



# The Soul of Iran: A Nation's Struggle for Freedom

*Afshin Molavi*

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## **The Soul of Iran: A Nation's Struggle for Freedom Afshin Molavi**

Iran thundered onto the world stage in 1979 with an Islamic revolution that shook the world. Today that revolution has gone astray, a popular democracy movement boldly challenges authority, and young Iranians are more interested in moving to America than in chanting "Death to America." Afshin Molavi, born in Iran and fluent in Persian, traveled widely across his homeland, exploring the legacy of the Iranian revolution and probing the soul of Iran, a land with nearly three millennia of often-glorious history. Like a master Persian carpet maker, Molavi weaves together threads of rich historical insight, political analysis, cultural observation, and the daily realities of life in the Islamic republic to produce a colorful, intricate, and mesmerizing narrative. Originally published in hardcover under the title *Persian Pilgrimages*, this paperback edition is revised, with a new introduction and epilogue.

## **The Soul of Iran: A Nation's Struggle for Freedom Details**

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Author : Afshin Molavi

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## From Reader Review The Soul of Iran: A Nation's Struggle for Freedom for online ebook

### Brian says

Like China Road, this book covers the ins and outs of a lot of people's daily views of life in Iran, right from the actual people, from both sides of the story, from conservatives to liberals. While it does sometimes retrace concepts now and then, mainly when dealing with particular events (Usually the different revolutions) it generally stayed fresh enough to keep me interested, and only goes to show me that the general picture shown to you is often just bits and pieces taken out of context to paint a picture for you that matches up with something that someone wants you to believe. In the US, that being that Iran is full of a lot of radicalist Islamic terrorists-in-waiting. This book helps pull back the veil (or hijab, if you want to be topical) on what is a life that should be familiar with a lot of people: Disappointment with government, anger at a lack of positive change, and fear of poor economic foresight and authoritarian ideas that chip away at freedoms. It shows that once you tear away our government and theirs, what would be left would be a lot of people, from different cultures, that want the same thing; a positive future.

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### Niko says

This wasn't my favorite book. It begins with the narrator in an Iranian airport lurking around the library books. She constantly picks up information on Iran's regime in the past. I learned that Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers spearheaded a revolution that would change Iran's government forever. The Shah (king) would be replaced. Clerics would have political power as oppose to one absolute ruler. This amongst many other historical events that impacted the politics of Iran was essentially the content of the book

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### Jessica says

This non-fiction book was a TERRIFIC read. Very easy to follow. NOT a chronological history of Iran. Instead, the author goes on various pilgrimages throughout Iran and tells the back story of the person (usually a shah, a martyr, a a prime minister, etc) whose shrine he's visiting. He also talks with NUMEROUS current day (written in 2002) Iranians who give him their opinions on modern day Iran. Overall, I'd certainly recommend the book if you're interested in Iran, currently and historically.

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### Sam Norton says

Very well done book. Initially I was a little disappointed to see that it was a political travelogue, but as I read on I realized that it was a good way to introduce the schisms within Iranian society. It seems very clear that but for a minority of conservative religious hardliners, Iran is a country inclined towards democracy. The question now becomes: what can the US do to responsibly encourage democracy in Iran?

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## Xue Yun says

A really long book with small prints. Most of the book is about pre-revolution Iran with continuous repetition of certain main points. This book is a mixture of history, cultural analysis, journalist interviews, and just travel journals. With the repetition, a lot of different names made my head hurt a bit while reading, jointing down key points, and comprehending.

This book focuses more on the post-revolutionary 1979 Iran where the Iranians are suffering economically with their currency that used to be 7:1 to U.S. dollars to 400(I forgot the exact but either 400 or 4000) :1. A huge inflation! This book also touches upon one of the greatest talking points about U.S. and the media.

In page 148 a question asked by an Iranian stood out to me, he asked "Why does Western media hate Iran?"

This is a pretty history oriented book, so I would only recommend it to those individuals that like global history one and two. A lot of Molavi's pilgrimage is of global history one historical figures.

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## Jonathan Lu says

Fantastically enlightening story from the open-minded and highly intelligent perspective of this journalist returning to his ancestral homeland. Equal parts historical, cultural, spiritual, and loaded with wit - follow Mr. Molavi on a journey of cultural understanding both historical and modern with classic pilgrimages to the tombs of revered poets, as well as modern pilgrimages by opportunity seeking engineers to the Canadian embassy in Damascus. Molavi's is exactly the perspective needed (and sorely lacking yet easily accessible from people like him!) by those who dictate our country's own foreign policy to massive intelligence failures. Artfully written so that as the reader I feel like I can see through Molavi's own eyes... and desire more than ever to find a way in to visit.

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## sheena says

if you, along with a great deal of our generation, felt solidarity with the threatened, arrested, and otherwise hurt writers and protestors in the recent highly publicized crackdown of open press in Iran, but didn't do shit that might help anyone, save wearing more green or something, and also failed to grasp the larger issues of what was going on and what all this might say about Iran's past and hint to for her future, then this might be a read for you.

Moldavi has written an accessible, inviting even, introduction to Persian history, culture, life and conflicts, based on his own research, travels and conversations. in *The Soul of Iran* he presents us with a country that wildly contrasts with the familiar nuclear armed, "die Israel, die!" nation who frequently has sleepovers with the US media.

i don't know if anyone can tell a story of their birth country that is not biased, delusional in its optimism or altogether hopeless and defeated, but Moldavi comes damn close. while he is ultimately rooting for a secular democracy, he doesn't paint the religious or other opposing sides as inhumane, gravely mislead or backwards. he interviews people from a variety of classes and beliefs. and it really seems like he does his best not to slant what they have to say.

from pre-Islamic Iran to the current generation that is stifled by the regime in power and apathetic as a result of their parents' idealism that failed to yield the change sought, the complexities and contradictions of the Islamic Republic are presented in a much more brilliant manner than my drunken review (sorry, guys) can reflect.

for ideas on why the road to democracy isn't and can't be a short one, but may still loom closer than we expect, and a review of how toxic decisions of the west both motivate and discourage change, please find your way to this book. it also includes pretty fascinating statistics on iran's population. great for cocktail parties.

hmm. it's a worthwhile read, and i'm sorry my review doesn't do it justice. buy the book and right your own superior review, please.

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### **Hong Deng says**

Although all the Iran terms for political figures, clerics, and Iranian places were overwhelming at first, the book offers great insight into the history of Iran and the various factors that led to the 1979 revolution. It was interesting for a comparative government student to see the similar ways both the Chinese and Iranian authoritarian states maintain their legitimacy.

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### **Jennie says**

I picked this up because I realized I knew nothing about Iran except the standard American media images from my childhood of hostages, Ayatollah Khomeini, flag-burnings, and angry men chanting "Death to America".

I don't think I could have picked a better book for my introduction to Iran. Molavi's writing style is conversational and engaging. As a student, I was fascinated by the history and the politics, but as an American I was equally fascinated by the conversations Molavi had with people he met during the course of his travels to various shrines. I found myself laughing at myself a few times when students in the book would ask Molavi how Americans felt about such-and-such political figure, I would think, "who?" just before reading Molavi's response that most Americans don't know who so-and-so is.

Molavi's numerous references to books and essays he read while researching the sites he visited should also prove valuable to readers who want to continue their own explorations. Highly recommended.

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### **Lukas says**

Even though it was written nearly twenty years ago it still captures the details forming Iranian soul. The right mix of history and human stories make the book really enjoyable.

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## Mayla says

my AP comparative government book gives me something to release my angst and anger. A Nation's Journey to Freedom: The Soul of Iran is its name and the author, Afshin Molavi is Iranian. I appreciate his passion for Iran, passionate enough to travel back to Iran and write a whole book about it, but can anything get anymore boring? He's a journalist...he needs to expose the conditions in Iran and the history of Iran! Why is he going out of his way to learn the real purpose of writing a piece of journalism to describe everything he sees even though it does nothing to the real point of the story? Why are his sentences so freaking awkward? Why is he trying to sound all professional? Dude should just tell it like it is! He said, "The weather was hot, but not oppressive." We don't care and since you're talking about human rights and oppression in Iran, stop using the word oppressive carelessly and out of context. "...he said: "We will use my cousin's truck. I hope you like Mashhad melons." I found out later that the two statements were linked. Mohammad's cousin, it turned out, drove a melon truck." Well, obviously we would've figured that out by now and the fact that "these two statements were linked" is not important at all. "...a thin man in a red shirt and black sandals." - Well, was he not wearing any pants? Is there any reason you didn't include the texture or the color of his freaking pants?

I.am.so.angry.right.now.

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## Otto says

Molavi was born in Iran but moved early to the US and has written for e.g. Washington Post and Financial Times so he is somewhat an outsider though he is familiar with the language, religion and culture of Iran. In this book, which is the updated version Persian Pilgrimages, he goes on pilgrimages to shrines of poets, politicians and historical and religious figures. And in doing so he creates a sympathetic and wonderfully readable view of modern Iran through his mixing of history and the stories of various people, taxi drivers and clerics and students, etc., that he meets along the way.

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## Jessica says

Though slightly less entertaining than Out of Mao's Shadow, Afsin Molavi also did a good job on both teaching and entertaining the reader. Originally, I thought Iran was a crazy, nuclear obsessed country tryin to destroy the United States. However, after reading Molavi's book, I realized the struggles the Iranian people must endure, especially the youth. Iran's history has always been complicated even to the people of Iran, but now I at least feel I have enough knowledge to discuss the topic without being ignorant. What I didn't like is that Afsin Molavi metioned the tradition of tarof in too much detail.

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## R says

A total waste of time. Same typical stuff written by Iranian-Americans, apparently it doesn't matter which book you choose you will the same stereotypes all over. I expected reading a different account of the history and politics of Iran as the author is a Tabrizi (not a Tehrani as usual) and holds a master's degree in Middle East history from John Hopkins University.

His long explanations about the country's history are repetitions of the same old cliches, lacking any insight or real depth, that can be read in any other book of the same characteristics. Same can be said about his description of the society, I expected to learn more about Iran's ethnic minorities and the lifestyles and opinions of people from non-Persian/non-urban areas of Iran, but this is simply another Fars/Tehran-centric book.

It's very unfortunate, as he is a good writer and the book had potential of being very interesting and original but it didn't meet my expectations at all.

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## Paige says

This was a pretty decent crash course in Iranian history & current affairs (says someone who is not an expert on either of those things). The cover (or one of the review/blurbs inside, I don't remember which) called this book "ambitious," and I agree. I'm not sure that it achieved all it wanted. After all, it's a really difficult thing to do to weave together ancient history, many political maneuvers over the last 100+ years, popular culture, analysis of an entire country... The most skilled pen could write volumes and still be lacking. Some sentences or even entire paragraphs seemed superfluous and/or clunky, and but overall I really enjoyed it. It held my attention. I learned a lot and would love to learn more. I feel a lot of identification with Iranians and would love love love to go there. I kept looking up all the sites mentioned on Flickr and they are just absolutely breathtaking. I would recommend this book to any US citizen--it really does seem that the western media and western politicians hate Iran. Coverage seems overwhelmingly negative and always focuses on the crazies and the weapons. (Side note: I am completely opposed to nuclear weapons and really most weapons, but the biggest stockpiler and user of them is...USA!!! So turn those news cameras back to your own country, media-types.) This is a much broader view than that. When I'd read a few paragraphs to Peter, he'd usually want me to keep going--he found it all pretty engaging as well.

I really would have liked it if he'd interviewed more women, because the perspective is very much a male one--almost every single person the author talks to is male. I understand that cultural customs in Iran pretty much dictate the separation--people have to be careful not to be seen associating with the opposite sex in front of the "moral" police. So I understand the omission and it was probably necessary. Even so, that's the main reason it loses a star: women make up a humongous portion of Iranians so the omission was quite noticeable to me.

PS The author included pictures of himself & is totally cute...fyi

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