



Persian Pilgrimages: Journeys Across Iran

Afshin Molavi

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The truths about Iran—quite different truths from versions put forward by Washington, Tehran, and the media.

Afshin Molavi, a young journalist and writer born in Iran and educated in the West, traveled his homeland for more than a year, encountering every facet of Iranian society—students of the right and left, bazaar merchants, Islamic clerics, pro-democracy journalists, Islamic hard-liners, reformist politicians, grumbling taxi drivers, urban slum dwellers, partying teenagers, village farmers, handicapped war veterans, and kids hooked on anything western. All opened their hearts to him, speaking candidly about a wide range of issues: unemployment, politics, freedom, religion, poetry, history, the Internet, the legacy of the Islamic revolution, the current pro-democracy movement, Iran's relations with the West, and much more. Throughout his meetings and travels, Molavi wove the tale of nearly 3,000 years of Iranian history through pilgrimages to ancient and contemporary sites, shrines, and monuments, vividly explaining the relevance of Iran's past to today's Iranian predicament. The pilgrimages ranges from the tomb of Cyrus the Great on the windswept plains of Pasargad to the splendid rose gardens at the Shiraz shrine for the fourteenth-century poet Hafez, the golden domes of Ayatollah Khomeini's vast mausoleum in Tehran, a haunting war veterans' shrine for survivors of the devastating Iran-Iraq war near the border of Iraq, and the European embassy "visa pilgrimages" of college graduates frustrated by bleak job prospects and the social and political restrictions at home. Cutting through the official rhetoric of the Islamic Republic, Molavi adds much-needed context to its political power struggle and demonstrates that the realities of today's Iran are far more complex than if often understood in the West. Through interviews with courageous journalists, students, and pro-democracy advocates who battle an entrenched conservative ruling class unwilling to accommodate popular opinion and numerous conversations with average Iranians frustrated by their deteriorating economy and the conservative stranglehold on power, Molavi chronicles a land and a people hungry for change. Few books have penetrated the soul of Iran—both past and present—as deeply as this exceptional report on one of the world's most important nations. *Persian Pilgrimages* is a journey to remember. "A rare and important work that examines Iranian society from a grassroots, human level while offering a taste of the grand sweep of Iranian history. I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in contemporary Iran." —R. K. Ramazani, professor emeritus of politics, University of Virginia. 12 pages of illustrations and map

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