

Album Leaves

The Memoirs of Norman “Nourollah” Gabay

Second Leaf

Edit & English Translation by Payman Akhlaghi

لطفاً نسخه فارسی این برگ از آلبوم را بیشتر در صفحه آغازین این فایل ملاحظه کنید.

I was almost 14. A friend of my employer, and a man of considerable influence in bureaucratic affairs, asked me, “Could you do something for me?” “It’d depend, Sir,” I said. “I’ve imported 1000 bicycles,” he explained. “I need somebody to deliver them this week to my buyer. You’ll be taking these bikes from the customs to Mr. Bazargan on the Nasser Khosrow Strip, then bring me the receipt.” Hadji Agha Bazargan (not the actual name) was a well-known and much-trusted merchant, and I was a 14 or 15-year old teenager, hungry for work. Naturally, I accepted the offer. That week, I had more free time on my hand, so I made it a day early to the customs to receive the bicycles, which had just been released. Right there, I had the cargo loaded onto several carts, took them over to the buyer, and had them unloaded at his warehouse. In those days, trucks were seldom used to transport goods especially within the city, and large carts drawn by men or donkeys were the norm.

Unlike what I had imagined, the bicycles hadn’t come assembled, but instead of one thousand whole bikes, their many parts had been packed separately. Several crates contained only the saddles, several others had housed only the chains, and the various other boxes contained either the bodies, or the wheels, honks, brakes, etc. Moving such merchandise was a particularly difficult job, needless to say physically, but also especially for the major responsibility that it entailed. There was simply no room for mistakes or accidents.

At any rate, I delivered the goods to the Hadji, and I asked him for the receipt, so I could take it personally to the seller. He jotted down a receipt, and handed it to me. It read, "I received the merchandise, but there are some discrepancies." I was alarmed. It smelled fishy. I realized that some con was in play. I had picked up the goods at the customs, and I had brought them all to him directly, just as I had received them. My mouth ran dry. A big lump grew in my throat. As young as I was, I mustered the courage to say, "I can't accept this receipt. You should give me one that only says you received the goods. I won't buy any 'discrepancies' or the like. What I received, I brought it all straight to you. I won't accept what you wrote." He asked, "What will you do if I don't give you the receipt that you want?" I said, "I'll have the crates reloaded, and return them to the owner. Either you write as you should, that "the goods were received," or I'll take them all with me. If there are any discrepancies, it'd be no fault of mine. You can go to him tomorrow, and sort things out for yourself."

I called out the porters, and we began to reload the crates. As the scene unfolded, the Hadji realized that I was serious. "Hold it!" he said. "Come into my office." His tone had softened. "You're right. I'll write you the receipt that you want." However, he also took a scrap of paper from a box, wrote something on the back of the discarded document, and gave it to me. The rhymed verse read, "A clergyman advised his donkey, 'Don't be a jackass, or they'll surely take you for a ride!'" Then he told me, "Dear boy! You were not fooled, and you'll never be!" I took the note along with the receipt, left his office, and dismissed the porters. The next day, I went to the friend of my employer, and I handed him the receipt.

In recounting this memory, I had in mind especially the advice that the merchant gave me in his own writing. "Don't be a fool..." That's absolutely the truth. The naïve and gullible people are surely taken advantage of. Who accepts a belief blindly, or agrees to do something without understanding what it's all about, he or she wouldn't make it in life. But those who understand things in time and put their understanding into action, they're bound to succeed. Nobody ever made it far by agreeing to things they didn't understand, or by doing things they had no clue about.

Speaking of informed action, I'm reminded of a quote attributed to Henry Ford, inventor of the automobile. A journalist asked, "What's been the secret of your success, that you made it big

in those days, and achieved such wealth and respect throughout the world?” To which the famed man replied, “I understood things one minute before the others did, and I acted 30 seconds ahead of everybody else. That’s been the secret of my success.”

May you succeed and prosper.

Norman “Nourollah” Gabay

December 2021, Los Angeles

Revised: January 2022

English translation: May 2022

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