonas, 15 days in the name of Holy Mary, 25 days for the birth of Jesus Christ, 50 days for the Resurrection of Jesus plus all Wednesdays and Fridays in the calendar. Our fasting means not eating anything that relates to animal such as meat, eggs and dairy products.](#)

Finally it should be said Odishu,s body was never found.

The martyr's father died shortly after his martyred son. The family of Odishu, on the recommendation of their priest, decided to bury something belonging to the martyr in a grave in his name; that was the bunch of his hair up to the age of 8 which the mother still kept in a safe place.



The tomb of martyr Odishu Badel-Davood and his father

The last few pages concerned the Ayatollah visiting the family of martyr Odishu which the Leader remembered and we described it further according to our notes; that's why we inserted its narration here. Now we go back to Mr. Khamenei's meeting with the family of martyr Piyir Maroun-Adeh.

After Mr. Khamenei told them about his meeting with Odishu's family, he talked with the mother about Assyrians living in Tehran. He asked: [how many Assyrians live in Tehran, how many families, do you know?](#)

The mother says: I don't know exactly, perhaps 400 families, possibly more.

– [Do you marry among your own community or you could marry others?](#)

– Whatever is one's destiny.

– [How about other Christians in Iran, such as Armenians, do you have good relations with them?](#)

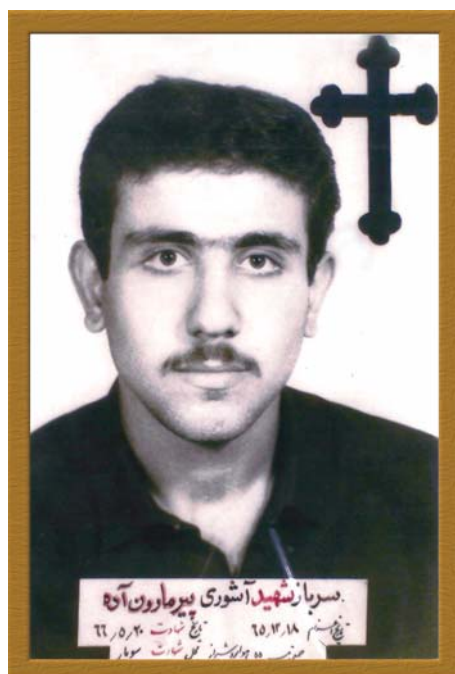
_ Yes, we do.

_ Of course their Christian beliefs differ from yours, don't they?

_ Yes, there are certain differences.

Ayatollah Khamenei then comments: Well, no matter what your particular religion is, if one possesses good, moral characters, if one behaves responsibly, if one's relations with other creatures of God are based on humbleness, if one doesn't tell lies, if one avoids vices such as deceit, back-biting and vile acts, then he or she will be a good servant of God. Of course each religion thinks that it is the rightful one, not others; yet one must enhance one's behaviour, practice and morals; this is most important.

Now it seems the presence of Mr. Khamenei and his narration of events have really changed the atmosphere and brought gladness to the mother's face; little Branco has also contributed to the changed atmosphere by running around and making noise; he grabs the Leader's walking-stick and Branco's mother get up to take the stick from him but Mr. Khamenei says: [let the boy go on with his game and have fun](#). The Leader then picks up his cup of tea and says to mother: [you told me what an excellent boy your son was](#).



He was wonderful, the mother says and adds: After his martyrdom, all people in our district, Muslims and non-Muslims took part in his funeral and mourning ceremonies, they all felt their own sons had been martyred; the prayers leader of our district mosque was there too. I can't really describe what a gentle, good person he was. Then she hesitates and can't go on because she remembered how he was martyred. We, of course, knew that he was martyred after a chemical attack in Ahvaz and the mother had seen his son's burnt-out blackened body; the family members tried to prevent her from seeing this tortured body but she refused: she saw his body, her heart burned and it is still burning, so she can't speak about it.

The Leader tries to change the discourse for the mother to be a little calmer and so asks the martyr's brother and sister: *Well, now, this language of yours, is it very difficult to learn?*

- No, sir, it's just like Arabic.

- *Okay, what's the word for water in your language?*

- We, say: Miyah.

- *How about bread?*



_ We say: Lah.

And Mr. Khamenei points at the lump of sugar in his hand and asks: [What do you say for “ghand”?](#)

_ We, in Assyrian, use the same word for it, ghand.

The Leader says: this [is understandable, for there was no word for ‘ghand’ \(a lump of sugar\) in ancient times, it’s a new word.](#)

Mr. Khamenei goes on asking questions about the Assyrian language in an exact method and then asks them about their script.

They say: It’s very much like the Arabic script.

_ [Do you have any books for me to look at?](#)

The martyr’s brother brings one of his books and hands it to the Leader and he pages through the book carefully and asks some further questions about it.

Then he asks the sister: [who is your representative in the Iranian Parliament?](#)

_ He is Mr. Khenanushu.

_ [Does his surname mean anything in Assyrian?](#)

They look at each other; they don’t know its meaning.

Mr. Khamenei then talks with all members of the family of martyr Maroun-Adeh: with the son-in-law about the new parliamentary elections, with the family’s son about the Assyrian way of writing, with the sister about the Assyrian alphabet, and with the mother about Assyrian origins and their history.

He has been talking with them so patiently and intimately that no one notices the passage of time but this rather long meeting has now brought smiles to the face of the martyr’s mother. Finally the Leader gives a gift to the mother and says:

_ [Well, madam, our intention was to meet you and glorify the memory of your martyr and to appreciate your patience and endurance, to appreciate for the pain and suffering you went through for your country, for losing your son in the path of God Almighty, may He bring happiness to your heart and grant you the best of rewards in His infinite mercy and may your heart always be illuminated by the thoughts of God.](#)

All four members of the family thank Mr. Khamenei for taking the time to go to

their house; they all say: thank you, you were most welcome. The Leader then says farewell to each member of the family: [God be your protector](#).



Sister and Nephew of Martyr Piyir Maroun-Adeh . November, 2014

Chapter 7

The year 1988

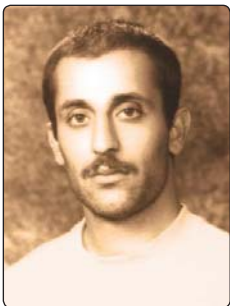
Eighteen

They had to go

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The family of **Martyr** Alfred Sarkis Ordushahi

Visit Date: 1988/12/29



The Photo of

Martyr Alfred Sarkis Ordushahi

Martyred in Soumar, Kermanshah

Martyred on 1988/2/13

The Iranian Oil Company does not give any leave to its employees because it is in an 'alert' situation but Yuhanna my husband, managed to get one day off for our Christmas; it is Christian Eve and we have a lot to do at home. He is doing something in our yard when the door-bell rings. I call on him to go and open the door and I wait to see who has rung the bell. Two young men are talking to him and I think they are two of our neighbours and I go back to the kitchen. Then Yuhanna comes with a perplexed face; it seems that something troubles him. I pour a cup of tea for him and ask him who they were. He said: they wanted to do an interview and I told them: what interview! They said: Not with you, we want to interview the family of martyr Alfred Sarkis Ordushahi.

Well, martyr Alfred was the son of Yuhanna's sister and so I was his maternal uncle's wife. After Alfred's martyrdom my husband urged Alfred's parents to come and live with us because our house is a two-story building and our upper apartment was vacant; that's why these two gentlemen came to our address.

Alfred was martyred almost 11 months ago, so the first anniversary of his martyrdom will be about a month from now.

Yuhanna is still deep in thoughts but, after drinking two cups of tea, he says: I told them I am the martyr's maternal uncle and asked them: Who's going to interview us?

They said: A government official. And I asked: Aren't we supposed to know who's coming for an interview?

They replied: we don't know the name yet, but we come to see you in the evening. Well, I think Yuhanna is right to be a little suspicious because they haven't told him who's coming.

Now it's noontime and Yuhanna and I and my young son Peter are having lunch and Anna, the martyr's mother (Yuhanna's sister) has joined us because her husband was not at home. Yuhanna is still thinking about this morning's encounter! He says: I don't know why they were so ambiguous but they didn't seem to be bad people! Actually there were very kind and polite; I don't know why there's some suspicion in my mind.

Anna says: I wish Avner was here because if the interview is about our martyr, then the martyr's father must be present. You could tell them to come after a few days because the martyr's father must be here too. Yuhanna says: Okay, sister, I'll tell them that when they come.

I should add here that Avner has gone to the United States for a heart surgery. Avner and Anna, apart from their martyred son, have two other children, Albert and Elizabeth, both elder than the martyr. Albert lives in the US and Elizabeth, after her marriage went to Germany with her husband. Albert is a football coach. So, during the last 6 or 7 years, the youngest child was living with her parents, he was their only companion and a real companion as he was so kind, so intelligent and so gentle; he paid constant, loving attention to his parents and never let them feel lonely. But, well, destiny had other things in store; it seems that fate chooses the best!

After lunch, Yuhanna goes back to the yard and I see from the window that the -12 year old Peter gives an order to his father saying: You must park the car just behind the parking-door so that it can't be forced open; the father and the son are engaged in some kind of security measures!

I go back to my room and look into a drawer where I've kept Alfred's photos and other things belonging to him. Among these there is an outstanding photo showing Alfred receiving a prize from the president of Assyrians in the world; this photo is also expressive of his politeness and humbleness, he was really a source of pride for all our family.



Then I look at his letter, written the evening before he died and addressed to me.

He wrote:

My dear uncle's wife, salaam to all the family who are dearer to me than my own life. I hope you're all happy and in good health. I am fine too and so you shouldn't worry about me. I received your kind letter today; how happy I was to receive it. You say you've heard some bad news about war-fronts. But there is nothing to worry about. I've written several letters to you; it seems you've received none of them. But now one of my comrades is coming to Tehran and I've asked him to take this letter to you personally. I again say that I'm well and very comfortable here, I swear to God that there is nothing wrong. Only here I think about all of you more often.

As regards coming to you on leave, I must say I really don't know, perhaps in the winter or the next spring! Please tell mother that I'm well and fine in every respect, so she should not be worried about me; I hope mother will not make life difficult for herself.

I really miss you all, of course, and I hope to see you again. I don't know what else to write. Please convey my salaam to all relations and friends, and please tell my parents not to worry about anything. Well, now I finish this letter; I love you all. Alfred, 1980/2/12.

The Visit

It's almost dusk, I go to the upper floor to see Anna; she opens the door and I see Alfred's copy of the Bible in her hand. Whenever Anna misses Alfred badly, she picks up this copy and reads and reads. Alfred also used to read our holy book very often and always carried this copy with him; this copy was in one of his pockets when he was martyred. I sit down and she says that her son has telephoned from America and said that they had reserved a ticket for father to come back to Tehran for in about 4 days from now. As it's getting dark I tell her to come down to our apartment for those people may have been serious about an interview!

We are now watching the television when the door-bell rings and Yuhanna, like a person who has received a needle, jumps up to go and open the door and Peter quickly follows him. Peter says: if there is something wrong, I run back and telephone the police!

Yuhanna then asks the guests to come in. they are the same two young men who had come in the morning but now they're carrying a big bunch of flowers and a big framed photo of Imam Khomeini.

They come into our reception room and talk about the best place to sit for the principal guest. One of them says: Perhaps here is the best; but the other says: No, here's too near the window, it's better there, on the couch near the store.

We still think these are very peculiar 'guests' and Yuhanna, who has been silent for a couple of minutes, asks them impatiently: After all, aren't you going to tell us who's coming here? Is it still too early to inform us? Do you still think that we shouldn't know until the visitor arrives?

Then one of the young men says: We really apologize to you if we troubled you, but we had to, because it's Mr. Khamenei who is coming to meet you!

We all are shocked to hear this but Yuhanna still doesn't believe them and objects: Are you having us on? Why do you say such things?

They say: we're telling the truth, Haaj-Agha, Mr. Khamenei, will be here any minute now.

I am very amused when they say Haaj-Agha to Yuhanna! But he hasn't noticed this because he keeps saying: I don't believe it; Mr. Khamenei comes to our

house this way! My wisdom does not accept it!

At this time the telephone rings, I pick it up, it's one of our neighbours, Rouny Bet Oshana, the wife of martyr Yermi Yagoub, she's so excited and hastily says: Zhenik, listen carefully, a minute ago Mr. Khamenei was in our house, we asked him to stay with us a little longer but he said that he was going to visit another Assyrian family near us and there is no family of martyrs but yours, I think he'll be at your house shortly, good-bye!

After this telephone call, all our worries are gone, instead we were instantly happy, a sort of clean, spiritual happiness that we'll meet Mr. Khamenei in person and in our own house!

Yuhanna goes to welcome Mr. Khamenei and after saying salaam and welcome, Mr. Khamenei asks him: [Are you the father of the martyr?](#)

_ No, I am his maternal uncle.

_ [Where is the mother?](#)

_ That lady sitting there.

_ [That lady in the corner?](#)

_ Yes, sir.

_ [Well, dear lady, please come and sit a little nearer.](#)



And then Mr. Khamenei asks: [Please tell me when your son was martyred?](#)

- Eleven months ago.

- [Where was he serving?](#)

- Mostly in western parts of the country, Soumar, Ghasreh-Shirin, those parts.

Yuhanna is sitting next to Mr. Khamenei and Anna next to her brother; I and Peter sit down on an opposite couch. I should say here that Mr. Khamenei's face is spiritually illuminating. Anna tells the President that she cannot speak fluent Persian and that her brother, Yuhanna, who is a good talker, will explain everything. So Yuhanna begins to explain how Alfred was martyred:

- Haaj-Agha, I was in Tehran then, first I was told that he was wounded. I left my office and asked one of our neighbours whose son was with Alfred in the same garrison but they didn't know anything. Later I found out that the same day I was told he was wounded, he had already been martyred. He had been shooting at the enemy when a mortar hit behind him in his trench and he was instantly killed.

But before this I stayed at home for some 16 days telephoning every hospital in Shiraz, in Zahedan and many other places.

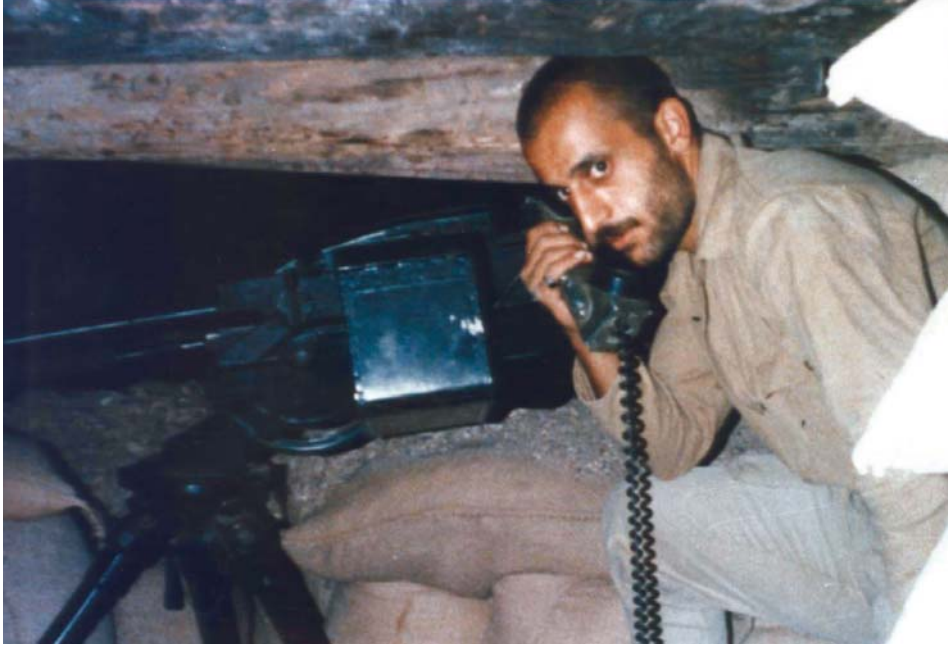
[He must have been in Regiment 88 from Zahedan](#), Mr. Khamenei says.

- Yes, that's right. I even checked with every morgue in Tehran if they had any Christian martyrs but none of the lists contained the name Alfred. They finally told me that I must travel to the military zone where he served. I took leave from my office and travelled to Hamedan; I called on all morgues and hospitals from Hamedan to Ilam.

[Did the lady-mother know about all this](#), Mr. Khamenei asks.

- No, she and her husband were in Tehran and when I was departing Tehran, my sister asked me where I was going and I said there is something urgent in one of the oil refineries and I must go to help.

In Ilam, I was told that they knew no such martyr, I went to Soumar and checked the names of the wounded soldiers in their hospital; a military officer then told me to go to the morgue there and see if you can find his body there. I looked at the bodies they showed me but none was that of



Alfred, I had given up hope when an official said: there is one more body here and when they pulled his cover aside, I saw Alfred's face!

There is silence in the room for some time: Uncle can't go on talking, Anna is weeping but then Anna stops weeping to tell her brother, who's now cleared his throat: go on.

He says: Alfred was good at football, he played in two famous teams, when I saw his body in the morgue, he wore the sports-pullover he used to wear when playing; apparently the weather had been very cold and he had to wear it. On his chest there was a big envelope in which I found his personal belongings. I wanted to rent an ambulance but the officials said: Don't worry, we'll send it to Tehran.

[Had you informed the mother then?](#) Asks Mr. Khamenei.

_ Yes, I telephoned my wife from Kermanshah and told her about Alfred and asked her to inform my sister, the martyr's mother, gradually. I came back to Tehran and when I arrived in our house, I saw many members of our family there. The following day, I received a call informing me that the martyr's body was now in Tehran. I told the person who telephoned that we come to take his body, but he said: we have ambulances, only tell us



about your customs and traditions; we're at your service. I had already bought a coffin; and I took it with me and they said: you may cover it with any kind of cloth or cover you like.

Mr. Khamenei asks: [how was the mother's state when she was informed?](#)

Yuhanna wants to answer this question but mother says quickly: They had to go. It was their duty to go to the war-fronts, our country was in danger, our honour and dignity was threatened.

Mr. Khamenei, being clearly touched by what the martyr's mother said, thus comments:

- What a great, spiritual strength has this lady-mother! It's exactly as she says, her outlook is logical; it's true throughout the world, that is, when a soldier is killed in defence of his country, he's called a martyr and all people take pride in him.

Death always comes to the young and old, to men and to women. There are certain deaths in which no honour lies, but the martyrdom of such young people as your son who died in defence of his country, is an honourable, praiseworthy act.



Certainly there are pains and discomforts but glory and honour as well. Some young people die in a car crash, some quarrel in the streets and are killed, some suffer from certain illnesses and die, we have all witnessed many, different kinds of death, but the one who dies in such glorious path, is ever-lasting; he is a great source of pride and honour for his own family and for his patriotic country.

We really and truly are prideful of such young people, not only in our own country but on an international level. Today our people are known everywhere as a courageous, resistant and selfless nation, a nation who's ready to defend his country, people who cannot be bullied and nothing may be imposed on them.

I am really touched by these divine comments, I feel as if this meeting is taking place in the heaven in which martyrs are taking part.

Then Anna tells Mr. Khamenei about Alfred's moral character: When he decided to join the military, I told him your sister has just arrived from Germany, she'll be our guest for a short time, why can't you postpone your military service for a couple of weeks? He said: dear maman, allow me to go, these dammed Baathists (The enemy's army) will come to Tehran. So I let him go. He

said: I'm going to the battle-grounds, and I said: Well go, may God be with you. After mother's comments, Mr. Khamenei said:

_ This is a great, human spirit, may God Almighty reward you as He wishes.
I hope your Christmas will be full of bliss, I pray for your happy, long life,
May God bring happiness into your hearts after your pain and sorrow.

I have prepared some nice cakes for our Christmas Eve. and, after finding out that we'll have guests, I increased the volume. So I ask one of Mr. Khamenei's companions: Will it be alright if I offer the President some cakes with his tea? He says it's alright; with Peter helping me, I cut the cakes and put cakes and cups of tea in front of all present.

Mr. Khamenei then asks us about the martyr's father and Anna describes everything.

_ May God heal your husband in his boundless mercy and protect your son
and daughter for you and may He make your children sources for your
happiness in life.

Then Mr. Khamenei starts to drink his tea with some pieces of our home-made cakes and after this, he tells his companions to give us the telephone number of his Office so we could contact them if we faced any problems. Anna bashfully tells Mr. Khamenei about her nephew, that is, my son who is doing his military service somewhere remote near the borders and asks him: now that the war is over, would it be possible to transfer him to Tehran because, after the martyrdom of my son, he has become my human walking stick?

Mr. Khamenei tells one of his companions to note down the exact location where he is serving and to arrange that he'll be transferred to Tehran. We all thank Mr. Khamenei for his kindness.

well, we seem to have come to the end of this great meeting because Haaj-Agha Khamenei gives mother some gifts and congratulates Christmas to us again and says to the martyr's mother: [Will you allow me to leave?](#)

Anna is very touched by this statement and says: You honoured us by taking the trouble of coming to visit us. And before saying good-bye, he turns to me and says: [By the way, your home-made cakes were quite delicious.](#)

I put my hand on my chest and, with a thankful lump in my throat, say: Haaj-Agha, may God be your Guardian always.

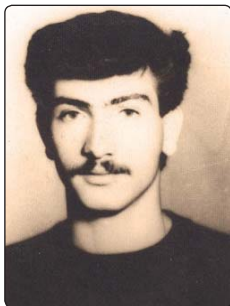
Nineteen

Thirsty for martyrdom

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The families of **Martyr** Razmik Khachatourian

Visit Date: 2015/1/8



The Photo of

Martyr Razmik Khachatourian

Martyred in Omidia, Ahvaz

Martyred on 1988/3/4

I am the eldest daughter and Razmik was my most confidant person, he kept nothing from me. I, Emik was the eldest child of the family, after me there was Rafik and then Razmik and the last child was my sister Anik.

My brother Rafik, was the calmest person in our family but Razmik was the most dynamic, active and humorous member of our family. He never wanted to continue his studies; he had learned how to write and read, but after that, he came to me and said: Sister, so far so good, but I don't want to continue my studies, I want to work and help the family with its expenses, please talk to my parents and make them agree with my working!

No matter how I tried to stop him, he gave up studying and started working: First he worked at my maternal uncle's shop for battery repairs and later, when my uncle had to sell his shop, he found a job with the Water Organization of Tehran. There, he received some regular salary but he never saved a penny. He helped with our family expenses or bought gifts which my mother, I and his younger sister loved. He was extremely kind to each member of the family as if he already knew he would not stay in this world for long!

When the Iraq-Iran war began, he eagerly anticipated to reach his legal age to join in the war effort. My mother opposed this but he somehow urged her not to be against it. At that time, the number of volunteers and soldiers had increased

so incredibly that they had to wait for two or three days to register their names. We asked him to wait for a few weeks for the crowd to lessen but he did not listen. I remember we used to take him something for lunch or dinner while he waited among the registering ranks.

There was a girl whom Razmik loved and it was arranged that they would marry soon. This girl did not like his joining the military. But my brother rejected her wish and said: My love for Iran, for this land of mine, is greater than any other kinds of love.

When he was a child, he used to play with guns and to imitate fighting games and, when I asked him why he loved guns so much, he said: Because I want to be able to defend Iran against all enemies.

At the first month of his military service, he was working at some bases of the Air Force which were far from the war-fronts but then somehow he managed to transfer himself to the army and went to the war-fronts of Shalamchah and Ahvaz. In the course of his two-year military service, he rarely came to see us on leave; he liked to be at the war-front and fight.



While Razmik was doing his military service, I married and later gave birth to two daughters. My husband owned a mini-bus and often carried certain goods and commodities to the war-fronts; he had removed the seats in the mini-bus and he used it as an ambulance when he was in the war zones. Razmik was very happy with my husband and always encouraged him to go there more often.

Well, his military service came to an end but he was not happy about this because the war had not ended yet. We all thought he must now be thinking of his fiancé and getting married but he was not in the mood for such happy events.

Unfortunately there was a radio broadcast saying that all those who had their military service could join the army for a few more months as there were new dangers threatening our country. This news for Razmik was like news from paradise and the following morning he joined the army again and was among the very first groups who were dispatched to new battle-grounds.

This time he tried to calm mother and stop her worries; he often told us about the sweetness of martyrdom but with mother he behaved differently and as an example, when mother poured water on the ground as he was leaving the house, he said jokingly: whether you pour water after me or not, your son will not come back!

His second period of military service did not last more than 4 months; the last time he came home on leave, he seemed to have become a different person. He had come to Tehran for the mourning and funeral ceremony of his martyred friend, Edvin Shahmirian. He, as usual confided in me, his elder sister, and said that some two days before he and martyr Edvin had met at the battle fronts and talked a lot with each other; he added: Now I am sure that I will be the next martyr! I begged him not to talk about martyrdom any more, but he said: Sister, martyrdom brings with it happiness, not sorrow!

The last time he telephoned me and told me about a dream he had and again talked about his martyrdom and added: I'm going to write down my will!

After this telephone conversation with Razmik, I went to my parent's house and mother told me that she had a terrible dream the night before: I saw your father carrying the blood soaked body of Razmik on his hands!

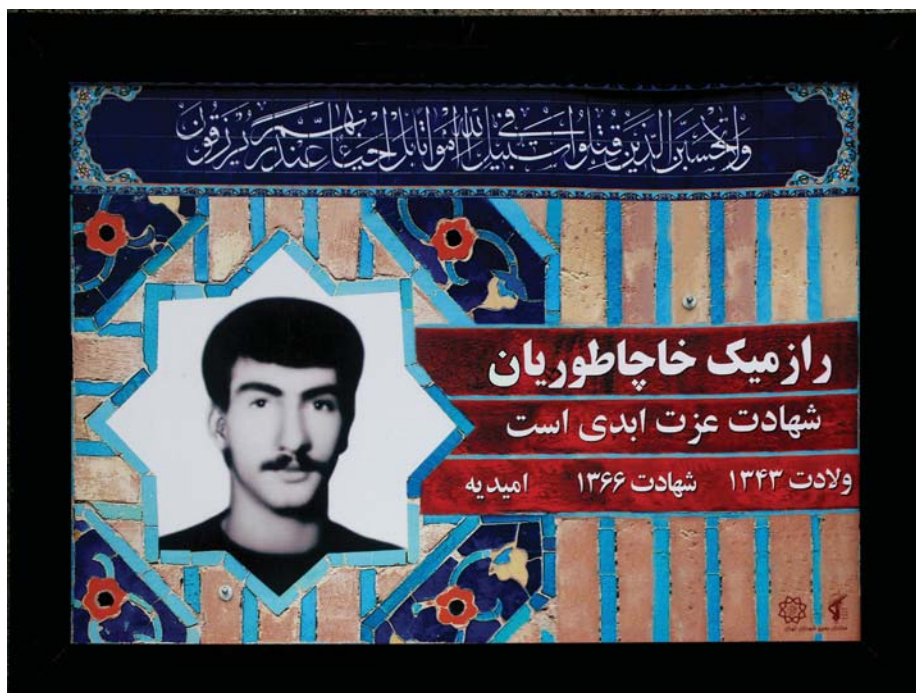


Image of Martyr Razmik Khachatourian mounted on the alley that bears his name.

The following day we received news that Razmik had been wounded and taken to hospital in Ahvaz. My father, my brother and my cousins immediately travelled to Ahvaz and saw Razmik in the hospital and informed us that he was 'in a state of coma, he cannot open his eyes, he is motionless but the hospital instruments show that he is still alive'. Now mother, could not wait any more and hastily travelled to Ahvaz. When mother saw him, she took his hands in her hands and suddenly Razmik's temperature went up and, after a few minutes, he moved his fingers slightly and opened and closed his eyes a few times; we were all happy that the presence of mother had helped him to come out of his coma.

Alas, a few hours later his heart beats stopped and despite the doctors' efforts he did not come back; as if all this time he was alive to see mother again for a few moments before passing away.

Among his belongings that were delivered to us, we found his will which was both heart-rending and soothing; he wrote:

my dear father and mother, never grieve for me, nor be heart-broken...!

*had to be away from you because an enemy had invaded our land, so not only I but thousands of others have to sacrifice and give up their lives in defence of their patriotic country, their nation and their own families... my dear parents, I tell you and tell my sisters, my brother and my friends let my selfless courage be a source of calm and consolation for you and let your memories of me be always with you... there have always been thousands and thousands of Razmiks *and there will also be in the future. I'm neither the first martyr of this land, nor the last. Good-bye and see you on the Day of Resurrection, yours Razmik".*

The Visit

Well, today I'm in mother's house; I've come here to help her with the decorations for Christmas. After the passage of so many years, mother has me only to help her; my father died several years ago, my younger brother and sister, Rafik and Anik have gone to the USA. But for my mother Razmik is always alive as if she constantly sees him and believes that Razmik also sees her and often she sits down, talks to him and listens to what he says!

Anyway, I'm busy decorating our Christmas tree when my mobile phone rings: Some people, three or four persons, want to meet us tomorrow evening and talk with me and mother about Razmik. As usual in such occasion I say 'you are welcome'; I also telephone my son-in-law to come here before the guests arrive in order that a man would be present at our house also!

Well, it's the following evening, instead of three or four persons, some 10 people have come to our house: They draw the curtains here and there; they change the location of the furniture and other things. I tell mother perhaps this is because they want to take a good film, but, after a few minutes, one of the guests comes to me, he apologized for what they've been doing and finally reveals that the Leader of the Revolution, Mr. Khamenei, is to visit you!

Mother, who doesn't understand much Persian asks me in Armenian: Emik, what did he say? Who's going to come to our house? I say: I don't really know. I close my eyes and think of what this gentleman said that the guest was Mr. Khamenei, I hope my son-in-law would be here before they arrive.

* Razmik is cognate with 'razmandeh' in Persian (both Indo-European languages) and it means: a fighter, a warrior.

After a few minutes the same gentleman who told us about the guest said: now Mr. Khamenei has entered your building. I really feel confused but I look around the room to see if everything is in order, we have never had such an important guest in our house. At this moment I hear Mr. Khamenei saying 'Salaam Alai-kum'. My mother, who now seems to become a younger, more agile woman, welcomes the Leader at the entrance and I do the same. Mr. Khamenei raises his head and responds to our welcoming words with a sweet smile but he pauses for a few moments to catch his breath back because he has climbed up some 40 stairs to reach our apartment!

And then he asks mother: [Do you go up and down these many stairs every day?](#)

Mother answers: yes, I have to.

And Mr. Khamenei comments: [it's hard for you.](#)



He and his companions step inside our reception room but he doesn't sit down and says to mother: you lady, please sit down.

So my mother and I sit down first and my mother and Mr. Khamenei exchange kind words enquiring after each other's health.

Then Mr. Khamenei asks: [Where is the father of the martyr?](#)

Mother replied: He has passed away.

_ [When did it happen?](#)

I reply: some 17 years ago.

_ [What is your relation with your martyr?](#)

_ I am his sister.

_ [That is, the daughter of this lady?](#)

_ Yes, sir.

_ [Is this a photo of the martyr?](#)

_ Yes, it is.

Haaj-Agha Khamenei looks deeply at Razmik's photo and after a few moments, he says: [May God bless this Christmas for you, for all of you.](#)



Mother says: Thank you and May God keep you in good health.

And I add: May this year be a blissful, prosperous year for all Iranians.

[God willing](#), says the Leader.

Before this meeting I thought that if I meet the Leader so closely, my heart would

beat fast and my tongue would stammer, but he is so kind and nice and talks to us so intimately that I think I'm talking to my own father.

My mother says: I truly thank you for taking the trouble to meet us; you did us a great favour.

The Leader says: [May you live long; we are proud of the families of martyrs, whether Muslim or Christian, the Christian martyrs selflessly stood up to preserve our Revolution and our system of government; their youth fought for this country and were martyred and their parents patiently bore their absence; this patience is most valuable, it needs great loyalty and firm faith. May God Almighty grant you proper reward and reward this young martyr; may God protect you all and bless you; you'll receive the reward for this patience from God Almighty; as far as I'm concerned, such meetings are the least I could do, it is my duty.](#)

I wish my son-in-law was also present to hear such kind, soul-elevating words especially in understanding my mother's enduring patience.

My mother says: that's right, his destiny was martyrdom.

Then Mr. Khamenei looks around the room and asks: [Don't you have a man in your house? I don't see a man here!](#)

We all smile and laugh. And mother says: my son-in-law was supposed to be here but he hasn't arrived yet.

[By your son-in-law, you mean the husband of this lady?](#) Asks the Leader.



I say: no, Haaj-Agha, my husband has died; mother is referring to my son-in-law. And mother adds: Yes I meant the son-in-law of my daughter, the husband of my grand-daughter. I actually telephoned him to be here, he's late. My mother likes my son-in-law very much and wanted him to be present. So she says to Mr. Khamenei: Please allow me to phone him and tell him to come soon.

The Leader smiles and says: *No, because if you phone him, it means that I must sit here till he comes, maybe he didn't come for hours!*

This makes everybody in the room to laugh and my mother and I laugh louder than others and mother says: No problem, please stay, I mean, stay for supper!

*_ Supper? No, when I visit the families of martyrs, I never stay for supper.
But some tea will be alright.*

Mother tells me in Armenian 'get up and bring tea'.

The Leader says: *Tell us what you said in Persian too.*

And mother says: I told her to get up and bring tea.

I add: I wanted to bring tea but your companions didn't let me.

The Leader says: *Why didn't they, you are the hostess.*

At this moment one of the companions comes in with a tray and we each take a cup of tea.

Mr. Khamenei asks mother *you've been a house-wife, did you have any other job?*

- _ No, just a house-wife.*
- _ How about the martyr's father, what did he do?*
- _ He was cook, a chef.*
- _ Where did he work?*
- _ In restaurants, he worked in many places.*
- _ And your young martyr, what did he do before?*
- _ He was a battery repairer.*

And the Leader says: *Yes I know, many Armenians are very good at mechanics and repairing automobiles and the like.*

I continue my narration: After finishing primary school, we insisted that he should go on with his studies but he said: I want to work at my uncle's shop, I want to help my father with the family expenses.

Then Mr. Khamenei asks mother about her financial conditions and if the apartment is theirs.

No, mother says, we pay rent, 550,000 Tumans a month.

So much money for such a place! The Leader wonders.

Above that the owner has told us already that we must add another 100,000 Tumans as from this New Year.

Haaj-Agha Khamenei smiles and says: *With all those stairs you must climb up and down every day!*

We all laugh and mother adds: And once I fell down the stairs and was hurt; she also tells the Leader: The prices have gone up and my salary doesn't suffice.

The Leader says:

- You're right, May God Almighty grant you rewards; of course the government must play its role, and the Martyrs Foundation, would like to help too; perhaps they're not financially in a position to help everyone; Mr. Moghaddam is present and we'll see what we could do. He then asks mother: How many children do you have?*

- Three at present, replies mother, a son and a daughter are now in the USA and the other daughter is the one here.

- What do those two do in the State? Are they working or studying?

- They work there.

- Why don't they study?

- Well, they are married and have children, but their children do study.

- Do they sometimes return to Iran to see you?

- No, they say they haven't got the money, it would be expensive.

The Leader seems to be annoyed at this and says: it's not right; they must come and see you or help you go there to see them.

Mother says: No, I don't go, I don't like to go abroad, I'll never leave Iran, all my hopes are here.

The Leader, noticing mother's misunderstanding, adds: *I didn't mean that you go and stay there, of course you should live in your own country but you could go to visit them.*

* Sayyed Ali Moghaddam is in charge of the People's Communication Section at the Office of the Supreme Leader.

Then mother describes her love for Iran and that her martyred son, Razmik was also in love with Iran, as soon as the war began he kept saying 'I must go and defend my country'. He was later shot at a battle-field; he was in coma in a hospital for a few days and passed away there.

_ How many years ago was his martyrdom?

This New Year, it will be 27 years, but for me he is still alive.

I narrate the story that his military service had finished after two years, that he was restless not to be fighting and that he was so happy when it was announced that such soldiers could join the army again.

Mr. Khamenei is surprised at this and asks: *where was he martyred?*

_ Omidia, in Ahvaz.

_ I see, was his father alive then?

I say: My father suffered from a brain tumor, he died 17 years ago.

The Leader addressing me asks: *how many children do you have, lady?*

_ Three, two daughters and one son, my husband died about 7 years ago, and now I am working to earn a living.

_ What type of work do you do?

_ I work in a school, cleaning, doing purchases for the school and the like but my salary is not much.

_ How much is it?

_ 450 thousand Tumans.

The Leader comments: *Yes, you're right, it is not much.*

Then he looks at one of his companions and tells him something about my salary. And when I talk about the rent I pay, he is surprised again and asks: *Don't you live here?*

I explain that my small place is on Ayat Street, far from here. This evening I came to mother's apartment to help her when I heard mother will have guests and I also informed my son-in-law to come here too, but he hasn't come yet, it was my pleasure to meet you.

_ When your son-in-law comes, please convey my salaam to him.

Mother interrupts Mr. Khamenei and says: oh, you want to leave us, so soon! And the leader smiles and says: *We've been here for sometime, it isn't 'soon'.*

We all laugh and Mr. Khamenei adds: [Our purpose of this meeting was to extend our respect and affection to you.](#)

My mother and I thank him very much for his kind words and then one of his companions hands him a purse and he takes out a precious gift out of it and says to mother: [This shall serve as a token of our sincere meeting this evening.](#) He then addresses me and says: [Come nearer, lady, there's a gift for you too, it's a gift of Christmas; then he gives another gift and says: and this is for your son-in-law who couldn't be here.](#)

I don't know what to say vis-à-vis so much sympathy, but mother says: You didn't have any fruits! Please have some.

The Leader says: [We had tea and cakes, that'll do.](#)

I get up to offer fruit but Mr. Khamenei says: [Having fruits takes time!](#)

Mother insists on her offer and Mr. Khamenei says: [okay, we'll take some with us!](#)



My mother and I laugh and mother says: Fine, that's better! I thank you again for your precious time spent with us; you really made us happy.

[_ May god protect you, goodbye ladies.](#)

Now Mr. Khamenei and his companions are gone and there has been a long silence between me and mother; were we awake? Were we dreaming? was it

really the Leader of Iran who met us at our humble abode. Suddenly the doorbell rings and puts on end to my confused thought; oh, it is my dear son-in-law! I wish he had come twenty minutes earlier!

The group accompanying the Leader had tidied up the apartment before they left, but my son-in-law senses something and asks: what's been going on?

While he's standing, I narrate the whole story but he doesn't believe it and says: You're having me on, aren't you? Mother goes and brings the Leader's gift and says: here, believe it, this is the Leader's gift for you, he also said to convey his salaam to you. Hearing this he drops on the couch and says: Are you quite sure? Was it the Leader himself? Did he say salaam to me and give me a gift?!

The Leader's meeting with us was on a Thursday evening. On Saturday we received a call from Mr. Khamenei's office about our problem; then after two or three weeks our problems were solved in the best possible way.

Finally I must confess that it's hard to believe that the Leader of an Islamic country should pay so much attention and affection to a Christian family: Not for us who met him at that intimate, sympathetic meeting but, I write these notes, for those who hear and read the story later.

Twenty

Human rights

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The families of **Martyrs** Zhermen Pargurgis,

Her Husband Agha-Jan Odishu, And Her Daughter, Ramina Odishu

Visit Date: 1991/12/25



The Photo of

Martyr Agha-Jan Odishu

Martyred During an Air- Raid

Martyred on 1988/3/11



The Photo of

Martyr Zhermen Pargurgis

Martyred During an Air- Raid

Martyred on 1988/3/11



The Photo of

Martyr Ramina Odishu

Martyred During an Air- Raid

Martyred on 1988/3/11

I am the daughter of a mother who lost her eldest daughter, her son-in-law and her grand-daughter in an air-raid. I write these lines to describe events addressed to my mother.

It was the evening of our festival of Easter, the day when all believing Christians were fasting; some only fast the last few days but you did observe all the 49 days of fasting, that is, you didn't touch meat or dairy products and only ate vegetables. Everything was prepared for the festivities; the house was tidied up and cakes, sweets and fruits were bought. Since this morning your daughter Zhermen and her daughter Ramina came here to help you and your son-in-law went out shopping. They were so tired that they slept in our house: Zhermen, his husband and their daughter Ramina. I wish they hadn't stayed with us!

Zhermen was your eldest daughter and you loved her so dearly; her husband Agha-Jan was a real gentleman. You really loved both of them. This was, of course, before your grand-daughter Ramina was born, then she became your most beloved! Now, Ramina is a 16 year-old girl. I know you have been hard of hearing for some time and that night you were very tired and fell into a deep sleep. That's why you didn't hear the explosion and the people in the street who were shouting on top of their voices. When you woke up, you could hardly breathe for there was smoke and dust everywhere and you started coughing

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badly. In the dark you called out Zhermen to come and help you but there was no reply. Then you noticed the abundance of dust, smoke and fire all around, you began to tremble and again shouted: Zhermen, Zhermen, Ramina, Ramina... no one was around you inside the house but there was an awful amount of cries and shouts outside. Then you wrapped yourself by a bed-cloth and went out of your house: It was doomsday outside and you cried: Oh, Jesus Christ.



The missile had destroyed your neighbour's house and half of your own house; you were gazing helplessly at the rubble that used to be your house. Solmaz, our neighbor on the right side brought you a manteaux and a head-scarf, she put them on you herself and next she came back with a pair of shippers and a glass of sugared water. You had your head down, your legs were showing. After drinking the sugared water, I think you realized what had happened. You ran towards the rubble where Zhemen, her husband and her daughter, your grand-daughter, were sleeping. You stood on the heaps of rubble and screamed: Zhermen, Zhermen. Two people in military uniforms approached you and you asked them in desperation: Where are my daughter, my son-in-law and my grand-daughter?!

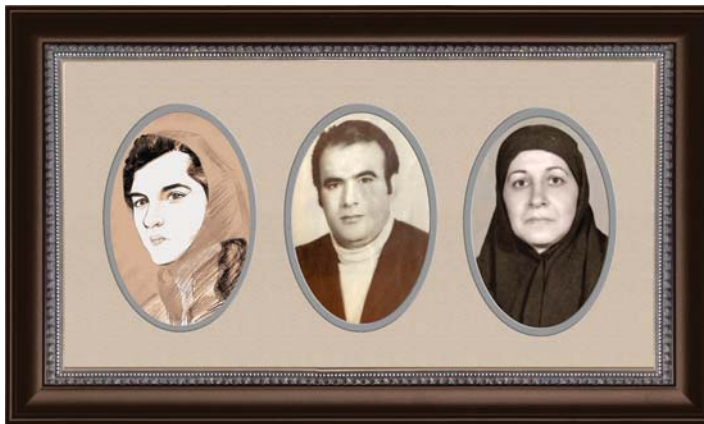
They said if they were injured, they have already been taken to hospital. You only heard the word 'hospital' and asked them to take you there; one of the men looked at his comrade and said: Okay, mother, let's go.

The hospital was full of injured people; you had not the courage to pull the sheets aside from over them but Solmaz asked one of the doctors there about it. What's her name? The doctor asked.

- _ Zhermen Purgurgis.
- _ Was she injured by the bomb from a missile?
- _ Yes, I was told they're brought here.
- _ Was she accompanied by others?
- _ Yes, her husband and her daughter.

The doctor looked at the ground, then looked at Solmaz who was biting the lap of her 'chador' and then whispered: La ilaha ellal-lah, no, they are not taken here, you must go and look for them at your ruined house!

Solmaz wept and then she embraced you but you were still in a horrible shock, you didn't want to believe what had actually happened; you didn't utter a word on the way back, but we saw the rubble of your house again, then you began to believe that the hellish missile has taken away everything you had. Then you moved the rubble with your bare hands in search of your daughter; blood was pouring down from your nail and, after a few minutes you fainted.



At home when you opened your eyes you saw Solmaz who was consoling you in Turkish. You got up to again search for Zhermen but you saw your son, Ebra-

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him at the door with dust and filth all over his clothes. His presence was really necessary for you; he fell down on his knees and said in Assyrian: Oh, yemma, yemma (mother).

They were in tight embrace for a few minutes with tears running down their face; one couldn't tell who's consoling who! Ebrahim managed to gradually overcome his grief but you remained in your grief-stricken mood for months.

Anyway when you came out of Solmaz's house, you saw dozens of people weeping and shouting and sifting through the rubble by spades; they didn't allow bulldozers to do the job because they could harm the body of the dead or injure those possibly alive. Also a bulldozer had been used in the bombed house of our Jewish neighbours, Mr. Yaqoub, his wife and two children who had all been killed, but the bulldozer had damaged the bodies. In the other street near us, things were worse; two young men, as soon as they hear the siren, they rush out of their house but their mother, who was moving slowly had not reached the street when a missile fell in the middle of the street killing her both sons; they both were tennis champions. When mother opened her eyes after this raid, she noticed that not much was left of her two sons.

Yes, mother, the same night we faced several such heart-breaking, bitter events. I should further say that the bodies of our martyrs were dugged out from the rubble but then and even before their funeral, we did let mother see them. At the funeral some Assyrian families of martyrs had joined us and mother said to them: My wounded heart is worse than yours because your sons were soldiers and when they joined the military, you could think that their martyrdom was probable, also they fought for their country and fought courageously against the aggressive enemy and lost their lives in this honourable path, but my 16-year old Ramina, with fasting lips went to sleep in our house for Easter Eve....and she perished!

You're right mother, your sorrow was unbearable, those days you were just like drunken people, you couldn't walk properly, you kept talking to yourself all the time, you kept swearing at Saddam Hussein, you asked God to bring him to his eternal damnation, him and all his foreign supporters.

What shall I say about the so-called international organizations, the United Nations and other human-rights advocates? They never paid attention to Sadd-

am's using chemical weapons, bombing civilians in populated cities, no voices even from those who call themselves the followers of Jesus Christ! No, no protests, no condemnations, political considerations against Islamic Iran suffocated them into deadly silence, no, your Ramina and Zhermen were not parts of their human rights!

But here in Iran, everything was different: All residents of our district, who are mostly Muslims and the prayers-leader of the district's mosque took part in our mourning ceremonies and wept for our martyrs because here is the land of Imam Ali who never discriminated against the followers of other religions. Once the army chiefs asked permission from Imam Khomeini to retaliate Saddam's raids and to launch missiles into Iraqi cities but Imam Khomeini, who was really an advocate of human rights, declared: only if such attacks would not harm civilians and ordinary residents of the cities and towns.

Now some three years have passed since those tragic events. Imam Khomeini passed away two years ago and his successor, Ayatollah Khamenei, is as just as he was.

The Visit

This evening the honorable Leader has decided to pay a visit to our family. Ebrahim is unfortunately not in Tehran but Karin, his wife and Ramsi, his son are at home to help mother prepare for this meeting. Fortunately it is our Christmas Eve and everything is almost ready for receiving guests.

Well, the popular Leader arrives, says salaam with a smile on his face and first of all asks about the martyrs' mother.

Mother sits on a chair and Ramsi sits on a couch next to Mr. Khamenei. I can't believe that our young Ramsi is sitting next to the Leader.

The Leader, after finding out that mother comes from Urumia, asks her about Assyrians living there and the languages she speaks.

She answers the Leader's question and the Leader comments:

_ Wonderful, so you speak Turkish, Assyrian and Persian!

_ Yes, sir.

And her daughter-in-law adds: she also speaks Armenian.

Where did you learn Armenian? The Leader asks.



_ In school, when I was a child.

_ [In Urumia or here?](#)

_ No, in Tabriz.

I'm thinking about mother's tumultuous life: born in Urumia, schooling in Tabriz and then living in Tehran. In fact, the Leader doesn't know that mother's daughter-in-law is Armenian.

The Leader says: [Yes, there are many Armenians living in Tabriz as well as in Tehran, but in Urumia, I don't think many Armenians live there.](#)

Karin says: there are Armenians there too, these days, there are lots of them.

The Leader says: [there are numerous Assyrians in Urumia and West-Azarbijan because they are natives of the region but Armenians are everywhere, in Tehran, Tabriz, Isfahan and other places.](#) Then the Leader asks Ramsi if he speaks Assyrian.

Here Karin jumps in and says: Yes, my son speaks both Assyrian and Armenian because I am Armenian.

_ [I see, you are Armenian yourself.](#)

Here Ramsi explains: My father is Assyrian and my mother, as she just said, is Armenian, that's why I speak both languages.

I notice that it was interesting for the Leader to see that Armenians and Assyrians have married and formed a family.

Then we talk about the Assyrian and Armenian churches near us and that our Assyrian church is located on Qavam-al-Saltaneh Street.

The Leader says: [Qavam-al-Saltaneh perished a long time ago!](#)

At this we all laugh and Karin quickly adds:

- I know, its new name is '30th of Teer' Street. The Leader then narrates an account about this important name-change for our further knowledge: You must know why this new name 30th of the month of Teer is associated with Qavam. Dr. Musaddegh resigned a few days later and people came out into the streets in his support to reinstate Musaddegh but the Shah had already appointed Qavam-al-Saltaneh as prime-minister to stop people's demonstrations. Qavam-al-Saltaneh then declared in a tough message: Everything has changed, I will deal with you violently, I arrest you, I kill you; warnings like these. But the people, despite many being killed and injured, continued their mass demonstrations and his premiership lasted only for some 36 hours. Ayatollah Kashani, the then religious leader had also threatened the Shah's regime and supported Musaddegh and he was reinstated in his position. That's why people changed the name of the street from Qavam-al-Saltaneh into '30th of Teer'; they showed good taste in this choice.

And we, young people who didn't know the story, think: what historical facts lay behind the street where our church is located.

Then the Leader, who seems to be interested in our languages, says: [So you all know both Armenian and Assyrian, well, tell me what is the word for 'mother' in Assyrian?](#)

- We say it's 'yemma'.

- [And in Armenian?](#)

Karin answers: Mayri or mama. And mother who's elder than all of us says: Mayri is better, mama is foreign!

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The Leader says: [well, many people use mama also and in Arabic the word for mother is 'umma' which is similar to Assyrian.](#)

The atmosphere in the house has become so intimate that now mother could recount what she went through that night. In fact the Leader gives this chance to mother to pour out her heart by asking her about that night.

So she narrates everything: her being sleep, the explosion in that Easter Eve, their fasting, running to the street bare-footed, the torn bodies of her Jewish neighbours, the whole story, and she concludes: I swear to God, Mr. Khamenei, that no one knows what I went through that horrible night.

The Leader says: [yes, it's tough, very hard to bear, may God give you proper rewards, these worldly events are really tough, lady.](#)

- Yes, sir, but it was awful, if one goes to sleep and never wakes up, it would be better, but in my case my dearest ones never woke up but I'm still alive.

- Yes, yes, [may God Almighty protect your other children and keep this young boy, this daughter-in-law and your grand-children in good health for you, May God damn Saddam Hussein eternally for he did bring about all these sufferings.](#)



Now Karin brings tea and puts a cup in front of Mr. Khamenei and he says in a humourous tone: *If you give us a sugar-lump, it would be better!*

Karin gets up to bring sugar from the kitchen while saying: you must excuse us, sir, but your surprised visit really made us confused!

The Leader says: *Well, you had everything prepared for your Christian festivity, you shouldn't have done anything more for our sake!*

These remarks bring smiles to everybody's face but mother is still remembering that night: You know, sir, I was going here and there just like the drunk, like mad people.

The Leader tries again to console her in his kind, affectionate way: *Well, yes, you have to be patient, life is hard indeed, you must thank God, life is not always absolute happiness or joy and such events also take place.*

Mother says: I used to be as strong as many men, sir.

_ God willing you're fine now, you seem to be a strong, determined lady.

Mother then goes on narrating how active and spirited she was during the days of the Islamic Revolution, how she helped the demonstrators by taking water, fruits and ice to them and how she joined their ranks, and how, when she saw people being beaten, wounded or shot, she hated the Shah's brutal regime.

After this, the Leader talks to Ramsi in a friendly and humourous tone: *Well, your mother is Armenian and your father Assyrian, after all, which one are you?*

Ramsi says: it doesn't make any difference.

But mother comments: well, he's more Assyrian because his father is Assyrian, the father is more important!

Mr. Khamenei does not agree and says: *both are important, both are principal causes.* Ramsi who's sitting next to the Leader says: I'm half Armenian and half Assyrian.

The Leader talks a little more with Ramsi in a man-to-man matter and we really enjoy watching this scene.

The Leader says: *After all, if you grow up to be a gentleman, an educated person, useful to the society in your job and your way of thinking, to be kind to people and humble in the presence of God, then it matters not at all whether you're Armenian, Assyrian or else.*

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Karin, the daughter-in-law, encouraged by Mr. Khamenei's fatherly advice, says: Fortunately, sir, we've been married for some 25 years and, whole our married life, we've never had any differences because our mother tongues were different; ethnic origins are of course something else, Armenians belong to the Arian race and Assyrians are Semitic but we get along well.

The Leader says: [the nationality of both of you is Iranian.](#)

You're right, we're Iranian, says Karin. The Leader further explains: [Both are Iranians, in Iran we have Arab Iranians, Turkish Iranians, Kurdish Iranians, Persian Iranians as well as Armenian Iranians, it doesn't matter if people are from different racial origins.](#)

Karin comments: we're surly proud to be Iranian.

[_ Yes, that is the principal fact.](#)

[_ We Christians are extremely happy with the Islamic Republic.](#)

[_ Certainly, because the Republic is yours too.](#)

[_ I mean Muslims in this Republic are most kind to us.](#)

[_ Yes, the Islamic Republic belongs to all.](#)

Then I say: Excuse me for taking your time but I must tell you about another incident that night. That night we found out that my mother's hand bag was missing, she used to keep her gold ornaments, rings and coins there. The hand bag was taken to the governor's office. There we were asked: what do you have in that bag? But mother, in her dizziness, couldn't remember anything! There were other things belonging to others as well. The officer there said that they couldn't then give everything to us. At this time, the deputy-governor came and asked the official: What are you doing? And then he ordered the official: throw down everything before them, they'll then pick up what's theirs, these are honest people, trust them. I can't really be more thankful to this kind approach.

Then the Leader said: [It should be so in the Islamic system, all people are under one flag, no one should be discriminated against, and we, as responsible authorities have to defend and protect them all in equal manners; when you defend the right of citizens, we should not ask them about their religion; all citizens are sons and daughters of this country, as one family, we should protect everybody's rights.](#)

While the Leader spoke, I remembered how the western governments that always claim to guard human rights, have dealt with Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Palestine and many other spots and how they have closed their eyes to numerous crimes committed against Muslims and other minorities in their own countries!

Anyway, now our dear guest has had his tea and gets up to say goodbye: [Once again I congratulate you on the occasion of Christmas and the holy birth of Jesus, please convey my salaam to your father when he comes back.](#) We all thank him for his kind visit and he adds: [Our intention was to really express our appreciation to a family of martyrs who lost their lives for this country, for our Revolution and the war-efforts, this was our purpose.](#) The Leader then offers mother a precious gift and says: [Goodbye, may God protect you all.](#)



Martyrs Zhermen Pargurgis, Agha-Jan Odishu, and Ramina Odishu tombs, Assyrian cemetery, Tehran

Twenty-one

Romantic Poetry Night

Ayatollah Khamenei visits

the Family Of **martyr** Vahik Yasaian

Visit Date: 1989/12/28

The Photo of Mr. Hamlet Toumanian.
Mr. Toumanian took upon himself
to write down the narration of this
visit. We are most grateful to him.



The Photo of
martyr Vahik Yasaian
Martyred in Sarpol-Zahab, Kermanshah
Martyred on 1988/6/24

The narration of what went on in the beautiful, intimate and loving meeting in this house between a great man and the dear family of martyr Yasaian is itself the tell-tale of the fact that selfless sacrifices and passionate patriotism surpasses all cults and religions.

Martyrs were in love with their patriotic country and they were chosen to become sources of pride and glory so that God will be happy with His own creations; and for a divine leader to meet the parents of such great martyrs.

Here I should address our martyr, Vahik and say: Everyone respects and reveres your parents and your family because of you; it is true that they miss you badly but they also take pride in you. After all, death is inevitable for all people, so praise and glory to those, like you, who passed away in honour and pride. Long live Iran that produced such great, selfless youth. In memory of all martyrs, here I narrate the meeting of the Iranian Leader with the family of our martyr and champion, Vahik Yasaian:

Vahik, a Zealous, responsible gentleman, was an enemy of all oppressors and a friend and helper of the weak people. As a patriotic person, he went to war-fronts to defend his country and stayed there steadfastly until God recalled him. He was at the fronts for some 27 months; only one month was left to finish his military service.

As he was at the war-fronts all the time, he was allowed to come back to Tehran. But he was drunk with the love of God and love of his country. Otherwise, when his comrades had to retreat, he didn't go back because he still had four rockets to fire at the enemy; he performed his last duty and died through the enemy's fire. He gave up his young life for God and for his country. That's why his family always remember him with pride and honour. He was also deeply spiritual.

The Visit

Before the Leader's arrival, his companions had brought us a big bunch of flowers and the scent of the flowers was a herald of the Leader's perfumed presence. He arrived and his saying salaam and enquiring after our health was most intimate and fatherly but his eyes told a different story: he was full of praise for the family who had brought up such a chivalrous son as Vahik and the same happy impression could be observed in the faces of the whole family who had the Iranian Leader, the great guide to Muslims in many countries, as their guest. There were quite a few of us present and the Leader said humou-
rously: [What a large family!](#)



The martyr's father said: One of them is my son and others are relatives and friends.

_ Well, how are you yourself?

_ Fine, thank you, sir.

_ How about you, lady?

I pray for your health, thank you, you're so kind to come to us, said the mother.

It's a great evening and it is also Christmas Eve. Our family members present at this unforgettable, pleasant meeting include the martyr's parents, his brother, his sister and one of his cousins. Mr. Khamenei's presence in our house on Christmas Eve, reward us all for Jesus Christ who taught his followers to fight tyranny and oppression; he taught them resolute resistance at the cost of his own holy life.

The Leader then asks us how Vahik was martyred.

The father informs him that it happened at Sarpol-Zahabe and that his comrade who had run out of bullets, had to retreat, but he told them: I still have 4 Sahand rockets; I must bring down those invading warplanes!

The Leader says: [Operating those rockets needed a high degree of technical knowledge; launching Sahand rockets was not easy.](#)



The father says: I'm proud of him; he was martyred when he was only 22 in the year 1988.

The Leader then prays for the martyr family and asks the father: *Are these young men your children?*

The father points at them and says: these two are my sons, those two are my daughters and this boy is my nephew.

May God Almighty grant proper rewards to you, says the Leader. He adds: *May God protect all your children and make them sources of satisfaction and happiness for you and I hope that this year's Christmas brings you God's blessings.*

We all thank the Leader for his warm prayers. The meeting is so friendly and intimate; that's why it goes on for almost an hour, as the Leader's visits of martyrs' families are usually shorter than this.

The Leader then says: *I hope this Christmas to be most blissful for you, but I think the Armenian Christmas has not arrived yet?*

- Yes, you're right; our Christmas Eve is on the 6th of January.

- *Where is your church? Is one near?*

- Yes.

- *it's on Karim-Khan Street?*

- Yes, it's near.

- *Do you go to church often?*

- Yes, sir, we often go there?

- *How about the younger ones? Do they also attend?*

- Yes, they do.

One of the martyr's brothers says: I go whenever I can, but often I'm at work.

At this juncture, the Leader talks about the technical knowledge of Armenians specially in repairing military vehicles and that many of them did voluntarily join the war efforts. These brave, selfless Armenians proved that defending Iranian dignity and independence is a holy duty for all, whether Muslim or Christian; how sweet it is to hear the families of martyrs talk about the important role they played in defence of their patriotic country. Mr. Khamenei then asks the martyr's brother: *What's your occupation?*

I have an automobile repair shop for fixing brakes, he replies.

The Leader adds: I used to go to Ahvaz in the first year of the war and I saw many Armenians engaged in such technical efforts and once, when I was there, a young Armenian came to me.



He said: Many of us are ready to come and help repair our military vehicles, yes, they are good at that.

Father says: They are also hard-working people.

The Leader adds: Not only that, they are really good, skillful technicians.

Father says: Also some 50 craftsmen and technicians were sent to the war-fronts by Mr. Vartan of our Church Kalifate Council.

Yes, I know, says the Leader, I have witnessed this myself as I said earlier, I commissioned someone to arrange for these volunteers to carry on with their skilled jobs; many of them were also martyred during the war.

The parents emphasized what a faithful person their son was and that he always carried a small copy of the Gospel in his pocket.

The Leader says: I know this because your Parliamentary representative once showed me the copy an Armenian fighter carried with him, it was bullet-ridden

but this person survived; surely your son too must have been a very faithful person.

This pleasant meeting continued and the Leader was keen to know about jobs and the education of the family; of course everyone spoke about Vahik also and it seemed to me that Vahik was sitting in the room listening to what the Leader and others said about him; this could be true because we believe that martyrs are alive; I am certain that Vahik is proud of his family, his Leader and his country.

Mr. Khamenei also asked the martyr's brother: *Well, young man, what do you do?*

- I help my father with his work.

- *Don't you study in some field?*

The father says: I told him to continue his studies and go to university but he said he wanted to work.

Well, doing a good technical job is also important. Then Mr. Khamenei asks the martyr's sister: *How about you, lady?*

I go to high-school, it's my second year, she says.

- *How about your elder sister?*

Father answers this question and says: She's studying at the Pharmaceutical University in Isfahan.



I wish her success, says the Leader.

Father adds: Apart from that she studies divinities at one of the old churches of Isfahan. My martyred son was also like her, a very faithful person; he was studying at university level but he chose to join the military and defend his country.

The Leader then comments: If a nation does not have such selfless, brave young men, this nation will gradually become weak, it's like a family faced with enemies but lacking strong men to defend it. Today all dependent countries suffer from this weakness and humiliation. We, for some 10 years, have been facing many problems and obstacles in production and trade; for ten years such difficulties have been imposed on us and before the Revolution, as you know, the circumstances were worse. Despite all these, we are a proud nation; we are not to be humiliated. No government under the sky today could claim to have any influence in Iran. We are not under the influence of any big power in the world; this means integrity and personality and honour. Apart from those few big powers, most countries are under the influence of others for various reasons, economic, financial or military threats or ideological dogmas.

Then the Leader prays for the martyr's mother saying: May God Almighty bring happiness in your life and bless you all and may He keep your children in good health for you.

We all thank the Leader for his wise comments and he goes on to say: Dear lady, death comes to all, no one may escape it. Young people also die because of an accident or some illness; these are inglorious deaths but your son's martyrdom is to be praised and glorified.

The father affirms what the Leader said: Yes, it was a prideful martyrdom, I'm proud that he went that way, just as he wished, his short life before joining the military and afterwards was a full, glorious life. And, Haaj-Agha, this is my youngest daughter.

- May God protect her, what school-class is she in?

- I'm in the 5th year of primary school.

The intimate atmosphere of this visit has cheered up the martyr's sister and mother; they are now more proud of him than before.

They remember many things about the character and personality of Vahik but

Varuzh, the martyr's brother says:

Vahik's sister tells the Leader how chivalrous he was:

The Leader says: yes, such selfless behavior makes these martyrs more praiseworthy and outstanding; such young men were exceptional, they were like brilliant torches in a dark world. He joined the military voluntarily and possessed high human morals, he was great.



to the front-lines'; he always tried to console me. He had also told his brother 'don't let mother know that I fight in the front-lines'.

The Leader then says to the mother:

- You must be strong and feel proud, truly, bringing up such courageous, kind and strong sons, is a great source of honour.

Mother says: Yes, I take pride in him who went away with dignity, honour and glory; wherever I go people respect me a lot.

Mr. Khamenei adds:

- well, your spiritual respect is much higher than the respect people pay to you. There are certain matters one must deliberate about, things that can't be expressed by tongues. Your son was like a founding- stone in a building which is not removable; the result of his selfless effort for the society, for this country and its people will remain forever, I mean that these martyrs and their heroic actions will be eternal.

Mr. Khamenei further explains:

- If you take a glimpse at the history of those countries which are considered as great nations today, you'll find out that this has come about through countless, continuous sacrifices and resistance. On the other hand, colonialist powers invaded the continent of Africa and, as there was not much resistance and people were not ready to fight and sacrifice for their lands, the colonialists plundered their wealth, shaved their heads and took them away into slavery. The result was that for some two centuries, the African people remained backward and suffered hunger and poverty. Some people think that Africa is a dry land and as hot as hell. This is not true; many regions in Africa are among the most beautiful, arable and green regions of the world. Colonialist powers also dropped hundreds of bombs on the African people to keep them in subjugation. On the contrary, our people proved how selfless, patriotic and resistant they were because our Islamic Revolution revived the people, and brought back their zeal, patriotism and honour. The Iranian nation, thanks to such youth as your son, was victorious; if it weren't for them, we would have become a humiliated, defeated nation.



The Leader finally said: I wish you all success and happiness. Then he addressed mother and gave her a precious gift and said: this is a little token of our meeting this evening.

Mother said: Thank you for your visit, you did us a favour.

It was hard for us to say good-bye to the Leader, but after he left, we all felt some spiritual tranquility resulting from his presence and his wise words. And we should never forget the sacrifices of the martyrs whose red blood kept our land green.

Twenty-two

Gift of God

Ayatollah Khamenei visits

the Family Of **martyr** Zhan-Zhorzh Zhan-David

Visit Date: 1988/12/29



The Photo of

martyr Zhan-Zhorzh Zhan-David

Martyred in Ein-Khosh, Ilam

Martyred on 1988/3/28

Six months have now passed since the UN Resolution concerning a cease-fire between Iran and Iraq. Ten years have passed since the Islamic Revolution but for some eight years of this period, the Iranian people have been engaged in defending their country against the Iraqi-imposed war supported by almost all big world powers. Some evil elements who did not participate in people's war efforts, try to humiliate the combatants and the families of martyrs of the war by making fun of them; they say: What happened to your epic slogans: fight, fight, till victory, liberation of Karbela, etc. what were all those young men sacrificed for? These remarks add salt to the nation's wounds. They refer to imam's words: 'I drink this cup of poison', to make more fun of us.

Anyway, under such circumstances, it was Mr. Khamenei, the President, who warmed up our hearts. Immediately after the adoption of the UN Resolution by Iran, he did, in his Friday-prayers tribune, defend the Imam's decision whole-heartedly and inspired the revolutionary people throughout Iran. He proved that the adoption of the UN Resolution was not a sign of weakness, as some suggested, because millions of Iranian were ready to fight on if their Imam so decided.

It is through such an insight that Mr. Khamenei has been visiting the families of Muslim martyrs almost on a weekly basis but the days of Christmas celebrations are set aside for meeting with the families of Christian martyrs and this

evening he is going to visit some Assyrian families.

One of these meetings was with the family of martyr Zhan-David. Unfortunately we do not have much on record about this visit: no photos, no films, only some sound recordings. Therefore we try to have an interview with the martyr's mother but she refuses our request for three times. Finally a Kermanshahi friend of ours asks her and she, also from Kermanshah, accepts our request.

We do understand the reason for her frequent refusal for an interview because she, after so many years since her son's death, is not emotionally in a position to talk about her son's martyrdom. What follows is the exact account of our interview with her; every line of this interview was mixed with tears that ran down her face; she said:

– He joined the army to do his military service with a delay of some three years because I was ill and had to have a surgical operation, then his father had diabetes and lost his sight. We called him 'Zhano', a term of endearment for Zhan. In fact he was his father's eyes. I was a teacher and when I was away, I was sure that Zhano was taking care of his father. Anyway I



personally did not want him to be a soldier, I did not have the strength to bear this, but despite all this, he did go away to do his military service.

He used to say: Mother, I can't stay at home all the time, I must go, and I will, God willing, return safe and sound, and if something different happens, well it has been my fate!

A year had passed since Zhano joined the army. My husband got worse and we, my younger son Zhako and I, took him to hospital; we stayed at the hospital till morning and when we came back early in the morning, I noticed that two soldiers were walking in our street. I told my son: maybe they're back from the war-fronts, let's stop and take them to their destination. But Zhako, while trying to stop the car, shouted: He's our own Zhano. I thought he was mistaken because Zhano had told us nothing about getting a leave, but, yes, it was Zhano. Despite my husband's illness, I was happy to see him but his hand was bandaged. I asked him: What's happened to your hand? And he said: I was playing with some matches and my hand was burnt! I knew he was lying; every mother has this intuition!

But the truth was that a mortar had exploded near him and it had cut off three of his fingers and for this reason he was given a -40day leave for medical treatment; when I saw his wound, I was sick in the heart. But now it was his turn to ask about his father and he knew that he was not feeling well, he quickly went to the hospital. Despite his injured hand, he gave his father a good bath and then shaved him, then he picked him up and let him rest on his bed. Unfortunately, it was the last day of my husband's life; so Zhano's injury let him see his father for the last time!

Zhano's 40 days of leave was totally spent in the father's funeral and mourning ceremonies and our gathering for the 40th day of his passing away. As Zhano was badly wounded, his commanders had given him permission to go to the war-region, collect his belongings and spend the remaining period of his military service in Tehran. He went back to collect his things but he...

Weeping did not allow mother to finish her statement. Whenever she remembers her martyred son, she gets a lump in her throat and cannot go on, that's why she refused our request for an interview several times. Afterwards she says:



You interview me and go away but I, because of reviewing the incident, feel awful for many days afterwards.

Later we ask her how she was informed about Zhano's martyrdom? Instead of replying to us she gets up to go to the kitchen and brings us some fruits and we notice that her eyes are almost red; surly she wept in the kitchen before coming back to us.

After a while she goes on with her narration:

- Zhano was born on the 6th of Iranian month of Farvardin and strangely he was martyred on the same day. Once we were at home watching football on television when one of our neighbours called out Zhako's name and asked him to come out of the house. He didn't come back for some 15 minutes. I was worried, so I went out of the room and saw him sitting in the yard, holding his knees and weeping. I asked: What's happened Zhako? He said: Zhano has been injured. Where is he now? I asked. And a man standing near the house-door with our neighbor said: In a hospital... then gradually I was told about his martyrdom; tears are running down her face as if it's the first time she hears about her son's death.

The Visit

Later, in order to change the atmosphere, we asked her about the evening when the Leader came to meet her and she says:

- You must excuse me for my speaking to you frankly. Those days I was

a mad woman, I couldn't bear anything or any person, specially if I was asked to talk about Zhano. That day my mother, who was then alive, had come to my house together with my niece. Before noontime two young people had rung our bell, and my niece who opened the door said: Auntie, these gentlemen say that an official is coming to meet you this evening, so please stay at home. I shouted: Tell'em to go away, I don't want anybody to come here! They had told my niece: the meeting will be for a few minutes and that person is an important official. I said: I don't want to meet anybody, even if he be the highest-ranking official in the country! Early in the evening, they telephoned again and said the same thing. I told them, okay, you first bring my son back and then come to see me! Poor young men did not know how to reply to what I asked! But my mother urged me to accept their request. Of course I never thought that the visitor could be Mr. Khamenei; I said to myself: The President of Iran coming to my house to meet me, Ha-ha-ha! Even when he arrived, I was still sunk in my sad thoughts, but, to tell you the truth, this spiritual man really changed the sorrow-stricken atmosphere of our family; I was a changed person after he left us, through his consolations, his wise advices and his humble behaviour; I really found a new calm in my heart; he also read a few lines of poetry for us that brought happy tears in our eyes; in short, I just say: It was a pleasant evening.

Mr. Khamenei, seeing the grim mother and finding out that not a long time have passed since her son's martyrdom, first said a very warm salaam to the mother and to the grand-mother, enquired after their health and said:

.. May God Almighty give you patience, may God grant you proper rewards, may God bring happiness in your hearts in all your life despite the sufferings you have borne. Bitter events in our worldly life are inevitable, dear lady: death, departures, incurable illnesses and other tragedies do exist, but a martyr's death is also something to be proud of; the family of the martyr feels that its martyr fought for his patriotic country, for its independence and for its people and did some service in this respect, his death was not in vain. In all countries of the world, everywhere and in all

wars, those families whose sons and daughters gave up their lives for this holy purpose are called ‘martyrs’; people take pride in them along with the personal pains that parents suffer from; there are all sorts of ordinary dyings but this kind of selfless martyrdom is the most valuable and most prideful of all, especially when these martyrdoms are accompanied by God Almighty’s rewards.

The President feels that this mother needs to be consoled more intimately and so he changes the subject to questions about Assyrian churches and their religious ceremonies and says:

You must suggest the positive aspects of the incident to yourself in order that you feel less uneasy because if you only look at it negatively, you’ll be less unhappy. One must confront the life’s events courageously and powerfully. Thank God you’re a courageous lady; I have met many Assyrian families intimately and I have found out that they all possess high spirits, happy characteristics and are most resistant. I’m sure you do possess the same spiritual qualities. Yes, of course, there was war, we all fought in defence of this country, yes, it was associated with many bitter experiences. I have met families who had more than one martyr. Last week, an evening like tonight, I went to visit a family whose four sons were martyred in the war, the father was also martyred after the martyrdom of his four sons. There were 5 pictures on the wall, the father and his four young, handsome sons; they were all martyred within one year only*! One is really touched.

I was truly astonished at the resilience of this family. And the father? He had been a faithful person; I really felt that he could not bear it any longer, so he went to the war-fronts to join his sons. Yet, the mother who couldn’t join the military, this great lady, was as solid as a mountain, she bore all these tragedies alone with patience and tolerance; when I met this lady, I really found her an exceptional, iron-willed person, respected and full of values.

* These martyrs belonged to a Muslim family and the account of Mr. Khamenei Visiting them is narrated in another look as the present look is dedicated to our Christian martyrs.

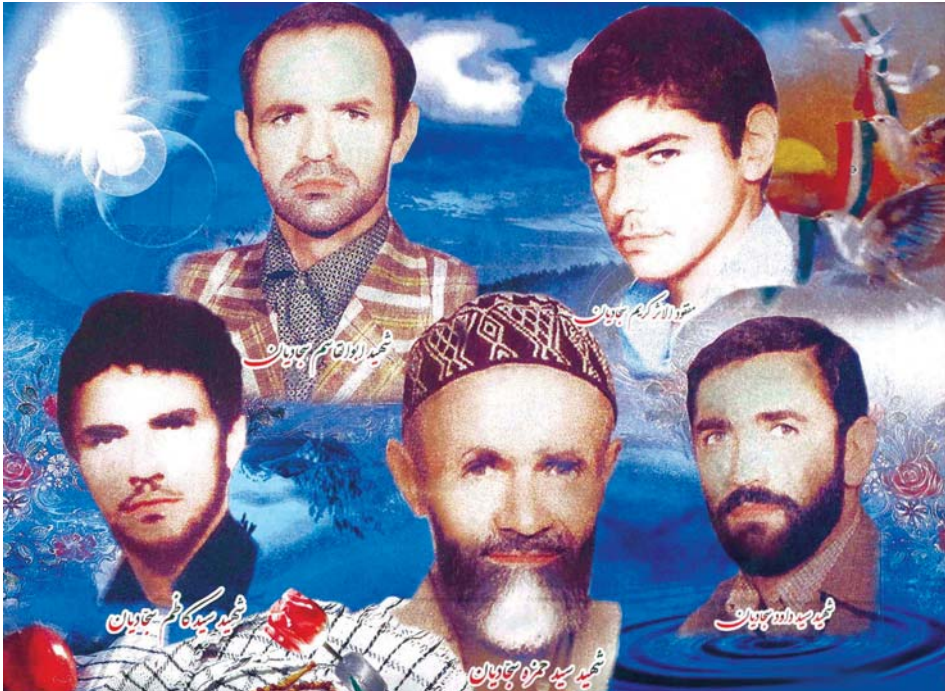


Image of martyr Sajjadian and his martyr sons, the martyrs that ayatollah Khamene'e referred to.

Now let's take a positive look at these events; we do see, in everyday life, that some young people are killed in car accidents, or get killed in a petty quarrel, some die because of illness that no one suspected, well, there is no pride, no glory in such deaths; their families just miss them as something valuable or expensive they have lost, no more. But when a young man, together with thousands of others, dedicates his life to the defence of his country, for an important cause, this is martyrdom, it's prideful and glorious.

As I said, this is the truth not only for us who live in Iran, no, throughout the world people call their soldiers who die in wars as martyrs and are proud of them, you must have read about them in novels, in history books, etc. Of course there is no contradiction in being proud and grief for the lost ones or weeping for them and feeling heart-broken. Besides, as you know, such martyrdoms are accompanied by God's rewards and blessing and Divine rewards in this world and the next. The worldly reward consists

of this feeling of pride and glory within yourselves, for, if the enemy could win the war, our safety and security, our independence, and our integrity would have been destroyed; all nations who were conquered, were badly humiliated and this does not only concern their leaders or a section or a class in the society, but the whole nation suffers; being defeated and humiliated is a shameful pain felt by every individual in the society.

Well, who were the selfless people who did not allow this to happen? They were people like your own son. Of course if some circumstances would prevent him from being in a special situation, perhaps he would not have been martyred but one may not foresee or predict events; something could have happened to him, something much less honorable, much less prideful.

Anyway, I do pray for you and I hope that God Almighty will grant you rewards out of His boundless mercy and love and do away with your sorrows and bring happiness into your hearts, your dearest and nearest ones, and to make you overcome your grief through His Grace.

Twenty-three

Martyrs are Alive

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The Family of **martyr** Herach Tourusian

Visit Date: 1995/1/2



The Photo of

Martyr Herach Tourusian

Martyred in Soumar, Kermanshah

Martyred on 1988/6/26

He was really happy that day because in the street a martyr was being taken to his funeral site by a crowd of people and on the photos of the martyr, it was written 'the -17year old martyr', exactly the same age as Herach. When he enquired about this, he was told that the martyr had volunteered to join the army a few months before reaching the age of 18.

He was also very much under the influence of a slogan often broadcast on the radio; it said: 'martyrs are alive, Allahu Akbar, martyrs have joined God, Allahu Akbar'.

That day he came home in a happy mood while singing this slogan. Our mother was in the kitchen and our sister was watching television. He went to his room searching for something in the drawers. My mother asked Herach: What's going on? What are you looking for?

I'm looking for my identification card.

_ What do you want it for?

Well, dear mother, everything is okay, I can now join the war-effort as a volunteer, he said. Our mother was awfully surprised.

Then Herach went to see Leon, our maternal uncle, whom he liked very much and often exchanged jokes with; the uncle's son, Razmik, was also his closest friend; they were the same age. When he arrived, uncle embraced him and Razmik asked: What's happened?

_ Well, everything is fine, the day after tomorrow I go to do my military service!

But there're still a few months left before our date of dispatch, Razmik said.

_ Yes but I volunteered to go earlier and it was approved.

Now the telephone rang and uncle picked it and talked to someone briefly and said to him: Is it your real wish to join the military?

_ Yes, dear uncle, I'm not one of those who paid 200 Tumans!

Uncle hit him on the shoulder and objected: Are you making fun of me?! Then we all laughed because many years ago uncle had paid 200 Tumans and became exempt from doing his military service.

This is what went on between Herach and uncle. And Razmik says I told Herach: why don't you wait for a few months and we go together? Razmik had later telephoned Herach and angrily told him that he mustn't go now. Later we found out that mother had telephoned Razmik and made him swear to Holy Mary to stop Herach from joining the army now.

Hearach was the youngest of us; he liked arts and was keen on sports, especially playing football. Our father ran a blacksmith shop and Herach, who was at school, went to his shop and helped father with his work.

Even when he came back from war-fronts on leave, he would still continue helping father and did not rest a day. Of course father often told him to go and rest, go out with your friends and have fun but he preferred to help father and said: I don't want him to sweat alone!

Anyway, Herach's training period finished and he came home on a short leave. He now was ready to go to the war-fronts. He always told us half-jokingly: I want you to be called 'the family of martyr Tourusian' one day! Of course he never said such things in front of our parents, but whenever he came to Tehran on leave and knocked at the entrance-door and we said: Who is it? He changed his voice and said: Excuse me, is this the home of martyr Tourusian?! To my parents he always said that his service would soon be over and he would come back to Tehran so that mother could find him a suitable bride.

Once he was about to take part in a military operation and its timing coincided

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1969-1988

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իրաւունքների շնոքերման:



سرباز شهید ارمنی
هراج طوروسیان
۱۳۴۸-۱۳۶۷

به تاریخ پنجم تیرماه سال ۱۳۶۷ در راه حفظ حقوق حقه ایران
در مصاف بارژیم بعثی عراق درجه سه سومار به درجه رفیع شهادت نائل آمده.

smith shop so that he could retire. And now I am so happy to hear Mr. Khamenei praising him; I am sure he can hear us and is greatly happy.

The Leader then asks me and my father about our profession and when he finds out that we all are engaged in technical, industrial jobs, he tell us about the valuable services performed by Armenian technicians and craftsmen in Ahvaz, Dezful and other location during the war and that most of them were volunteer combatants.

Later in this friendly meeting, the Leader asked us about our churchgoings, our priests and our special churches, and my parents, my sister and I all take part in this intimate conversation; we are all really delighted with this sociable encounter. My father says: I do not believe in any particular church, I go to any church whenever possible.

The Leader confirms father's statement and says: [well done, all houses of God are houses of worship; they are all sacrosanct; if one could, no matter where, reach God and attach one's heart to Him, that is admirable.](#)

Our mother tells Mr. Khamenei: He loved us all, specially his sister, and weeks before his martyrdom, he always sang the line: 'Martyrs are alive, Allaho Akbar'.



Razmik, his cousin used to tell him: Your parents are with you, why do you weep? He answered: I weep for other martyrs and their parents.

Mother narrates the coincidence of my marriage ceremony and his martyrdom at the same time and Mr. Khamenei consoles her, prays for her and asks God to bring happiness to her heart and protect her other children for her.

Then mother shows the Leader a framed painting of Herach and Mr. Khamenei says: *How beautifully it has been drawn.*

Then he says: *I suppose your daughter is married, isn't she?*

Yes, mother says, and this little girl is my grand-daughter; she was born some-time after my son's martyrdom; she's now four years of age and her name is Biayna.

Mr. Khamenei asks her, in a tone of talking to children: *Well, what's your name, you dear, little lady?*

My sister, a little ashamed, says: she doesn't know much Persian.

The Leader asks her in a humourous tone: *Why haven't you learned Persian, you little lady?!*

At this hint, all of us as well as the Leader's companions laugh. For me it was a long time that I had not seen my parents to so happily smile and laugh. The only person who doesn't smile is Biayna who didn't understand much!

Mr. Khamenei would like to embrace her and let her sit on his leg, so he says: *Little lady, come here a little and sit on my knees, it may be good for you!*

My sister tells her in Armenian to do this but she holds herself tightly against her mother and doesn't move!

My father says: She's very shy, she's taken after me, her grandfather!

What! You don't seem to be shy at all, joked the Leader.

It seems to me that Mr. Khamenei also does not wish to end this very familiar meeting, so he tells us about Bishop Mannoukian, his meeting with him and his manner; he also informs us about the history of Armenians in Iran and how Shah Abbas dealt with them in kindest terms; he concluded: *You are our fellow-countrymen, you're not separate entities from the rest of Iranians, Iran belongs to you, that's why you participate in its defence; it is our duty, yours and ours, to rebuild this country and make it prosperous and this duty is not upon the shoul-*

ders of a particular class, religion or ethnic group, we all must help and cooperate in such constructive efforts, if God will.

The Leader finally said: Well, our intention was to meet you this evening as a respected martyr family, and to congratulate you on the occasion of your New Year. We meant to express our intimate gratefulness to you and remember your valiant martyr. I pray to God for your happiness and success in life. Also, in case you faced any problems, I give you an address and a telephone number to contact us, my Office staff will be at your service.

Then one of the Leader's companions gives our father an address and a phone number. But for us the important thing, more than removing any problems through his office, was that the Leader of this Islamic state has the families of martyrs in mind; this was a great source of warmth, intimacy and peace of mind. Mr. Khamenei then gives mother a gift and says: This is a token for remembering this evening's meeting.

All family members thank Mr. Khamenei for his kind visit and the Leader addresses mother and says: May I have your permission to leave?

And our father, forgetting the Leader's heavy preoccupations, says: Treat our house as your own and please come again whenever you like!



Twenty-four

If he had a grave

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The Family of **martyr** George Keshish Haroutoun

Visit Date: 2015/1/8



The Photo of

Martyr George Keshish Haroutoun

Martyred in Gilan-Gharb, Kermanshah

Martyred on 1988/7/22

This Thursday evening coincides with the anniversary of the birth of our holy Prophet (SA) when we drive out of the office of the Leader in three very ordinary cars; the cars are carrying the Leader and his companions and the destination is the house of a martyr family. No one in the streets could guess that the Leader is sitting in one of the cars because we do not do anything unusual. We stop at every traffic light, stop for many minutes in traffic congestions and do not speed up. Because of the evening rush hours, we spend almost an hour on the way before reaching our destination. The first place to visit is in Narmak, almost in south Tehran where the family of a Christian martyr, George Keshish Haroutoun live.

Background

The Haroutoun family had moved from their old place after George's martyrdom and we went through a lot of hardship to find the new address; we only did not discover which floor of the building the family lives in!

Well, we rang different bells and fortunately someone answered the bell on the 4th floor: I am the sister of the martyr, my mother and my younger sister live on the first floor, but they are not at home now. I told her that we would like to meet your mother tomorrow evening to talk to her about your martyr.

It seemed it was hard to reply to our request but, after a few moments, she said that it was alright. At this time the mother appeared with a walking-stick in one

hand and a shopping basket in the other. I said salaam to her and she, in thick Armenian, responded very kindly and went into the house. I gave the sister my mobile number and added: So we'll be seeing you tomorrow evening.

On Wednesday morning my phone rang and the caller said: I am the martyr's sister but the voice was not that of the sister I talked to. She explained: You talked to my elder sister yesterday; I said: Yes, yes, we'll be seeing you tomorrow evening. But she said: I called you to tell you not to come!

Why? I said.

- _ Because my mother is not well, she'll be hurt.
- _ We won't take much of her time, only for a few minutes.

She said, in a dry, rather angry voice: I said 'no'.

I meant to talk to her a little more but she hung up.

I haven't yet said anything to my colleagues about this but I am very worried. I think perhaps we'll have to change the Leader's program. I go to their house again and ring the 4th floor and the elder sister says: Salaam, what is it you want?

- _ Please could you kindly come down to the entrance-door?
- _ Who are you?
- _ I told you on Tuesday that we come to meet you this evening.
- _ But my sister phoned yesterday and asked you not to come?
- _ Yes, she did but please let me explain things, you see, lady...

She had hung up the door-phone.

It's too early to name the guest. I rang again

Yes? She says.

- _ Lady, we don't mean to trouble you at all; it won't be more than a few minutes.
- _ No sir, we don't want to be interviewed, my mother is not well.
- _ Listen, lady, if your mother couldn't talk, we leave you; we just want to see her.

Again she hung up. I look at my watch; the Leader will be on the way in about half an hour from now. I don't know what to do; this elder sister who was not unfriendly at first and did not behave so obstinately but the younger sister who telephoned me yesterday was worse.

I go back to our car to consult with my colleagues and say: they don't agree. Why? They ask.

I don't know; they didn't even let me explain.

Now I think the Leader is about to leave his Office. I go back to the house, and before that I say 'salavat' five times. I ring the bell and she, as soon as she hears my voice, hangs up. I must decide soon because if we can't meet this family, I must inform the Leader companions to change the program. I go back to our car again for consultation; they're all worried except an older friend of mine: he and I have been accompanying the Leader in visiting the families of martyrs since the days of Mr. Khamenei's presidency; we are the most experienced members of our team. He smiles and says: Haaji, don't worry; I'm sure you'll finally persuade them, go back and try again.

I go and ring the 4th floor again and say: please don't cut off.

I say: Please listen for a moment, I am a Muslim and you are a Christian, both of us are Iranian and famed to be hospitable, I don't want anything, but I have to take a tablet quickly, would you be kind enough to fetch me a glass of water, then I just go away.

She's silent for a few moments while I pray to God silently; then she says: Okay, I'll bring you a glass of water.

I thank God again, now I can at least say something face to face. I look at my watch; the Leader must be on the way, then the entrance-door half opens, it's the younger sister with a glass of water on a tray; she still seems to be angry. I take up the glass, take a tablet out of my pocket and gulp it down; I still have the half empty glass in my hand and I say: it's a pity you don't let us come into your house; a very respected guest is coming to congratulate you on the occasion of Christmas.

- No, thank you, there is no need for anybody to come, even if he is the President!

The Sister's Narration

Yesterday someone came to us and said: We want to interview the martyr's mother, I approved his request, but when I told my younger sister, he got angry and retorted: Don't you remember the last time, how upset mother was; no, they shouldn't come.



She was right about mother's condition and I agreed with her and she said; I'll telephone them.

It's true about mother, she has suffered a lot in her life, father died a long time ago and George was martyred 25 years ago, my two other brother have gone abroad; when my father had a heart attack and died, George was only 15 and my elder brother Harout became the bread-winner of the family but George did different jobs whenever he could to help with our daily expenses. Harout was exempted from military service but my other brother Zhavor, after getting his high-school diploma, joined the army and finished his two-year military service and finally George joined the army and after his training period, he was dispatched to join the Regiment 71 in Kermanshah.

He didn't tell us much about the battle-front; he only said that he liked his military service and that he had lots of friends, mostly Muslims. We did witness this after his martyrdom when all those Muslim friends came to his mourning ceremonies. In the middle of his service, we managed, through some friend, to ask the offi-

cials concerned to send him to some other parts, away from the front-lines but he found out about this and rejected it. He said: I don't want to go away from the front-lines; he was truly a selfless, fearless person.

By then I had married and my husband found an apartment in Majidiya District in Tehran and we moved there; our neighbours were the Allah-Dadian family and when their son Albert was martyred, George came to Tehran on leave and asked us to go and visit the Allah-Dadian family and we were there, he seemed to be more grief-stuck than Albert's parents as if he was ashamed to be alive! And after this he went back to front-lines and never came back.

It was only two more months before his military service would finish and mother was happy that he would soon come home but four days later the so-called Mujahedin-Khalg Organization (MKO, known by the Iranian people as 'the Hypocrites' attacked the western parts of Iran) exactly where George was stationed. This operation called "Al-Mersaad" came to an end in a few days and mother was waiting for him to telephone us as he usually did. But there was no news and we tried to get some information but nobody knew anything and mother was worried to death thinking about him.

We could not tolerate this lack of news so, seven of us, my two brothers, my husband and my cousins travelled to those fronts, searching for him in all regiments, military bases, hospitals and morgues. My brother Zhaver could manage to go to the front-lines and talk to some of his friends and each one told him a different story: he was wounded, he was taken prisoner after being hit and the like but none of them were certain about what happened.

When these 7 relatives of ours returned, they were really feeling awful: the scenes they had seen, no news of George, identifying some martyrs and the injured; and my mother's conditions were not describable; the hate for MKO members, among Armenians from that date, was immense.

Nobody knew about the martyred, the wounded and the captured. But from the day when the prisoners of war started returning, my mother again became hopeful. Perhaps he would be one of the prisoners of war; whenever she heard that some war-prisoners, Muslim or Christian, have returned home, she would try to find their address to see them and make enquiries about George. She

called on them and showing a photograph of George, asked whether they had seen such a person.

Once someone brought us a group photograph of war-prisoners but they had shaved their hair and wearing similar clothes and no George could be identified among them. When all war-prisoners returned, my brothers, my sister and I were certain that he had been martyred. Also there was another Armenian soldier named Herand Hakopian who was also martyred and his body was never discovered; so we all thought that George had also met the same fate.

Now some 25 years after George's disappearance, mother is still hoping; anyone who knocks at our door, she hopes there will be some news about George. She's suffering from several illnesses and doctors say they're all caused by her nervous system; she says if my son had a grave and I could go there to weep and talk to him, I would not be so ill. Some time ago some people from the television came to interview us; she wept and told her story and we thought she would become better after so much weeping and wailing but she was worse later. A few days later this interview was shown on the television but we didn't let her watch it.

The Visit

Well, as I said, this was a few months ago, but yesterday some people came to our house and said that they would like to come here for an interview; I didn't refuse their request but my sister contacted them and asked not to come. But a little after dusk the door-bell rings and it was the same gentleman who had first talked to me. I asked him: Didn't my sister tell you not to come and I hung up but he rings again and I tell him again: We don't want an interview. A few minutes pass and I think he's gone away, but no, he rings for the third time and says: I'm Muslim and you're Christian but we're both Iranian, at least give me a glass of water to take my tablet; I couldn't refuse this simple request but I don't take the glass of water myself because I fear I might give in to the request for an interview, so I go down the stairs to the ground floor and tell my younger sister about it. She says: Okay, I'll take him a glass of water. She puts on her coat and wears her scarf and goes to the entrance-door in an angry mood.

I'm waiting for her to come back soon but she takes some time and when she's back, she seems to be a different person, she's very anxious and her face is pale.

Why doesn't she want to tell me what happened; then she notices my surprised features and explains: I opened the door and gave him the glass of water and he, while having his tablet said: It's really a pity, a very dear guest intends to come to you and congratulate you on the occasion of Christmas; I replied angrily: It doesn't matter who your dear guest is, can't be higher the president! And he said: Yes he's higher than that, Ayatollah Khamenei; the Leader wants to visit you! I was really thunder-struck, never been so astonished before and I opened the door completely and asked: Why didn't you tell us this? But before he answers me, I whisper, of course, it's for security reasons, and then ask him: How much time have we got?

He replies: About 45 minutes, but you don't have to do anything, only if you permit us, let me and my friends in? I say: Certainly, I go upstairs to inform my sister and mother. Now it's my turn to be motionlessly astonished, but my sister says: Get up, get the hoover and let's clean the apartment.

All this moment the same gentleman who talked to me arrived together with three others, and I ask him: Is my sister telling the truth, is the Leader really on the way to our house?

He says: Yes, it's true, you should excuse us, we couldn't let you know earlier.

Then my sister comes and, in front of these gentlemen, reproaches me saying: be careful, not to tell anybody about this, and then she asks those men: Don't you want to cut off the telephone lines? I laugh from the bottom of my heart because my sister now has become more security-sensitive than them! They say: No there's no need to plug out the telephone, but please set your mobile phone on 'silent'.

During this half an hour we've got, I ask my husband and my cousin to join us. And thank God everything is alright, we have prepared tea and set plates of fruits on the table; fortunately because of Christmas we are ready to receive guests. Mother has changed her clothes and is wearing the yellow scarf that becomes her very much.

As mother sits down on an armchair, we hear a lot of noise on the walkie-talkies of the people present at our apartment. I ask one of them: Is Haaj-Agha about to arrive.



Yes he is already here, the man says, but please don't go downstairs, you can welcome him at your apartment's entrance-door. My mother and I stand up and firstly we hear the Leader's warm 'salaam'. I say to myself: Praise be to God, how handsome and friendly looking he is; these are things I had never noticed on his television images.

We are all at the door welcoming the Leader, but the first thing he says is: [Where is the lady, the mother of the martyr?](#)

My husband walks aside a little so that Mr. Khamenei could see mother and he introduces her. Haaj-Agha Khamenei stands in front of mother and says to her: '[Salaamun Alikum](#)', in the warmest way I had ever heard.

It seems that Mr. Khamenei, meeting our very old mother, has guessed that she is a little hard of hearing and again says to her: Salaamun Alikum, and mother, in her thick Armenian accent, says:

- Salaam, Haaj-Agha.
- [How are you lady?](#)
- Merci, merci, how about you?
- [Fine, and you?](#)



Merci, merci, mother keeps saying!

My sister says: We didn't expect you to take the trouble to come to see our mother.

May God Almighty keep her in good health, says the Leader. He does not sit down before we have sat down and then he says: May this Christmas be full of blessings for you, it is a blissful coincidence because the birth anniversary of our holy Prophet is about these days and I congratulate you for both occasions, may God Almighty prosper you and may He grant your martyr mercy and bliss; where is the martyr's father?

Now I am no more anxious and say: He has passed away.

_ Are you the martyr's sister?

_ Yes, I am his sister.

_ And this lady sitting there, is she also the martyr's sister?

_ Yes, she is.

_ When did your father die?

_ Some 36 years ago.

_ I see, that means that he died long before your brother was martyred?

_ Yes, that's right.

The Leader then points at George's photograph and asks: [When exactly was he martyred?](#)

_ In 1988, during the Mersaad operation fighting against the MKO who had invaded Iran.

[_ I see, that's after the war. May God Almighty include him in his boundless mercy and bliss, both him as well you all, who suffered patiently.](#)

As mother does not say much, Mr. Khamenei asks whether she speaks Persian or not?

My sister explains: well, mother doesn't speak Persian well, but the reason for her not talking much is that she's a little hard of hearing, anyway, you must pardon her.

The Leader smiles and says: [There's nothing for pardoning!](#)

By his kind behavior, smiles and friendliness, we're all really at ease now sitting next to the Leader of the Islamic Republic and talking as old friends.

Then the Leader asks about the men in the room and their relation to us.

One of them says: I am the cousin of the martyr.

The other says: I am the husband of the martyr's sister.

[There are two sisters here, which one is your wife](#), the Leader asks and my husband points at me.



_ How about your children?

My daughter got married and has gone abroad but my son is upstairs.

_ You mean, in this house?

_ Yes, he's on the 4th floor.

_ May God help you to live happily together.



My husband adds: my wife's mother lives on the ground floor and we are on the 4th .

And then the Leader looks at my sister in a fatherly way and asks: [well, you lady, why haven't you got married?!](#)

My sister who is not as shy as I, but we never thought that she would, in such a meeting, reply: No, fortunately!

Some people in the room smile or laugh at this humorous or serious reply.

But the Leader asks: [Fortunately! Why?](#)

And then, in a really fatherly tone, advises: [No don't make that mistake, marriage is one of the God-given bounties; one must take advantage of all that God's wisdom has set for us: one is that the husband and wife must create a very kind, affectionate and loving atmosphere within their family; people, in daily life, face](#)

all sorts of problems and many ups and downs, and under such circumstances, one needs a safe haven to resort to and that is the family; there should be such affectionate ties and, of course, there is the question of having children and bringing them up properly. Today our country needs a larger population, and if you have more children, God willing, it would be a virtuous measure.

And now my sister says in a calm voice: I'll try my best.

I was first upset at my sister's apparently not a good joke but now I was happy to have heard the Leader's advice. I confess that since my father's death a long time ago, no one had even given us such sympathetic, fatherly advice. It was interesting to hear him requesting us, the Armenian minority to have more children; he was right because in the past, Armenian families need to have at least 4 or 5 children but nowadays, they usually have less than 3 children.

Well, at this point, Mr. Khamenei changes the subject by picking up the framed photo of my martyred brother and asks: [How old was this young man?](#)

I don't really remember but mother sighs and says: He was 26, my son.

[I see](#), say the Leader, [wasn't he married?](#)

- No, he wasn't.



_ What was his job, his profession?

Mother doesn't quite get it and says: his job?

_ Yes, I mean, what was he doing before joining the army?

_ Oh, he was a metal-cutter.

The Leader says: [yes, many young Armenians are very good at technical, industrial professions; I'm quite familiar with that, they're also very good at jobs relating to automobiles and industrial machines.](#)

Then he asks about our jobs; first he says to my cousin: [what's your job, sir?](#)

_ I'm a chemical engineer.

_ [I see, where do you work?](#)

_ I used to work with 'Iran Tyre Company'; I'm retired now.

Then the Leader asks the same from my husband and he says: I worked at a car repair shop but I'm not working now because of my heart trouble.

And he turns to us, the ladies and I explain that mother and I have always been keeping house.

Mr. Khamenei then asks my younger sister: [And you madam?](#)

_ I work.



_ Where do you work?

_ At a doctor's clinic, I'm a secretary.

Okay, says the Leader, but why didn't you continue your studies to be a doctor yourself?

_ After I received my high-school diploma, I somehow couldn't go on.

The Leader then says: I pray to God for your health and happiness; may God Almighty illuminate and gladden your hearts, but even after some 25 years since your son was martyred, I do know that a mother's pain for his son never becomes old, but I intended to come here, meet this lady-mother to probably soothe her a little and pay my respects to the family of this selfless martyr.

Haaj-Agha Khamenei is right, his presence here was really like a healing ointment put on the old-deep wound of our mother and the thought that we were about to reject his meeting us, makes me shake.

At this point my cousin brings a book and hands it to the Leader; he looks carefully at the book and asks: What's it about, sir?

_ The title of the book is 'Gole-e-Maryam'(tub rose), it contains the biographies of all Armenian martyrs during the -8year- war imposed on Iran.

_ What a wonderful work, what a good achievement! Is the compiler an Armenian?

_ It should be, it was given to us by the Council of Armenian Khalifate.

_ That's great, would you kindly give me this copy?

_ Certainly, sir, I brought it for you.

_ Thank you very much, I'm interested in such works; of course I have visited many such Armenian families of martyrs, perhaps some 30 families.

_ You're very kind, we say.

Mr. Khamenei pages through the book with care and interest and asks: Many photographs of martyrs are missing.

Yes, sir, we don't have photos of them all; my cousin also tells the Leader about what Armenian prisoners of war went through in captivity.

The Leader says: Very well, I thank you very much for giving me this book, I'll read it with interest, as you know, I'm always reading books, whenever I get hold of a good book, I do read it through.

And I think to myself: Incredible! How could the Leader, despite his constant, daily engagements read books all the time!

Then we ask Mr. Khamenei to have some fruits and he takes a slice of apple from the plate in front of him. And my cousin says: As there is the coincidence of Christmas and the birth anniversary of the holy Prophet of Islam, we would like, in our turn, to congratulate you for both occasions.

The Leader says: *I thank you very much and I pray that both occasions will be blissful for you and for all Iranians and certainly for all Christians living in this country; we are quite happy with our Christian communities.*

We consider ourselves a part of this land, says my cousin and the Leader says: *It's true, it's exactly so.*

My sister pointing at George's photo says: Our mother did not believe that he was martyred for a long time.

And I add: I don't think that she believes it even now!

My husband further explained: she used to say that George was a prisoner and one day he'll come back and sometimes she said that George had married; we smiled and told her it was not possible but she said: with a mother everything is possible; that's how it has been with mother.

The Leader commented: *We understand her and her feelings. Yet there is a big difference between an ordinary death and martyrdom. Let me cite an example: You own a very precious ring and somehow you lose it when walking in the street, well, this is a loss. A second example is when you go and deposit this very expensive ring in a bank for safe-keeping; in both cases you don't have the ring on your fingers but there is a difference, the first one was lost but the second is there. The case of martyrs is like the second example; the martyr is no more with you, you don't have him around you but he is alive through the Grace of God and God Almighty does reward you.*

I am really amazed by this simile; I hope mother did hear it too. Now when I think of George with such insight, everything becomes different and more beautiful. How soothing and hope-giving is what Haaj-Agha Khamenei expressed.

Then the Leader, pushing the plate of fruits toward us and his companions, says: *well, I had some, why don't you have some too?*

Every one takes up an apple as an orange.

Then he says: [Let me give some gifts in the memory of our meeting this evening, bring me that black box.](#) Mr. Khamenei gives a precious gift to our mother first, then two gifts to me and my sister and then to my husband and to my cousin; he says something nice to each person and when handing a present to my cousin, says: [this gentleman is our chemical engineer, we must value his knowledge!](#)



We all thank him and then the Leader turns to mother and says: [Will you lady allow us to leave?](#)

Mother says: you were most welcome, and my husband now remembers that tea has not been served and says: We forgot to serve tea!

The Leader says:

[_ No, no need for it.](#)

We all say we'll serve tea in a few moments but Mr. Khamenei says: [It's alright, we had fruits. Let's say good-bye.](#)

And that's the end of our exciting meeting. This half of an hour seemed to me as I was in a sweet dream.

In the evening when the Leader is shown on the television, I ask mother: Do you

believe it that this gentleman was in our house a few hours ago?

And when I tell my daughter and my brothers abroad about this, they say: Oh, come on, you're having us on!

And in our district some people have somehow found out about this because they already knew that Mr. Khamenei often visited the families of Christian martyrs. Many neighbours came to us to enquire about the meeting, and some asked: did you ask for anything from the Islamic Leader?

We replied: we were so happily excited, we never thought of asking anything from him!



Mother And Sister of martyr George Keshish Haroutoun - February, 2015

Chapter 8

The year 1990

Twenty-five

Jamkaran

Ayatollah Khamenei Visits

The Family of **martyr** Alfred Gabri

Visit Date: 2011/2/17



The Photo of

Martyr Alfred Gabri

Martyred in Gilan-Gharb, Kermanshah

Martyred on 1990/9/8

Twenty years have passed since Alfred's martyrdom. This morning we received a telephone call and the caller said: We would like to pay a visit to you as a martyr family. None of us is in the mood to receive such guests, so I tell him that my parents are very old and impatient, especially my mother who, since Alfred's death, has not welcomed any guests or any social parties.

And myself? I'm 25 years old, but because of certain events in my life- which has a long story- I suffer from depression and above all I am unemployed, and my mother, trying to soothe me, says: Well, you're still a child!

Anyway I told the caller repeatedly not to come but he insisted and said: it would only be for a few minutes, please stay at home this evening! And a couple of hours after sunset three middle-aged persons come to our house and tell us that your guest will be here in a few minutes. We don't pay much attention to them and my father says: We told you that you need not come! They talk a little among themselves and keep looking at their watches. Then one of them takes father to a corner of the room and says something into his ears. Father is surprised to death and then orders me and mother: Go quickly, change your clothes, we must also tidy up the house, get up Robert! But I said: Leave me alone, I'm not in the mood.

Father says: you know who is coming to visit us? It's Haaj-Agha Khamenei!

What? Who? You mean the Leader? I exclaimed. Then I jumped up and went to the man who talked to father and ask him: Are you sure? Aren't you having us on? The serious expression on his face is a good enough answer for me, but then he smiles and says: Yes, he'll be in your house in a few minutes. I quickly go to my room and put on a white shirt, comb my hair and return to our reception room. I still don't believe it until I see him saying salaam to all of us and shaking hands with me. I take a look at our room, everything is in place and the small lamps on the Christmas tree are on. Father is wearing a jacket and mother is preparing tea. Then Mr. Khamenei and my father sit on two armchairs under the photo of Alfred and my mother and I sit on the other side near the curtains. Well, now, I have to believe it that the Leader is in our house, we don't know what to say, but Mr. Khamenei talks to us so warmly and intimately that the official atmosphere completely changes. He says: [May God Almighty grant mercy and bliss to your martyr and may God give you more patience and proper rewards. Is this a photo of your dear martyr? When was he martyred?](#)

Father answers the Leader's question: In 1990.

[_ You mean after the end of the war?](#)



_ Yes, sir, in 1990, at Gilan-Gharb, Kermanshah.

_ Was he a soldier?

_ Yes, he was.

_ How old was he?

_ Twenty, he had just finished his high-school studies, we thought he would try to go to a university but he said: I first do my military service and after that I will continue my studies.

The Leader says: *You're surely rewarded by God; certainly such tragedies cause you pains and sorrows but God Almighty who witnesses your patience, your tolerance and your gratefulness, will absolutely embrace you with his blessings. Our Islamic teaching shows this and in fact all divine religions agree on the question of martyrdom and God's rewards. God Almighty is merciful, kind and just and so He will grant those who suffered in this world in His path, many rewards in the next world. According to our Islamic beliefs and beliefs in other divine religions no one will be a loser in this respect in the sight of God.*

and then he addresses mother and asks her how she was informed about her son's martyrdom?



My mother, who always keeps her calm, says in a faint voice (I think if she wasn't sitting near the Leader, he would not have heard her): First we were told that he was wounded and that he was in a hospital, but I already had a dream about him.

You had a dream? Asks Mr. Khamenei.

- Yes, I saw him wearing his soldier's uniform, I put on the light to see him better but the light went off! So I said to my daughter: Alfred will not come back! But my husband mocked me and said: Women's dreams are nonsensical! Anyway, the last time he went back to the front, I poured some water after him and he noticed that I was really worried, so he said: Don't worry mother, I come back, and then Albert goes to do his military service and then it will be Robert's turn. But he looked around the room and the house in such a way as if he knew he would not come back. He was shot in the heart and died instantly.

The Leader said: **Your reward is with God Almighty. He then asked mother: How many children do you have?**

- I had 3 sons, Alfred, the eldest was martyred, the middle one has gone abroad and the youngest is sitting here; I also have a daughter who's married.

Mr. Khamenei is now looking at me and I wonder what he'll ask me, I don't know why I am lost in such occasions.

Well, what do you do, young man? The Leader asks.

What an apt question? I had in mind to ask the Leader to help me find a job, and now he asks me what I do!

There is a lump in my throat but somehow I managed to say: At present, I don't have a job.

- **Why don't do any work, why?**

I really don't know the answer to this question. As the brother of a martyr, a few times I asked the officials at the Martyrs Foundation to find me a job but they couldn't do anything. I explained this to Mr. Khamenei and also informed him that Alfred was good at martial arts and I also followed him in this kind of sports and that my hand once broke in an accident and couldn't continue.

Mr. Khamenei carefully listened to my story and then told one of his companions, who seemed older than others, to make a note about this and try to do

something and he added: *It's a pity for such a good young man to remain idle.*

I was really delighted to hear the phrase 'such a good, young man' from the tongue of our Leader.

Then Mr. Khamenei addressed my father and asked: *How about you?*

I retired, answers my father.

_ Where did you use to work?

_ At the General Electric Plant.

I see, said the Leader, I came to this Plant a few times in the early days after the Revolution, so you were working there when I was there, that's interesting.

Yes, I remember, you used to come there, says father.

Mr. Khamenei says: *So you were there, after a while the workers in that Plant became friends with me.*

And my father who sees that the Leader is interested in his narration, goes on: I used to drive there every day and once, I think it was the 22nd of the month of Bahman (the day of the victory of the Islamic Revolution) and I was driving back to Tehran when suddenly someone on the radio cried: 'This is the voice of the Islamic Revolution of Iran'. I stopped the car, came out and prostrated on the ground and thanked God. So many things I remember about those days when the leftist elements among the workers stirred up a lot of trouble. One day a big framed picture of Imam Khomeini was taken there, it was so large we couldn't take it into our dining hall.

The Leader says: *Yes, that's true, one afternoon I attended the same dining hall, the workers had taken many chairs and benches into the hall, I think there were more than 600 workers there.*

Father says: There were some 800 workers there and about 300 employees who were stationed in some other locations.

The Leader comments: *yes, the leftists, Communists and Tudeh party organizers had also brought workers from other factories to start some movement of their own; they had some old plans. I don't want to analyze it. One day, I had to frequently go to the tribune there and neutralize what the adversaries were saying, there was a bad tumultuous atmosphere, finally they cut out the electricity; the whole thing was like a battle-field.*

We were all listening to what Mr. Khamenei said with great interest, but he himself changed the subject to Alfred and asked: [is this photo taken shortly before his martyrdom?](#)

Yes, says our father.

And I explain that the big photo behind the Leader was taken before he joined the military, he turns back and looks carefully at the photo.

Then I say: may I ask you for two small things?

He smiles and says: [certainly, please tell me.](#)

I repeat my unfortunate situation of being unemployed in detail.

He patiently listens and says: [I have already told this gentleman- one of his companions- about you and, God willing, your problem would be removed;](#) he adds: [Well, this was the first, what's the second thing you meant to say?](#)

And I don't remember what the second thing was, I'm confused, so I just say: well, I meant that I still don't believe that I'm sitting near the Leader of the Revolution and talk to him freely and intimately!

Mr. Khamenei smiles and says: [Well, what shall I do to make you believe it, okay, come here, let me kiss you and then you'll believe it!](#)

I take a step forward as in a dream, like a small child before his grandfather and the Leader puts his hand on my head, draws it nearer and kisses my left cheek three times, my heart is beating fast and I don't know what to do next when mother says: oh, child, go back and sit on your chair! I'm out of this world.



After a few moments, I notice that my mother is engaged talking to Mr. Khomeini and telling him everything she's kept in her heart for a long time: Mr. Khomeini! You must excuse me, but after my son was martyred, I suffered a terrible nervous break-down, and one night I dreamed that an old man, who had a white beard like yours and was wearing a green hat, tapped me on my shoulders three times, then he said: Mother, don't visit doctors so often and don't take any more medicines, instead tomorrow take a few steps under the flags and banners that people carry for Imam Hussein. I told my Muslim neighbours about this dream and they told me when the mourning groups reach our street, they will tap on my window and when you come out, we will give you a hand to walk under the flags. I did this with the help of our neighbours and in the evening I did take some Diazepam tablets. When I got up in the morning, I felt so good, there was no sign of my nervousness, and you know, Mr. Khomeini, I haven't told my husband about this, he doesn't know how I got better. He used to say: You must be hospitalized, because before I had that dream, I couldn't bear anybody, if they laughed, I hated it and when guests came, I would go out of the house.

The Leader, who listened to mother attentively, said:

Thank God for that, this is true in the case of pure, clean hearts for those divine personalities watch all events, they pay attention and they will help with their blessings through the power of God Almighty. I myself know Armenians in Tehran and other occasions who greatly respect Shi'ite rituals and love Imam Hussein and his father, Imam Ali.

Here I also enter the conversation and say: I witness to what Mr. Khomeini said because I really love the Imam Hussein's mourning programs, every evening in the month of Muharram (the lunar month of Imam Hussein's martyrdom). I have also even visited Jamkaran a few times.*

The Leader, hearing the word Jamkaran says with a nice smile: *You go to Jamkaran, bravo!*

And I add: In addition to that I have even dropped a letter in the Jamkaran well! Mr. Khomeini thus commented on what I said:

* It is a location near the city of Qom which has associations with the 12th Imam of the Shi'ite.

_ You need not drop a letter there! When you go there, be sure that there is someone there who hears; make sure that you are really talking to someone you don't see, speak with a pure heart and be certain that God Almighty hears you; throwing letters down a well and this sort of things are not necessary, those who could make miracles, do not need to receive letters, go there and talk or wish most sincerely and pour out your heart.

Let me tell you something about myself: I once had composed some poems concerning our 12th Imam, God's greetings upon him, so I went to Jamkaran, I performed prayers and some usual rituals but I still felt restless, so I stood up and, in a low voice that others could not hear, addressed the Imam and said: I have composed a few lines of poetry for you and I read it to you*. After I read it I really felt well, a spiritual feeling that my prayers and other rituals had not caused. What I mean is that when you utter words risen from the bottom of your heart, it has such results. So do speak to such people, they are saints of God Almighty, they could help you through the power of God. Of course, in our Islamic teachings, such requests and supplications do not rule out one's strength, dynamism and hard work in your life, that is, one should not say to oneself: Now that I have made such supplication, then everything shall be alright; say a person has a certain illness, he implores God to heal him, and then he's inspired to go to a certain doctor; this is a means of restoring his health, but he should not say: Now that I have made a supplication, I need not visit a doctor! No, one must go to doctors; he must work hard and perform his worldly duties. But all our physical attempts and all our material doings are only the surface of things, not the spirit lying beyond all events; and that spirit is created by beseeching God and His virtuous servants or saints; that's how it comes about.

* Here we venture to translate the first couplet of this distich 'Ghazal':

My heart is restless wailing after thee,
As wild rue seeds on a live coal, you see
I'm thrown around, I am no longer me!

How calmly and confidently Mr. Khamenei speaks; I had often listened to his speeches broadcast on the radio or television but this intimate conversation is something absolutely different. Now my mother got up to bring tea but one of the Leader's companions said: I'll bring it. Of course mother had already prepared it. When tea is brought, Mr. Khamenei takes a small sugar-lump and says: *Well, we'll have the tea and then ask you for our leave!*

I am still wondering about this kind visit in our humble house but, being encouraged by Mr. Khamenei's fatherly behavior, I foolishly ask: Do you visit all the families of martyrs?! The Leader answers:

- Well, it's impossible to do that, but I do visit as many as I could.

My second question was probably more foolish: how come you choose our family to visit?!

The Leader, smiling at me, replies: *Well, if you don't like it, we go away now!*

All in the room laugh at this remark and my mother pinches me on the arm and, in order to help me, says: He's so happy he doesn't know what nonsense he says!

But the Leader calmly and patiently explains:

- Yes, if it was possible, I would go and visit all the families of martyrs but my preoccupations and engagements do not permit this, so we have to select; in fact I don't play a role in this, my staff go through files and records and various considerations and by the guidance of God, select some and today I was told to visit you and so this evening we came to see your family.

My father says: We're all proud to see you; we welcome you upon our eyes. Then Haaj-Agha Khamenei takes a piece of cake and, with a small fork, puts it in his mouth; it's most interesting to me that before eating it, he says "*Bismillah*" (in the Name of God). Then Mr. Khamenei asks father about the present conditions of the General Electric Plants and my father says that he has not been there for some 17 years.

The Leader says: *two or three years after those tumultuous evenings at the Plant, I was elected the President and the workers at the Plant brought me a gift: a radio-recorder they themselves had made, they told me this is a token in memory of those evenings. In fact, this radio-recorder worked well, I liked it,*

there was something wrong with it about two or three years ago, I don't know what our children did with it, but it was really a good radio.

All this time I was thinking that nobody would believe what went on this evening, so I said: Sir, may I have a signature of yours?

The Leader said: a signature? On what? I don't usually sign blank papers, but do you have a book or a copy of the Gospel? I would then sign it.

Yes, I said, I have my own copy of "Enjil" (New Testament).

Okay, bring it to me, says the Leader. And mother seems to be saying to me how rude I am! I bring the book and Mr. Khamenei, before signing it, pages through it and says: It is in Armenian script, isn't it?

I say; yes, and you may keep it if you wish!

The Leader says: I have all these books in Persian, both the New and the Old Testaments; I have various copies as well as a copy of the Bible Encyclopedia.

I say: You could learn Armenian, it's an easy language, I can teach you!

Unfortunately I don't have the time for it, if I had the time I would ask you to come once a week and teach me Armenian.

My mother and father could hardly stop themselves from laughing; I am sure, after the Leader is gone, they would blame me saying: You must be ashamed of yourself for what you said. The Leader was so kind and humble to be patient with you, if we were in his place, we would surely be angry with you, what a rude person you are Robert to tell the Leader of the Islamic Republic 'I teach you Armenian'!

But Mr. Khamenei adds: Yes if I had time, I would love to learn Armenian as well as Assyrian; Assyrian is also of interest to me.

Then Mr. Khamenei writes down a line on my copy of the Gospel and signs and dates it. Now I may show this to all people how don't believe that Mr. Khamenei did visit us at our house.

Haaj-Agha Khamenei then gives us each a precious present and says: this is just a token to remember this meeting.

Mother thanks him and says: it is so kind of you.

And Mr. Khamenei says: only the spiritual aspect of these gifts matter. I usually visit the families of Christian martyrs at about Christmas festivities, but this year somehow it was not possible, you must excuse me.

Here, my mother whose grief for her martyred son seems to have come back, sighs and says: Haaj-Agha, I have been fooling myself all this time, but it is said that a broken heart will always remain broken!

The Leader soothes her: [if God will, a broken heart is not a thing to lament about, broken hearts are more attended to by God Almighty.](#)

There is a young man among Mr. Khamenei's companions who takes photographs of the meeting all the time, so I ask the Leader to take a photo with my parents. He agrees and tells the young man to take a good photo of them, and then he says what I had in my heart: Give the family some of these photos.



That's the last thing I thought of: My old parents stand next to the Leader of Muslims and take a memorable picture in our own house!

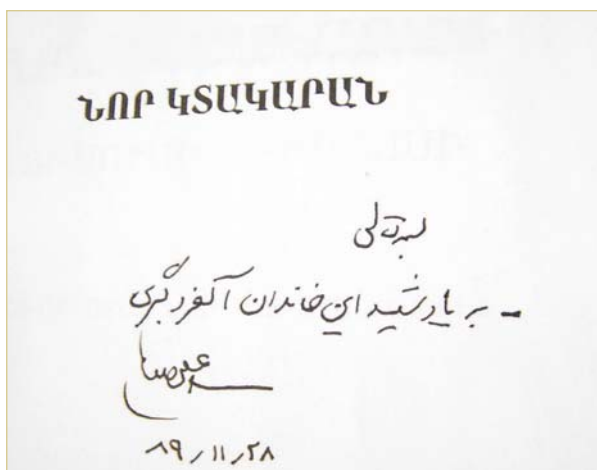


Image of a handwriting by Ayatollah Khamenei

