

Speech by

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Before a Gathering of Friends and Relatives

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English Translation by Payman Akhlaghi

My dear ones; I welcome each and every one of you who've gathered here tonight.

Before we continue, let me remind you that you may listen to the English version of this speech right now on your mobiles at www.BabaNouri.com.

Tonight, eager to see you my dear ones, and wishing to maintain our social and familial ties, I've come to receive your energy, before I'll return to my city.

One midnight, two drunken men were fighting each other in a quiet alley of the Jewish neighborhood of Kashan, Iran. One said, “That thing in the sky is the Moon!” While the other one

insisted, “No! It’s the Sun!” Suddenly, they grabbed an old Jewish man who happened to be passing by, shaking from fear, and asked him, “You tell us! Is that round ball up there the moon or the sun?” The old man realized that whichever his answer, one or the other of the men would beat him up. So he scratched his head, took a look at the sky, and said, “God knows, I don’t live in this neighborhood!” Well, tonight, I don’t live in this neighborhood, either!

In 1955 C.E., I lived by myself for 9 months in New York. At that time, nobody imagined that before long, due to a major political overturn, countless Iranians would find themselves in the present situation by a wave of unwanted emigration. Nobody thought that a generation completely different from those who came before, a generation hundreds of years ahead of its ancestors, would emerge on the stage of the world, outside of Iran; a generation that now, using the opportunities offered by the environment, is walking side by side the world — so far as we may say that more than 90% of our youngsters today have been to the colleges and universities.

However, we may dare to say that before them, the most fortunate generation of the Jews of Iran were those who were born at the dawn of the Pahlavi dynasty; those who as the country came to flourish, benefitted from the precious services of Reza Shah and “Alliance Israélite”; and above all, who saw the State of Israel regain independence — that two-thousand-year old dream of the Jewish people, a dream kept alive every year by the promise of “le-shanah ha-ba’a be-yerushalayim”. They left Iran as the sun set on the Pahlavi era, made every effort and kept step with the free world, and managed to lead the next generation to success. Now, that same generation, carries the mission to share their precious experiences with the younger generation. May I add that I hope those who’ve remained in Iran, will always live in security and comfort, and continue to grow and flourish.

I’m certain that the future will remember this massive emigration in its own right, even as we remember the Exodus from Egypt. This immense emigration wasn’t just about migrating from one place to another. Rather, it meant a large and sudden leap for us in time, and the liberation of the coming generation from discrimination.

The Iranian immigrants, having inherited the Ahurai culture, earned themselves many scientific and economic achievements, and soon they showed the world how well they could swim once they had reached the clean waters; and even as now, they continue to study, man and woman, toward a better future. Thence, every member of various societies, specially each and every member of the Iranian Jewish community, we are duty-bound to do what we can — in words, in action, in donations — to maintain and to protect our family ties, this secret of the survival of the Jewish culture.

Humankind flourishes in the floods of crises; and the accomplishments of the Iranian immigrants around the world are some evident cases in point. Immigration made us realize our shortcomings better than we had done in the past; and given the opportunities available in our new surroundings, it afforded us more scientific education than ever before.

If memory serves me well, Mr. Hassan Pirnia wrote in his book in Persian, *A History of the Ancient Iran*, that the Iranian Jewish population at the time of the Sassanid era — that is, about 1750 years ago — amounted to more than 200,000 people.

We should ask what happened to them, and where did they go? How come that in the many centuries since, the Iranian Jewish population could never reach to even 100,000? Fortunately, over the past 40 years, our population — that of the Jewish people of an Iranian origin — has exceeded 500,000 around the world. Just in terms of the quantity, no other era could come close to compare. And certainly, over the coming 30 years, this scattered society will grow to a million in numbers, and flourish yet more amazingly than we have seen so far.

It's evident that to achieve and maintain such success, we need to exercise foresight and already make the necessary preparations. We should be building dams and bridges before the flood hits the town. Above all, we should stay together so that we shall survive the harsh waves on the turbulent path of life, and we won't fall apart by the blows of change in the world, which are sure to come.

Every Jewish person needs to understand the meaning of “kol yisra-el arevim zeh la-zeh” — that is, “All Jews are mixed together and are responsible for one another.”

The Jewish people have fallen so often and have broken enough bones to understand that to rise, they don't need a hand from the outside, but the will and the power of the people from the inside; and thence why they must rely on themselves. Let's see what were the outcome of the many centuries of an Israel without independence, and we would understand the endless necessity for such self-reliance and independence.

Let's not forget that during the years of the sudden wave of emigration in the 1980's, had it not been for the wisdom and supervision of the Israeli government and our religious and social organizations, we might have hardly achieved our today's glories. The secret to our success is our familial and social bonds. Judaism isn't just a common religion for us; but in its broader sense, Judaism is the shared fate of a nation. Let's cherish our family ties. Let's keep in mind that the lack of attachment in those families without support, and the children without mentors, this has contributed to placing the world today in danger.

As such, I also point out that it's time for our leaders and representatives, those of the Jewish communities of an Iranian

origin worldwide, to come together in a comprehensive Congress — to talk, share their problems, find solutions, plan wisely, and coordinate their efforts for the future of this small yet unique community. In recent months, I have shared the essence of this idea with a few of the active members of our community; and I hope that the idea will soon come to fruition.

Rabbi Zvi Dershowitz, the former rabbi of Sinai Temple, Los Angeles, said in one of his weekly sermons, “We Americans should learn about family ties from the Iranians; and the Iranians should learn about punctuality from us!” I’d better stop now to leave time for questions and answers. Besides, the second collection of my heartfelt writings over the past few years, entitled *Be Up to Date*, is soon to be published in Persian and English,; and those concerns won’t need to be repeated here.

Finally, I’m proud to be hosting you all, my dear ones, including Misters Yousef Shaheri, Elias Kalimian, Sion Mahfar, Dr. Homayoun Aram, and Rabbi Yedidia Ezrahan — the philanthropists who for long have been putting in their all, and together with their friends and allies, for years have served the

society. I hope that the coming generation of our youngsters will find examples in them.

I wish you all a wonderful evening, and fulfilling lives.

Norman “Nourollah” Gabay

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Questions and Answers...