

because their automobile was stopped and meticulously searched at numerous roadblocks, they reached the hospital in time.

Mona was the second child born to Yad'u'llah and Farkhunde Mah mudnizhad and brought the family great joy. Their first daughter, Taraneh, was already seven years old and her parents had often prayed for another child. Mona spent her first four years in Yemen, most of it uneventful and showered with great love by her family.

On one occasion, however, while crawling around as a baby, she nearly died from accidental poisoning. When she was out of danger and released from the hospital, she began shaking her hands and dancing to music her father was playing, much to everyone's immense relief. At age two, she was hit by a car and thrown to the sidewalk. She got up and uttered the only harsh words she knew, "You are bad," and then passed out before being taken to the hospital. Luckily, she sustained no serious injuries and she soon recovered.

Mona would probably have grown up in Yemen had the government not expelled all foreigners in 1969. While Yad'u'llah Mah mudnizhad desired to remain as a pioneer, he was forced to return to Iran, spending two years in Isfahan, six months in Kirmanshah and three years in Tabriz before finally settling, in 1974, in Shiraz, a city precious to Bahá'ís because it is the birthplace of the Faith and home of one of its two Prophet-Founders, The Bab. During this time, her father repaired small appliances for his work and served the Bahá'í community as both an elected and appointed member of various administrative bodies. [1]

SENSITIVITY AS A CHILD

Mona's family was very humble and sensitive, passing these traits to Mona. While she was only a young child, she was already displaying these qualities which later led to her becoming known, even as a youth, as the "Angel of Shiraz". When she attended school in Tabriz, for example, she became so close to her teachers that she would cry when they left the school for some other position.

When she entered the third grade in Shiraz, she was quickly recognized as an excellent student and was considered one of the most outstanding in the school. She also had a beautiful singing voice and a genuine love for those around her, especially younger children who would often surround her when she arrived at school just to be with her.

Mona's special qualities were greatly appreciated by her Bahá'í community. She would always complete her assignments for Bahá'í school classes and was often asked to recite poems, sing songs or chant prayers at the Bahá'í 19-day Feasts.[2] When she met people that she loved, her eyes would fill with tears and she would run forward to spontaneously embrace them. She would then exclaim in a loud voice, "O my God! I want to hug you and squeeze you in my arms."

One young woman had this recollection of Mona at age 11:

The first time I met Mona, it was in their apartment on the fifth floor of a building in downtown Shiraz. The family was living in a two bedroom apartment. I do not know why and how I was attracted to that simple room, Mona's room. The decoration of the room was as simple as possible, and the only thing that caught one's eye, was a large wall decoration made by Mona from the Bahá'í writings. It clearly showed, even at that early age in life, how devoted she was to the Bahá'í Faith.

By the time Mona became a teenager, she was well-known in Shiraz by both young people and adults, both inside and outside the Bahá'í community. She was growing into a lovely young woman, with long brown hair and beautiful green eyes. She also continued her excellent scholarship, entering advanced Bahá'í classes with students who were often much older. She did well, however, and was one of the best at memorizing many prayers and passages from the Bahá'í writings. Mona's love for the Faith ran so deep that she would often awake in the middle of the night to pray and meditate.

MONA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HER FATHER

While Mona's father deeply loved his whole family, he had a special love for Mona and would say, "Mona is the very child I have asked the Blessed Beauty [3] to give me." The two developed a deep bond and grew together as Bahá'ís. In 1981, Mr. Mahmudnizhad was appointed as an Auxiliary Board Member [4] for the Province of Pars, and was also elected Secretary of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Shiraz. He was one of the most popular teachers in the Bahá'í school. Those who knew them closely said that Mona would often look deeply into her father's eyes in an almost meditative state and communicate with him silently. He was known as a man who was always smiling.

Mr. Mahmudnizhad's humility and dedication to service can be seen from the following story. When the family first moved to Shiraz, they considered it a dream come true. In Tabriz, they had prayed fervently that they would be able to visit the House of The Bab, the most holy place for Bahá'ís in Iran, and were thrilled that they would be living in the same city. But even when they were finally living in Shiraz, however, Mr. Mahmudnizhad still did not feel that he had earned the right to visit the House of The Bab on his own and told his family, "I shall not visit the Blessed House of The Bab unless he calls me himself."

One day Mr. Mahmudnizhad received a phone call and was asked to go to a certain address to repair a television set. The television, as it turned out, belonged to the mother of the caretaker of The Bab's House. After doing the work, Mr. Mahmudnizhad was ready to leave when the woman said, "Don't you want to visit the Blessed House? There is nobody there and I will let you in."

Thus, in this unexpected way, Mr. Mahmudnizhad had his prayer answered. He had been summoned to the House of The Bab to provide a service for the caretaker's family. Later he told his family that it was the happiest day of his life. He walked around the yard several times and then up and down the stairs, kissing the edge of each step; finally, he entered the room where The Bab had first

declared his mission, bowed his forehead to the ground, and immersed in spiritual ecstasy. Every time he talked about this visit with family or friends, his eyes would fill with tears.

THE CRISIS IN IRAN

Because of the rise to power of the Islamic clergy, the Islamic Revolution inaugurated a new period of severe repression of the Bahá'í Faith. The "mullahs", as the clergy are called, had branded the Bahá'ís as "unclean infidels" at the earliest beginnings of the religion in 1844 and had continued to incite popular prejudice against them under all regimes. Over twenty thousand Bahá'ís had been put to death, often after barbaric and public torture, throughout the 19th century and in sporadic pogroms as recently as 1955 and 1963, when Bahá'ís were murdered and Bahá'í centres destroyed by the combined forces of the clergy and the late Shah's army.

From the moment of the Bab's claim to have brought a new religion which fulfilled Islam, they denied even the possibility of another message from God after Muhammad, whom they regard as the "final prophet". In addition, the fanatical Muslim clergy deeply resent and fear the modern, scientifically-minded social teachings of the new faith, such as the equality of men and women, its emphasis on education, its world-minded attitudes, and especially the fact that it stresses the capacity of each individual man or woman to study and recognize spiritual truths for themselves, without the intervention of a clergy.

In Shiraz, the persecutions were particularly severe. In 1978, mobs vandalized the House of The Bab and also set fire to the homes of several hundred Bahá'ís. The events had a profound effect on both Mona and her father. On November 19, 1981, Mona and her father visited the House of the Bab, now almost completely destroyed, for the last time. Her mother relates that when she returned from the visit, she asked for her permission to walk into the house, "just this once", with her shoes on, since they were covered with the dust of the Bab's House. She told her, crying, that she wanted to write something about her experience. She went into her room and wrote a long, poetic essay.

As the crisis for the Bahá'ís worsened, Mona had many disturbing thoughts of the destiny that God might have in store for her father and for herself. She had a dream in which both she and her father were killed for their faith. After the dream, Mona added another virtue to those she already possessed -- fearlessness. As the persecutions worsened, she talked and wrote to her friends about the need for courage in the face of their fundamentalist persecutors, showing no fear of death. Her father reacted in the same way. When the Islamic authorities banned public Bahá'í meetings, he, his wife and Mona would continue to visit their Bahá'í friend in their homes, although they were constantly watched and harrassed.

REACHING MATURITY

Mona's life changed on September 10, 1980, when she turned 15, the age of

spiritual maturity in the Bahá'í teachings. [5] Mona had already begun following in her father's footsteps as a Bahá'í teacher and wanted to teach young children, for whom she had a special love. A year earlier, she had applied to the Bahá'í Education Committee to be named to one of their sub-committees, but was refused because she was not yet 15 and not considered old enough for this service. When she received the news, she burst into tears.

When she turned 15, she considered it her true first birthday and immediately registered as a Bahá'í youth and reapplied to the Education Committee. This time she was assigned to the Children's Education Committee and began teaching Bahá'í children's classes, which included the study of the great religions, developing spiritual qualities, encouraging the children to put their talents and education to the service of their fellow man and especially learning to appreciate the oneness and diversity of the human family.

Her service to the Faith accelerated greatly and actually began causing her problems. She spent so much time on Bahá'í activities that she was having difficulties completing her school assignments. At one point, the pressure was so great that she considered resigning from her Bahá'í activities, but could not do it. One day, when she was particularly tired, she asked her father to help her. He read her a passage from the Holy Writings that said, "The prophets of old wish they were alive in this day so that they may accomplish a service." Mona immediately stopped talking about her problems and decided that she would carry out her duties to the best of her ability. She even began walking to school instead of riding a bus and saved enough pocket money to buy coloured crayons, booklets and pencils, which she would give out as prizes to the students during Bahá'í children's class. She also wrote prayers in the booklets and would give them to the children to memorize.

PERSECUTIONS AT SCHOOL

The persecution of the Bahá'ís extended to every level of society. While the Islamic authorities tended at first to single out only the more prominent members of the Faith for arrest and execution, cancellation of pensions, freezing of bank accounts and dismissal from employment, they extended their repressions even to the school level by expelling numerous Bahá'í children, especially those attending high school and university. They were only to be allowed to continue their studies if they denied being Bahá'ís. Bahá'í children, even when they were still allowed to stay in school, were forced to sit apart at the back of their classrooms, as "unclean infidels" and were not allowed to touch the other children. In one instance a Bahá'í child was forced to wash the brick floor of his classroom and sent home with bleeding hands, because he had refused to recant his Faith.

In Shiraz, a number of Bahá'í children had been expelled and Mona expected that her expulsion would come soon as well. But rather than fear it, she looked forward to it, since she would then be able to spend all her efforts for the Faith. When one of her friends was expelled, she said, "Good for you. Now you can study the Bahá'í books one year longer. Pray that I will also be

expelled."

In the fall of 1981 (her second year of High School), she enrolled in a course on religious literature. Up to that point, like most Bahá'ís in Iran, her freedom to mention her Faith had always been strictly curtailed and was limited to brief and private responses to the questions of fellow students about the symbol on the stone in the ring she wore. However, when the literature teacher assigned the students a paper on the topic: "the fruit of Islam is freedom of conscience and liberty, whoever has a taste for it is benefitted," Mona poured out her frustrations at being silenced in the poignant essay which follows.

While the paper Mona wrote is still in the hands of school authorities, the notes that she used to write the paper have been recovered:

'Freedom' is the most brilliant word among the radiant words existing in the world. Man has always been and will ever be asking for liberty. Why, then, has he been deprived of liberty? Why from the beginning of man's life has there been no freedom? Always, there have been powerful and unjust individuals who for the sake of their own interests have resorted to all kinds of oppression and tyranny...

Why don't you let me be free to express our goals in this community; to say who I am and what I want, and to reveal my religion to others? Why don't you give me freedom of speech so that I may write for publication or talk on radio and television about my ideas? Yes, liberty is a Divine gift, and this gift is for us also, but you don't let us have it. Why don't you let me speak freely as a Bahá'í individual? Why don't you want to know that a new religion has been revealed; that anew radiant star has risen? Why don't you push aside that thick veil from your eyes?

Perhaps you don't really think that I should have freedom. God has granted this freedom to man. You, his servant, cannot take it from me. God has given me freedom of speech. Therefore, I cry out and say, "His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh is the Truth!" God has given me freedom of speech. Therefore, in clear words, I write, "Bahá'u'lláh is the One whom God has made manifest! He is the founder of the Bahá'í religion and His Book is the Mother of Books..."

The frank openness of her paper caused a furor at the school. The principal, who was considered a fanatical Muslim, called Mona to his office and warned her that she no longer had the right to mention the Bahá'í religion while on school grounds, a prohibition which Mona obeyed.

THE DREAM ABOUT BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

Ten months before she was killed, Mona had another extraordinary dream which was later related by family and friends. Following is the version transcribed from her diary.

She had been saying prayers with a small group of friends for several hours. After they left her home, she was so moved by the prayers that she went into the living room and sat down in front of a photograph of 'Abdu'l-Bahá [6],

meditated quietly and then fell asleep.

In her dream, she saw Abdu'l-Bahá's chair and desk, with a vase on it, as in the picture before her. She was very happy and said: "How happy I am to see your desk and chair." At the same moment she saw Bahá'u'lláh entering the room. The Blessed Beauty went out into an adjoining chamber and brought out a box containing a beautiful red cape. He unwrapped it in front of her, saying, "This is the cape of martyrdom in my path. Do you accept it?"

Mona was speechless with happiness. Finally, she said, "Whatever pleases you..."

Bahá'u'lláh put the cape back in the box and returned to the adjoining room bringing back with him a second box, containing a black cape which he unwrapped and said:

"This black cape symbolizes sorrow in my path. Do you accept it?" Mona replied, "How beautiful are the tears shed in thy path."

He put the cape back in the box and again returned to the other room, emerging with yet a third box containing an elaborately beaded blue cape of the same design as the others.

Without a word of hesitation, he placed the cape around her shoulders, and said: "This is the cape of service." Then he seated himself in the chair and said to Mona: "Come and take a picture with me!"

Mona was breathless with astonishment at the bounties being showered on her and could hardly walk. She looked up and saw a man sitting behind an old-fashioned camera covered by a cloth. Bahá'u'lláh repeated his instruction but Mona could not move. .

Then Bahá'u'lláh took her arm, saying, "Mehdi, take our picture." And he took a picture of them together. The flash of the camera wakened her abruptly and she pleaded tearfully to be able to finish her dream and then fell asleep again. Bahá'u'lláh had left the room. Only the photographer remained, carrying the tripod and camera on his shoulder as if to leave. He turned around and asked Mona to convey his love to his children. But Mona could not tell which "Mehdi" he was since there were many people by that name in the long history of the Faith and in her own community. But still he looked familiar to her. "Mehdi" was busily tying his shoes and noticed that Mona did not recognize him. As he was leaving the room he turned and said, "I am Medhi Anvari." Mona instantly recognized him as one of the Bahá'ís of Shiraz who had previously been killed. [7]

Beginning at the age of 13, Mona had begun to dream and write about her father's death in a startling way. Some of these writings are now preserved among her papers.

THE ARREST OF MONA AND HER FATHER

The months following Mona's dream of the capes were tense for the Bahá'í

community. Arrests and executions of Bahá'ís were taking place all over the country. In Shiraz, the Public Prosecutor had initiated mass arrests in late October 1982. While it was almost a foregone conclusion that Mona's father would be arrested because of his service on the Local Spiritual Assembly and the Auxiliary Board, few suspected that Mona would also be singled out.

The arrest occurred at 7:30 pm on October 23, 1982. Mona was at home with her parents. Her sister, Taraneh, was now married and no longer living with her.. " family. When the door bell rang, Mona was studying for a test she had in ~ English, her father was writing some letters in a notebook and her mother was doing housework. Her father opened the door and four armed revolutionary guards demanded entry. The Guards said that they were appointed by the Public Prosecutor of Shiraz to inspect the Mahmudnizhad household.

Before the search began, Mona asked to put on her chador (Islamic head covering) and was escorted to her room so that she could retrieve it. Her father asked if her mother could put on a jacket. Then the three members of the family were ordered to sit in their living room, with Mona and her mother flanking their father. One Guard held a gun on the Mahmudnizhads, while the others meticulously searched and ransacked their rooms.

At one point, Mona's mother whispered to her father, "What shall I do. They are going to arrest you." Her father replied, "Say the prayer "Remover of Difficulties" to yourself and turn to Abdu'l-Bahá." He then fixed his eyes on the picture of Abdu'l-Bahá in front of them. Mona was the picture of calm and continued to study her English lesson. At one point, she even asked her father a question, but the Guard ordered her to be quiet.

When the search ended, Mona's mother became terribly upset when the Guards ordered both Mona and her father to come with them. She said, "I can understand that you would want to take my husband with you, but why do you want to take Mona. She is only a child." According to one account, one of the Guards replied, "Do not call her a child. You should call her a little Bahá'í teacher. Look at this poem. It is not the work of a child. It could set the world on fire. Someday she will be a great Bahá'í teacher."

The guards continued to heap abuse on both Mona and her father, causing her mother great anguish. At one point her father told her not to be worried, that he considered the guards to be his children and Mona their sister, that the guards had been assigned by God to come to their house and take them away together. Mona reassured her mother, saying, "Why do you beg these people? What offense have I committed. Have I been a bad girl? Do we have smuggled goods in the house? They arrest me just because I believe in Bahá'u'lláh. Mother, this is not going to prison, it is going to Heaven. This is not falling into a pit, it is rising to the moon."

When the Guards took Mona and her father, they also confiscated all of their papers and some cassette tapes of Mona's chanting.

IMPRISONMENT

While they did not know it at the time, Mona and her father were among the first of 40 Bahá'ís in Shiraz, including six women, who were arrested that night or during the next few days. After the arrest, both were blindfolded, taken to Seppah prison and then led to separate quarters. Mona was given a piece of paper to hold [8] and led down a long corridor and then into a large room where the blindfold was removed. Since it was around midnight, the room was dark.

More than 40 women were in the room at the same time, Mona later recounted. As her eyes adjusted to the light, she could see windows in the room covered with metal bars. The room was also dank and had poor ventilation. Since Mona was the first Bahá'í woman to reach the prison, she was all alone and knew no one in the room. She was met by the woman-in-charge, who asked her crime. Mona replied that her crime was being a Bahá'í. The woman then issued her two blankets and showed her to a space where she could sleep. The room was so crowded, however, that everyone had to sleep on their sides.

Here is Mona's account, as told to a fellow Bahá'í prisoner, of what happened next:

I didn't know anybody and had no news about my father. I was saying prayers in my heart and I was praising God because I had entered his Court. My mother's worried face was in my mind and I was praying for her steadfastness and for that of my father as well. I decided to go to sleep like the others and wait to see what the Blessed Beauty had in store for me.

I lay down and was deep in thought when suddenly the door opened and a lady was brought in. They guided her in just as they had done with me and because they found out she was a Bahá'í, they brought her near me. A few minutes later, they brought another lady into Our cell. She suffered from severe headaches, and requested her medicine, but no one paid any attention to her. She was Mrs. Tuba Za'irpour. [9] I didn't recognize her in the dark, but her voice was very familiar to me. Suddenly Mrs. Za'irpour said, "Mona, is that you? What are you doing here? They have arrested you as well? O My God!"

Mona later recounted that she was greatly comforted when she recognized Mrs. Za'irpour .

Even though Mona was separated from her family and home, she soon found a new family in jail. All the older ladies, she said, were her mothers and aunts and the younger ones her sisters and cousins. Despite the fact that she was the youngest in prison, it was Mona who most frequently reassured the other women and helped them to be steadfast during their periods of imprisonment and interrogation.

The jail itself was terribly overcrowded, with not enough facilities to meet basic needs. There were only two showers for the 80 or 90 women in the prison. On the first day, a fellow Bahá'í prisoner described how they were given one plate of soup to be shared by three women, and eaten with their hands. Worse than any physical restriction or deprivation, however, was the fact that the

guards would not allow the Bahá'ís to pray.

THE FIRST FEW DAYS IN PRISON

The first few days in prison were worse for the families outside than for the prisoners themselves, who were photographed on their second day of arrest, but otherwise left alone. The families, however, were given no word about the fate of any of the prisoners and were refused permission to visit them. Every day Mona's mother and sister went to the prison to request permission to see Mona and her father for just a few minutes. They were insulted and taunted by the prison authorities, but they did not give up and encouraged other Bahá'ís with family members who had been arrested to do the same. Taraneh said, "We should be prepared for everything and should not give up. We should be so strong that even if at the very moment they deliver us the bodies of our loved ones, we should keep smiling and with this attitude make them feel how weak they are."

After an entire week of being refused permission, Mona's mother finally lost control. She recounts, "I was sitting by my window. I had no news about my heavenly daughter, Mona. Many times I had gone to Seppah, but they never gave me permission to visit. When I saw people walking in the streets so freely ... tears started running down my face and with a loud voice, I prayed, 'O Blessed Beauty, I want my child. I want Mona back from you. I have no news of her. O Blessed Beauty, I want my child.' I looked up in the sky and said, 'All birds are free. My little bird is in prison.' I spent the day in tears and grieving."

On the next day, October 31, Mona's mother was granted permission to visit Mona, although not her father, who was believed to have undergone such severe torture that the authorities were afraid to let anyone see him. Mona's mother and sister were taken to the visiting room at Seppah about one o'clock in the afternoon and made to wait for six hours before they brought Mona and the other Bahá'í women prisoners to an adjacent room separated by a thick glass wall, through which they could only motion to each other .

"We were standing on the other side of the glass," Mona's mother said. "I was looking at them and crying. Mona indicated in motions that I shouldn't cry. Quickly, I wiped my tears away. I couldn't tell her, my beautiful bird, that my tears were from the joy of seeing her."

THE INTERROGATIONS AT SEPPAH PRISON

Each Bahá'í arrested is subjected to a four-stage interrogation process that leads either to release or execution. The first stage consists of a series of formal interrogations by an Islamic judge appointed by the Public Prosecutor. These take place inside the prison. The interrogations, which last for many hours, are usually held with a number of the prisoners present, although some are also held with each prisoner alone. The revolutionary guards are usually masked and the prisoners blind-folded, and made to sit facing a wall. At each stage the victim is verbally abused, asked the same questions over and over again, and often asked to write down the answers since the majority of the

revolutionary guards and many of the interrogating judges are illiterate, while their Bahá'í victims are often well-educated. the interrogators demand to know the names, addresses and telephone numbers of all the Bahá'ís in a given city, then in all of Iran, then around the world. [10] At each stage the prisoner is asked to deny their Bahá'í beliefs and become a Muslim.

At one tense moment, the Mulla told Mona, "If you only say you are not a Bahá'í, you and your father will be freed in no time. But if you continue being so obstinate, I will see to your being executed myself." Mona replied, "I am a Bahá'í and I will never deny this fact."

The next stage is an interrogation at the Islamic Revolutionary Court, which is carried out by the Assistant to the Public Prosecutor. This interrogation may also take many hours, but is normally completed in one day. The final interrogation takes place in front of an Islamic Revolutionary Judge, and usually lasts only a short time, sometimes less than an hour .

After the three interrogation stages, there is no set time before a "sentence" is handed down. It can take weeks, months or longer. In all interrogations and before any Bahá'í is executed, however, he or she is given numerous opportunities, usually under great physical and mental anguish, to recant.

The Bahá'ís arrested in Shiraz were first taken to Seppah prison where they underwent the first stage of the interrogation process, which began late in the first week of their arrest. When Mona was taken for what she thought was her first interrogation session, she was led instead to the basement to see her father briefly while he was being tortured. He told her to answer all of their questions honestly and to explain clearly what the Bahá'í religion teaches. She was then taken back to her cell.

The next morning, her sixth in prison, Mona's interrogations began in earnest. Mona did not like to talk much about the time she spent in Seppah prison, nor about her interrogations. She felt this would bring her "down to the world of accusations, ugly words and improper questions." When Mona saw her mother and sister for the first time after being imprisoned, she had been interrogated from one o'clock in the afternoon until three o'clock in the morning, with only a break to see her family at 7 in the evening. This is her own account of her first session, as told to a fellow prisoner:

The next day my interrogation sessions started. Questions were as follows: What is your religion? What do you believe in? Were you born in a Bahá'í family? Date and place of birth. Name of the school you are studying at. Which grade? Have you ever taught in a Bahá'í class? When did you declare and who was present at that session? Names of the members of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Shiraz and the members of the Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly. What activities do you do as a Bahá'í? Names of the members of the Bahá'í committees in Shiraz. Write about the Bahá'í administration. How many members of the Universal House of Justice [11] are Persian and how many are not? What nationalities are they? Names of all the prominent international Bahá'í administrators in the world. Have you ever been on pilgrimage? How much have

you donated to the Fund? Who was the chairperson of the feast and where was it held? Who did you vote for this year? Have your parents been members of the Local Spiritual Assembly? The name of the Bahá'ís you know. Are you willing to recant?

I answered all the questions very frankly and my answer to the last question was, "I am a Bahá'í and I will never recant." The interrogator said, "If you refuse to recant your Faith, we will execute you." And I told him that I would rather be killed than recant the Faith I believe in.

Mona did say that her sessions would normally begin around 10 am and last till 4 am the next morning. She added that by refusing to let her sleep, the authorities believed that she would weaken and recant. "During all the endless hours," she said, "I was praying and begging Bahá'u'lláh to give me the strength to remain steadfast all during this nightmare. This interrogation went on for several days. One day, the Mulla told me to write all the details of my life, where I was born and raised and the names of the schools I have studied in, as well as my activities as a Bahá'í, all of which I again described very frankly."

At various times, prisoners were interrogated verbally and required to stand blindfolded for hours on end while they answered. At others, the prisoners were seated facing a wall and handed a set of written questions. The sessions lasted for roughly a week, with the prisoners kept under a constant barrage of questioning. While the main interrogator was usually the Islamic judge or "mulla", he was at times accompanied by others. Often, because they were blindfolded, the prisoners would not know how many people were in the room.

All of the Bahá'í women were thus interrogated, and several were severely beaten as well. These beatings took place separately from the interrogations, usually in the basement of the prison. The victim is tied to a specially designed table and then beaten on the soles of the bare feet with a rod or a piece of wire cable, the traditional Islamic punishment called the "bastinado". The prisoner is given a few lashes, allowed to regain sensitivity, and whipped again and again until the punishment is finished or the prisoner passes out. When they regain consciousness, the beating resumes.

The victims are then made to walk on their bleeding feet and often additionally tortured by being taunted with a glass of water kept just out of reach.

On another occasion, one of her early dreams about martyrdom came true. In the dream, she had to face several spiteful men who asked her about The Seven Valleys [12]. At one of her interrogation sessions, the Mulla asked her about Bahá'u'lláh's writings on The Seven Valleys, to which she gave a detailed reply, but was ignored. The Mulla then asked her to say a prayer. She asked him if he really wanted her to do so and he replied sarcastically, "Yes." Mona then folded her arms, closed her eyes and started the prayer, but was cut off by snide laughter from the Mulla.

TRANSFER TO ADELABAD PRISON

Mona was in Seppah prison for a total of 38 days, and was intensively interrogated for roughly one week during that time. On November 29, 1982, she and five other Bahá'í women were transferred to Adelabad prison, also in Shiraz. At the time, the Islamic authorities arrested another 50 Bahá'ís, including 11 women, who were subjected to the same interrogation, but quickly transferred to Adelabad to join the growing number of Bahá'ís there.

Adelabad prison was considerably different from Seppah and much dirtier. There were three tiers of prison cells, with each broken down into small units. The Bahá'ís were sent to the third floor, with three assigned to one cell. There was often only one bed per cell, which forced two of the women to sleep on the floor. While the Bahá'í women were kept in cells together, they were allowed to congregate with the other female prisoners on the same floor, including a mix of political prisoners and those arrested for various identifiable crimes. A number of these women were addicts and prostitutes.

Characteristically, the authorities did not tell any of the families of the transfer. Mona's family found out when they came for a visit at Seppah prison about a week later and quickly rushed over to Adelabad. Mona's mother was greatly disturbed to see that Mona had become quite sick with a cold. Mona had tears in her eyes, but did not cry. She reassured her, saying, "It's very comfortable here. In comparison with Seppah, this prison is a palace. They serve us breakfast, lunch and dinner." She added that she had written them a letter, which they received a few days later.

"In the name of God, my dear ones and my mother who is dearer to me than my life and my kind sister. What can I say and write about God's bounty, which is so great and encompasses all created things, even this poor handmaiden who is not worthy of serving at his threshold. Dearly beloved of my heart and soul, pray for us so in all conditions we will be content. Then we ask you not to be overtaken with sorrow and to pray for us because we are in need of your prayers ...

Mona was also thinking of her father. She asked her mother, during one of her visits with her sister, to bring him some extra blankets to protect him from catching cold. Mona's thoughts were usually about God or her fellow prisoners, but rarely about herself.

THE SECOND STAGE OF INTERROGATION

During the second stage of Mona's interrogation she was awakened at four o'clock in the morning and transferred an hour later by automobile to the place of interrogation. The session lasted most of the day. She was asked the same questions that she had been asked over and over again at Seppah about her beliefs.

"I told them that I believed in God and all his messengers who had revealed a Holy Book and that we consider them all to be Messengers of God. The Assistant to the Public Prosecutor said, 'You are accused of being a member of the Zionist movement, who are spies.' In reply, I told him that Bahá'ís have

nothing to do with politics. On the other hand, the state of Israel was founded only 32 years ago, while the Bahá'í Faith was founded 139 years ago. We only have spiritual organizations which have nothing to do with politics. He said, 'There remains only one way for you, you should either recant the Faith or you will be executed.' I said I would rather be executed."

THE THIRD STAGE OF INTERROGATION

The final formal interrogation took place a few days later. Again, Mona was taken away at 5 am. This time she met with the Islamic Revolutionary Judge, who handled all of the Bahá'í cases in Shiraz. While the interrogation was the shortest that she underwent, in many ways it was the most dramatic.

The Judge, after insulting her a long time, told her that her parents had deceived and misled her and accused her of following them without being aware of what she was doing. She replied,

"Although I was born in a Bahá'í family, according to Bahá'í principles, we have to search for the truth ourselves rather than imitate our family's ideas and that is exactly what I have done. You have many of our Bahá'í books here and you could read them and find this out for yourself. They never insisted on my becoming a Bahá'í or accepting their ideas. If Your Honour insists that I recant my Faith, I should assure you that I will never do that and that I am ready to be executed."

The Judge was shocked at that point and looked at her angrily, saying, "You are just a child. How could you possibly know the real meaning of the word Faith?" Mona replied,

"What more proof do you need than that I was dragged out of school and put in jail and now, for many months, have endured all these interrogations for the sake of my religion. What else but my Faith could give me the strength and power to stand here in front of you and answer your Questions."

Then the Judge asked her to pray and she replied, "I cannot do that." The judge asked her, "What do you mean?" and Mona pointed out, "You would have to sit respectfully, with your hands folded on your chest before I would recite a prayer ." At first, the Judge refused, but after awhile, as though spellbound by her spiritual character, he complied with her wish and she recited the prayer:

"O God, refresh and gladden my spirit. Purify my heart. Illumine my powers. I lay all my affairs in Thy hand. Though art My Guide and My Refuge. I will no longer be sorrowful and grieved. I will be a happy and joyful being. O God, I will no longer be full of anxiety, nor will I let trouble harass me. I will not dwell on the unpleasant things of life.

"O God, Thou art more friend to me than I am to myself. I dedicate myself to Thee, O Lord."

When Mona had finished reciting the prayer the puzzled Judge asked her , "Why did you not chant it?" To which Mona replied, "I only chant from my heart and

when I am alone, not in front of you." The Judge was deeply moved and said, "In the night when you and your father were arrested, the revolutionary guards brought back lots of tapes of your chanting. You are accused of misleading youth with your beautiful voice and chanting. Now I am sure about the charges against you." Mona replied, "Your Honour, is chanting, praying and repeating the verses of God a crime?"

He said, "Child, what is wrong with Islam that you have become a Bahá'í?" She explained, "The foundation of all religions are one, but according to the circumstances, after some period of time anew prophet is assigned by God to guide mankind. But if you are trying to force me to become a Muslim, I should say that nothing is wrong with Islam. But its followers do not know anything but killing and terrorism, examples of which can be observed every day in this very prison. This is the reason why I have decided to become a Bahá'í."

The Judge said, "We are acting according to our Holy Book the Quran."

Her fellow prisoners were all astonished and kept asking how she dared to answer the Judge like that. "How dare you tell them all that so openly?" someone asked.

Mona's open, forthright answers were a topic of conversation among the prisoners for a long time.

THE ARREST OF MONA'S MOTHER

In mid-January, shortly after Mona's third interrogation, Mona's mother was contacted and told that Mona was considered not guilty and would be released on bail, provided that the Mahmudnizhad's could raise bail money.

Mona's bail was set initially at about \$35,000. Mrs. Mahmudnizhad tried to get the Court to accept a mortgage on the small apartment that the family owned in Shiraz, but that was not accepted because the family did not have a clear title. Mona was not released. The presiding judge then raised Mona's bail to about \$88,000. But after Mrs. Mahmudnizhad had turned the title over to the authorities, Mona was still not released. The authorities took the property anyway and then arrested Mrs. Mahmudnizhad when she came to the prison with the documents for Mona's presumed release.

While the Islamic authorities did release six Bahá'í prisoners, Mona and 14 others remained in jail. Her mother remained in jail with them until a week before Mona was executed.

Mona's mother was arrested on a Saturday, the same day that visitors were allowed at Adelabad. Mona's sister was very upset at the arrest of her mother and went to the prison alone. Mona immediately asked where her mother was, not believing that she would miss a visit. When told that her mother had been arrested, Mona did not say a word.

When Mrs. Mahmudnizhad arrived, Mona insisted that all the other prisoners be allowed to greet her first. Mona then took her in her arms and said, "Mother, welcome, welcome to your new home. Come, come! I'll show you your new home."

Mona and her mother were assigned to the same cell for that night. Mrs. Mahmudnizhad slept on the bed, while Mona and her cellmate, Tahirih Siyavushi, one of the nine women later hanged with Mona, slept on the floor .

Before Mona's mother could fall asleep, Mona took her hand and whispered,

"You have to adjust to the situation here and the monotonous atmosphere. Say prayers often. Cry only when you are alone, and only out of love for the Blessed Beauty. Do not ever cry out of grief because Bahá'u'lláh doesn't like that. Always laugh and be happy so you will give support to the other prisoners."

"There is something else I want to ask of you and that is not to kiss me or show more love to me than you do to the other prisoners. I don't want them to think that Mona's mother is by her side and that they are alone here. You should be more mother to them than you are to me. It is not important if you don't have much time for me or don't walk with me. Try to take care of the other prisoners first."

Mona's mother obeyed the request. Until the day of her release, she never again kissed her daughter and spent less time with her than she did with the other prisoners.

LAST VISIT WITH MONA'S FATHER

About 10 days after Mona's mother was imprisoned, the Bahá'í prisoners were startled to hear an announcement calling all "Bahá'í sisters" to an area on the roof of the prison. It was the first time that the word "Bahá'í" had ever spoken over the intercom. When the women reached the area, all the Bahá'í men who were being held in the prison were there too. The Mahmudnizhad family, father, mother and daughter, were together in prison for the first and last time.

It was a precious, if brief, moment for the Bahá'í prisoners. Those who had other family members in the prison sat hand in hand, while others sat in small groups and whispered together, sharing stories and gaining strength from one another. The Mahmudnizhads sat together and had their last family conference.

Mona's mother was very frank and said to Mona, "They'll execute your father." Mona replied, "I know, but I can take it." Her father then said, "Yes, these days of separation will be over soon. Do you remember earlier, every time we moved, I would always go first and prepare a home and then bring you to the house like a lady. Now it is the same way, I'll go ahead and prepare a home for you in the spiritual kingdom and prepare to welcome you there."

After that Mona and her father spoke little, although they continued communicating with their eyes, as they had done almost all of their lives. Mona's mother later recounted the moment in this way:

"I noticed that Mona got up and kissed her father's eyes several times. She seemed to read heavenly secrets from his eyes. They didn't need to communicate verbally because they could communicate perfectly with their eyes. Then he

asked about how our friends and relatives were. Finally, our time was over. I never saw Mona's father again until exactly one month later, on March 12, 1983, after they executed him along with two other Bahá'ís, Mr. Rahmat'u'llah Vafa'i and Mrs. Tuba Za'irpour.

TARANEH'S LAST VISIT WITH HER FATHER

Mona's sister Taraneh was the only member of the family who was not imprisoned. On Wednesdays she would visit her father and on Saturdays her mother and sister. This was a terrible period for her --the first time in her life that she was separated from everyone in her family. She cried bitterly that first night from the pain of separation from her entire family. She later recounted:

"The night they imprisoned my mother was a bitter night for me. I could not believe that my life could suddenly become so empty. I kept telling myself that this was nothing compared to what Bahá'u'lláh had to endure --all the imprisonments, the chains in the Siyyah Chal, being away from his family, exile, the martyrdom of his son, the onslaught of his enemies. Meanwhile, he comforted all of the devoted and bereaved friends and gave us all those tablets and writings, all those life-giving words.

"O my, how ignorant I was and now I have discovered his limitless favour. "O Blessed Beauty," I prayed, "just give me the steadfastness to endure this separation from my loved ones."

On the first Wednesday in March, after her mother had been in prison for about a month, Mona's father said to her sister, during one of their visits, "Tell your mother that in life we have always shared our misery and happiness. Now that we have to burn in separation, it will be a test of our love for God and for one another ."

She then asked him, "Father, why is it that out of the four people in our family, three are so beloved by God and I am outcast from the sight of God. What sin have I done that I am not worthy enough to go to prison?" He replied, "Do you think that you are free? All of you who are out of prison are still prisoners in a larger prison. With all the restrictions on your life, you too are in prison. Besides, a lover is never free, but is a prisoner of love."

"Father," she asked, "are you saying that I should be happy and sure?" With great conviction, he replied, "Be confident and happy."

Four days later, Yad'u'llah Mahmuznihad was hanged. Mona's sister heard the news at 10 am that morning from her husband, who was crying. She later recalled:

"After hearing of this tragedy my whole body started trembling and I began shouting, 'O Blessed Beauty! Father, where are you now?' My one-year-old daughter woke up from the noises we were making and started to cry as well. All of a sudden, I calmed down and said, 'Father, you used to say that the spirit of the martyrs always makes the tolerance of calamity easier for those who are left behind. They give assistance and intercede on our behalf. Where is that

assistance?' I swear that at that moment such tranquility overwhelmed me as I have never experienced. I decided to go and, if possible, visit the bodies of the three beloved martyrs and, with great difficulty, succeeded in doing so. Of course, they were no longer in their bodies. I wanted to kiss the mark on my father's neck that had been left by the rope, but I had neither the ability nor the permission to get closer to his body.

One day, while she was in prison, Mona awoke and refused food and drink for 30 hours, despite the entreaties of her mother and fellow prisoners. Later it was learned that it was on that day that her father had been executed. When Mona did hear the news formally, all she said was, "I know, I know. What a great bounty for him."

Yadu'llah Mahmudnizhad
Mona's Father
Executed March 12, 1983

ANECDOTES FROM ADELABAD PRISON

Mona and the other prisoners remained in jail for three more months. One fellow prisoner wrote about Mona as follows:

"Mona was a perfect human being. She was fully practising the Bahá'í principles. She was a living example of encouragement and steadfastness. She was what a Bahá'í youth is supposed to be. During the days we spent in jail together, all day long, she would pray. Her behaviour was like a grown up, a noble person, although she was just an innocent child. I remember the days when she used to come to my cell, hold her chin in her hands and stare at the walls, deep in thought. That was when I would ask her to chant."

One day, according to another prisoner, one of other women in the prison returned from her interrogation session at Seppah prison, bringing back with her some very small green plums. She gave one of them to Mrs. Nusrat Yalda'i [13], one of the Bahá'í prisoners and said, "I know you like these, but I don't have any more to give everybody. Eat this without telling anyone else." Mrs. Yalda'i didn't have the heart to eat it herself and gave it to another prisoner who, in turn, gave it to Mrs. Mahmudnizhad, sitting next to her .

Moments later Mona passed by their cell and Mona's mother gave her the tiny plum. She took it and in a few minutes returned with a small tray. She had cut out the seeds from the plum and cut the fruit into seventeen tiny pieces -- one for each of her friends in the cell block. She had also decorated the corner of the tray with knives and forks. She called all the prisoners and they sat around and each had a piece. Everyone was delighted and laughed for much of the day.

Mona also became friendly with many of the prisoners who were not Bahá'ís. At their request, she would speak with them and quietly sing them songs about the Faith, especially in moments of distress. However, she had to be very careful because she didn't want to get them into trouble by talking about the Faith. After awhile, a number of them would seek Mona out to ask her questions or to

teach them songs. Mona also continued writing poetry, another of her loves, and had developed a sizeable collection. All of the Bahá'í women prisoners were mentioned. One day, however, the prison authorities came to inspect the cells and Mona, fearing that they would cause problems for everyone, tore them up before she or anyone else could memorize them.

SACRIFICING 100,000 LIVES

After she had been in prison for a time, Mona's mother shared a confidence with her:

"Gradually, I had reached a strange state in which I could feel that true submission is possible, while at the same time I was very depressed. I started talking to Mona about my state of being. Suddenly, I told her fearfully, 'I don't think they will release you and with all the things that are happening if they don't execute you, they'll keep you in prison for at least 15 to 20 years, and when they release you, you'll be 35 or 40 years old. How will I stand it?'

"Mona replied, 'Mother, If I knew that during each year I spend in prison only a few people become Bahá'ís, I would wish that I could spend a hundred thousand years in prison.'

"And if I knew that because of my execution, all the youth of the world would arise, join hands in service to humanity, become selfless, teach the world about Bahá'í ideals and try to move the world, I would beg Bahá'u'lláh to give me 100,000 lives to sacrifice in his path.'

Her mother wrote: "I felt so small before the greatness of her soul, as if she were the mother and I the child. And now she has accomplished what she wanted with her one life."

MONA'S VISION OF MARTYRDOM

One day, which coincided with a Bahá'í holy day, Mona wanted to say prayers alone instead of joining a small prayer session organized by the Bahá'í prisoners.

Mona, in fact, had been spending increasing amounts of time alone. Often, when the other prisoners would congregate together, Mona would find an empty cell to pray and meditate by herself. On this occasion, however, her mother insisted that Mona join them, so she acquiesced.

Later in the day, she took her mother aside and said, "Mother, I would have wanted very much to spend this last holy day alone, to pray and meditate on my own." Mona's mother didn't understand what she meant and said, "If you had told me, I wouldn't have minded. Why did you agree so quickly?" Mona said, "Because you have the right to ask me to be with you."

Mona then took her aside and said, "Mother, I want to tell you something, please come with me." She led her mother down a corridor that was so narrow that they had to walk in single file. Suddenly Mona stopped, turned around, and said, "Mother, do you know that they are going to execute me?" Her mother

became very upset and refused to listen. She was completely unaware of the spiritual state that Mona had reached and said, "No, dear, you'll be free, " released from the prison. You will have a family and children. I want to see , your children. Please don't think this way."

Mona became upset and said, "I swear to God that I do not wish this for myself and you shouldn't wish it for me. I know that they are going to kill me and I want to tell you what I am going to do when that happens. If you don't let me tell you now, you will regret it in the future. Now, do you want to let me tell you or not?"

Mona's mother was stunned and said, "Yes, tell me." Then Mona faced her and said, "You know mother, at the place where they're going to take us for our execution, we will have to go up and stand on something high where they will put a rope around our necks... Then I'm going to kiss noose and say a prayer ."

Mona then folded her arms across her chest, closed her eyes and with a blissful look on her face said a short prayer. Then she opened her eyes and said, "I'll say that prayer for the happiness and prosperity of all mankind and bid farewell to this mortal world and go to God." Then she looked at her mother, who was staring at her in a state of confusion and bewilderment. All she could say was, "That was a nice story, Mona."

Mona eyes filled with tears. Quietly, she said, "Mother, was is not a story. Why won't you believe me?"

A DREAM FOR STEADFASTNESS

Two days later, Mona and the other nine women were told that they would be given one more chance to recant their Faith or be sentenced to die. It was their last chance to remain alive. That night, Mona had another dream in which she was in prison saying the long obligatory prayer. Abdu'l-Bahá came through the cell door and sat on the bed on which Mona's mother was sleeping. Tahirih Siyavushi was sleeping on the floor. He patted her mother's head and raised His other hand towards Mona, who thought to herself that He might leave if she continued saying her prayer. So she sat on her knees in front of Abdu'l-Bahá and held her hands in His.

'Abdu'l-Bahá asked Mona, "What do you want?" Mona replied, "Steadfastness." 'Abdu'l-Bahá asked again, "What do you want from us?" Mona replied, "Steadfastness for all the friends." Abdu'l-Bahá asked for a third time, "What do you want?" Mona again replied, "Steadfastness." Then Abdu'l-Bahá said twice, "It is granted. It is granted."

THE LAST INTERROGATION

The next morning, June 12, she told all of the Bahá'í prisoners about her dream. Later that morning, two other Bahá'í women were called to their last session of interrogation and pressured to recant. Neither of them did so and were returned to their cells. The Bahá'í women expected that they would be taken out and executed that evening, although no verdict of death had been

handed down.

During the day, everyone chanted the short prayer called the "Remover of Difficulties", which is said in times of great crisis. During the prayer session, Zarrin Muquimi, one of the two who had undergone the last interrogation, spontaneously hugged Mona and said, "O Mona, what a good wish you asked of Abdu'l-Bahá. This would have been a tragedy if they had taken us for execution, but now I'm sure that we will be steadfast. You might have wished for your own and your mother's freedom. You could even have asked for freedom for all of us. But instead you made the most beautiful request of all and Abdu'l-Bahá has granted it."

MONA 'S MOTHER'S RELEASE

On June 13th, Mona's mother was suddenly released. Before she left the prison, all of the women hugged her. Mrs. 'Izzat Ishraqi, whose daughter, Rosita, was soon to be married, asked Mrs. Mahmudnizhad to attend the wedding on her behalf, and asked her to take a red carnation for each of the women prisoners. Then Mona took her in her arms and they kissed for the last time.

"Mother," said Mona, "Just as you were encouraging and assuring to everyone while you were here from now on you should be the same and encourage the friends (outside) to be patient and tolerant." They kissed again and her mother left the prison and went to stay with Taraneh. While there, she told Taraneh about each of the women and visited the mothers who had daughters in prison.

On Thursday, June 16, six Bahá'í men were executed --Abdu'l Hossein Azadi, Bahram Afnan, Jamshid Siyavushi, Koorosh Haghbin, Bahram Yalda'i and Enayat'u'llah Ishraqi. Three of the men were related to the women prisoners. Jamshid Siyavushi was the husband of Tahirih Siyavushi. Enayat'u'llah Ishraqi was the husband of 'Izzat Ishraqi and father of Roya Ishraqi. Bahram Yalda'i was the son of Nusrat Yalda'i.

The next day, the Bahá'í community was filled with activity, with Bahá'ís from all over the city visiting the families of the martyrs. They brought flowers and, while their eyes were filled with tears, they were smiling and wearing colourful clothing, rather than the traditional mourning garb.

LAST VISIT WITH MONA

On Saturday, Mona's mother and sister visited the prison, along with the families of the other women prisoners, who did not yet know about the killings of the 6 men. Only four Bahá'ís at a time were allowed in to visit the prisoners, who were kept behind a glass partition and had to talk through telephone handsets. Mona's family brought her some watermelon, along with a scarf and a new towel.

Taraneh was chosen to tell Mona about the martyrdoms. When she greeted her, she told her that six Bahá'í men had been executed. [14] Mona's eyes filled with tears. She put her hand over her heart and asked who they were. As Taraneh named each one, tears welled up in Mona's eyes and she pressed her hand closer

to her heart. In a whispered tone, she said, "Good for him! Good for him!" after each name.

When Taraneh finally spoke the name of Mr. Ishraqi, Mona began to weep openly, saying, "Good for them all!" Then she said in a loud voice, "Taraneh, I swear to the Blessed Beauty and to God that these tears are not tears of sorrow. These are tears of happiness. Don't you ever think that I'm crying out of sorrow. It is only out of happiness."

THE HANGINGS OF THE 10 WOMEN

Mona

The hangings of the 10 women took place on the eve of June 18, 1983, under cover of darkness, in a nearby polo field. The driver of the bus, who later met the grandmother of one of the young women, told her, "They were all in the most excellent spirits and were singing many songs on the way. I could not believe that they knew they were going to be executed. I have never seen people in such high spirits."

The names and ages of the other women who were hanged with Mona are:

Mrs. Nusrat Yalda'i, 54 years old,
Mrs. 'Izzat Janami Ishraqi, 50 years old,
Miss Roya Ishraqi, 23 and daughter of 'Izzat,
Mrs. Tahirih Siyavushi, 32 years old,
Miss Zarrin Muqimi, 28 years old,
Miss Shirin Dalvand, 25 years old,
Miss Akhtar Sabit, 19 or early 20's,
Miss Simin Sabiri, early 20's,
Miss Mahshid Nirumand, 28 years old,

Mrs. Nusrat Yalda'i
Hanged June 18, 1983

Mrs Nusrat Yalda'i, 54, was a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Shiraz and was known for her kindness and hospitality. Her home was considered one of the centers of Bahá'í community life in Shiraz. She was one of the women who were tortured and was twice given severe beatings of as many as 200 lashes. Her wounds, it was said, were visible when she was hanged. She was arrested with her husband and son, Bahram, who was hanged two days before her.

Mrs. 'Izzat Ishraqi
Hanged June 18, 1983

Each was a heroine. The Ishraqi's, for example, were arrested earlier and released, but they refused to leave Shiraz. They remained to help the Bahá'í community. During one of Mrs. Ishraqi's interrogations, during which she was blindfolded and having a difficult time walking, the interrogator taunted her, saying, "Are you so blind that you cannot walk." She replied, "I am outwardly blind, but you are inwardly blind."

Miss Ruya Ishraqi
Hanged June 18, 1983

Her daughter, Roya, who had been studying veterinary medicine, was one of the most radiant Bahá'í youth in Shiraz. At 23, she was one of the most beloved of the prisoners and was the center of attention and activity. Roya was very active in her life and loved sports such as mountain climbing. Her sister, Rosita, became engaged the same day that her father was killed. When Rosita told her mother and sister about her father's death two days later, her sister said "Thank God!" and her mother calmly said, "I knew, I knew, I knew ."

Miss Zarrin Muqimi
Hanged June 18, 1983

Zarrin Muqimi, 28 years old, had a ringing, melodious voice. One of her interrogators said that rather than having a degree in language she should have had one in public speaking. Like Simin Sabiri, she defended the Faith vigorously during her interrogations because of her deep knowledge of the writings. At one point, after her interrogators could not convince her with arguments, they began abusing the Faith with foul language. She started to cry and told them, "Whether you accept it or not, I am a Bahá'í. You cannot take it away from me. I am a Bahá'í with my whole being and my whole heart." Apparently, her knowledge of the Faith was deeply resented by the authorities and she was often interrogated alone.

Mrs. Tahirih Siyavushi
Hanged June 18, 1983

Tahirih Siyavushi, 32, also served on the Local Spiritual Assembly in Shiraz. She was a nurse and had memorized Bahá'u'lláh's Most Holy book, the Kitab-i-Aqdas, which is the book of laws of the Bahá'í Faith. Both she and her husband, Jamshid, were arrested and subsequently martyred. Tahirih was a nurse and was used by prison authorities to care for other prisoners.

When the prison authorities brought the Bahá'í prisoners together in February, Tahirih saw her husband for the first time since their arrest. He had , been so badly beaten that she could barely recognize him. She could not sleep that night. The prison authorities did not believe he would last the night and the guards felt so sorry for him that they asked Tahirih to take him some fruit. But he was unable to eat it. He recovered, somewhat, only to be hanged two days before her. When Tahirih knew that she would also be executed, she told her family that she was relieved and happy. When she saw her father for the last time, she said, "Look at how beautiful I am. Look at me well." She was laughing.

Miss Shirin Dalvand
Hanged June 18, 1983

Shirin Dalvand was 25 years old, with a graduate degree in sociology from the University of Shiraz. She was such an exceptional student in school that some of the professors would quote from her thesis even though they knew she was a

Bahá'í. Shirin loved flowers and would always keep a single flower or a green leaf in her room. She also loved the ocean and would visit the beach as often as possible.

Shirin had insisted on remaining in Shiraz even though her family lived in England and she could easily have left the country. She chose to remain and live with her grandparents in order to continue serving the community. Although Shirin was basically shy and sensitive, her whole character changed when she was under interrogation. When she was once asked how long she would resist recanting the Faith, she said, "Even to death! I hope that God's mercy will enable me to remain steadfast up to the last breath of my life."

Miss Akhtar Sabit

Hanged June 18, 1983

Akhtar Sabit was a graduate nurse with a very kindly disposition. In her early 20's, she was the second youngest of the group. She also taught Bahá'í classes. When she was asked about her sentence, she said, "Never mind, I am not worried. Whatever happens, I am content with the Will of God."

Miss Mahshid Nirumand

Hanged June 18, 1983

Mahshid Nirumand, 28 years old, was a graduate in physics from the University of Shiraz. She was ridiculed by her interrogator for her degree. He said, "What an education! A graduate in physics! And here am I, questioning you, and I don't even have a high school diploma." Mahshid was very strong throughout her stay in prison and would often share her food with the other prisoners and encourage them to be steadfast. Before being imprisoned, she had been a youth advisor and had been a member of a number of Bahá'í service committees.

Miss Simin Sabiri

Hanged June 18, 1983

Simin Sabiri was one of the most fearless of the group, who had been a member of the Bahá'í Study Committee in Shiraz, responsible for the continuing education of Bahá'ís about the Faith and its writings. During her interrogations, she would constantly try to refute the accusations and misinformation of her interrogators. During her stay in jail, she was known to be strong and resilient and never to have expressed sadness.

There is one more woman who should be mentioned for her heroism -- Mrs. Tuba Za'irpour, who was martyred with Mona's father on March 12, 1983. Mrs. Za'irpour was 56 years old and was highly educated with a degree in Persian literature. She had been in charge of the Bahá'í classes in Shiraz in which the students studied the Bahá'í writings, comparative religion and Arabic. She was also one of the teachers.

While in prison, Mrs. Za'irpour shared her knowledge of the Faith with others. She had a strong influence on one Muslim woman, who later told the Bahá'ís how much she had respected Mrs. Za'irpour. During her imprisonment, Mrs.

Za'irpour was tortured very badly by the prison authorities and was bastinadoed on three successive days. Her feet were so damaged that she could not walk and asked the guards to allow her to crawl, but they refused her request, causing her to walk in great pain. One of the Muslim women who was a cell mate told the Bahá'ís that even though Mrs. Za'irpour was so weak that her hands shook and she could barely comb her hair, she never once complained.

ONE LAST KISS

The families of the women learned of the hangings of their loved ones the next morning, June 19. Mona's mother and Taraneh finally succeeded, after great difficulty, in getting permission to see the bodies. Mrs. Mahmudnizhad, who had been their companion until the last few days, kissed each woman on the cheek and then said, "I wish the whole world could see through my eyes how these dead bodies testify to the love of the Blessed Beauty."

Taraneh later recounted:

"It was a bitter day and for the last time, without having a thick glass in between, I kissed the beautiful and tranquil face of my dear sister and said goodbye to her. With all my heart, I was hoping that once more she would open her eyes and smile. But I know that now, forever, she is observing us with an everlasting smile and, if I shed any tears it would only upset her. So, my dear Mona, because of you and the love that you have for Bahá'u'lláh and for humanity, I laugh to let the people know why you sacrificed your life and why all those dear ones gave their sweet lives in His path."

A young man, who was able to see the 10 bodies after their hanging wrote:

"When I found myself in the morgue, I felt as if I would explode. I could not stop crying all during the time I was there... when I entered, the first sight was of Mona's innocent face, lying with her head resting on Mahshid's shoulder. Mahshid looked as if she were in a deep, peaceful sleep.

"To Mona's right was Shirin, so beautiful, a witness to injustice, her eyes covered by a blindfold --why, we never knew.

"Roya, her eyes wide open, seemed to be gazing at the crippled human beings wandering about her. With a face full of faithfulness, she tried to make me understand and let the world know that they killed them in order to destroy their love. But what they could not understand was that love never dies and that a person who loves is always alive.

"Then there was Mrs. Yalda'i, with her familiar, loving smile. In spite of the black marks on her face, she was still easily recognizable. Her white hair spread about her face. I held her head in my hands and kissed her forehead. It seemed to me that she was still alive, full of life and love.

"And Simin, who was always full of life and ringing laughter, lay there silently. Next to her was Mrs. Ishraqi, the model of sincerity, love and friendship.

"And, finally, in a little room set apart from the others, was Zarrin, the example of strength and faithfulness.

"I could not believe that I would never see them again. I paused for a moment on the threshold and promised them all that I would continue their work by serving humanity."

The hangings of the women shocked the entire city. One person wrote that, "Shiraz smelled of blood, of love and devotion... The families were all in astonishment and awe. They were all expectantly waiting to hear of more executions every day. A memorial service was held for the women who were martyred two or three days later. People would come in groups with bouquets of flowers. They had no thought of any personal danger to themselves. You cannot imagine the commotion in Shiraz. We could not find flowers anywhere in the whole city. Wherever we went to buy them, people would ask if we wanted them for the "Brides of the City"! Their families were strong and told us stories of the devotion of those who had died. Their high spirits truly bewildered those who came in contact with them."

EPILOGUE

During their last visit together, Taraneh realized that Mona would soon be executed and that she was fully prepared. She said, "You're going to be executed too!" And Mona replied calmly, "I know. I know," and added, "Taraneh, I have of request for you. I want you to pray for us that we will go to the field of our execution dancing."

Taraneh agreed and Mona said, "I have one more request of you and that is to pray for me that the Blessed Beauty will forgive all the sins I have committed before my execution. Then they can take me!" By that point, Mona was crying and laughing at the same time, talking about her execution as a foregone conclusion even though she had not yet even been sentenced.

Taraneh then gave the phone to her mother and went to talk with Tahirih Siyavushi, who assured her that Mona was fine. Mona's mother took the phone and after some small talk, Mona told her, "Mother, tomorrow we will be the guests of the Blessed Beauty." Mona's mother had an astonished look on her face. When Taraneh saw this, she grabbed the phone from her mother, saying, "You have been with her for five months, now it is my turn to talk with her a little longer."

Then she said the same thing to Mona, who said with a loud voice, "Do you know what it is that makes me so happy?" Taraneh replied, "No, tell me." Mona said, "What makes me happy is that I see that we have been chosen by God to be strong." She paused and continued, "Dear Taraneh, give my regards to all the family and friends. Kiss all of them for me. I have everyone's face in my mind, but I am not allowed to name them." Then she pointed to Taraneh's daughter, Noora [15], who was with her mother, and said, "Raise Noora to be like our father." Taraneh looked at her silently and said to herself: "No, Mona, I will raise her to be just like you."

FOOTNOTES

- The Bahá'í Faith has no clergy. The community around the world is administered at the municipal and national level by elected institutions called Spiritual Assemblies.
- Meetings that are held every 19 days, at which the local Bahá'í community comes together to pray, consult and enjoy fellowship.
- A term for the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh, whose name means "Glory of God".
- A Bahá'í institution that serves to teach and protect the Faith.
- The age at which individuals make their own personal decision to declare their membership in the Bahá'í community.
- One of the much-loved central figures of the Bahá'í Faith and the son of the Founder, Bahá'u'lláh. His life and writings are regarded as a source of inspiration and insight into the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith.
- Mr. Mehdi Anvari was executed in Shiraz on March 17, 1981.
- The paper is held between the guard and the Bahá'í prisoner because they believe that Bahá'ís are unclean and should not be touched.
- Mrs. Tuba Za'irpour was executed in Shiraz on March 12, 1983 along with Mona's father and Mr. Rahmatu'llah Vafa'i.
- Numbering in reality approximately 3 million.
- International elected governing body of the Bahá'í community.
- One of the poetical works of Bahá'u'lláh which describes the different stages every human being passes through in gaining an understanding of God.
- Mrs. Yalda'i was later hanged with Mona.
- Dr. Bahram Afnan, Mr. Bahram Yalda'i, Mr. Jamshid Siyavushi, Mr. 'Inayatu'llah Ishraqi, Mr. Kurush Haqbin, Mr. 'Abdu'l-Husayn Azadi.
- The name Noora means "light" in Persian.

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