

A Chapter of the Report on Seven Years

Imprisonment in Iran

What Happened to Us In 1988?

By: Nima Parvareh

Translated from Farsi into English by Shahla Sarabi

Edited by Larry Tallman

May 1995

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What Happened to Us In 1988?

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This document bears witness to some of the atrocities of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is a chapter of the report on seven years imprisonment written by a youth who was only fifteen at the time of his arrest.

1988 Gohar Dasht Prison

March 1988, the new year^{*}, brought nothing new. It was like all the other new years we had spent in prison since 1985. Nothing new happened in prison. They used the same method of repressing and suffocating the demands of the prisoners. The prisoners were endlessly active to achieve their basic human rights in Evin and Gohar Dasht prisons. In spite of seven or eight years of efforts to change the situation in the prison, the prisoners did not seem to be tired of continuing their efforts. In any case, living in prison for several years proved that the government was shameless enough to deny all our rights as human beings. We knew the only way we could gain any rights at all would be through our endless struggle. We were aware that our struggle was intertwined with the social struggle of masses and without vast support by the people, our status as prisoners would be always under serious threat.

However, some events happened in Gohar Dasht Prison, a while before the new year, that gave special characteristics to the new year 1988. These events help explain the situation that led to the massacre of the political prisoners.

In February 1988, two months before the new year, the prisoners in all the wards of Gohar Dasht Prison went through a major interrogation. Later on we realized and understood the importance of these interrogations, and found out that the massacre was according to a pre-planned program. The interrogations were the start of this program.

That month, all the wards in Gohar Dasht Prison and all the prisoners' belongings were searched. All writings and notes belonging to prisoners were taken out of the wards. Some time later, prisoners were individually blindfolded, taken out, and interrogated. The questions were according to the political ties of the individuals and were in two categories: one for leftists and the other for the Organization of Mojahedin. The following questions were asked of the leftist prisoners: 1. the prisoner's complete identification; 2. the prison's political beliefs (or what he or she was accused of); 3. whether the prisoner was Moslem or not; 4. whether the prisoner believed in Marxism or not; 5. whether the prisoner would accept having an interview in the presence of other prisoners and condemn the political group to which he or she belonged.

These questions were asked from the prisoners who belonged to the Organization of Mojahedin: 1. the prisoner's complete identification; 2. the prison's political beliefs (or what he or she was accused of); 3. whether the prisoner believed in the Organization of Mojahedin (called Monafeghin by the government) or

* Iranian new year starts on the first day of spring, March 21.

not; 4. whether the prisoner would accept having an interview in the presence of the other prisoners and condemn the Organization of Mojahedin.

These questions were not new, and ever since 1985 the authorities had periodically asked such questions to assess the status of the prisoner. This time the style of the interrogation had a novelty that made it different from the previous interrogations and implied the importance of the questions for the interrogators.

One afternoon in February 1988, the prisoners in my ward were awaiting fresh air (The prisoners were kept in rooms all day except for a short time called fresh air). Our turn for fresh air was in the afternoons. After a while, a guard came with a list and called the names of ten prisoners. He blindfolded them and took them out of the ward. As the guards did not let us out for fresh air and as the prisoners were not returning we realized that some plot was going on. After a while another ten prisoners were called. We realized that there was no particular reason for calling these particular prisoners as the names were simply called alphabetically. The alphabetical series of names continued to be called. Each prisoner was waiting for his turn. The coincidence of this event and the search of the ward and confiscation of prisoners' writings and notes made the situation very mysterious and questionable.

My name too was eventually called. We put the blindfolds on our eyes and left the ward. Outside the ward, we stood in a hallway, blindfolded, and waited. Again, slowly, our names were called and we were taken to a room adjacent to the ward^{*}. I was led to the front of a table. I could see someone's hand from beneath the blindfold, and he was wearing a suit. This person started to question me. After asking my identification and political conviction, he asked if I were a Moslem or not. I answered that I wasn't a Moslem. He asked if I were Marxist or not and I answered that I was. Then he asked if I would accept being interviewed in front of the prisoners in order to condemn my political affiliation. My answer was no. He then sent me out of the room and I joined the rest of the prisoners who had been already questioned. They kept us waiting in the hallway, blindfolded, until the very last prisoner was questioned. It was after nightfall before we were sent back to the ward.

After entering the ward, we found out that the majority of the leftist prisoners had answered yes to the question of whether they were Marxist but had answered no to the question of whether they were Moslem and whether they would accept public interviews. A small number of leftist prisoners did not declare themselves as Marxist and accepted being interviewed. Some of the supporters of the Organization of Mojahedin, in answering the question about political conviction, had declared themselves supporters of the Organization. After taking such positions, some of them were immediately beaten up by the guards and taken to solitary confinement. We never succeeded in seeing them again.

One of them, Hamid Ardestani, was with me in the ward ever since I entered Gohar Dasht Prison. In spite of our obvious political differences, a deep friendship formed between us. He was one of the rare supporters of Mojahedin who kept the line of dialogue and argument open with the leftist prisoners. After the interrogations, Hamid was kept in solitary confinement for a while and was among the first to be executed.

Sometime after the above interrogation, in early March 1988, there were major changes in the wards. Since 1985, leftist prisoners and the supporters of Mojahedin were kept in the same wards in Evin and Gohar Dasht prisons. Now, the leftist and Mojahed prisoners were segregated into separate wards. Actually the prison wards were physically divided into two sections. The section of the prison that included the entrance of the building was reserved for the Mojahed prisoners. The back part of the prison, adjacent to the building of the amphitheatre, was reserved for the leftist prisoners. To prevent prisoners from knowing the new organisation of the wards, the numbering of the wards was changed. In both the leftist and the Mojahedin sections, the numbering was different. In both sections prisoners were placed in wards according to length of their sentences. For the leftist prisoners, two wards were specified for those who had under ten years terms. These were wards 7 and 8 at the end of the building, each with 85 to 90 prisoners. Prisoners who had 10 to 15 year terms were placed in one ward (ward 12 with 120 to 130 prisoners). Prisoners who had 15 years to life imprisonment terms were placed in another ward. The prisoners who said yes to being publicly interrogated were located in ward 14 (one level beneath ward 12) with approximately 50

* In Gohar Dasht Prison adjacent to each ward there was a large room including a washroom. In many occasions this space was used to isolate some prisoners from the others.

prisoners. At the same time, all the prisoners from Evin Prison, who had finished their terms but were still in jail for not accepting the interview criterion, were transferred to Gohar Dasht Prison. These prisoners were placed in ward 10. Ward 10 was located between the ward for under 10 year terms and the ward for 10 to 15 year terms. There were 120 prisoners in ward 10. They were called Melli Kesh (a sarcastic term used by prisoners to indicate the fact that ward 10 prisoners had finish the state assigned prison term but were still in jail).

In May 1988, the election for the Islamic parliament, the Majlis, was going on. During the election the government was using all propaganda outlets (the press, radio, and television) to emphasise the importance of this election. The prisoners, except for the ones who had repented, traditionally refused to vote. On election day, Naserian* accompanied by another prosecutor named Abasian, ordered the ward doors open and all the prisoners to stay blindfolded in the hallways. These two men were the organizers of all the recent changes in Gohar Dasht Prison. They seemed to have taken over the role of Mortazavi, the head of the prison.

We were all lined up in the hallway. The prison authorities declared that whoever refused to vote would have to identify themselves. Following this, most of the prisoners identified themselves, and refused to vote. Some of the prisoners from wards 7 and 8 protested to this ordeal and said that it was an inquisition. They refused to give their names. Consequently, they were beaten up by Naserian and the guards and were sent to their wards. Soon after we were able to communicate with the prisoners in the Melli Kesh ward. The same process had happened to them and they had refused to vote or identify themselves.

Since the Mojahedins' ward was totally segregated from ours, we could not get any information regarding the prisoners' situation there. However, in late May, we had numerous reports about wide spread protest and hunger strikes by Mojahed prisoners. These actions showed a change from the previous protest actions taken by Mojahed prisoners. During the last several years they had had a conservative policy based on maintaining their forces. The recent actions were a significant change in their policies.

Around June 1988, all the convicts from the Revolutionary Court of the city of Karaj (where Gohar Dasht Prison is located) were segregated from us and put into a ward that was on the side where the Mojahed prisoners were spending time. One of them was Davood Heidary, a militant teacher, and one of the activists of the Peikar Organization. He was sentenced to ten years. After a short while, he was among the first prisoners to be executed.

In mid June 1988, we were totally confused by events outside the prison. We read in the newspapers that Rafsanjani had called an urgent meeting of the Khebreghan Assembly**. One day later, Khomeini released his famous message agreeing to peace with Iraq. We could not believe this. When at two o'clock in the afternoon Khomeini's message was broadcasted from prison's loud speakers, there was dead silence in the ward and the whole prison. All the prisoners were listening with astonishment. We assumed that the government was in a serious crisis, and Khomeini was close to the end of his role. That night, again his message was broadcasted on television.

Among the prisoners in the ward, and even when communicating with other wards, there was much talk. Many prisoners assessed the events as a major crisis in the government and as a result of a mass movement protesting against the government. They anticipated even further changes; at least a move from government's direct fascist oppression to a more liberal policy. Meanwhile, some prisoners argued that agreeing the peace with Iraq implied the hegemony of Rafsanjani's faction in government. It was Rafsanjani's faction that wanted peace with Iraq. Because of the lack of information, non of us had a clear idea about the political changes that were going on outside.

A few days later, on June 26, 1988, the guards took all the television sets out of the wards, and cut off all the loudspeakers that aired radio news on 2:00 pm and 8:00 pm. From that day on, the fresh air for all

* Naserian was the deputy prosecutor of Evin, Gohar Dasht, and Ghezel Hesar prisons.

** Khebreghan Assembly is the highest ruling institution in Iran that can overrule the decisions of the Islamic parliament. Its members are exclusively Shiite clergy.

wards was cancelled. Visits with family members were cancelled too. Our connection with the outside world was completely cut. With not even having the fresh air, we were put into a situation of isolation and quarantine. Our only line of communication was using Morse Code with Melli Kesh ward and through them with other wards. The guards did not answer prisoners' questions. They only opened the doors three times a day to give food. One night, a prisoner felt extremely ill. He was vomiting constantly. We hit on the door and reported how badly our comrade was feeling. The guards shut the door again and later, in the middle of the night, came back and took him away. After a quick check up by the doctor he was immediately sent back to the ward.

Around this time, the month of Ramadhan was approaching. (Ramadhan is the month of fasting for Moslems. In Iran non-Moslems and non-practising people are harassed by the revolutionary guards if they eat, drink, or smoke in public from dawn to dusk). When Ramadhan started, we were extremely surprised to see that the government, contrary to the previous years' practise, was not starting a conflict with leftist prisoners by imposing Moslem fasting on them. Prison authorities, as usual, provided us with three meals a day at the exact times as before. There was no reason for the prisoners to protest against forced fasting. For the last three years, each Ramadhan brought widespread protest by the leftist prisoners who had wanted to have the right of not fasting. All those years the government had beaten and confined to solitary cells those prisoners who did not conform to the fasting rituals. This right was always denied to us. Now, without any protest from our side the government had granted this right. Many prisoners considered this policy change as a defeat of a government that was facing a serious crisis outside the prison. It was considered a victory which was gained because of the government's fear of popular insurrection by the masses. Prisoners anticipated that the government would turn to more liberal policies to maintain its power. Many prisoners thought that in a near future many of them would be set free so that the government could show a democratic face to the international powers.

These details may sound unnecessary. But it is important to mention them so that there is a clear understanding of what kind of subjective space the political prisons were living in. This mentality was created because of years of isolation from the society. The reactions and behaviours of many political prisoners were based on these political judgements. At this time our communication with outside society was totally cut off and we were in isolation. Yet we were constantly discussing and arguing the events that we already knew.

The discussions and analyses went beyond our ward. We communicated with other wards through Morse Code by light and exchanged the latest analyses and discussions with them. In a short while we realized that the guards were not preventing communication among leftist wards. Since leftist and Mojahed wards were completely quarantined from each other, the guards were sure that no specific news could be exchanged. It happened that the prisoners from my ward spent two to three hours morsing with Melli Kesh ward without any interruption by the guards. At that time, this point made absolutely no impression on us.

Prisoners in other wards assessed the situation in the same way as we did: that the government was in a weak position. They stressed the possibility that the government would release the political prisoners as proof that it was pursuing democratic policies and opening the doors to pluralism.

In Evin Prison, we soon found out, similar events were going on. In February 1988, the prisoners were questioned in a similar way as in Gohar Dasht Prison. Later on, in March, Mojahed prisoners were segregated from leftist prisoners. All the male prisoners were placed in the wards and female prisoners were sent to rooms that had been assigned as classrooms. After the government agreed to peace with Iraq (on June 26, 1988), all the wards were isolated, family visits were cancelled, and the fresh air program was cut. Every thing was programmed exactly as in Gohar Dasht Prison.

The prisoners in Evin Prison found out the essence of what was happening a lot sooner than Gohar Dasht prisoners. The executions started sooner in there. In the first series of executions, in May-June 1988, the political prisoners who were in jail for a long time but were not sentenced yet, were killed. Among them were: Darioush Kayed Pour, Reza Ghorieshi (member of the central committee of Razmandegan Organization), Anoushiravan Lotfi (member of Fadaiian- Minority) and many others. After June 26, all the prisoners with life terms were executed. The reason for executions was still unknown to the prisoners in Evin Prison.

In our ward, we heard from a guard that Mojahedin apparently had attacked Iran's western boundaries and different cities in the Kermanshah area and were proceeding further. It was hard for us to believe what he was saying especially because he was mocking and being sarcastic . A short time later, wards 7 and 8 informed us through the Melli Kesh ward that they were seeing big trailers, equipped with refrigerators, loading many corpses from the amphitheatre area (that was connected to these wards) and carrying them out of Gohar Dasht Prison. This was occurring both night and day. Some of the prisoners thought the corpses were related to Mojahedins' casualties in the borders. Later, we were informed through the prisoners on wards 7 and 8 that they were totally frustrated by the odour of decomposing corpses and had mentioned it to the ward guards. That night they saw guards spraying the corpses that were going to be loaded on the trailers.

In a few days after receiving these news, we noticed that new prisoners were being transferred to a room adjacent to our ward. In the middle of the night we succeeded in contacting them through a window that was close to a small window in their room. One of them identified himself and asked to talk to us. He was a Mojahed prisoner and known by some of the prisoner in my ward. He informed us that since June 26, in Gohar Dasht Prison (and also in Evin Prison) a special court was set up headed by Ayatollah Eshraghi and Ayatollah Nayeri. Each day, groups of Mojahed prisoners were put on trial again. These were group trials. Prisoners who still considered themselves affiliated to Mojahedin, or did not accept to be interviewed in public and condemn Mojahedin's attack on the borders, were hanged in the prison amphitheatre. Many prisoners were hanged this way everyday.

Believing the news was incredibly difficult for us. The news about the executions and hangings in the prison's amphitheatre corresponded to what we had already heard from wards 7 and 8. But the tragedy that was happening was so horrible that we could not put it together with our previous subjective analyses.

The first night that the news of the executions broke, many prisoners stayed awake or were awoken. There were discussions whether to transfer the news to other wards (Melli Kesh, 7, and 8) or not. Some prisoners said that the news could be part of the exaggeration and self -aggrandisement of Mojahedin. On many occasions they had spread false news among prisoners. For example, some time before these events we heard from Mojahed prisoners that several hundred of Mojahed prisoners were executed in Evin Prison. After a while it was clear that the news was wrong. Or, sometime before Mojahed prisoners were segregated from the leftists, we heard from Mojahed prisoners that Masoud Rajavi (the leader of Mojahedin) had returned to Tehran and was organizing from inside Iran. This news proved incorrect too.

Anyway, some prisoners considered this recent news as a continuation of exaggeration of news that was common among Mojahed prisoners. A number of prisoners disagreed with transferring the news to other wards because it would decrease the spirit of militancy among the prisoners. The other argument was that, whether right or wrong we are obliged to transfer it to the other wards. Even if there was a small chance that the news was correct, all the prisoners had a right to know it and therefore be prepared to react accordingly. I personally decided to inform the Melli Kesh ward in the first possible chance. Next morning, August 5, at 10:00 a.m., I had a contact date with a comrade in Melli Kesh ward. As I was transferring the news, a guard opened the ward door and called the names of some prisoners. During the following contact I found out that prisoners had been called in other wards as well (Melli Kesh , 7, and 8). Before finishing the contact, I emphasised to my comrade to spread the news to everyone, but especially the ones that were in the process of being called up, before they left the ward. It seemed as it was the leftist prisoners' turn.

The news had already been spread in other wards on the same day. Even though there was reluctance to spread any news to prisoners who had different political tendencies. There was some control on to whom the news should reach. That morning, I sent the news to the Melli Kesh ward. I am not sure whether the prisoners from Melli Kesh ward who had already been called by the guards had received the news. But I do know that out of 50 to 60 prisoners who were called that day only one or two are alive. The rest were executed that day. Among them, I remember some who were put on trial and executed on that first day:

* In Iran the Islamic Revolutionary Courts are set up in prisons.

- Jahanbakhsh Sarkhosh, supporter of the Organization of Fadaai Guerillas(the Minority), who had an eight-year term and was from ward 8 Gohar Dasht Prison
- Masha' allah Mohammad Hosseini, supporter of the Organization of Fadaai Guerillas (the Minority), who had a six-year term and was from ward 7 Gohar Dasht Prison
- Majid Vali, supporter of the Organization of Fadaai Guerillas(the Minority), who had a five-year term and was from ward 7 Gohar Dasht Prison
- Hooshang Ghorban' nejhada, supporter of the Tudeh Party, who had an eight-year term and was a political prisoner during the reign of Pahlavi (the monarchist regime)
- Hossein Nazari, supporter of the Tudeh Party, who had a ten-year term and was from ward 8 Gohar Dasht Prison
- Davood Heidary, supporter of the Peikar Organization who had a ten-year term and was from the ward specified for the political prisoners from city of Karaj

The fact that many of the prisoners never returned to the ward was a serious warning for us. Throughout that day and night we were communicating in Morse with the other wards, no one yet knowing the executed prisoners' fates. The following day, we contacted the Melli Kesh ward and they informed us that all the prisoners from wards 7 and 8 had been blindfolded, taken to the hallway, and lined up. Then Davood Lash'kary* and a number of guards questioned them about their convictions, sentence terms, whether they were Moslem or not, whether they performed the daily prayers or not, etc.

After these questions, many prisoners from ward 7 were taken to a court where Ayatollah Eshraghi was the judge. Out of the 85 to 90 prisoners who had been in the ward only 30 survived. The rest were hung that day. Once the court's working hours were over, the prisoners from ward 8 were all transferred to a ward with individual cells and were kept in solitary confinement. Even so, they managed to contact a survivor of the hangings. He informed them that all the prisoners who were called out of the ward that day, had been retried and executed. This information helped those prisoners to think about a defence strategy that saved many of them from hanging.

The courts were closed on August 29 and 30. Several years previously the prime minister's office was bombed and prime minister Rajaii and another high rank official were killed. The Islamic regime honoured these days, the anniversary of the event, ever since.

During these two days, the remaining leftist wards (my ward, Melli Kesh ward, and ward 14) had no information on the fate of the prisoners in wards 7 and 8. At this time prisoners from all the political groups were constantly trying to contact their comrades in Melli Kesh ward. We wanted to know of each other's situation in order to be prepared. We were quite sure that grave and serious events were happening. We had to be ready to react accordingly. If executions were occurring, then our political analysis regarding the outside situation had to be revised. In any case, we knew that mass executions were a serious possibility. Everyone had to evaluate his political standing accordingly.

At 9:00 pm, on August 30, 1988, we received information from Melli Kesh ward that one of the survivors from the first day of calling had returned to ward 8. At that time, ward 8 was evacuated of prisoners. He was alone in the ward. He commented that any prisoner who had declared himself not to be Moslem and not to perform Moslem prayers was taken to a court. If in court he insisted on declaring himself as non-Moslem, he was executed. This prisoner also informed us that most of the prisoners who had been taken out of the leftist wards were executed the same day. Naserian (the deputy prosecutor) had threatened him with execution. But in court he agreed to declaring himself a Moslem. Therefore he was not executed.

The person who sent the information to our ward was trusted by many prisoners. We knew that what he was saying was not simply a justification for declaring himself a Moslem. He was a militant prisoner who consistently resisted prison authorities. We could not doubt his information. It was obvious that the stream of events was very different from what we had subjectively analysed. We had only one night to think over the realities and decide on what to do before tomorrow they would come to interrogate us.

* He was a veteran Pasdar (the special guards of Islamic Republic of Iran), the internal director of Gohar Dasht Prison since 1986, and one of the acting personnel of the massacre of political prisoners in 1988.

At midnight, we received another piece of information from Melli Kesh ward. The supporters of the Tudeh Party (pro-Soviet Union) who were in Melli Kesh ward said that if they were taken to court, they would not defend their political views and would agree to public interrogations. Several other prisoners, two of them from Peikar organization, named Abbas Ra'isi and Ismail Mousai, declared that they would defend their political views as Marxists and that was their personal decision.

Next morning, August 31, 1988, Naserian and several guards opened the doors to the wards, ordered all the prisoners to blindfold themselves, and exit the ward. After exiting the ward we realized that Melli Kesh prisoners were out of their ward and lined up in the hallway. The prisoners were taken one by one to a room adjacent to one of the wards. There Davood Lash'kari (a prison manager) was sitting with several guards. He questioned the prisoners. Any prisoner who said that he was not a Moslem and would not pray was seated on the left side of the hallway. Those who said they were Moslems were seated on the right side of the hallway.

Those who had declared themselves Moslems were further asked to perform the Islamic prayer. If they refused they were taken to other rooms or isolated cells where they were whipped. There are three times during the day for Moslems praying: dawn, noon, and dusk. Refusal to pray at each time resulted in the prisoner being whipped 20 times.

All the prisoners who prayed were taken to ward 8. The prisoners who were seated on the left side of the hallway were taken in small groups to the first floor where the prison administration was located. The office of the prison head and manager were on the first floor. There, in front of Ayatollah Eshraghi, the same questions were asked of the prisoners. If the answer was that they were not Moslem, then they would be seated on the left side of the door outside of the court where Eshraghi was. Then the prisoners were taken to Gohar Dasht Prison's amphitheatre. Prisoners were hanged there group by group.

I was still waiting for my turn when a guard, whom I had argued with on several occasions in the ward or in the solitary confinement, grabbed me from behind of my shirt and pushed me to Davood Lash'kary's office before it was my turn. He told Lash'kary, "Sir, you know this one". Lash'kary slapped me hard on my face and started interrogating me on whether or not I was a Moslem. I answered no. He then continued, "Do you recognize Hazrat (Highness) Mohammad as the prophet or not?" I answered no. He asked with a sarcastic tone, "Do you believe in hell or heaven?" I said no. He asked, "Do you pray?" I said no. He sent me out and I was seated on the left side of the hallway.

Since the previous night I was constantly thinking. I could not clarify for myself what position to take. Even in my first trial I could not accept declaring myself a Moslem. However, in that court I did not declare myself a Marxist either. I was now confused on what position to take. Would the government claim credit if I and other prisoners accepted Islam? Would we be betraying our beliefs if we played any role in the government claiming such credit? But who were we? Our acceptance or refusal, our dying or living, how much would it affect the people's struggle? Maybe our deaths would have a powerful effect on society. I could not decide. If accepting the government's terms was a betrayal, how could I ever face my people? I loved them. I was ready to sacrifice my life for the progress of the society. Was this the moment for me to test how true I was to my ideas? But in a battle, not every participant is supposed to be killed! Many are killed and some survive. Are survivors traitors? During my entire prison term, I and many other comrades worked very hard to frustrate the government and prove our ideological and personal strength to them. By accepting their terms, wouldn't we prove ourselves as weak characters?...This was a very hard test. The entire night before and during those moments in the hallway I was involved with such thoughts. If Lash'kary and his collaborators had hanged me right after the interrogation I would even have been thankful of them! Then, instead of me having to answer these questions they would have answered them for me. In that case, I would have happily accepted the execution.

At the very last moment I gave up on every thing. I said to myself, "If you are strong enough to accept death, the answer will come by itself. If you are not strong enough then you will compromise". (I am not even sure if I was compromising. But that is what I was thinking at those moments).

I felt that every thing was approaching an end. All the worries, anxieties, happiness, bitterness. Everything was coming to a close.

Other prisoners were sitting beside me. A guard approached us and took us to the first floor via the stairs. I had only been there once and that was to spend time in solitary confinement. I was not curious about that part of the prison. I sat in a corner of the hallway. There were other prisoners, some waiting for their turn to go to the court. Other prisoners who had gone through the trial were sitting on the left corner of the court room awaiting their execution. Unfortunately I can't recall their names.

A scream was heard from the courtroom. We could hear a string of obscenities being exchanged. Then the courtroom's door was violently opened with a kick. A few guards were beating a prisoner and swearing at him. Naserian (the deputy prosecutor) was constantly slapping and kicking the prisoner. The prisoner, too, was swearing at them and Eshraghi. He was swearing at Islam and their brutality. They had him under their fists and kicks. The prisoner was Abbas Ra'iisi, a well-known prisoner from Melli Kesh ward. I saw him for the last time from behind while the guards were taking him to the amphitheatre. He was executed that day.

Immediately another prisoner who was ahead of us in the line-up, was taken to the court. Apparently he had declared himself a Moslem. After he came out of the court he was seated on the right side of the hallway. The next person was taken to the court room. After coming back, he too was seated on the right side of the hallway.

My turn came. Naserian grabbed me on my collar and pushed me to the court room. There, he took the blindfold off my eyes. The room smelt of blood. For the last two months, all the staff in this room were busy killing prisoners. Their quest for killing seemed unsatiable. Naserian was angry and agitated. In front of me, Eshraghi was sitting at a table in his clerical gown. His huge body had filled the chair entirely. At another table a few guards were gathering prisoners' files.

Eshraghi started questioning me. He first asked my identification, then my political accusation. Then he asked if I were a Moslem. I answered, "If you are intending to execute me, then I am a Moslem. If you don't intend to execute me I will give a different answer". Eshraghi asked if I had ever performed the Islamic prayer. I said yes, when I was a child. He asked if I had ever been to a mosque. I said yes, I had been. He asked if I ever prayed in prison. I answered no, I never prayed in prison. At this time Naserian angrily entered the interrogation and asked, "After all, are you Moslem or not?" I replied, "If you want to make us Moslems by execution, then I am Moslem. Otherwise not." Naserian said, "Then you have to shave your moustache". He brought an electric razor and said, "If you don't, I'm going to shave it". I answered, "Are you prosecuting me for having a thick moustache?" I was thrown out of the court room, while Naserian beat and slapped me. The blindfold was put on my eyes again. He took me to the right side of the hallway and said, "We should execute all of you. You are all malice." Then he left me with the other prisoners.

After a while we were taken to another room on the same floor. Davood Lash'kari, the internal manager of Gohar Dasht Prison, and several guards were there. The same guard who had previously dragged me into Lash'kari's office before my turn, came back to me and said sarcastically, "You are still alive?" Davood Lash'kari asked prisoners one by one if they did the prayer or not. Whoever agreed to pray was taken to ward 8. Those who refused to pray were laid on the bed in the same room and were flogged (20 hits for each of the five daily Moslem prayers).

I and some other prisoners said that we were not praying. We were kept in that room and others who were willing to pray were taken to ward 8. The guards laid us one by one on the bed and started beating us with a cable. To save their time and to prevent us from moving our bodies and feet, a guard would sit on the prisoner's stomach. That time, we each received 40 strokes because Moslems combine noon and afternoon prayers and we were supposed to get 20 strokes for each prayer. After bearing the flogging procedure, a guard lined us and took us to the second floor to a room adjacent to ward 8. He warned us that as long as we did not agree to pray, at every praying time we would be in the same situation.

* Many Iranian male leftists traditionally grew moustaches. By contrast, hezbollah activists grew beards. Here, Naserian implied to ridding the prisoner of any symbols of his political beliefs.

Some time later we received information that the prisoners in Evin Prison were in the same plight. There, prisoners with no fixed terms were executed first. Then prisoners with life terms were retried and executed. And after that prisoners on other wards were executed. However, in Evin Prison, prisoners found out about the prison courts and the massacre of the political prisoners a bit earlier than we did.

After getting to the temporary ward, we met other prisoners from my ward, Melli Kesh ward, and ward 8, who were also there for not going along with prayers. But the extent of the massacre of political prisoners was beyond our imagination. In the first day, most of the prisoners from ward 7 were executed.

That night when it was time for evening and late night prayer, a guard opened the door to our room and we were transferred to another ward which directly faced ward 8. There was nobody in this ward. In the middle of the hallway adjacent to the ward a bed was set. A few guards, with cables in their hands, were standing by the bed. We were laid down one by one on the bed and a guard sat on the prisoner's stomach. They started beating us with the cable. Our bodies were still hurting from the noon beating. And we were receiving more hits on the same spots. This time, too, every prisoner received 40 hits. The prisoner was then taken off the bed and other guards attacked him with their cables. The cable hit any part of prisoner's body. To defend themselves, prisoners covered their heads with their hands. After that, punches and kicks were added to the ordeal. Then we were taken to our temporary ward. The hallways of the wards were filled with the screams of prisoners who were being beaten up by cables. After getting to the ward, we all collapsed on the floor. The cable had struck a comrade's face and a red line was showing on his face. Our faces were red and swollen as well as our feet.

After a while they brought dinner. We "dined" in a heavy silence. Some prisoners were so weak and hurting that they could not eat at all. Meanwhile, we started whispering with each other: for how long they can put this much pressure on us? How many days? How many months? Is it possible that they would start executing us again? (They had already, in several stages, executed most of the supporters of Mojahedin.) Is any prisoner going to survive this? May be this is what the authorities want. May be they don't want to have any political prisoners, so they are killing as many of us as is possible. But, would this be possible? They had already executed a great number of political prisoners.

Sometime later, we had a more precise statistic about the number of executed prisoners. We calculated that during the months of June, July, and August more than 2500 political prisoners were killed in Evin and Gohar Dasht prisons. Throughout all the prisons in Iran we estimated 4500 to 5000 prisoners executed.

That night around 10 p.m., three guards came to our ward with cable lashes and started to beat us. We were cornered by the walls and our only defence was to protect our heads and faces as much as possible. We had no choice but to bear the beatings. After half an hour of this the guards left. We realized that other than beating us for not praying at specific times, the guards were coming at any time to beat us! Around 4:00 a.m. the guards opened the door again. A guard asked one of the prisoners if we had prayed or not. When he received a negative answer, he ordered us to get blindfolded and exit the room. We were taken to the adjacent ward. They laid us on the bed one by one and started to hit the soles of our feet with cables. This time 20 hits were given to each of us. But since we were hurting from previous beatings, the pain was even more unbearable. Screams were echoing everywhere. After being released from the torture bed, the guards would still keep on beating with the cables. This time each prisoner limped/ran to the door that connected to our room so that he could take refuge away from the beatings.

In the room all the prisoners collapsed. One or two said that they were going to do the prayer. They said there was no use in bearing with this situation; prisoners who defended their beliefs would be executed. In the morning, when the guards came to give us tea, these prisoners told them that they would agree to pray. Around 10:00 a.m. the door was opened again. Davood Lash'kari and several guards came to the door. Lash'kari told us that anyone who agreed to pray should get blindfolded and come out. Several prisoners joined two others who had already said they would agree to pray and all were blindfolded and led out. Lash'kary sent them all to ward 8 with a guard. Lash'kary then told everybody else to get blindfolded. We were only three. We put the blindfolds on our eyes and exited the room while the guards beat us with the cable leashes. We were herded to the area outside that room. The guards started to beat us again. Because of heavy beating and all the pain and soreness involved with that, it was impossible to stand up. We ran away from one guard and faced another. The cable lashes constantly landed on different parts of our bodies. We could feel the guards' anger and hatred towards us by the intensity with which they landed the cable lashes

on our bodies. Because of the intensity of the pain, I could hardly breathe. I was screaming with my whole strength. Other prisoners were in a similar situation. But the beating went on and on and there was nothing left with which to hear the screams of others.

After about an hour we were sent back to the room where we had spent the night. In an hour it would be another beating. I told my co-prisoners that after the noon hour beating I was going to agree to pray. They told me that they were going to do the same. I was quite aware that the prison authorities did not care much about praying. Their point was to force us to change our standing on that issue.

Around 12:30 pm, the guards came back. We were blindfolded and taken to the same place outside the room. First me and then the other two prisoners were laid on the bed and whipped. For the noon prayer we were going to get 40 lashes. Each of us screamed with all of his force. It was not just the lash that was hurting; it hurt to remember all the friends who had lived with us and were now executed. It hurt bitterly to be defeated in this way. It hurt that we were defeated by such worthless prison-keepers who were laughing over the dead bodies of our comrades and co-prisoners. It hurt to remember all the young people who had been killed in this prison. A thousand other wounds during all these years in prison hurt...

After that beating, we declared that we were willing to pray. We were sent to ward 8. In ward 8 we met some of our friends who had survived. We hugged and cried...we remembered those who were not among us anymore. Crying was the only way of reducing our pains, so we were crying.

Almost every prisoner who was alive was taken to ward 8. There were still a number of prisoners in solitary confinement. Out of 500 leftist prisoners in five wards, approximately 250 to 300 had survived. Almost half of the leftist prisoners in Gohar Dasht Prison were executed. Death had spread its shadow on Gohar Dasht Prison. Evin Prison was in the same situation.

For a week Davood Lash'kari and Naserian, accompanied by their guards, came to the ward and ordered all the prisoners to sit on the floor in the hallway. Then they would choose some prisoners, blindfold them and take them out. We did not really know what they did to those prisoners. Later on we found out that they were taken to solitary confinement. Whenever the wardens came in for another round of hunting, a dead silence fell on the ward. Prisoners had to sit on the floor while the wardens walked along the hallway that was full of prisoners. The wardens would grab some of the prisoners and take them away. We were uninformed of their whereabouts for a long time. This situation continued until October 1988. By Early November, some of these prisoners were taken back to the ward from solitary confinement. When that occurred, we gradually felt that we may survive.

In November 1988, the wardens asked us to give them the clothing and other belongings of the executed prisoners. Traditionally, since the widespread executions of 1981, when a prisoner was executed, most of his belongings and clothes would be given to his closest comrades as something to remember him by. Surviving prisoners gave some of the clothes of the executed prisoners to their families outside. As far as I know, the government released the news about the executions very slowly and in a controlled manner. Many of the relatives had no information about their loved ones until December 1988 and even months later. In the ward there was silence and the shocked looks of the survivors. No voice of joy was ever heard from any cell and no song was chanted!

Among the large number of prisoners who were killed in Evin and Gohar Dasht prisons in 1988, I can only remember the following names:

- 1- Farhad Mahdyoun, supporter of Peikar Organization, executed in August 1988 in Gohar Dasht Prison
- 2- Ismail Mousaii, supporter of Peikar Organization, executed on August 31, 1988 in Gohar Dasht Prison. His prison term was finished two years before his execution and he was in the Melli Kesh ward
- 3- Abbas Ra'iisi, supporter of Peikar Organization, executed on August 31, 1988 in Gohar Dasht Prison. His prison term was finished two years before his execution and he was in the Melli Kesh ward
- 4- Hamid Ghadimi, supporter of Peikar Organization, executed on August 31, 1988 in Evin Prison
- 5- Alireza Zomorodian, a journalist who wrote for Peikar Theoretic, executed in August 1988 in Evin Prison. He was a political prisoner during the time of Shah. He spent seven years in the prisons of the Monarchy and another seven years in the prisons of the Islamic Republic of Iran

- 6- Davood Heidary, executed in July 1988, a teacher who supported Peikar Organization. He was among the political convicts from the city of Karaj
- 7- Naser Almasian, supporter of Peikar Organization, executed in August 1988 in Evin Prison
- 8- Siamak Almasi, supporter of Peikar Organization, executed in August 1988 in Gohar Dasht Prison
- 9- Mir Shams Ebrahimi, supporter of Peikar Organization, executed in August 1988 in Gohar Dasht Prison
- 10- Mohammad Ali Pejman, a journalist who wrote for Peikar Theoretic, executed in August 1988. He was an active member of the Confederation of Iranian Students Abroad which effectively opposed the human rights violation of the monarchist regime. Later on, he became one of the founding members of a Marxist group by the name of Peikar-e- Khalgh. He was from the city of Shiraz. His pseudonym was Ali Kaku
- 11- Bijan (I can't remember his surname), supporter of Peikar Organization, executed in August 1988- Gohar Dasht Prison
- 12- Hamid Heidary, supporter of Peikar Organization, executed in 1988
- 13- Abbas Zare, supporter of Peikar Organization, executed in 1988- Evin Prison
- 14- Reza Ghoreishi, member of the central committee of the Razmandegan Organization, arrested in 1983, jailed in Evin Prison without a trial until he was executed in June, 1988 - Evin Prison
- 15- Darioush Kaied Pour, member of the central committee of the Razmandegan Organization, a political prisoner during the monarchist regime, from the city of Masjid Soleiman, arrested in 1983, jailed in Evin Prison without a trial until he was executed in June, 1988 - Evin Prison
- 16- Fath-ullah Golablu, supporter of the Razmandegan Organization, executed in 1988- Evin Prison
- 17- Jafar Bayat, supporter of the Communists' Union, executed in 1988- Evin Prison
- 18- Hashem , political affiliation unknown, an independent communist, executed in August 1988- Evin Prison
- 19- Mahmoud Ghazi Pour, supporter of the Organization of Fadaii Guerrillas (Majority), executed on August 28, 1988- Gohar Dasht Prison
- 20- Bahman Rownaghi, member of the Ranjbaran Party, executed on August 31, 1988- Gohar Dasht Prison
- 21- Homayoun Azadi, supporter of the Organization of Fadaii Guerrillas (the Minority), executed on August 31, 1988- Gohar Dasht Prison
- 22- Majid Vali, supporter of the Organization of Fadaii Guerrillas (the Minority), executed on August 27, 1988- Gohar Dasht Prison
- 23- Masha'allah Mohammad Hosseini, supporter of the Organization of Fadaii Guerrillas (the Minority), executed on August 27, 1988- Gohar Dasht Prison
- 24- Jahan'bakhsh Sarkhosh, supporter of the Organization of Fadaii Guerrillas (the Minority), executed on August 27, 1988- Gohar Dasht Prison
- 25- Amir Hooshang Safaiian, supporter of the Organization of Fadaii Guerrillas (the Minority), executed on August 28, 1988- Gohar Dasht Prison
- 26- Nasser, supporter of the Organization of Fadaii Guerrillas (the Minority), executed in August 1988- Evin Prison. He was arrested in 1985 and sentenced to ten years imprisonment
- 27- Hashem Eliasian, supporter of the Organization of Fadaii Guerrillas (the Minority), executed in July, 1988- Gohar Dasht Prison
- 28- Anoushiravan Lotfi, supporter of the Organization of Fadaii Guerrillas (the Majority), executed in June, 1988- Evin Prison. He was a political prisoner during the rein of the monarchy
- 29- Ebrahim Najaran, supporter of the Organization of Fadaii Guerrillas (the Minority), executed in August, 1988- Evin Prison
- 30- Jalal Fat'he, supporter of the Organization of Fadaii Guerrillas (the Minority), executed in August, 1988- Evin Prison
- 31- Alireza Tashayod, member of the Rah-e- Karegar Organization, ex-member of the Mojahedin Organization, with seven years imprisonment during the monarchist regime and another seven years during the Islamic Republic of Iran, executed in August 1988- Evin Prison
- 32- Mansoor Najafi Shooshtari, member of the Organization of the Communist Unity, member of the Confederation of Iranian Students in Sweden, executed in August 1988- Gohar Dasht Prison
- 33- Reza Esmati, member of Komaleh, executed in August 1988- Evin Prison
- 34- Davood Nasseri, member of Komaleh, executed in August 1988- Gohar Dasht Prison
- 35- Ali Safari, member of the Unity of Communist Militants (Sahand), executed in August, 1988- Evin Prison
- 36- Ghodrat-ollah Javan, member of the Unity of Communist Militants (Sahand), executed in August, 1988- Evin Prison

- 37- Mohammad Rahim Zadeh, member of the Unity of Communist Militants (Sahand), executed in August, 1988- Gohar Dasht Prison
- 38- Mohammad Saboury Gorgory, member of the central committee of the Revolutionary Unity for the Emancipation of the Working Class (Vahdat-e-Enghelabi dar Rahe Azadi Tabagheh Kargar), executed in August 1988- Evin Prison
- 39- Hooshang Ghorban Nejad, member of the Tudeh Party, executed on August 27, 1988- Gohar Dasht Prison
- 40- Khalil Binaii Masooleh, supporter of the Tudeh Party, committed suicide in August 29, 1988, while in solitary confinement in Gohar Dasht Prison. He was arrested in 1979 on the charge of carrying guns for the Organization of Fadaai Guerrillas, but in prison he became a supporter of the Tudeh Party
- 41- Hassan Nazari, member of the Tudeh Party, executed in August 27, 1988- Gohar Dasht Prison
- 42- Hamid Ardestani, supporter of the Mojahedin, executed on July 1988- Gohar Dasht Prison
- 43- Saiid, supporter of the Mojahedin, executed on July 1988- Gohar Dasht Prison