



Mofarah and James Forsythe look at photo of Baha'i Shrine in Haifa, Israel, in their home.
Photo by Art Ilman

American husband, Jimmy.

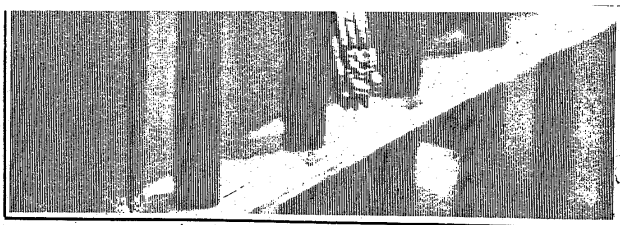
"Our faith, from the beginning, said things that would annoy the (Iranian) authorities," she began.

Baha'is do not believe in clergy, which would appear to be anathema in a country whose political shots are called by the Islamic clergy.

Women were accepted as equals in the early writings of Baha'i founder, Baha'u'llah. That statement and others earned the founder a lifetime in jail, according to a history of the faith. Baha'i women are not bound to wear the traditional veil that has again become popular among Islamic women in Iran.

Baha'is believe all world religions are divine in origin. Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed and Baha'u'llah are all prophets. There is no one, true prophet.

In addition, because the founder spent so much time in jail there, Haifa, Israel, holds one of the major shrines to the Baha'i faith. Israel and Iran share a relationship akin to that between water and oil — they don't mix.



Historically, the Baha'i have been objects of religious persecution since the religion was founded. Waitman Baha'i Henry Lawrence likened the persecution waves as appearing in five and ten year cycles.

As a minority, and because they were different, Baha'is found themselves blamed for epidemics, famines and other natural disasters throughout Persian history.

The late Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi refused to reopen Baha'i schools that had been closed during the reign of his father. In 1955, his government announced the Baha'i religion had been banned.

Violent attacks on Baha'i followers and landmarks including rape, looting, burning and murder followed. International outcry helped reinstate the Baha'i in Iranian society.

With the coming of the Ayatollah's Islamic Republic, Baha'i were again barred from schools and universities in September, 1981. For Mrs. Forsythe's brother Soroush, it meant the end of two years of medical studies, she said.

He was working in a factory before his disappearance, she added.

Shrines of the faith have been destroyed during the past two

years. The home in Takur of Baha'i founder Baha'u'llah was destroyed and the land put up for sale. The shrine of another Baha'i prophet, Bab, was bulldozed over in 1979.

It is the increasing scale of the latest persecutions that led Henry Lawrence to add a postscript to his theory of cyclical persecutions of the Baha'i.

"The fear is of genocide this time." After several minutes of careful thumbing, Mrs. Forsythe added her own postscript, quoting the words of Baha'u'llah: "Every one of us looks forward to the day when the earth will truly be one country and mankind its citizens."

Baha'i leader demands halt to harassment, torture, killing

WASHINGTON (UPI) — The leader of the Baha'i religion in the United States recently told the House Human Rights Caucus that Washington should take the lead in gaining worldwide condemnation of the persecution of Baha'is in Iran.

The suffering of the Baha'i community in Iran could be reduced if the public would "express its indignation and demand the cessation of terror against the innocent," said Dr. Fritz Kazemzadeh, secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of Baha'is in the United States.

Otherwise, "the Baha'is will be continue to be harassed, maltreated and killed in a country where jail and the hangman's noose have become common instruments of persuasion," said Kazemzadeh.

Shiite Moslems, the current rulers of Iran, believe that the Baha'i faith is a heresy — that Islam, out of which Baha'i partially developed, is the "final" religion and that Mohammed was the last prophet to appear on earth.

The Moslem hatred of the Baha'i, Kazemzadeh said, "is further fed



US President Ronald Reagan
UPI file photo

Earlier this month, 16 Baha'is — six men and 10 women, including three teenage girls — were executed by hanging despite a personal appeal for their lives from Pres. Ronald Reagan

by Baha'i belief in the unity of mankind, the equality of races, the equality of sexes, universal peace, universal education and the harmony of religion and science."

Kazemzadeh told the Human Rights Caucus that since last September's congressional approval of a resolution condemning Iran's persecution, 27 more Baha'is have been executed.

Earlier this month, 16 Baha'is — six men and 10 women, including three teenage girls — were executed by hanging despite a personal appeal for their lives from President Reagan.

The Baha'i leader asked that the U.S. government push for the U.N. Commission on Human Rights to intercede with Iran on behalf of the Baha'is, and that immigration

rules be eased for Iranian Baha'i refugees.

In the three years since the Iranian revolution that brought the Ayatollah Khomeini to power, more than 150 Baha'is have been executed, thousands of Iranian Baha'is have lost their jobs, and thousands more Baha'i children have been deprived of formal education, Kazemzadeh said.

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