

# “Please ... Call Me an Iranian, Not a Moslem!”

"This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness."  
-Dalai Lama

**By Farhad Mafie**

**P.O. Box 51330, Irvine, CA 92619**

**949-851-1714**

**Mafie@att.net**

**November 16, 2003**

## **Hold on to Your Hat!**

Some days the Persian Gulf is referred to as the Arabian Gulf. Some days Rumi—the great Iranian poet and philosopher—is referred to as a poet from Afghanistan or a poet from Turkey. Some days Sina or Avicenna, Rāzi, Farabi, Birouni—the great Iranian scientists—are referred to as Arab scientists. Some days Iranian arts are referred to as Islamic arts in famous European galleries.

Why, then, should we be surprised to hear that European officials and the European media are referring to Ms. Ebadi, the Iranian Nobel Peace Prize winner, not as an “Iranian” but as a “Moslem”? Has she lost her nationality? Consider this: If a German or a Canadian (or anyone else for that matter) wins the Prize, does the media refer to the winner as a “Lutheran” or as a “Methodist”? No! Why, then, are Europeans bestowing Iranians with the new title “Moslem”?

The title “Moslem” pleases only the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) and others who are promoting the notion of Western Civilization vs. The Moslem World. Strategically, this renaming is a significant gift to the Islamic government of Iran because since the establishment of this antediluvian system in Iran its leaders have done their best to replace the notion of *Iranian Identity and Nationality* with *Moslem Identity and Nationality* both inside and outside Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini has emphasized this goal in several of his speeches, for example, on Dec 1980 (as published in *Kayhan*):

“Those who say that we want nationality, they are standing against Islam. . . . We have no use for the nationalists. Moslems are useful for us. ***Islam is against nationality.*** . . .”<sup>1</sup>

“These issues that exist among people that we are Iranian and what we need to do for Iran are not correct; these issues are not correct. This issue, which is perhaps being discussed everywhere, regarding paying attention to nation and nationality is nonsense in Islam and is against Islam. One of the things that the designers of Imperialism and their agents have promoted is the idea of nation and nationality.”

Maintaining an Iranian identity and nationality has been an *on-going struggle* for Iranians since the seventh century Islam-Arab attack on Iran. This struggle, as well as the new European strategies for collaboration with the Islamic government of Iran, requires much insight and understanding. And it should be taken very seriously by all Iranians and those who are interested in long-term world peace.

## **The Persian Empire Existed Long Before Islam**

Let’s not forget that Iran was a great empire long before the existence of Islam. Let’s not forget that:

Cyrus the Great (580–529 BC), the first Achaemenian Emperor of Persia, issued a decree that was later hailed as the *Charter of Human Rights* for all nations. Inscribed on a clay cylinder, this first declaration of human rights is now kept at the British Museum. A replica is also on display at the United Nations in New York.

By the time of his death in Battle, Cyrus had conquered the whole of Asia Minor, Babylonia, Syria, and Palestine, and made Persia the world’s leading nation. Four years later his son Cambyses had conquered Egypt and ruled an empire bordered by India in the east and the Mediterranean Sea in the West.

“The post-exilic books of the Hebrew Bible often reflect this perception of the Persian conquests of the sixth century BCE as a fulfillment of God’s purpose. This comes out

---

<sup>1</sup> This quote is also listed in *Mehregan Magazine*, Volume 12, Numbers 1 & 2, Spring & Summer 2003, p 16.

most strongly in Isaiah (44:28 and 45:1), when the **Persian King Cyrus is spoken of as God's shepherd** and even as God's anointed (Hebrew *mashiab*).<sup>2</sup>

“Darius (522 BC) the king thus says: In the protection of Ahuramazda, I am of such a character: What is right I love and what is not right I hate. . . Of the man who speaks against the truth, never do I trust a word.”<sup>3</sup>

“To the end of his life Darius continued to express his pride in his **Ordinance of Good Regulations**. His reputation as a lawgiver survived him. To Plato, Darius was the lawgiver whose laws had preserved the Persian Empire to the Philosopher's own day.”<sup>4</sup>

“Says Darius the King: This land Parsa, which Ahuramazda has granted me, which is beautiful, possessing good horses and good men, by the favor of Ahuramazda and of me, Darius the king, it has no fear of an enemy.

“Says Darius the King: May Ahuramazda bring me help with all other gods, and may Ahuramazda protect this land from a hostile horde, from the evildoer, and from the Lie.”<sup>5</sup>

“In an inscription of 260 CE proclaiming his victory over the Romans, the Persian ruler Shapur I described himself as follows: ‘I, Lord Shapur, worshipper of Mazda, King of Kings of Iran and of non-Iran, of the race of the Gods, son of the worshipper of Mazda the Lord Ardashir, King of Kings of Iran, of the race of the Gods, grandson of Papak . . . I am the ruler of the land of Iran.’”<sup>6</sup>

### **The First Islam-Arab Attack and the Iranian Struggle to Maintain Our Identity**

The history of Iran shows that the Iranian ethnicity, nationality, and culture have proven over and over again that—despite lost wars at the hands of Islam-Arabs, Mongols, etc.—Iranians have been able to survive by assimilating the imposed new cultures into the Iranian culture and by overwhelming them with the rich Iranian ethnicity and nationality.

However, neutralizing and removing the influences of the seventh century Islam-Arab attack on Iran due to its strong entanglement with Islam have been an *on-going struggle* for Iranians throughout the centuries. This struggle started very early in every aspect of Iranian cultural, political, and religious lives.

For example, after the Islam-Arab invasion of the seventh century, Iran was the *first* and the *only* country that recovered its distinct Iranian identity from its victorious enemy. Iran alone retained its Persian language, which it still uses, while the rest of the countries that were conquered by the Arabs lost their original language, and today they speak Arabic. Although many Iranian scholars, poets, writers, and scientists contributed greatly to enriching the Arabic language and culture, they nevertheless maintained their own distinct Iranian identity. For example, one of the most important contributions of Iranian scholars to the Arabic language was the development of the Arabic grammar by the Iranian scholar Siboyeh.

Overall, Iranians retained a strong awareness of their homeland as something much more than just a physical place. The reason is very obvious. Iran was NOT just another place that Arabs subjugated. Iran was a political entity (the Persian Empire) centuries prior to the creation of Islam or the formation of the Arab countries. And memories of that independence and greatness were very much fresh in Iranian's cultural memory. Sigmund Freud<sup>7</sup> refers to this memory as the collective or cultural memories of a nation or a group of people. This collective and cultural memory has helped Iranians to maintain their nationality and not adopt the Arab identity despite the fact that many of them were forced to adopt Islam.

Interestingly, even today, if someone mistakenly calls an Iranian an “Arab,” the speaker will be informed very politely and promptly that he or she is not an Arab but an Iranian (or a Persian).

### **Iranian Poets and Thinkers Leading the Struggle . . .**

---

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, Bernard, *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East*. New York: Schocken Books, p. 87.

<sup>3</sup> Olmstead, A.T., *History of The Persian Empire*. Chicago: The University of the Chicago Press, p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> Olmstead, A.T., *History of The Persian Empire*. Chicago: The University of the Chicago Press, p. 130.

<sup>5</sup> Olmstead, A.T., *History of The Persian Empire*. Chicago: The University of the Chicago Press, p. 175.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis, Bernard, *The Middle East*. New York: Scribner, p. 135.

<sup>7</sup> Freud tried to demonstrate how nothing that has been formed in mental life can perish—despite the depredations of memory. He believed that everything is somehow preserved and can, in suitable circumstances, once more be brought back to light.

As part of restoring Iran's identity and sense of nationality after the seventh century Islam-Arab attack, Iran's greatest poet of all time, Ferdowsi<sup>8</sup>, tells the courageous, noble, and heroic deeds of ancient Iran and Iranians in his masterpiece *Shahnameh (Book of Kings)*. In this beautiful poem Ferdowsi uses poetic rhymes so simple that every Iranian, regardless of his or her literacy, can memorize these stories and be proud of his or her Iranian identity and past. Many of the *Shahnameh* stories have served to strengthen and to reinforce the sense of Iranian identity and Iranian nationality within the Islamic and Arab folds. Thus *Shahnameh* became Iran's national epic and for many Iranians more important than their holy book.

Due to Ferdowsi's great contribution to Iranian identity and ethnicity, the Islamic clergies of the time did not allow his body to be buried in a Moslem cemetery, forcing Iranians to bury their poet in his private garden. Finally, after many centuries, the great Reza Shah Pahlavi in the twentieth century built a beautiful, well-deserved tomb for this great patriotic poet of Iran.

Nader Naderpour (1929-2000) believed that the reason that Ferdowsi started *Shahnameh* with the story of creation (similar to the structure of many holy religious books) was to make *Shahnameh* as important as a holy book in the mind of Iranians. Naderpour believed that Ferdowsi was successful in achieving this noble and gallant objective. Incisive as always, Naderpour also felt that *Book of Kings* should be translated as *The Best Book*. His reasoning is well founded: In Farsi the prefix *shah-* means "best" (for example, *shahroud* means "the best river"), and *nameh* means "book" (it has other meanings too). Therefore, *Shahnameh* can also be translated as "*The Best Book*."

In this endeavor, Ferdowsi was not alone. In different eras many others tried to recover the past glories and also restore Iranian national identity (to replace the religious identity), including great Iranians poets and thinkers such as Khayyām, Hāfez, Iraj, Dehkhoda, Hedayat, and Naderpour. Iranian Constitutional thinkers such as Ākhundzadeh<sup>9</sup>, Talebof Tabrizi<sup>10</sup>, Mirza Agha Khan Kermani<sup>11</sup>, and Mirza Jahangir Khan Shirazi<sup>12</sup> supported this endeavor as well by contributing to Iranians' progress toward modernity and secularism in Iran's 1906 Constitutional Revolution.<sup>13</sup>

They all supported and advocated Iran's greatness prior to the Islam-Arab attack of the seventh century and tried their best to inform and educate Iranians of their pre-Islamic past as a vehicle to create a patriotic sense in people as well as to limit and stop the power of the Islamic clergies over people's lives, thus personalizing the notion of religion and separating it from the governing elements of Iran's societies—for good.

### **“Islamic Republic of Iran” or “Second Islamic-Arab Attack on Iran”?**

From the first days of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, one of the key objectives of the Mullahs (Moslem clergymen) and the ruling Islamic government of Iran has been the promotion of the idea of having one great Islamic Nation (called "omat-e Islam") among Iranians and other Shiite-based countries in the region. Ayatollah Khomeini, in order to completely deny Iran and its past history, continuously discussed the idea of "omat-e Islam" and continuously emphasized that Iranians are part of the Islamic "omat-e" and that the Iranian nation and Iranian identity have no meaning. According to Khomeini, Westerners, in order to divide Moslems, created the idea of nation, nationality, and identity. To advance his ideology, even during the eight years the Iran-Iraq war, one of Khomeini's ridiculous objectives was to advance his Shiite-centered Islamic Revolution all the way to the holy sites in the heart of Israel—thus destroying Israel!

To promote the Islamic identity, and at the same time disparage and destroy the Iranian identity, the Islamic government of Iran has been using every possible means, such as:

<sup>8</sup> Ferdowsi, Hakim Abuol Ghasm (940–1020; *dates approximate*), He undertook his epic *Book of Kings* (More than 60,000 verses long), a history of Persia that begins with the arrival of the Persians and ends with the arrival of the Arabs, in an effort to glorify Persia's past. Variant spellings: Firdausi, FirdawsI, Ferdusi, and Firdousi.

<sup>9</sup> Ākhundzadeh, Mirza Fath-Ali (1812–1878), He edited and wrote many books, including *The Story of the Deceived Stars (Dastan-e Setaregan-e Farib Khordeh)*, *The Story of Pushkin's Death (Dastan-e Marke Pushkin)*, and *The Russian Poet (She'r-e Rousi)*.

<sup>10</sup> Talebof Tabrizi, Abdol-Rahim (1834–1911), He is one of the first Persian writers who encouraged Iranians to write science fiction and plays and to translate books, and he stressed writing in simple language. He wrote and edited many books, including *Ahmad's Book (Ketab-e Ahmad)*, *Physics*, and *A Brief History of Islam (Tarikh-e Mokhtasar-e Islam)*.

<sup>11</sup> Mirza Agha Khan Kermani (1853–1896; *dates approximate*), Born in Kerman (in southeastern Iran), Kermani studied mathematics, natural sciences, and English and French. He was a writer of the Iranian enlightenment and sought to associate the Iranian people with the "advanced, Aryan" Europeans.

<sup>12</sup> Mirza Jahangir Khan Shirazi (1875–1908), Publisher of the newspaper *Soresrafil* during the Constitutional movement. His name became synonymous with his famous newspaper. Because of his newspaper editorials, he was hanged by Mohammad Ali Shah Ghajar.

<sup>13</sup> Brown, Edward G. *The Persian Revolution 1905–1909*, Mage Publisher, 1995.

- Stoning people. Cutting off fingers, right hands, left legs (or vice versa). Gouging eyes. All are now commonly practiced in Islamic Iran.
- Deemphasizing the notion of Iranian nationality in every official government statement. In many government documents even the name “Iran” is omitted.
- Destroying thousands of Iranian historical places and important ancient artwork (or selling them for personal gain). At the beginning of the Islamic Revolution, the infamous Khalkhali (Khomeini’s right hand and the famous butcher of thousands of Iranians) tried to destroy Persepolis,<sup>14</sup> which is one of the most important historical places in the world. He was stopped by the local people who risked their lives in confronting this maniac.
- Renaming many Iranian streets from, for example, “Cyrus the Great” to “Dr. Shariati,” an Islamic-Marxist promoter.
- Commemorating the murder of Anvar Sadat by naming a street in Tehran after his murderer, Khaled Estantoli.
- Trying to replace the Iranian New Year Noerouz<sup>15</sup> (literally “new day”) with a Moslem New Year and preventing Iranians from celebrating all the festivities associated with New Year. They failed big time! Iranians have been celebrating Noerouz and its associated festivities more than ever before as an instrument to show their Iranian independence and identity. Significantly, even during the eight-year Iran-Iraq War, Iranians under Iraqi attack in the southwest provinces still celebrated Noerouz to show their resentment toward their external Arab oppressors and their internal Islamic-government tormenters. Proof indeed that Iranians were willing to fight the imposed ideologies and to protect their rich Iranian ethnicity and nationality.
- Incorporating many new Arabic words and phrases into the Persian language in a deliberate attempt to further damage and weaken the Persian language.
- Destroying many Iranian symbols and replacing them with Islamic signs.
- Deemphasizing the roles of great Iranian poets and thinkers who were free thinkers or were against Islamic rule in Iran.
- Removing the Lion and Sun symbol (which has nothing to do with the Pahlavi Dynasty) from the Iranian flag and, instead, adding the symbol of Hindu-Sikhs.
- Changing the symbol of the Iranian Red Cross to an Arabic version.
- Killing, torturing, or jailing anyone who is against the Islamic system.
- And much more.

That is why Nader Naderpour, in his famous article “In Hope of a Third Movement,”<sup>16</sup> describes the Islamic Revolution of 1979 as the second Islamic invasion on Iran. In Naderpour’s opinion, since the seventh century Arab attack, Iranian thinkers tried twice—unsuccessfully—to rid themselves of Islamic governmental rule. In his article he describes how the Constitutionalist (in Iran’s Constitutional Revolution of 1906) tried to separate religion and state, and to replace “religious identity” with “national identity” in Iran for good.

### **One More Time . . . The Challenge Is On!**

Unfortunately, these days the Islamic government of Iran is getting direct and unprecedented support from its European friends to reach its past-due objectives. Direct support from European countries is a win-win model for both Europe and the Islamic government of Iran—but of course the unfortunate losers would be Iran and the Iranian people . . . *but only if Iranians allow it.*

---

<sup>14</sup> The magnificent ruins of Persepolis are located about 400 miles south of Teheran. The exact date of the founding of Persepolis is not known. It is assumed that Darius I began work on the magnificent platform and its structures between 518 and 516 BC, visualizing Persepolis as a showplace and the seat of his vast Achaemenian Empire.

<sup>15</sup> Jamshid, one of the most important and most famous kings in Iranian mythology, started Noerouz (literally “new day”), the Iranian New Year celebration at the beginning of Spring.

<sup>16</sup> An English translation of this article is available in: Mafie, Farhad, *Nader Naderpour (1929-2000): Iranian Poet, Thinker, and Patriot*. New York: Mellen Press, 2002. The original Persian version of this article is available on: [www.Naderpour.org](http://www.Naderpour.org).

In his article “In Hope of a Third Movement,” Naderpour explains why two historical Iranian “thinker movements,” as he calls them, failed, and he describes how a third movement is needed to help Iran and Iranians rid themselves, once and for all, from the tyranny of Islamic domination. Understanding Erfan, the first “movement” that Naderpour addresses in his article, is key to appreciating Naderpour’s position. Erfan is often incorrectly associated simply with Sufism. Naderpour makes clear that Erfan was a product of Iranian thinkers and that it was a philosophical ideology, not a religion or a branch of Islam. The second “movement,” according to Naderpour, was the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, when Iranian thinkers tried to separate church and state, that is, to end Islamic rule over Iran.

The latest European-promoted and -supported strategy of bestowing Iranians with the new title “Moslem” is part of a much bigger vision, part of a planned strategy that has become apparent since Khatami started his dog-and-pony reformist show more than six years ago.

These days, the European cheerleaders are labeling the collaborators and associates of the Islamic government of Iran with ridiculous slogans such as “Modern Islam,” “Modern Islamic Women,” “Modern Islamic World,” “Modern Islamic Civilizations,” and “Gentler Islam,” all in an effort to extend the life of the Islamic government of Iran for a couple of more decades *with a different image*. A softer and a gentler radicalism! A true oxymoron ...

They are doing their best to destroy the notion of Iranian identity and to promote Islamic fundamentalism as the cultural identity for Iranians—of course, a softer version of Islamic fundamentalism—to further distance Iranians’ struggle toward modernity and Western Civilization.

The objective of European countries, G8, China, etc., is very clear: They all know very well that a religious government in Iran is the best instrument to distance Iran and Iranians from Western Civilization and from individualism, social freedom, democracy, and secularism. These countries know that only a chaotic and oppressive system in Iran continues to bring them financial benefits such as:

- Low-cost oil and gas prices (actually below actual production cost)
- Weapon sales (the result of local conflicts and wars)
- Increased business resulting from war-damaged infrastructures
- And much more

#### **We Have a Choice: We Can Fight Back and Stop This Nonsense!**

We Iranians who live either forced or self-imposed lives in exile need to use the freedom that we have along with every possible legal and democratic means available to us to FIGHT BACK and not allow this anti-Iranian movement to become Iran’s next default alternative and Iran’s political scenario for the next few decades.

Every newspaper, every TV and radio station, every government official that substitutes “Moslem” for “Iranian” should be bombarded with phone calls, faxes, emails, and letters against this “Islamic identity.”

The same way that the collaborators and associates of the Islamic government of Iran, the leftover Iranian leftists, and their European cheerleaders are using the media to label us “Moslems,” we must to the same extent show our disapproval by voicing our opinions and expressing our strongest resentment. How else can we end this dark anti-Iranian campaign?

### **With Pride and Honor, We Have One Simple Message for the Whole World:**

#### **“Call Me an Iranian, Not a Moslem”**

This is the time to resign once and for all from the “silent majority” and join all those Iranians who care for Iran in this praiseworthy and commendable endeavor. Just say NO to this pro-Islamic and anti-Iranian campaign.

Let us be the last generation of Iranians who experience either a self-imposed or a forced life in exile. Iran deserves much more! So do you! And so do all of us!

Farhad Mafie  
Irvine, CA

**Copyright © 2003 by Farhad Mafie. All rights reserved. Any reprint of this article must bear this notice. For information, contact Farhad Mafie at [Mafie@att.net](mailto:Mafie@att.net) or at (949) 851-1714.**