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A MUSLIM PRIEST BECOMES A BELOVED PHYSICIAN

Dr Saeed Khan was formerly a Kurdish Muslim priest whose job was to call the people to prayer from the minaret of his mosque. He wanted to study Christianity so that he could win its followers to Islam. So when he had a chance to buy a stolen Bible in the bazaar, he quickly seized the opportunity. But it was while Saeed was reading the Bible that he came to faith in Jesus Christ.

When Saeed Khan read in the New Testament about communion and how Christ said to do this in remembrance of him, he longed to take communion with his Lord. But there were no other Christians around. So he went out to a nearby vineyard, with a loaf of bread, picked some fresh grapes and squeezed them. Then, all alone, he ate the bread and drank the grape juice, just as Jesus had told his disciples to do. That was the only way he, a Muslim priest, could have communion with the Lord.

Here he was a Christian—yet he was still serving as the *muezzin* of a mosque, giving the call to prayer. At first he changed the words so that they sounded similar. But he wasn't satisfied with that.

Finally Saeed Khan could no longer keep silent about his newfound faith. He told his family that he had become a Christian. When his own brother Kaka tried to shoot him, Saeed fled from Kurdistan, in north-western Iran.

He came to Hamadan, which is the old Ecbatana mentioned in the Bible, in [Ezra 6:2](#) and which had once been the summer capital of the Persian empire. There he met some Christian missionaries who welcomed him into their home. But when the people of Hamadan heard that a Muslim priest had become a Christian and was with the missionaries, they began rioting and set out to lynch him. [p. 153](#)

The angry mob attacked the gates of the mission compound, trying to force their way in. But the gatekeeper had the presence of mind to ask them calmly:

'Why are you all excited about this man? He is not a Shi'ite Muslim but a Sunni. So what if a Sunni becomes a Christian. Why are you so excited about *that*?'

Well that hit home. These two divisions of Islam had been fighting each other for centuries. Almost immediately the Shi'ite leaders dismissed the mob, and the crowd dispersed.

Yet the missionaries knew that if Saeed stayed in Iran, he would be killed. So they sent him to study medicine in England and stay with Christians there. After he received his degree, he returned to Iran as a doctor. He even became the private physician to the Shah or King.

In time Dr Saeed Khan became known as 'The Beloved Physician of Tehran'. His patients adored him. After treating his patients to the best of his ability, he would say to them: 'Now I've done everything for you that my medical training has taught me. But there is still one thing more I can do for you.'

'What's that?' they would ask him.

'I can pray for you. Would you give me permission to pray for you?' And with that, Dr Saeed Khan would kneel down beside the patient's bed and ask the Lord to heal the person not only physically but spiritually as well.

Time after time, attempts were made on Dr Saeed Khan's life but in every instance God delivered him in a wonderful way. As the Psalmist writes in [Psalm 34:7](#):

The angel of the Lord encamps round about those who fear him and delivers them.

Dr Saeed Khan was not afraid of death. He knew God's protection.

Once when he was travelling to another city, he and his party decided to take a different route than they normally took. Later he learned that an ambush had been staked out on the original route, and he would have been killed had he travelled that road.

I remember hearing Dr Saeed Khan give his testimony in the church in Tehran, when I was a young boy. My parents had sent me to Tehran for one year of schooling in the eighth grade before I came to the States. Inside, the church was packed. Outside, a heavily armed police guard surrounded the building to protect him against any assassins. The government of Iran respected Dr Saeed Khan so highly that they did not want anyone to endanger the life of the man all Iran knew as 'The Beloved Physician of Tehran'.

His life story appears in the book *The Beloved Physician*, co-authored by Cady Allen and Jay Rasooli (Bromley, UK: STL, 1975).

'FATHER, FORGIVE THEM ...'

Hassan Dehqani-Tafti was born in a little village in Iran called Taft.

Hassan left his village to attend the Christian school in Isfahan, the artistic centre of the Muslim Shi'ite world. His father would cast lots each year to determine whether or not he should send Hassan to the Christian school, and every time the lot indicated that he should. [p. 154](#)

It was there that Hassan came to Christ.

I met Hassan at Cambridge University in England in the spring of 1948, when we were both students there.

At Cambridge, Hassan had been confronted by higher criticism of the Bible for the first time, and it really concerned him. I remember the long hours we spent talking and praying together. He said that he knew the Bible was the Word of God because it was through the Bible that he had come to know the Living Christ who had forgiven his sins and given him a new life. Yet now he was being taught all the things that were wrong with the Bible. He wondered if perhaps the Bible were like a beautiful stained glass window in a church which, although cracked, yet looks beautiful when the sunlight streams through it.

I tried to show Hassan that it wasn't the Bible that was cracked—it was the people who were teaching these doctrines!

Hassan and I had great times together there as students.

Then Hassan went back to Iran and became the Bishop of the Anglican Church there.

As a Christian leader in a Muslim country, Hassan had several attempts made on his life.

Shortly after the Ayatollah Khomeini took over Iran, several men broke into his bedroom early one morning and shot at him repeatedly as he lay in bed. His wife Margaret threw herself over him, and a bullet wounded her in the arm. Her blood soaked his pillow. However, he was untouched. The bullets ricocheted around his head but missed him completely.

The assassins then fled, thinking they had killed him.

After this, Hassan escaped from Iran and went to live in Cyprus.

He had an only son Bahram, who graduated from Oxford and was teaching English in Tehran. While Bahram was driving home one day, another car suddenly swerved in front of him and cut him off. Several men leaped out, dragged him from his car and threw him into their own. Then they drove outside the city limits where they shot and killed him.

Bishop Hassan Dehqani-Tafti couldn't return to Tehran for his son's funeral, since Khomeini was then in power. However, he sent a father's prayer for his son's murderers by telegram.

I would like to include it here. I believe it is one of the most powerful prayers I have heard in recent times. It reminds me of our Lord's intercession on the cross when he prayed: 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.' Hassan's prayer is written in the same spirit. It is called 'A Father's Prayer for the Murderers of His Son'.

Oh God, we remember not only Bahram but also his murderers, not because they killed him in the prime of his youth and made our hearts bleed and our tears flow, not because, with this savage act, they have brought further disgrace on the name of our country among civilized nations of the world, but because through their crime we now follow Thy footsteps more closely in the way of sacrifice.

The terrible fire of this calamity burns up all selfishness and possessiveness p. 155 in us. Its flame reveals the depth of depravity and meanness and suspicion, the dimension of hatred and the measure of sinfulness in human nature. It makes obvious, as never before, our need to trust God's love as shown in the cross of Jesus and His resurrection. Love which makes us free from hate towards our persecutors. Love which brings patience, forbearance, courage, loyalty, humility, generosity, greatness of heart, Love which more than ever deepens our trust in God's final victory and the eternal designs for the church and for the world. Love which teaches us how to prepare ourselves to face our own day of death.

Oh God, Bahram's blood has multiplied the fruit of the Spirit in the soil of our souls. So when his murderers stand before Thee on the Day of Judgment, remember the fruit of the Spirit by which they have enriched our lives, and forgive.

Hassan tells his story in the book, *Design of My World* (London, UK: USCL, 1962). He went to school in Isfahan, the capital of the empire. Isfahan was developed by one of the great Persian kings, Shah Abbas, a contemporary of Shakespeare in the early 1600s. Impressed with the Armenian Christians who lived to the north and were very accomplished in artistic crafts, the Shah transported an entire village of them down from their home in the Caucasus and settled them outside his capital city of Isfahan, on the other side of the river, so that they could introduce their arts and crafts to his entire empire.

Ever since then, Isfahan has become the artistic capital of the Middle East. In fact, the Iranians have a saying '*Isfahan Nisfi Jahan*', which means 'Isfahan is one half of the world'.

There you find people painting pictures and delicate miniatures. In one bazaar, you will see them fashioning beautiful brass vases and trays. In another, they are weaving exquisite rugs and carving designs in wood to stamp on decorated cloth.

The Shah Abbas hotel, which Khomeini destroyed, was one of the most beautiful in the world. Each room had an exquisite hand-painted mural. Everything was artistically designed.

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Honour and Shame