

## [PROVISIONAL TRANSLATION FROM PERSIAN]

[Translator's notes appear in square brackets.]

[Personal information has been **redacted**.]

[The excerpt below is from the section of the article that pertains to the Baha'i Faith]

[Adapted from website:] Pezhvak-e Iran

[Date:] 14 Esfand 1389 [5 March 2011]

The History of Cemeteries Called Golestan Javid [The Baha'i Cemetery]

[By:] Vadiéh Kariman

During recent weeks, a report has been received from Mashhad that government officials have again started to persecute the Baha'i community in Mashhad by delaying the issuance of the burial permit for a deceased Baha'i in the city's Baha'i cemetery.

According to reports, Mrs. Zinat Ghorbani, who died on 25 Dey 1389 [15 January 2011], is the second person [whose family] faces problems from the government officials with having her body buried in the Golestan Javid of Mashhad, which has been the place of the Baha'i cemetery for more than 25 years.

Apparently, the authorities are trying to provide another place as a cemetery for the Baha'is of Mashhad and take away the current cemetery from this community. Apparently, their excuse for this action is that the location of the Baha'i cemetery is situated in the green space and is for public use.

It is true that the Baha'i cemetery is located in a green area, and people from all over would like to come to visit it and its surroundings for recreation and fun. But this does not mean that 25 years ago, the government authorities gave the Baha'is a green space to bury their dead. In fact, this green place, which some now consider to be their resort area, did not look like this on day one.

This place was a remote area in a dry valley and the [government] authorities gave this place to the Baha'is to bury their dead after demolishing their former cemetery in Mashhad. In order to get to this place, which is now a people's resort, [Baha'is] were obliged to cross the dirty road for many, many years. In those days, instead of trees, you would come across piles of animal carcasses, garbage, and insects that disturbed the people. The image of this cemetery at that time can still be seen in many cities of Iran. Sometimes the authorities, in order to persecute the Baha'is, are not satisfied by just giving a remote, arid piece of poor quality land to the Baha'is for a cemetery; even from the beginning, if they did not intentionally provide the Baha'is with land near such foul-smelling sites, sometime later they would transfer the dumping place of the municipal garbage to a location near the Baha'i cemeteries.

Apart from humiliating and persecuting the Baha'i community, the main reason for allocating such lands [as a Baha'i cemetery], is that they basically consider the Baha'is to be misguided and deviant from religion, and they do not want their dear Muslim compatriots to find out the truth behind the

false accusations about the Baha'is; or they become aware of Baha'i beliefs and practices such as "unity of God", "belief in the next world", "life after death", "survival of the human soul", and belief in the spiritual significance of the burial ceremony, and clear up their misunderstandings.

Ironically, it took years for the municipality to turn the land around the Baha'i cemetery in Mashhad into a green space with tree planting and garbage collection. The Baha'is, who basically call their cemeteries "Everlasting Garden [Golestan Javid]", planted the trees in this land and worked hard to beautify the environment. The Baha'is of Mashhad, young and old, each helped as much as they could in this process—one by collecting the garbage, another by planting the seedlings, others by building a mortuary, a break room, platforms for sitting, and so on. All these services, as well as the current cemetery services, such as digging the graves and washing the corpses, and other administrative services for members of the Baha'i community, have been done voluntarily, without any financial support from or cost to government officials.

Moreover, the Baha'i cemetery in Mashhad, like the cemeteries in cities such as Semnan, Vilashahr, Gilavand, Tehran, Yazd and several other cities, were destroyed by unknown intruders on the evening of 8 Khordad 1389 [29 May 2010], according to the Baha'i community news service, and their mortuaries and places of prayer were severely damaged.

In the Iranian cities, I have seen several Baha'i administrators who spent a lot of time, suffered and were persecuted for a piece of land for the Baha'i cemetery. In Karaj, for example, two Baha'is were arrested and imprisoned for 15 years while they were applying for a piece of land to be allocated as the Baha'i cemetery. They were imprisoned as young men and released from prison as middle-aged men. During this time, the detained defendants and their families were subjected to so much mental stress, that each time their families were allowed to visit them, they were told, "This is your last visit and both of them will soon be executed". In Ordibehesht 1374 [April/May 1995], with regard to these two individuals, Keyvan Khalajabadi and Behnam Misaghi, Amnesty International, in its report, "The Official Cover-up of the Islamic Republic on Repression and Oppression" wrote: "They were arrested in Gohardasht In April 1989 and held without any charges or trial until December 1993, when they were sentenced to death by the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Tehran. The reason for this is the religious beliefs of these people. Their current whereabouts are unknown." (Note 1)

However, the number of incidents is not small where, due to the fact that Baha'is are deprived of access to the cemetery in some cities, the bodies of deceased Baha'is were left in front of the municipality office for hours and days and were not attended to by the authorities. A cemetery may even have existed, but no burial permit was issued, or there were disturbances preventing the funeral procession from entering the cemetery, and the graves were attacked and desecrated. And these are just a few of the persecutions that have been inflicted upon Baha'is for the burial of their deceased, the details of which have been reflected in the Baha'i community's news service or in other news agencies.

In addition, the Baha'i Cemetery in Mashhad contains the bodies of individuals who were executed by the government solely for being Baha'is or assisting the affairs of the Baha'i community:

Mr. Rouhollah Rowhani, who was the last person to be officially arrested by the government for involvement in administrative affairs of the Baha'i community in Mashhad and executed without notice, in 1377 [1998], at a time when the government's policy of killing Baha'is seemed to have changed and the violence had eased slightly; Colonel Nosratollah Vahdat, whose son Jalayer, his son-in-law Davar and grandchild Noura Nabilzadeh, are now, more than 25 years after his execution in the year 1363 [1984], struggling with false accusations; Mr. Firouz Poudel, who was also executed in 1363 [1984], while he had two young children (Note 2). Recently, in the month of Tir [June/July] of this year, they caused problems in obtaining a burial permit for his mother, Mrs. Marzieh Gholami, to

be buried in the same cemetery in Mashhad, in such a way that the [authorities] kept her body in the morgue and refused to deliver it to her family for the burial, and made the issuance of a burial permit conditional on the payment of 360,000 tomans for “services”. (Note 3)

The reason for these persecutions, like other forms of Baha’i persecution, seems to be their beliefs and unwavering service to their beloved homeland, about which some are still pessimistic. It is strange that the land that they themselves gave to Baha’is years ago, which Baha’is turned into Golestan Javid [Baha’i Cemetery], will be taken away, and instead another piece of arid, stony land will be given to them in a remote place—a place with a “very small area”, situated “40 km outside the city of Mashhad and on an unsafe and unsuitable road” and with “no facility for burial”, a place where “the ground is so hard, that digging and preparing a grave, will be very difficult” (Note 4), circumstances that have undeniable similarities with the former state of the current Baha’i cemetery ... as if history repeats itself.

I wish they had thought a little about why Baha’is plant in a dry land, build a platform, collect garbage, and volunteer to serve it with heartfelt joy. Why do Baha’is call cemeteries “Golestan” [Garden]? In the Baha’i belief, these lands are “Golestan” because they receive bodies to which the human soul once belonged, and the human soul is honourable; it is from the Kingdom [of God], and has dignity. The human soul is capable of rendering services to its fellow human beings through its association with the same body that is now buried; as a result, it ascends to the realm above with joy and satisfaction. A body that once carried such a human soul is worthy of respect, and a cemetery is more than a place of sadness and mourning. It [the cemetery] is a place to think, to meditate about people who have “given their lives for the world”.

To think that sooner or later, the day will come when I also will go, and I need to make a resolute decision and plan for the rest of my life, so that I can have a dynamic life and leave this world joyous and content! To think that it would be a pity, if I only think of my short-term goals here as an immature child, busy myself with my own work, and if I have association with others, it is mixed with selfishness and oppression! It is a pity for me to be like an ignorant child who ignores the advice of a kind father and refuses to grow and mature, to serve for unity and to serve the human race.

- (1) <http://www.iranrights.org/farsi/document-103.php>
- (2) [http://khabarnavard.blogspot.com/2010/07/blog-post\\_20.html](http://khabarnavard.blogspot.com/2010/07/blog-post_20.html)
- (3) <http://news.persian-bahai0.info/2010072109>
- (4) <http://www.hra-news.org/1389-01-27-05-24-07/6338-1.html> and [http://khabarnavard.blogspot.com/2011/01/blog-post\\_19.html](http://khabarnavard.blogspot.com/2011/01/blog-post_19.html)