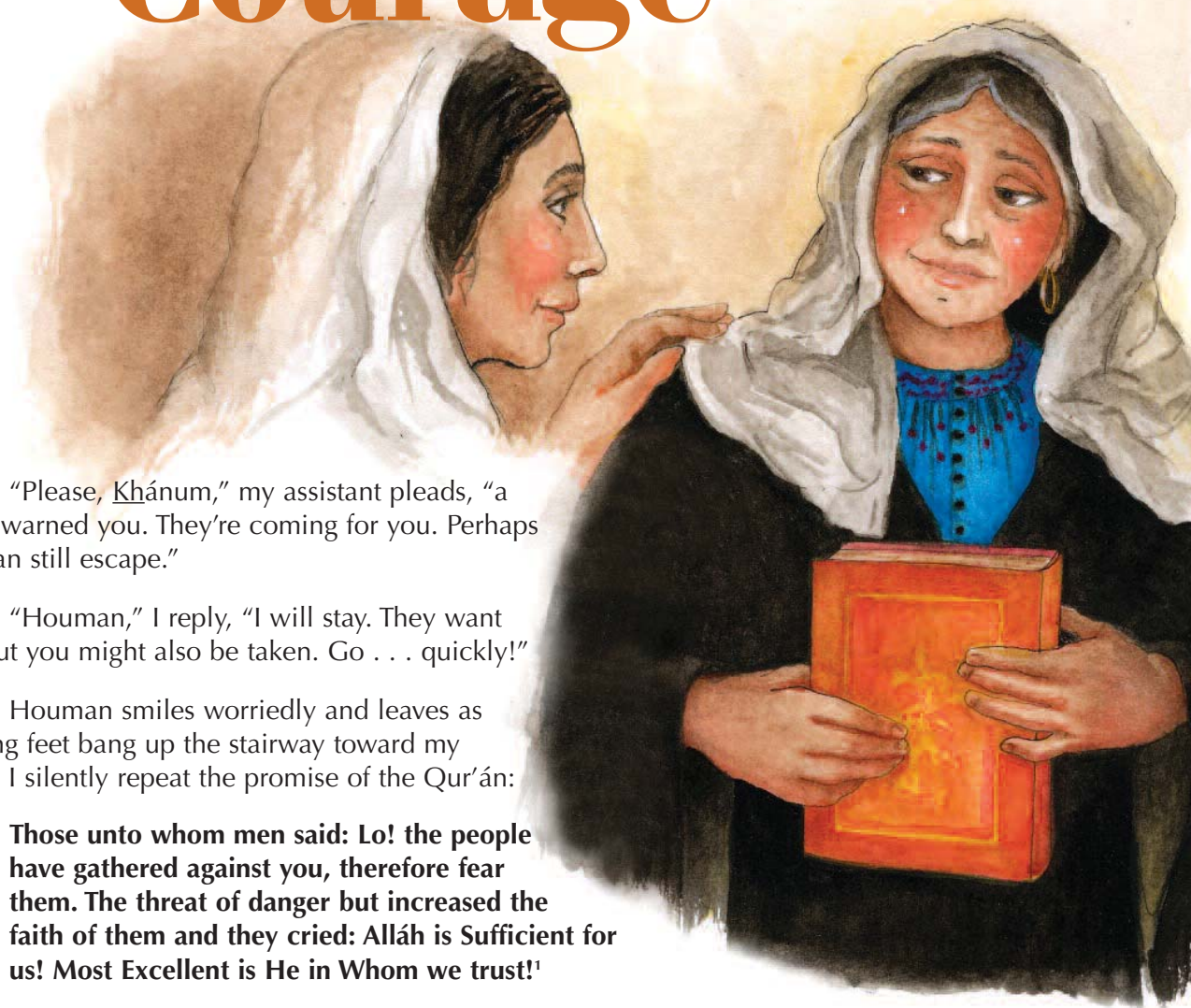


When God sent forth  
His Prophet Muḥammad,  
on that day the termination  
of the prophetic cycle  
was foreordained  
in the knowledge of God.  
Yea, that promise  
hath indeed come true  
and the decree of God  
hath been accomplished  
as He hath ordained.  
Assuredly we are today  
living in the Days of God.

— The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 161

# The Power of Courage

Written by Rick Johnson  
Illustrated by Winifred Barnum-Newman



“Please, *Khánum*,” my assistant pleads, “a caller warned you. They’re coming for you. Perhaps you can still escape.”

“Houman,” I reply, “I will stay. They want *me*, but you might also be taken. Go . . . quickly!”

Houman smiles worriedly and leaves as running feet bang up the stairway toward my office. I silently repeat the promise of the *Qur’án*:

**Those unto whom men said: Lo! the people have gathered against you, therefore fear them. The threat of danger but increased the faith of them and they cried: Alláh is Sufficient for us! Most Excellent is He in Whom we trust!'**

<sup>1</sup> *Qur’án*, *Súrih* 3:173



I gaze out my window at a city in chaos. For days mobs have been chanting hysterically that the Islámic Revolution has come.<sup>2</sup> Smoke curls into the sky from looted, burning buildings. I wonder what this “new day” really will bring. Friends and neighbors are disappearing: A Jewish doctor who had attended medical conferences in Israel. A Bahá’í colleague. A young Muslim woman working in the sháh’s government. All condemned as “enemies of God.” Many others flee . . .

Whatever happens,  
I choose to remain.

The door crashes open. Men barge in brandishing machine guns.

“What do you want?” I ask calmly.

“We arrest you as an enemy of the revolution!” Rashid, seemingly the leader, declares.

I look at my former student. His fiery zeal sounds like a recorded tape.

<sup>2</sup> The story takes place during the Islámic Revolution in Iran that occurred in 1979. The description of revolutionary circumstances in the story is historically accurate, although it does not recount specific occurrences.

“What law have I broken?” I ask.

He does not answer, only pokes his gun closer toward me.

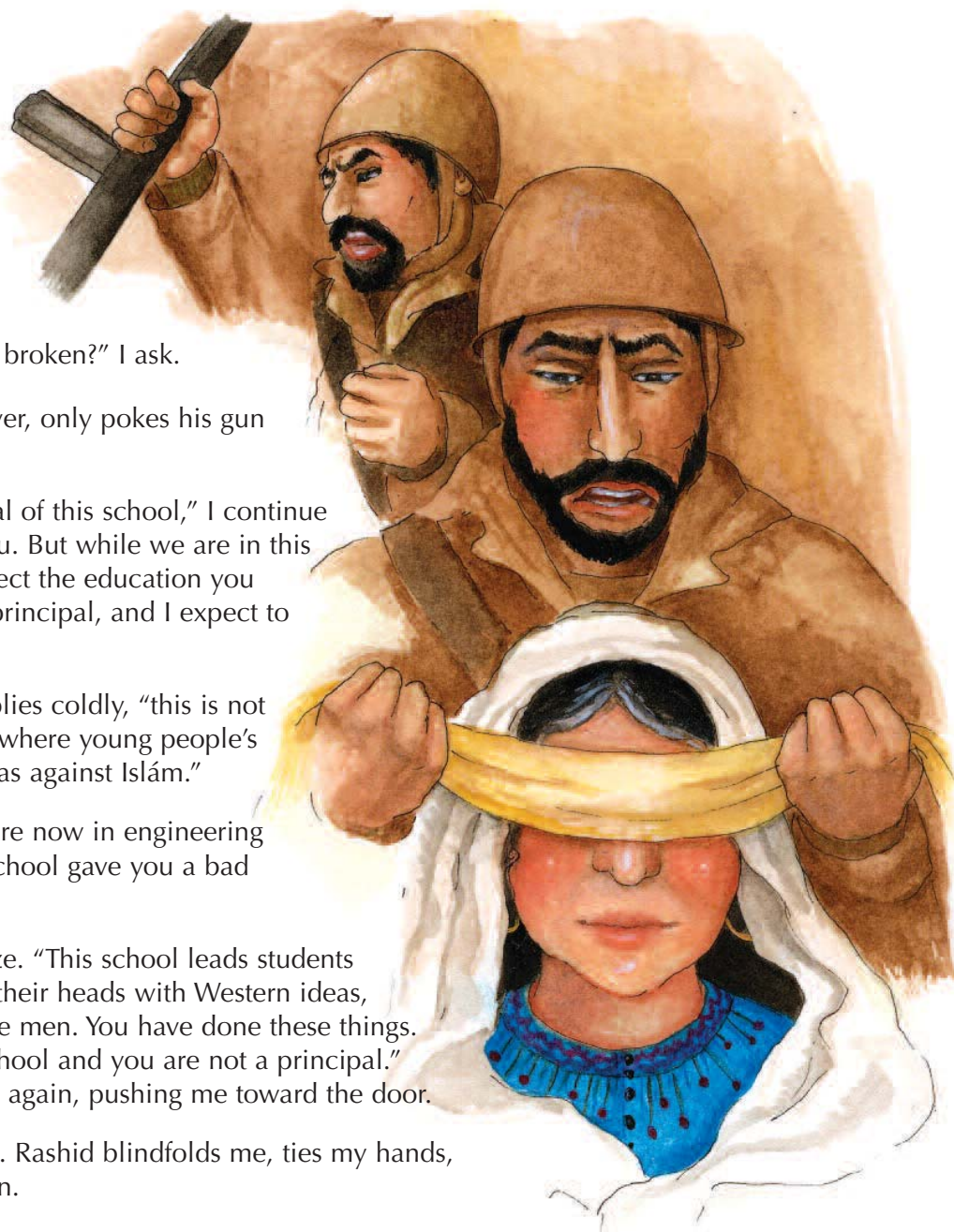
“I am the principal of this school,” I continue firmly. “I will go with you. But while we are in this school, I ask you to respect the education you received here. I am the principal, and I expect to be treated with respect.”

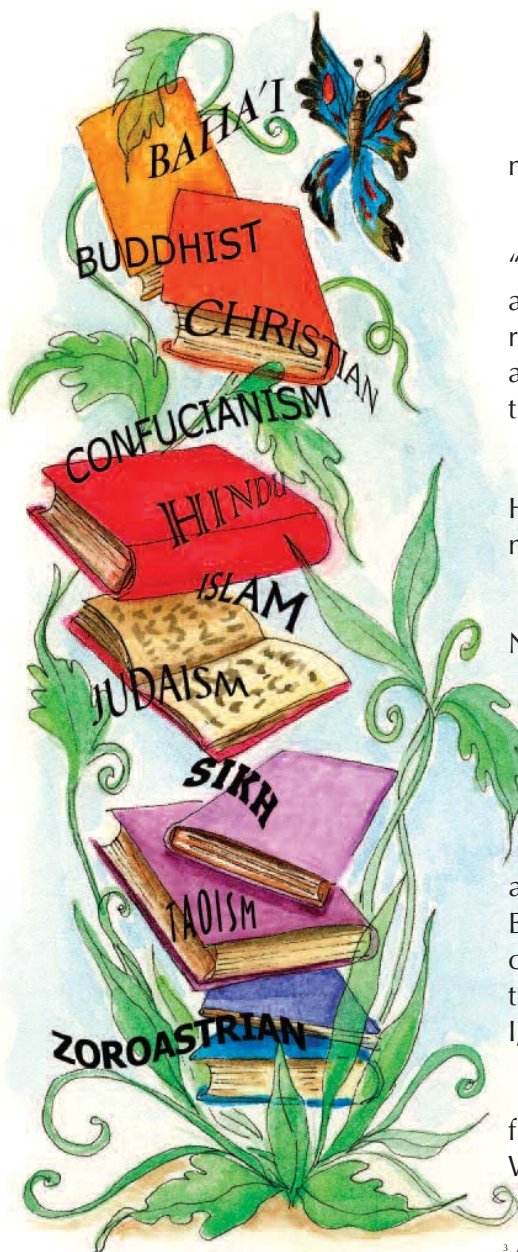
“Khánum,” he replies coldly, “this is not a school. This is a place where young people’s minds are filled with ideas against Islám.”

“So the fact you are now in engineering college is because this school gave you a bad education?” I ask.

Rashid’s eyes blaze. “This school leads students away from religion, fills their heads with Western ideas, and educates women like men. You have done these things. Therefore this is not a school and you are not a principal.” He motions with his gun again, pushing me toward the door.

We stop speaking. Rashid blindfolds me, ties my hands, and hustles me into a van.





As we drive through the city in silence, I recall the night I made up my mind to remain at the school rather than to flee . . .

My good friend, Nasrin, was exasperated with me. “Azar,” she said, “you should leave while you can.” She pointed around my apartment. “Look, Azar,” she said, “books of different religions . . . Bibles, the Bhagavad-Gita, Buddhist writings . . . and Bahá’í books . . . A teacher cannot do this. Your free thinking will get you killed.”

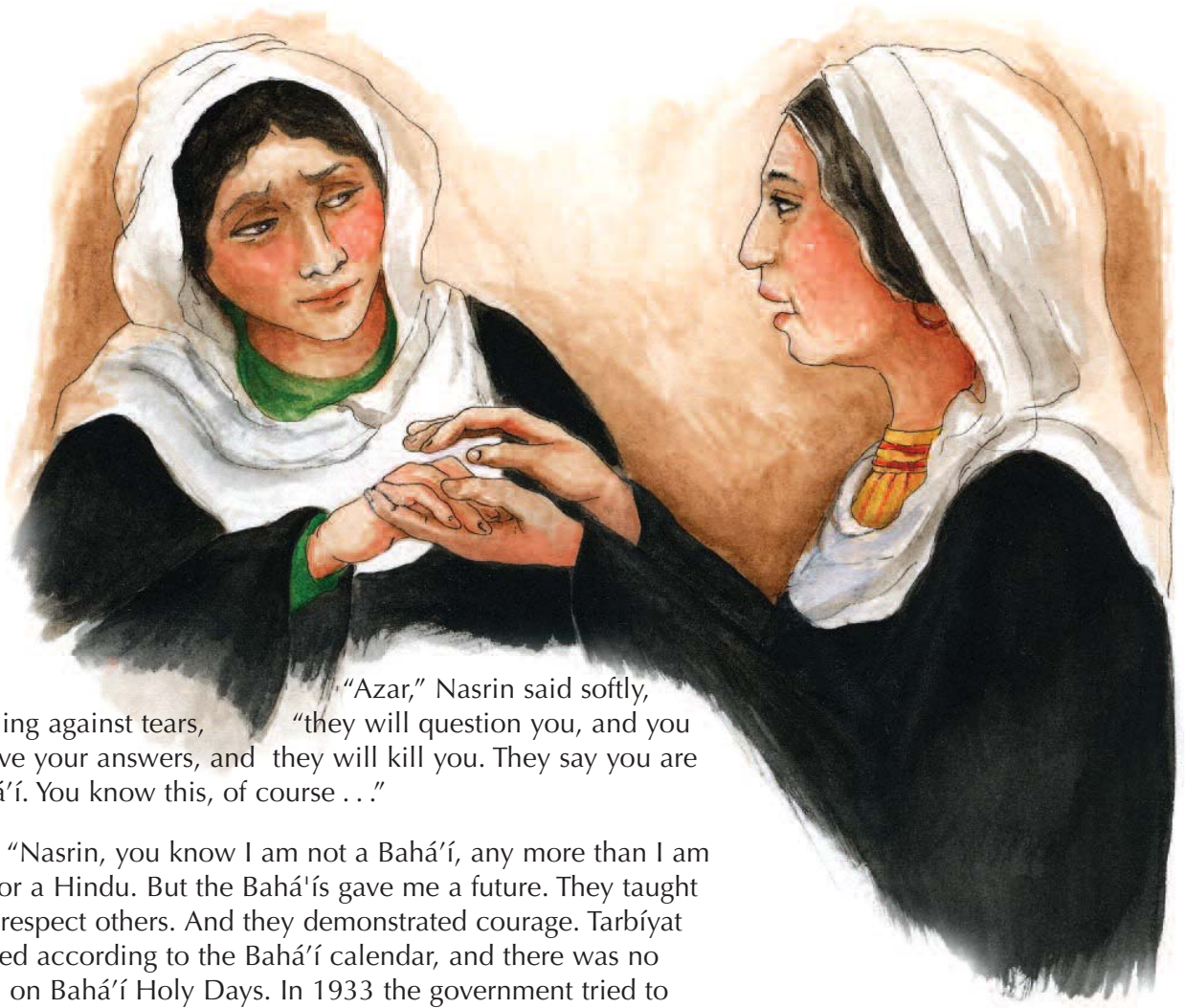
“Nasrin, you know me,” I replied. “I am not Jewish, Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, or Bahá’í. I am a Muslim. But I do not recognize Islám in what is happening now.”

“Azar, they will use your own words against you . . .” Nasrin’s voice trailed off.

“What can I do?” I continued. “When I was a child the government imprisoned my father and confiscated much of his property. When he was released he still believed that Iran must progress into the modern world. He sent his children to universities in the West, including his daughters. When I was a child he sent me to the Tarbíyat at School in Tíhrán.<sup>3</sup> The Bahá’ís ran it but he did not care about theology. He wanted his children to learn, and the Tarbíyat School was the best. I loved that school. It was the beginning of my life, really. I learned that I, a woman, had a future.”

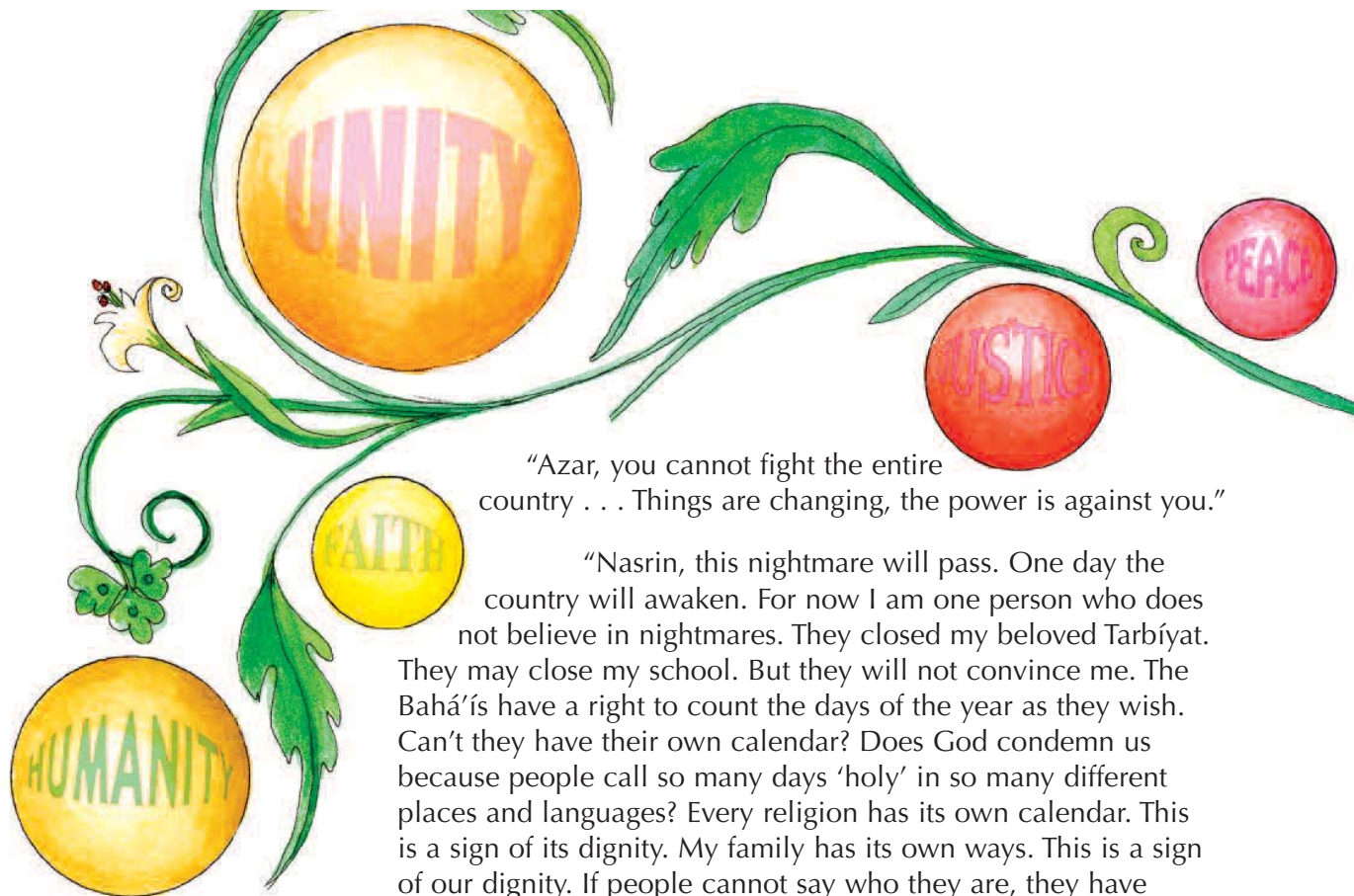
I paused and took Nasrin’s hand. “This ‘new’ Iran has no future for me. My father did not educate me to be a fanatic. What I am, I am.”

<sup>3</sup> Although the Tarbíyat School was sponsored and administered by Bahá’ís, its reputation for academic excellence attracted many persons of other faiths. Before the school was closed, many students came from families of the leading elements of Iranian society.



“Azar,” Nasrin said softly, struggling against tears, “they will question you, and you will give your answers, and they will kill you. They say you are a Bahá’í. You know this, of course . . .”

“Nasrin, you know I am not a Bahá’í, any more than I am a Jew or a Hindu. But the Bahá’ís gave me a future. They taught me to respect others. And they demonstrated courage. Tarbíyat operated according to the Bahá’í calendar, and there was no school on Bahá’í Holy Days. In 1933 the government tried to force the school to be open on those days. Rather than agree to such tyranny, Tarbíyat closed. I was so sad. My beautiful wonderful Tarbíyat School gone! But the Bahá’ís suffered more than I did. They lost rights, possessions, even their lives. Other Bahá’í schools were closed also. It was then that I decided to become a teacher. I decided that I would build a new Iran through education. If the Bahá’ís were not allowed to do so, I would do it.”



“Azar, you cannot fight the entire country . . . Things are changing, the power is against you.”

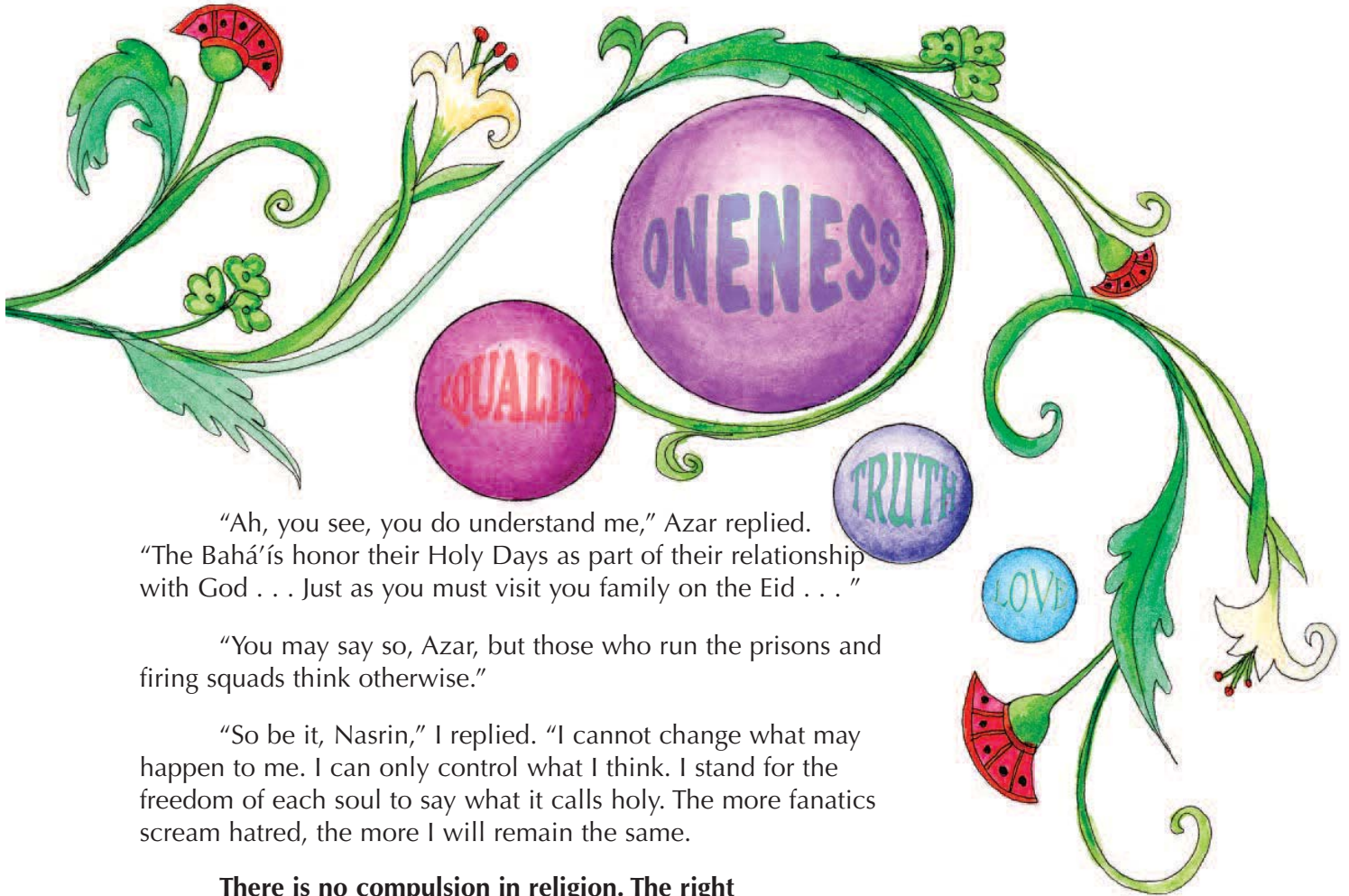
“Nasrin, this nightmare will pass. One day the country will awaken. For now I am one person who does not believe in nightmares. They closed my beloved Tarbíyat. They may close my school. But they will not convince me. The Bahá’ís have a right to count the days of the year as they wish. Can’t they have their own calendar? Does God condemn us because people call so many days ‘holy’ in so many different places and languages? Every religion has its own calendar. This is a sign of its dignity. My family has its own ways. This is a sign of our dignity. If people cannot say who they are, they have no dignity.”

“It all happened so long ago, Azar, why not just drop it?”

“Nasrin, if I told you that you could not visit your family on Eid al-Fitr,<sup>4</sup> what would you say?”

“Not celebrate the Eid holiday with my family? That would not be right! Eid al-Fitr is a part of being Muslim! My family would be very upset if I didn’t visit.”

<sup>4</sup> The Muslim Holy Day that comes at the end of Ramaḍán, the month of fasting. It is a very happy, festive time when friends and family gather for celebrations of all sorts.



"Ah, you see, you do understand me," Azar replied. "The Bahá'ís honor their Holy Days as part of their relationship with God . . . Just as you must visit you family on the Eid . . ."

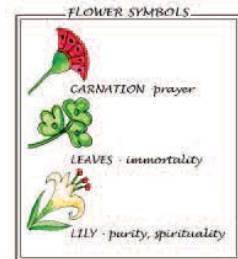
"You may say so, Azar, but those who run the prisons and firing squads think otherwise."

"So be it, Nasrin," I replied. "I cannot change what may happen to me. I can only control what I think. I stand for the freedom of each soul to say what it calls holy. The more fanatics scream hatred, the more I will remain the same."

**There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error.<sup>5</sup>**

I am not a rebel. I will not fight with guns. But my mind will not change. I owe this to my teachers at Tarbíyat who gave me a life I have loved. I will not let them down."

<sup>5</sup> Qur'án, Súrih 2:256





As the van takes me to be questioned, I remember this conversation with Nasrin and realize my story may be coming to an end. But is it? Many different Holy Days are celebrated in many languages all around the world. Many people celebrate love for the same God—my Beloved—even if we call different days “holy.”

**Our Lord! Cause not our hearts to stray after Thou hast guided us, and bestow upon us mercy from Thy Presence. Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Bestower.**

**Our Lord! Lo! It is Thou Who gatherest mankind together to a Day of which there is no doubt. Lo! Alláh faileth not to keep the tryst.<sup>6</sup>**

If I go to meet my Beloved, I will see countless others of all faiths who celebrate the same Beloved. I will have many friends in Paradise. ★

<sup>6</sup> Qur'án, Súrih 3:9 Note: Tryst is an agreement between lovers to meet in a certain time and place. As used here, it refers to the believer being reunited with God, the Beloved.