

To Sarvy and Hanif, my children. For when they want to know why and how. And to many more children, who lost their parents and their normal lives and couldn't understand why.

This is my life story, what I went through and what I saw. From 'zero', when I was born, to 'zero', when I left the Mojahedin organization. Yes, I arrived at another zero, and perhaps I have to congratulate them for that, as it was always their wish to reduce us to 'nobody' and 'nothing' in every sense. Zero, as you are disconnected from any sense of belonging, your past, your memories, your friends and relatives and loved ones. Zero, as you have lost your identity, your individuality, your likes and dislikes, your principles and beliefs. Zero, as you feel you know nothing, for whatever you once knew is under a big question-mark. And again zero, as you have nothing, for everything you once had materially and physically is lost, your health and your youth. You start again from zero, born again, but without all the advantages and hope and help that are given to a newborn child.

This has been the fate of people like me, who thought they were doing right and that nothing was right except what they were doing, since they were following the right guru, the one whose word was prophecy, who was all-seeing and all-knowing. This has been the fate of people like me, who denied themselves, who burnt all their bridges to past and future, whose lives were broken and who struggled for the survival of what remained of themselves.

**Change into** Ordinary people, mortal, fallible, without pretensions or delusions of grandeur. Not like those who think themselves infinitely superior to ordinary people, who see themselves as the gift of God, the sign and shadow of God on earth, the peak of human evolution; who believe it is their destiny to lead people towards glory, at any price, even at the cost of the deaths of millions and the misery of many more; who see their end or failure as the end of everything, of hope and desire, of happiness and fulfilment, of evolution and civilization. I don't mean prophets or philosophers, or people like Gandhi or Mossadeq, though there are similarities between them and those to whom I refer. Both groups believe in something that transcends daily life. Their aims go beyond individual hopes and desires. Both understand the hope of all human beings to be something more than a bag of soil when they die. Both believe in evolution and the purpose of life. Both advocate the idea of Utopia. Both differ from ordinary political leaders, whose prime purpose is the struggle to gain and hold on to power.

There the similarities end. These claimants to divinely inspired supremacy are after not only power but also eternity, and in the process they are prepared to pay any price, even the sacrifice of their own lives. But the main difference between these super-leaders and the prophets is that the latter believe in the power of the people and the miraculous presence of a God, while the former believe in the miracle of themselves. The super-leaders believe the ultimate end must be achieved in

their own short life span. By contrast, the prophets believe people have to decide and fulfil their destiny, so they see themselves as teachers or at most guides, mere humans, trying to push their nation one step forward, but never dreaming of attaining all their goals within their lifetime. For these people any individual is as important as the whole nation, life is precious and should not be lost in vain.

Readers of this book may have a question that persists in their minds to the last. Why couldn't I see that I was wrong and why didn't I leave the organization sooner? It is a question that I may never be able to answer satisfactorily. Let me try an analogy. Your white blood cells protect you against disease. You have a degree of immunity that defends you against any kind of invasion, physical or mental (or even ideological). You could describe your individuality from birth, with the main objective of survival and later reproduction, as a kind of personal ideology that protects you against a foreign ideology that endangers your existence. But if the defence system is paralysed for some reason, then the protective shield crumbles and you are defenceless against any minor incursion. When your ideological immunity breaks down, your intellect and your education are no use to you. Gradually you are forced to deny your past and see it as wrong and corrupt. Submitting to the slogan 'the ugliness of selfishness', you reject the first objective of existence, the survival of the individual. Step by step, you accept that your logic and principles, your wants and desires, your loves and likes and dislikes, your relationships with everyone and ultimately not only your negative points but even your positive ones are all wrong and have to be discarded. Then the foreign invader has triumphed.

The loss of immunity to incursion by the foreign ideology did not just apply to me personally. I believe it also afflicted Iran as a nation. No doubt there will be many Iranians who totally disagree with me from this point on. But that is the beauty of human thought in all its variety. Who knows where we would be if we all thought the same all the time? It seems to me that for a long time, owing to the losses and misfortunes of the Qajar era and then of the Second World War, the nation at large, and its intellectuals in particular, lost faith in our culture and traditions and our ability to handle various situations, including cultural or material foreign invasions. After the 1953 American-British coup against the national government of Dr Mossadeq, most young Iranian intellectuals rejected out of hand our way of struggling for progress and welcomed foreign ideas. Turning away from Western culture and capitalism, they accepted instead the common antidote of 'imperialism', namely Marxism. Even if they were ashamed to accept the material part of Marxism, there is no doubt that they could readily square its claim to a scientific interpretation of events with their consciences. The introduction of the theory of the 'vanguard' by Lenin and then Mao, the

notion of the organization as absolute and on a plane above the individual and finally the acceptance of armed resistance as the quick solution to any opposition or attack were the bequests of revolutionary Marxists, especially those in Latin America, to our young intellectuals, who now began to call themselves revolutionaries as well. Mossadeq was one of the last Iranian politicians who believed in real democracy and trusted the Iranian way of doing politics. Instead of having faith in an organization he had faith in the people. He considered arms as the levy a democratic government might have to pay to defend the rights of the people. And finally, instead of believing in the vanguard or the traditional Islamic equivalent, the Imam, he championed the right of people to choose their representatives and leaders in free elections.

After 1953 most of our intellectuals criticized Dr Mossadeq for not using arms in the coup, for not creating an organization that could back him and perhaps for not acting like Mao in China. After that, the creation of and reliance on ‘revolutionary organizations’, on the one hand, and ‘armed struggle’ in the shape of guerrilla warfare, on the other, became the main objectives of the intellectuals and the younger generation. Underpinning these active goals was an ideology of absolutist worship of vanguards, under various names such as ‘heroic revolutionaries’. The immediate result of this new credo was to separate the people from the intellectuals, isolating the latter and confusing the former. Then, when the revolution came, the only group of people who were capable of leading the way and pursuing it to where we are now were those who were still connected to the majority of ordinary people, namely the mullahs.

I believe that as a nation and as individuals we are still suffering because of that ideology.

As an individual, like many others, I didn’t dare to stand against our generation’s new dogmas, the ‘organization’ and its heroic leaders and martyrs, nor to question the ‘armed struggle’, as immediately it implied surrender to the dictatorship and betrayal of the ‘people’ and ‘freedom’. After all, many organizations established after the 1953 coup, the Mojahedin organization above all, were based on the rules of the new revolutionary thinking. At the present time, the Mojahedin are the sole survivors of that way of thinking, which is why they have understandably embraced and see themselves as protectors of extreme absolutism.

Another consequence of the invasion of revolutionary ideology was that the younger generation lost their connection with their elders and thus could not benefit from their wisdom and ability to deal with problems. Hence they had to start from scratch, using a needle to bore into the mountain and finding their way by trial and error.

I have done my best to write the story of my life as it happened and to show the contradictions in my thinking at various stages. But I admit that my best may not be good enough and that while writing I have had many flashbacks and thus judged certain situations with hindsight.

Even when I left the Mojahedin, I was still not able properly to see what was wrong. I knew only that I could not change myself any more. I guess when you are in the middle of a current and you are struggling to keep your head above water, you cannot appreciate its strength or direction. Only when you leave it and look at it from a distance can you see the whole picture. With the passage of time, I have been able to see and understand more and more, not only about the organization and the events I experienced, but also about myself and my beliefs, who I am and what I want. I am still at an early stage, trying to learn everything all over again, and perhaps I shall never stop doing so, as so much has been lost and has to be regained, a little at a time.

But there was something that at last penetrated my brain soon after I left the Mojahedin, though I could have learnt it much earlier, when I was only a child: that, as my kind and ever-smiling grandmother told me, life is not black and white. I paid a very heavy price to learn something that was given to me free. But I cannot entirely regret having had to pay this heavy price for such a priceless lesson. Imagine how many lives could be saved if we all just understood it. This is the message of this book: life is a rainbow, and 'black and white' is another world, a world to be repudiated and despised, where people deal only in the extremes of love and hate, right and wrong, good and evil.