

Highlights of a Talk by Mrs. Malek-Áfágh Dávoodí (the wife of the late Dr. `Alí-Murad Dávoodí) at the Dec. 26-30th, 2000 Society for Persian Arts and Letters Conference*

My dear ones, the Revolution days in Iran were indeed strange times. They reminded me of this saying from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Great tests and difficulties await the friends; the magnitude of these trials shake even the bones of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.”

However, friends in the sacred land of Iran who were stronger were subjected to these tests and, with great courage, sacrificed their lives to bear testimony to the greatness of this Cause. For a while, I did not comprehend the depth of the tragic events in those days. At first, I was sad that government officials were seizing the Bahá’í properties. But Dr. Dávoodí once told me, “These are made of stone and mud, which can be replaced, but I am worried about the individuals who will be martyred. It will take time to replace these people. I am also worried whether these dear souls would come out of the tremendous tests awaiting them with flying colors; to be willing to abandon their spouses and their lives and drink the cup of martyrdom and sacrifice.”

First, Mr. Movahed, a former cleric who had come to know Bahá'u'lláh on his own, had been abducted. Everyone was worried. It was then that I started to sense the danger and began to really worry about my spouse, Dr. Dávoodí. The government knew where we lived. Dr. Dávoodí did not hide himself and fearlessly responded to polemical works against the Faith in various publications inside Iran. He always included his own signature, too. They kept calling our home. He always answered the calls personally and, in response to their threats, would courageously state that “I have prepared my briefcase. You all know where I live. I hope I will not make your people wait for me for too long. I will open the door myself.”

I was totally awestruck by his courage and thought to myself, “My God, how strong and assured of himself is he to be so indifferent to the dangers threatening his very life?!” Our older daughter, Zohreh, who lived in America at the time, was visiting us in Iran in those days. Before returning to the U.S., she asked her father to travel to the U.S. with her and rest there for a while as all of this hard work and the various difficulties had really worn him out. I’ll never forget the strange, meaningful look that my husband gave in response to our daughter, “My dear, this is not the time to leave Iran. Now is the time to stay in the midst of the storm of tests and trials. If I leave and others leave, who will guide the ship of the Cause in the sea of sorrows and difficulties? And who is to answer those dear ones who have elected me [to the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran]?”

I said, “They will take you and, after much torture, execute you.” He responded, “I know myself. I am not worthy of martyrdom.” I continued, “They will torture you and others so they can bring you for confessions on the TV to weaken the will of the friends. Whatever they say, you will be forced to do so they can reach their goals.” Again, he gave me one of his special looks and said, “I have yet to receive a slap in the face in the pathway of the love of the Blessed Beauty. If I am fortunate, maybe I will end up eating fewer rice dishes in this mortal world.”

Contrary to my extreme state of anxiety and discomfort, Dr. Dávooodí was calm and relaxed. He used to tell me, “Mali [short for Malek] khanum, these are all prerequisites for love.”

Another thing that really bothered me was his daily visits to a park near our home. He would walk there for hours. One day, I asked him, “Why do you risk staying at the park until 11:00 at night when no one is there?” He replied, “Mali khanum, in those late hours, in the darkness of the night, I have the good fortune of conversing with the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh when no one else is around. Can you think of a greater bounty than this? I beg them for martyrdom if they consider me worthy.”

Our home was near the Revolution (Enghelab) Square (formerly the 24th of Esfand Square) and the University of Tehrán. We continuously heard the sounds of rifles and gunshots. I was absolutely terror-stricken. I would tell Dr. Dávooodí, “It is not fair that you always wish for martyrdom, which will leave me and our children alone. Our younger ones, Marján and Fariborz, have not yet grown up. They need a father.” He would respond, “I said if I am worthy [of martyrdom].” Strangely enough, when writing anything, he would do so hastily. He was also very kind with our children and humored them all the time.

One day, I lost patience and, with tearful eyes, said, “My dear `Alí, if you are not around, what will I do with the children? You know that I came to accept the Faith on my own. I feel I will be very lonely and no one will be around to support me.” He responded, “You will not be alone. You will have the Blessed Beauty. You will have His dear friends. What are you afraid of?” I remarked, “If they take this home away, as they took our other possessions, what am I to do? All we have left is this house.” He responded, “Mali khanum, I am retired now. They will continue to give my pension to the family. But forget about the house.”

I was surprised and asked why. His reply set my whole being on fire. “If you recall when they destroyed the House of the Báb, I was commissioned by the NSA to visit Shiraz. The first thing I did when I saw that they had reduced the house of the Báb to a heap of rubble, I stepped on top of the rubble and, after saying a prayer, I asked God that if he considered me worthy, I wanted my blood to be shed like that of the Báb and that my home, which was my only possession in the world, be destroyed like that of the Báb. I also made a third request from the Báb, which I will tell you later, if I am still alive.” When he was telling me these things, he had a strange look on his face and an unusual tone in his voice that left me speechless. For the first time ever, I came face-to-face with the sacrifices of the early heroes of the Faith, and the steadfastness they showed for the greatness of the Cause. Instinctively, I bowed my head before the magnanimity of my husband.

Later, I could hear his voice from the direction of the same park that he frequented and from which he eventually never returned, “My dear Mali, they will take this house. Do not trouble yourself and do not go after it.” After he was abducted, I started living in a room. One day, one of our neighbors called to tell me that they had destroyed our house. When she noticed how much this news saddened me, she said she hoped she was wrong, but that maybe I should go visit the place.”

I could not sleep all night and paced back and forth. The next morning, I called the wife of Dr. [Kambiz] Sadeghzadeh [another member of the NSA of the Bahá'ís of Iran]. Even though she was in the midst of her own tests and difficulties, she was extremely kind to me, which led me to share all of my troubles with her. She came with me to the site of our home. When we got there, a member of the demolition crew was striking the last blow to the entrance door of the house with his pickaxe. With that blow, the door also fell to the ground. I intuitively remembered Dr. Dávoodí's face and voice telling me, "Do not go after the house. I have asked the Báb with all my being that if my house is worthy, it would be reduced to a heap of rubble just like His." I could not withhold my tears. I felt as if I was no longer in this world. I had nothing left for the future when I would be advanced in age and in poor health. I could not have expected any assistance from family and relatives, either. God knows what I went through. I hope that the Báb, through His bounty, also fulfills my husband's third wish.

Dr. Dávoodí went to the park on November 11, 1979 around noon and never came back. The NSA was scheduled to meet that day. Other members called to say he had not yet arrived. In response, I would tell them that he had not returned from the park yet. At about the same time, our telephone rang again. When I picked up the phone, I heard the voice of Mrs. Vahid, a friend of mine. She said she had a private matter she wanted to discuss with my husband. I informed her that he had not come back from the park yet and that we were all worried. I immediately noticed a change in her tone of voice. I asked, "Do you have any news?" After a short pause, she said, "Mrs. Dávoodí, don't be alarmed by this. Last night, I was with my ill father, Lieutenant-General Saha'i. He had woken me up in the middle of the night to tell me that he was really worried about Dr. Dávoodí because he had a strange dream about him. In the dream, the sarcophagus containing the blessed remains of the Báb was being brought before the friends for the purpose of viewing and paying respects. The sarcophagus was covered in a green cloth. When they opened it, Dr. Dávoodí arose from the sarcophagus and told my father, 'Do not be disturbed. It is just a dream.' I hope that we will soon hear the news of your husband's safe return." It was then that I felt he will attain his heart's desire [martyrdom]. As many of the friends had not yet been arrested, we all tried very hard to find my husband, but to no avail. After him, Mr. Ruhi Rowshani and later the other members of the NSA as well as two guests at the home where they held Assembly meetings were abducted. We have no news of any of them. Subsequently, members of the first, second, and third NSA, as well as many friends in other cities were arrested and martyred. God knows what the Persian friends have gone through in the past few years. However, one and all, they courageously endured these trials and tribulations. In these strange times, I am reminded of this beautiful poem [from Bahá'u'lláh's mystical work known as "Sáqí Az Ghayb-i-Baqá"]

If thine aim be to cherish thy life, approach not our court; but if sacrifice be thy heart's desire, come and let others come with thee. For such is the way of faith, if in thy heart thou seekest reunion with Baha; Shouldst thou refuse to tread this path, why trouble us?

[In the original Persian:]

ایم نجای هستت به دل ایجان هم الی گر خ
ارو هم ب ایب ی نثار جان و دل دار گر
طلب ی است گر وصل بها داری ره ا رسم

اریه دور شو زحمت ن نیمرد اینباش گر

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