

*Dr. Hormoz Shariat is "The Billy Graham of Iran" – Joel C. Rosenberg*

# IRAN'S GREAT AWAKENING

How God Is Using a Muslim Convert to Spark Revival



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DR. HORMOZ SHARIAT





IRAN'S  
GREAT  
AWAKENING

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# Iran's Great Awakening

HOW GOD IS USING A MUSLIM  
CONVERT TO SPARK REVIVAL

DR. HORMOZ SHARIAT



TO MY NIECE, HALEH  
A GENERAL IN THE LORD'S ARMY



# ENDORSEMENTS

## (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

Iran's political struggles and social unrest are newsworthy, but the real battle for freedom is being waged in the heavenlies. Dr. Hormoz Shariat shares his remarkable journey from Iran to the United States, and from Islam to Christianity. Out of brokenness, Hormoz found his freedom in Christ, a freedom that resulted in a powerful ministry to Persians at home and abroad. Dr. Shariat's scientific mind and understanding of both the political and the spiritual realms make him uniquely qualified to be an ambassador for Christ in the Middle East. I highly recommend this inspiring story of courage and conviction.

**Dr. Neil T. Anderson**

Founder and President Emeritus of  
Freedom in Christ Ministries

A historical and ordained awakening of a nation coincides with God's incredible plan to use a Muslim-background believer to influence a wave of transformation in Iran. This book is a delightful, compelling, and inspiring story of commitment, perseverance and faith. A must read.

**Dr. Mike Ansari**

President, Heart4Iran/Mohabat TV

With a pen of fire, Hormoz Shariat describes Jesus Christ's power to change lives. In these pages, you will learn about the world's fastest-growing church, located in the world's most powerful Muslim nation. What is happening in Iran today is unprecedented in its 5,000-year history. This is Iran's Great Awakening! God is on the move.

It's time for you to learn about it, and step into the story of what He is doing!

**Ray Bentley**

Author, and Pastor of Maranatha Chapel

It has been my privilege to know Dr. Shariat for many years, and to serve on Iran Alive Ministries' board of directors for nearly 10 years. He is one of the few men I have known who is both an evangelist and a pastor. Hormoz has two great burdens that drive him every day: to finish his ministry well and to pass on to Iran's next generation what God has given him. You will be shocked and thrilled by what is happening in Iran. Today is the day of harvest in Iran. Will you join us in training the emerging young leaders of this massive movement of the Spirit?

We in the West have much to learn from Iran's underground church movement. Read, pray, and then act decisively.

**Dr. Monroe "Monnie" Brewer**

Former Missions Pastor for 36 years

East-West Ministries, Plano, Texas

Voice of the Martyrs, Bartlesville, OK

Adjunct Professor, Dallas Theological Seminary

Hormoz Shariat peels away so many misconceptions about Iran and its citizens, providing a fresh perspective on God's heart for this extraordinary nation. Iran is not a country Christians should fear, but rather, be ready to invest, if need be, their lives to see the Gospel transform all Iranians and strengthen His church. Hormoz is a dear friend and ministry partner whose life exemplifies

a deep passion for making disciples of all nations and bringing glory to the Great I Am.

**Floyd Brobbel**

President, The Voice of the Martyrs, Canada

Few nations are of greater consequence to God's end-time plan for the earth than Iran. Within this fascinating nation, there is nothing as potent as today's awakening church. And within the Iranian church, there is no one who has made a greater impact than Dr. Hormoz Shariat. His influence is breathtaking, his story is enthralling, and his insights are crucial for us all. *Iran's Great Awakening* is a gift of pure gold for those who love the Lord and understand the remarkable times we live in.

**Dr. David Cannistraci**

Gateway City Church, San Jose, California

This is absolutely a must read. Dr. Hormoz has poured out his heart, but more importantly he has opened our eyes to the incredible harvest that is about to come to Iran. This harvest will change the course of the Middle East! This book will awaken your heart.

**Dr. Robert W. Carman D.D.**

President of Victory World Missions

We live in a world filled with chaos and devoid of spiritual courage. Into the maelstrom and swirling storms of cultural dissonance comes the powerful voice of Hormoz Shariat. Speaking with clarity and candor, Shariat stirs the heart and compels our hands. It is one thing to be inspired, quite another to be empowered. Hormoz speaks with the integrity of a man seasoned by cultural battles but with the

compassion of a man infused with God's presence. This is the voice of a statesman for the Kingdom of Heaven, a man of deep conviction in a season of desperate need.

**Rev. Paul Louis Cole, D.Th.**  
ChristianMensNetwork.com

Inside these pages, you will discover a true story of a radical conversion, of the effect of amazing grace on a human heart. From an unlikely background, Dr. Hormoz Shariat has become a modern-day Apostle Paul. This is a brilliant tale of the author's personal journey to Jesus Christ in a Muslim-dominated world. You will witness Hormoz's unstoppable passion to reach the seemingly unreachable, and you will be encouraged in your own walk with Christ to do the same. Get your copy of *Iran's Great Awakening* and spark a revival in your community today!

**Billy Crone**

Author, Pastor, and Media Leader

When you think of Iran, *terrorism* probably comes to your mind first. But did you know that Iran has the fastest-growing church in the world right now? Hormoz Shariat is right in the middle of this historic movement of God! God took a Muslim from Tehran and brought him to faith in Christ. Hormoz's life was changed radically, but God was just getting started.

Today, Hormoz Shariat is president of Iran Alive, and the Spirit of God is all over this man. He is a winsome, warm, and humble powerhouse for Christ who is bringing the Gospel to thousands of Iranians every day through television. I've been to Iran, and the people are truly loving, gracious, and welcoming. I believe Iranians are

more open to Jesus than any other people on the planet. Hormoz and his wonderful wife, Donnell, have been selected and raised up for this special moment in time. He truly is the Billy Graham of Iran. I love Hormoz and have been privileged to be his ministry partner for more than a decade.

*Iran's Great Awakening* is a thrilling book! I highly recommend it to you. And be sure and grab a copy for your pastor. Read it and you'll understand the real story in Iran. You'll also see how God can take one man and use him to be His voice to a nation on the brink of disaster. Iran needs Jesus! Hormoz Shariat has dedicated his life to making that happen.

Thank you, Hormoz, for giving us a bird's-eye view of the miracle that is Jesus's church in Iran. Nobody knows this miracle better than you!

**Tom Doyle**

Author of *Dreams and Visions*,  
*Killing Christians*, and *Standing in the Fire*

President of Uncharted Ministries

Seldom does a nation experience a radical spiritual transformation like the one we have seen in Iran over the past fifty years. And no one has been more instrumental in that awakening and transformation than Dr. Shariat, whose ministry has impacted hundreds of thousands of Iranian lives. His story and insight are invaluable to understanding what God is doing in these last days to radically change the Muslim world.

**Mani Erfan**

President & Founder

Mani Erfan Ministries

Dr. Hormoz Shariat is not only one of the most humble, caring, and generous people I have ever known, he is on a very short list of those whom the Lord is using to transform an entire population with the hope of Christ. It is not an overstatement to call Hormoz “The Pastor of a Nation,” because Iran’s people have been deeply impacted by the Lord’s work through Iran Alive Ministries, in every corner of the country and throughout the Persian world.

**Ken Fifer, D.Min.**

Missions Pastor, Bent Tree Bible Fellowship

It is impossible to consider the miracle of salvation pouring out among Iranian people without mentioning the visionary and pioneering work of Brother Hormoz Shariat. I commend this book to all who have a heart for what God is doing in Iran and among the Iranian diaspora!

**David Garrison**

Missionary and Author of *A Wind in the House of Islam*

Wow, what a fantastic book! It is engaging with every turn of the page. The author shares his early years as a Muslim, his involvement in the protests that helped overthrow the Shah of Iran, the execution of his brother in an Iranian prison, and his becoming a Christian. And he warns about what is coming in the near future for Iran. Every chapter is challenging, yet encouraging. Read this book. You will be glad that you did.

**Tom Hughes**

Lead Pastor, 412 Church

Founder, Hope For Our Times

Through Hormoz's life story, you'll come to experience the fascinating grace of God's faithfulness and how God, in His mercy, directs a man's steps. God calls us and chooses to manifest His life through us by the Holy Spirit's power when we yield to Him. In dying to ourselves we find true, eternal life in Jesus and His resurrection power. May millions in Iran be saved through the power of the Cross and the cleansing blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

**Kevin Jessip**

President, Global Strategic Alliance

*Iran's Great Awakening* will give you hope and confidence about the country's future. This is not a book that artificially makes you feel good. It is a book about the powerful demonstration of a move of God that is transforming the lives of thousands of Iranians every day. As God leads the movement through Dr. Shariat, Iran is now the fastest-growing Christian nation in the world.

Shariat's journey from Islam in Iran to Jesus is moving. He came to America to earn his doctorate in technology at USC. Upon graduation, he moved to Silicon Valley and a high-paying technology job. Little did he know how God would ultimately use him.

I have watched God's call on his life for more than twenty-five years. God called Dr. Shariat to disciple His people and plant the largest Iranian churches in America. Now, through a TV satellite ministry to Iran, God has moved mightily to empower the fastest-growing Jesus movement in the world. Reading *Iran's Great Awakening* will inspire and give you hope!

**Bryce Jessup**

President Emeritus,

William Jessup University

For many years I have been a friend and admirer of Hormoz Shariat, and a partner to his work in Iran. I will tell you plainly that no one else in the world can match his heart, passion, and knowledge when it comes to reaching the lost of Iran. What Hormoz shares in this book will absolutely astound you and reveal the unfolding of God's secret plan for Iran in the last days.

**Jeff King**

President, International Christian Concern  
Persecution.org

This is a powerful testament to God's calling on our lives and His faithfulness in leading us to fulfill the promises that He has placed in our lives for His glory. Challenging and thoughtful applications in each chapter make this a great study tool for personal development or for group application.

**Pastor Tong Liu**

Founder and Senior Pastor of River of  
Life Christian Church

The Gospel is victorious inside Iran despite the Islamist regime's intense opposition to God's Word and His people. No amount of imprisonment, torture, or killing has slowed the Gospel's advance. *Iran's Great Awakening* is a critical part of the story of history's greatest move of God among Muslims. It should be read by everyone so that all may know that John 1:5 is true in Iran: The light of Christ shines in Islam's deepest darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

**Cole Richards**

President, The Voice of the Martyrs (vom.org)

Behind the iron curtain of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a movement is spreading—one that has the ayatollahs terrified. Though they work to extinguish it, it continues to spread like wildfire. I'm speaking of Iran's underground church, the fastest-growing revival in the world. For decades, Pastor Hormoz Shariat has been one of this movement's shining lights. Hearing his story, and the story of the Iranian Christians, will ignite the flames of revival in your heart. The Western church needs to read this book.

**Joel Richardson**

*New York Times* best-selling author,  
filmmaker, and speaker

Dr. Shariat has written an honest and powerful testimony of his life's journey. This book is more than the author's personal testimony; it explores deep truths that are vital to the body of Christ today. Each chapter carries biblical principles of the cost and rewards of true discipleship. These truths penetrate the very heart and nature of what it means to be a Christian today. This book is a must read for Christians today.

**Drs. Frederic and Susan Rowe**

Founders, The Global Watch

Dr. Hormoz Shariat is a humble servant with a heart of gold. The Lord has given him a mighty voice to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Great things, such as miracles, healings, and visions have been accomplished through his steadfast efforts to evangelize the lost throughout the world, especially Iran. Countless lives have been inspired,

and souls have been saved through his television shows and related teachings. Iran has truly come alive because of his ministerial efforts through Iran Alive Ministries! *Iran's Great Awakening* is a must read, guaranteed to motivate many readers to greatness.

**Bill Salus**

Founder of Prophecy Depot Ministries

This book is the most informative and inspirational book I have ever read on what God is doing in Iran. Pastor Hormoz Shariat masterfully shares startling testimonies and spiritual insights that he gained from the Scriptures and his work on the ground in Iran. Equally riveting is Hormoz's pilgrimage from influential Silicon Valley scientist to church planter to international apostolic worker. Once you pick up this book, you won't be able to put it down. Get ready to be inspired and empowered.

**Dr. Ed Silvano**

Founder and CEO of Transform Our World/Harvest Evangelism and author of *Ekklesia* and *Anointed for Business*

Wow! What an incredible and powerful testimony of God's amazing and abounding grace! This book is a living testament of what God did through one man's radical obedience to His calling. Dr. Hormoz's life story is truly a message for our generation. And, like the early apostles, he reminds us that no matter how difficult it seems at times to complete God's callings and assignments, He is always faithful. I've had the privilege of knowing and being friends with Dr. Hormoz for two

decades, and have had the pleasure of serving alongside him. I have been deeply moved by the depth and substance of his life, reflected so honestly in this book.

Truly, his life exemplifies simple obedience to God (which is the highest form of worship), persistence, personal consecration, courage, and personal sacrifice. For the humble Dr. Hormoz, of course, it's an honor, not a sacrifice, to serve the Lord and love His people. His story reminds me of a quote by the great missionary David Livingstone: "Why is it when an earthly king commissions us, we consider it an honor, but when the Heavenly King commissions us, we call it a sacrifice?"

Yes, in many ways, Dr. Hormoz, his family, and those who have stood with him, have made sacrifices along the way, yet they recognize the privilege of God's calling them. This is a must-read book! May you be deeply moved and provoked in your own life and journey in the Lord as you read and digest this real-life testament to God's love, grace, and mercy.

**Doug Stringer**

Founder, Somebody Cares America

Jesus promised, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." From an early 21st-century American perspective, one could be tempted to doubt these words. But for those who lift up their eyes to see what God is doing across the earth, all doubt fades. He is moving with power to fulfill this promise. Perhaps the hottest spot on the map of the Spirit's moving is Iran. Dr. Shariat is not only uniquely positioned to describe the work of the Spirit there, he is one of its chief catalysts.

I pray every reader will be inspired to live more boldly for the King and His kingdom as a result of this book.

**Clyde Taber**

Executive Director, Visual Story Network

I have thanked God often for pastor Hormoz Shariat, for his heart for God, his passion for Iran, his zeal for the Gospel, and his unique gift in evangelism. Hormoz has been at the forefront of a great movement of God in Iran. If you would like a front row seat for this spiritual revolution in the Persian-speaking world, read this book!

**Rev. Sasan Tavassoli, Ph.D.**

Pars Theological Center

What's happening in Iran today is unprecedented. It is just like the Lord to move so powerfully through a people governed by such an ill-inspired regime. Most incredibly, the testimony of the blood-won Iranian church is already impacting the nations and pressing us into a beautiful expression of God's eternal purposes in our day and time. Dr. Shariat's testimony will encourage you. His clarity will edify you. This book will empower you. Something incredible is taking place; let it not be said of us that we did not use every opportunity to be part of it.

**Dalton Thomas**

Founder/President, FAI

You will be inspired by the story of Dr. Hormoz Shariat! You will weep as he shares his struggles and shout for joy when you see God's victory in his life. What an amazing story of an ardent researcher who was a Muslim and

came to faith in Christ! His walk with Christ and his ministry will challenge you to dig deep and find the true source of success. Your life will be enriched and your vision expanded as you read what God has done in Dr. Shariat's life.

**Dr. Sammy Tippit**

Author and International Evangelist

Dr. Hormoz Shariat heard the words of God: *"Iran is ready."* Be prepared to experience a startling testimony, a big vision, and the enormous personal obstacles that did not stop this brother in Christ from bringing the Gospel to a spiritually starving Iran. I highly recommend you take the journey to discover how a million Iranians will embrace Jesus as Messiah through Dr. Shariat's steadfast faith and media outreach.

**Walt Wilson**

**Founder and Chairman**

Global Media Outreach

Iran's House Church Movement has created the fastest-growing church in the world. In the forty years since the Islamic Revolution, the number of Iranian followers of Christ (from Muslim backgrounds) has jumped from fewer than 500 to over one million! This is a mighty move of the Holy Spirit, in cooperation with dedicated men and women of God. Dr. Hormoz Shariat is one of them. He could have been a millionaire, but he left his lucrative career and dedicated himself to serving the Lord Jesus Christ. Through his 24-hour TV ministry, he has shared the saving message of the Gospel with millions of Iranians.

I wish Brother Hormoz many more victories in presenting the Savior of the world and the King of Kings to many more millions of Farsi-speaking people.

**Brother Luke Yeghnazar**

Eternal Life Agape Ministries, Inc.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	xxiii
<b>PART I: My Journey Out of Islam</b>	1
Chapter 1 – “Death to the Shah, Death to America”	3
Chapter 2 – “You Are an Infidel and You Will Go To Hell!”	11
Chapter 3 – My Younger Brother Was Executed	23
Chapter 4 – “I Am Giving You The Honor To Join Me”	29
Chapter 5 – Getting Kicked Out of the Church I Started	39
Chapter 6 – Our Switchboard Lit Up Like a Christmas Tree	49
Chapter 7 – Sixty-Five Family Members Come to Christ	59
<b>PART II: Iran Will Be a Christian Nation</b>	69
Chapter 8 – For the Bible Tells Me So!	71
Chapter 9 – Iran Will Be Attacked	79
Chapter 10 – There Will Be a Horrible War in Iran	101
Chapter 11 – God Will Set His Throne in Iran!	115
<b>PART III: IRAN IS JUST THE BEGINNING</b>	131
Chapter 12 – Iran Has The Fastest Growing Christian Population	133
Chapter 13 – Back to The Future of Iran	149
Chapter 14 – How Do We Get There from Here?	169
Chapter 15 – The Past and Future of Iran in The Bible	181
Epilogue – What About Persecution?	191
<i>Questions for Reflection</i>	199
<i>Notes</i>	239
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	241
<i>About the Author</i>	243
<i>Get Involved</i>	244



## FOREWORD

**I** CONSIDER HORMOZ SHARIAT to be the Billy Graham of Iran.

He is far and away the most watched and most influential Iranian evangelist in the world, and his story is well worth reading.

In his day, Billy Graham preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly and unequivocally in stadiums all over the world. Sometimes 40,000 or 50,000 or even 100,000 people or more would come each night to hear Dr. Graham speak the truths of God's Word. Yet the most widely listened-to and fruitful evangelist in the history of the world was never able to travel into Iran to preach the message of eternal salvation, because to do so was (and is) utterly illegal.

But now God has opened an extraordinary door. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year, Hormoz Shariat and his Iran Alive Ministries colleagues broadcast satellite television programs in Farsi (the language of the Iranian people), sharing the Gospel, teaching in-depth Bible studies, and taking live phone calls from Muslims, who call at great personal risk. These Muslims are so desperate to know if Jesus is God, and so hungry to have their souls and bodies healed by Him, that they are willing to make the call even though they know they could be discovered by the secret police, arrested, tortured, and even killed for showing interest in Christianity.

Because Hormoz and his team are broadcasting programs unlike anything on Iranian state-run television, millions of Iranians are watching every day. They watch in the privacy of their homes, hungry for the truth and grateful for men and women willing to speak the truth in love.

Hormoz's satellite network also broadcasts Christian worship services into Iran, right over the heads of the ayatollahs and the

mullahs and the Iranian intelligence services. Many secret believers in Iran are too scared to go to a church, fearing that the secret police might catch them. Many Muslim converts are too scared to play Christian music in their homes or sing too loudly, fearing that their neighbors might hear them. For some of them, the church services that Hormoz's network broadcasts are the only times of worship and fellowship they have. And for Muslims who are curious about Christianity, such services give them a safe window into a spiritual world of hope to which they feel increasingly drawn.

I had the joy of meeting Hormoz nearly fifteen years ago. He had become interested in my novels and in my first non-fiction book, *Epicenter*, in which I explained a number of Bible prophecies and shared my conviction that the Lord will, one day, draw millions upon millions of Jews and Muslims into the Kingdom of Christ by the power of His Holy Spirit. For some reason, Hormoz graciously invited me to visit him in a secure, undisclosed location. I gratefully accepted his offer, and am so glad I did.

For me, a Jewish follower of Jesus, it was incredibly moving to meet such a remarkable Iranian follower of Christ and his family and his staff. It was amazing to see how God was using them to reach the nation of Iran, the people they love so dearly, with the life-changing message of the Gospel.

Most remarkable to me was to learn that Hormoz did not grow up in a Christian home, hoping to be an evangelist. To the contrary, he was an Iranian-born Shia Muslim. His wife was an American-born convert to Islam who had come to Iran for work. The two met in Tehran. That's where they were married. In 1979, they were members of the Iranian Revolution, marching with millions of other Iranians in Tehran's streets, shouting, "Death to America! Death to the Shah!" And then, as you'll read, they thought, *Well, maybe not Death to America quite yet. We'd like to go to graduate school over there.*

What follows is an extraordinary and truly miraculous journey. This is the story of how God led Hormoz and Donnell Shariat from Iran to America, from Shia Islam to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, from students of the Quran to teachers of the Bible, from people with no background in media production to pioneers in Gospel satellite television. What's more, this is the story of two lost and broken people (a couple whose marriage was in the process of blowing up), whom God not only saved and healed but called to become leaders of a worldwide movement of Muslims turning to Christ.

I am humbled to call Hormoz and Donnell my friends. They have welcomed me into their home. They have introduced me to their family and friends and staff and board members. We have prayed together. We have studied the Scriptures together. We have spoken at conferences together. I've appeared on their network several times, teaching the Bible and answering questions on live broadcasts. My wife, Lynn, and I have even had the honor of hosting Hormoz in Jerusalem, Israel, on his first foray into the Holy Land, where he shared his story at an Epicenter Conference organized by The Joshua Fund, a ministry we established several years ago.

For years, I have been urging Hormoz to write a book that would share his story in detail, and to explain the vision that the Lord has given him for the salvation of the Muslim world—particularly the transformation of Iran from the world's most dangerous terrorist state to a nation in love with Jesus. Finally, Hormoz has come to his senses and done what I've been asking for so long!

The book you hold in your hands is not only worth reading; it's worth sharing with others. Don't simply read it. Write about it. Talk about it. Discuss it on social media. Absorb its message and pass it on to others.

More people need to understand how much God loves the world's 1.6 billion Muslims. More people need to learn about the work of Iran Alive Ministries and the power of Gospel satellite television. And far more people need to be involved in praying for

(and financially investing in) the effort to reach every Iranian and all Muslims with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I sincerely hope that this book, *Iran's Great Awakening*, will be used by God to educate and mobilize a far larger movement of Christians to love the Muslim people, and to more deeply appreciate God's great power to seek and save the lost.

I must confess that Hormoz is driving me to jealousy me because (so far) so many more Muslims than Jews are coming to faith in Christ. Indeed, more Muslims have come to Christ in the past fifty years than during the previous fourteen centuries. As a Jewish follower of Jesus, and citizen of the State of Israel, I certainly believe the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 11:26. I have no doubt that one day, "All Israel will be saved." Right now, I see a great awakening underway in Iran, and not yet in Israel. But that's another reason I love Hormoz and the book he has written. Because God has taught him lessons that my colleagues and I need to learn as we work to reach our people and seek God for an Israeli awakening.

There is one other reason I believe this book is important: its emphasis on biblical prophecy. Sadly, most Christians don't study prophecy. Yet 27 percent of the Bible, more than one in four verses, is prophetic. Most Christians ignore these Scriptures because they feel they are too complicated or controversial. That's a profound mistake. Every verse of Scripture is inspired by God and useful to us. There are important things about the future of specific nations that God urgently wants us to know. That's why He gave us these prophecies. And woe to us if we ignore them and thus are unprepared when dramatic events eventually come to pass. We will all give an account to the Lord one day. Knowing this, do we really want to have paid scant attention to one-quarter of what God is telling us in His Word? To have failed to live in light of the critical truths contained in these passages?

In this book, Hormoz explains the biblical prophecies about Iran. He explores the passage in Jeremiah 49 that explains how God will judge the leaders of Elam (Iran) and then move His throne there. He also addresses the prophecies found in Ezekiel, chapters 38 and 39, in which God (in the “last days”) vows to judge an alliance of nations seeking to attack Israel, an alliance partly led by a nation known as Persia.

What exactly do these passages say? What do they mean? And how should they motivate us to live differently for Christ? Some authors and Bible teachers might shy away from such matters. Not my friend Hormoz. To the contrary, he deals with them head-on, with courage and candor. For this I love him all the more.

May the Lord bless you for picking up this book and reading it thoroughly and digesting it carefully. May the Lord bless you even more for letting the Holy Spirit ignite a passion inside you to reach every Iranian, indeed every Muslim, with the message of Jesus.

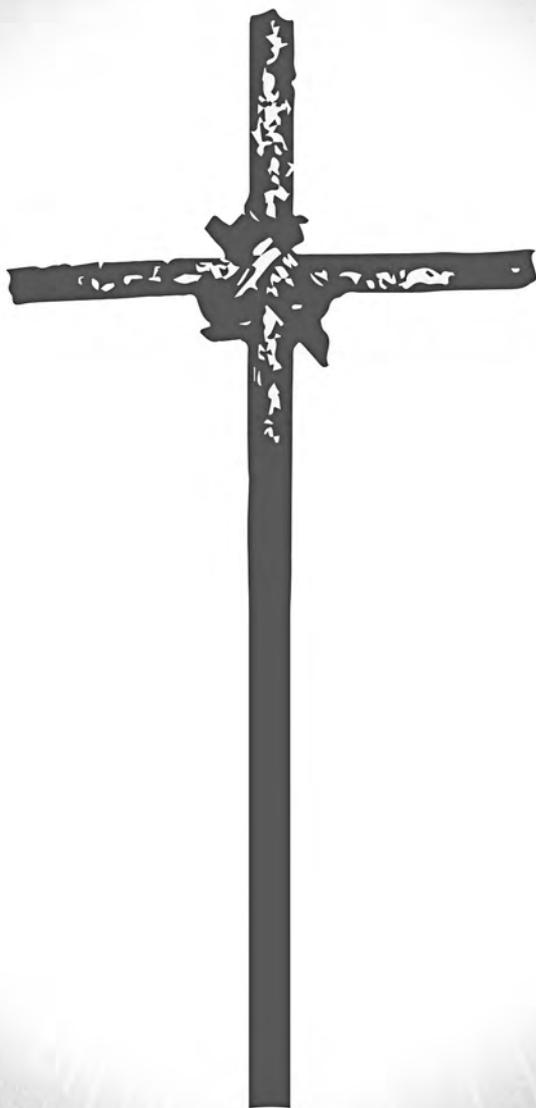
Today, the mere mention of Iran too often conjures up thoughts of war, rumors of war, terror, and tragedy. But Hormoz and I believe that a new day is coming. Soon, possibly very soon, the Lord Jesus will move His throne into the heart of Iran. He will transform that country for His glory. He will send many Persian people into the world as His servants and His witnesses. The Islamic Republic will become the Christian Republic. The Islamic Revolution will become a Gospel Revolution.

In the pages ahead, Hormoz testifies first-hand that this prophetic, supernatural transformation has already begun in Iran. But it is far from complete. More is coming. Much more. He wants you to be of it, and so do I. So read on, dear friend, and discover Iran’s Great Awakening for yourself.

**Joel C. Rosenberg**

Jerusalem, Israel

January 10, 2020



PART I

MY JOURNEY  
OUT OF ISLAM





## CHAPTER 1

# “DEATH TO THE SHAH, DEATH TO AMERICA”

**I WAS BORN** into a Muslim family in Tehran, Iran in 1955. My grandfather had been an Islamic religious leader. He passed away when my dad was just a kid.

Today, in the city of Semnan, there is a mosque that was built and dedicated to Islam by my grandfather’s grandfather in 1826. Called Sultan’s Mosque, it stands as the oldest and most prominent mosque in the region.

My grandfather (who lived from 1865 to 1920) served as the mosque’s custodian for much of his life, and he also directed the upkeep of other buildings and lands in the area.

After my grandfather died, his nephew assumed those responsibilities. In fact, that mosque, along with assorted other schools, buildings, and lands, were under the care of someone from my family until the 1970s. (After the Islamic revolution of 1978-1979, the mosque was taken over by the new government and renamed Imam’s Mosque, but was also referred to as Khomeini’s Mosque.)

My parents were educators. My dad was a high school principal, and my Mom was a teacher. They were Muslims, but they never forced their faith on me. I remember my Mom always telling me, “Don’t be a bigot or closed-minded. Never accept or reject anything before you study and understand it.”

I held on to Islamic beliefs and practiced them until I was twelve. At that time, I started thinking, “What effect do these practices, such as fasting and ritual prayers, have on me?” I did not (and still don’t) like repeating things mindlessly if they do not add to my life. I had been following these rituals, but they were doing nothing for me. They did not change me or affect my relationships.

I wondered, *Where is God?* These rituals were certainly not connecting me to Him.

So I decided to discard the Islamic rituals, in favor of simply trying to be a good person and focusing on my studies.

I decided I wanted to be a scientist. I dreamed of going to the United States of America to pursue graduate studies. I hoped to earn a Ph.D. in science and then become a research scientist at one of the top research centers.

I worked hard and became the top student in my class at Kharazmi High School. Then I was admitted to the region’s top technical school, Aryamehr University, which is now named Sharif University of Technology. (Incidentally, “Aryamehr” means “lover of the Aryan race,” and it was one of the Shah’s nicknames. The school was renamed after the revolution. Sharif Vaghefi was one of the martyrs killed during the revolution.)

## **“DEATH TO SHAH, DEATH TO AMERICA!”**

While in college, I met Donnell, this brave American girl from Oregon who had moved to Tehran and was working at DuPont, the well-known global science company. Donnell was a nominal

Christian, and when we decided to get married, she converted to Islam.

She was touched by the devotion of Muslims. She admired their focus on their faith and their families. When she compared Islam to the lukewarm Christianity she saw in her church, she was drawn to Islam. Of course, she needed to convert to marry me, but her devotion to the faith was real. We were married in Tehran on October 23, 1977.

In 1978, I finished my last semester at technical school—and not a moment too soon. That summer, turmoil erupted on the streets of Tehran, and the demonstrations forced my school to shut down.

I should note that I was not a leader but an active participant in the protests. I supported the effort, because that’s what all my peers were doing.

For the four years I was on campus, I shared this mind-set with my fellow students: “We need do something for the good of our country because the Shah of Iran is corrupt.”

It wasn’t about politics; it was about our genuine love for our nation. Plus, it was our job as students to oppose *something!*

On September 8, 1978, (a day that became known as Black Friday), the Shah’s army opened fire on a group of protesters, killing and wounding hundreds.

My new wife faced death during this season of protest. Twice.

During a street demonstration outside her job at DuPont, Donnell heard bullets crash through her window and ricochet off a wall. Some of those bullets barely missed her head. Later, slugs were found in the trash bin near her desk.

Weeks later, her life was spared again. A few minutes after she finished dining in a restaurant in Tehran’s Argentina Square, a bomb exploded, killing many diners.

The protests and violence continued through the fall of 1978.

I faced a dilemma. I wanted to be on the streets, supporting the demonstrations. But I knew that I could be shot and killed as a result. Eventually, my sense of duty to my country overcame my fears. Donnell and I decided to join the demonstrators, despite the danger.

It's important to note that the revolution began with students and other young people. Eventually, the oil workers joined effort, going on strike, as did some government employees.

When it looked like we might actually topple the powerful Shah and bring in a democratic government, more older men joined.

However, most of the protesters were brave young men and women who protested peacefully.

By December 1978, the Shah decided to stop responding violently to the demonstrators. This caused our resistance to grow in numbers, and in boldness. Various factions of the resistance began to unite and organize.

In the beginning, this revolutionary movement was not Islamic at all. There were many opposition groups, including the intellectuals (mostly university students and graduates), the mujahideen (a militant Islamic group), the Fadaian (a militant/terrorist Marxist group that had been trying to topple the government for 25 years), the Tudeh Party (a communist group), and several other Islamic groups, some liberal and conservative.

These disparate groups had differing philosophies and beliefs, but they all knew that they would need to find some common ground and purpose if they wanted to bring down the Shah, who was backed by the United States. The biggest question was *how* to bring him down.

Eventually, the resistance found common ground in the Islamic faith. Even the intellectuals like me (who didn't practice the faith in

our daily lives) held positive feelings about Islam. We believed that Islam was a good religion, even if it wasn't our personal religion.

Thus, Islam became the revolution's focal point. Soon, a rather obscure Islamic leader named Ruhollah Khomeini became the face of the revolution. (Americans came to know this man as Ayatollah Khomeini.)

Khomeini had been exiled by the Shah in 1964, and he was living in Paris, France, when the revolution erupted. He accepted the role as “leader of the opposition.”

He met with the leaders of all the opposition groups—even the atheists—assuring them that he had no desire to lead Iran after the revolution succeeded. When the Shah was gone, Khomeini promised to step aside and let Iran be governed democratically. This promise pleased everyone in the resistance, so Khomeini received a promise of full support.

This sudden unity shocked the Shah's regime. It also shocked President Jimmy Carter and his administration. American leadership didn't realize just how unpopular the Shah was. And no one expected the Shah to face such a large and unified movement.

When President Carter and his team saw millions of people protesting, the United States withdrew its support of the Shah. They encouraged (or perhaps forced) the Shah to step down and leave the country—before Iran suffered any more bloodshed.

The Shah had become so unpopular that even the students and other intellectuals became militant. Donnell was so shaken by the two violent attacks she experienced that she donned the chador (an Islamic cloak) and joined me on Tehran's streets, shouting, “Death to Shah. Death to America!” with the rest of the mobs.

However, while my lips were proclaiming death to the United States, in my heart I was pleading, “But not yet. I want to get my Ph.D. from a good American university!”

Indeed, this was a time of profound internal conflict for me. It was my dream to attend school in America, but I knew I would hate myself if I sat at home and failed to join the other university students in their heartfelt protests. I didn't want to be disloyal to my country. But I also didn't want to get killed while protesting. I should add here that today my wife and I joyfully sing "God Bless America." Those days of anti-America sentiments are long gone.

The Shah left Iran in January of 1979, and we all felt that our troubles were behind us. The opposition unified under Khomeini, and we expected Iran to become a democratic country in short order.

I hoped to resume my plans of earning a doctoral degree from an American university and becoming a research scientist.

I had applied to and was admitted to the University of Southern California (USC). In late January of 1979, Donnell and I left the chaos of Iran to build a better life for ourselves, to pursue the American dream.

## WHAT WERE YOUR CHILDHOOD DREAMS?

I am not and have never been a fan of empty rituals, which bring no personal benefit. If you practice something over and over and it doesn't change you, maybe you are searching for truth and meaning in the wrong place.

I had a dream from childhood that God would use me to do something great through science to impact people's lives. It was a God-given vision and He directed me to fulfill that vision in a better way--through the sharing of His Gospel.

What about you? What were you passionate about when you were younger? Have you given up on those dreams? Have they withered and died within you?

Often our passions, our dreams, are from God. They reflect how God has designed you and me and what He wants from our lives.

Now, you might say, “I don’t think much about my childhood dreams because I wasn’t a believer back then. However, while you might not have known God, He knew you. He called you even before you were born. (See Jeremiah 1:5 and Ephesians 2:10.)

Take time to review those childhood dreams with God right now.

Pray, “Dear Lord, I had dreams in my youth that are now forgotten and buried under the burdens of this life. Were they truly from You? Did You design me for them? If so, please resurrect them in my heart and enable me to pursue them with Your strength and direction, and for Your glory.”

When Donnell and I came to America, we were starving for change. We dreamed of making a better life for ourselves. We pursued that goal the best way we knew how—through education and being open-minded.

What about you? Are you hungry for change? Are you open to new spiritual truths? No matter how hard your life may have been as a child or how many miles you have traveled to get where you are now, I want you to know that you are not alone. We all have unique paths to walk, but there are universal truths we can rely on throughout our journeys.

I know that my life is a bit radical. Most people reading this book have never shouted “Death to Shah, Death to America” on the streets of Tehran.

But I know that many of us feel embarrassed by certain parts of our life stories. Please don’t hide any part of your story, for it makes you who you are today.



*I believe your life is  
unique and your story  
is worth sharing  
including the good,  
bad, and  
the embarrassing.*

I share my story (the good, the bad, and the embarrassing), because I value truth. I left my family in Iran to begin a new search for truth and a better life for Donnell and me.

I believe your life is unique and your story is worth sharing: the good, bad, and the embarrassing.

At the end of this book, I will share questions for you to reflect on, questions connected to each chapter.

As a research scientist by trade (and by passion), I believe God has so much more for you and for me if we are willing and open-minded enough to reflect, study, and research.

Psalm 32:8 assures us, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.” This verse has always held deep meaning for me, because it gives me the warmest feeling that God is my father.

My earthly father was not involved in my life at all. He was very distant. As a middle child in a large family, I was mostly ignored. I was encouraged to be “the quiet child,” to study hard and avoid causing any trouble.

As a result, I felt like I grew up without a father. I always wanted a male presence in my life, a father figure who would teach me how to live and give me wisdom to make the right decisions and have the right attitude.

That never happened, but it didn't stop me from pursuing my dreams, living my life, and learning from good books—as well as from my mistakes.

Eventually, I found the best book in the world (the Bible) and the best father (God). God has never left me. He has always guided me, even in the worst crises and most heart-wrenching decisions of my life.

