

The following is a true story written by one of Dr. Makbuleh's students and is a clear example of her life's mission in action. This wonderful story has been translated into several languages and distributed widely thru the internet.

Mohammad Our Brother: A True Story

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"Breakdowns, if handled correctly, can lead to breakthroughs," we had been told repeatedly in our Kabbalah class, but on this journey we learned to live it in practice. This was my fourth or fifth trip with Mitra, our Kabbalah teacher (or our "study companion" as she prefers to be called). On each of the previous travels, I was witness to some amazing events and meaningful coincidences. Our car broke down on three occasions, resulting in memorable lessons and valuable experiences. But what I witnessed in our last journey together tops them all. This story also involves a breakdown.

Mitra planned a "Mystical Journey" to Williamsburg, Virginia—a one-week Spiritual Psychology Workshop titled: "**Goddesses in Every Woman**" based on a book by Jean Shinoda Bolen. Mitra wanted to teach us about our inner psychological tendencies through the stories of the seven Greek-Roman Goddesses (Demeter, Persephone, Hera, Athena, Hestia, Diana, and Venus) by pointing out the similarities between these Greek Goddesses and the Heroines of the Hebrew Bible, as well as their corresponding relations to the various spheres on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life.

We were ten women on a journey from southern California, all Iranian and all Jewish. We arrived at Norfolk Airport around 6:00 pm on Friday, October 4, 2002. Mitra had reserved a state-of-the-art 15-passenger van, but the van we were given was an old, beat-up piece of junk. From the first sight, we knew it was going to give us trouble. We tried to change the car to a better one, but were told it was the only one available.

As Mitra drove toward the resort from the airport, we all enjoyed the beautiful scenery of this lovely state with its many rivers, lakes, tunnels and bridges. It was as if we were driving through a magnificent work of art. Everywhere we looked, it was like a gorgeous painting. To me, it was all that I had imagined America to be in my childhood years. Who knows, maybe this pristine image is truly why people from all over the world are drawn to this country?

After about forty minutes, we arrived at our destination, a very peaceful and beautiful resort called *Williamsburg Plantation*. Mitra had reserved two spacious and fully equipped condominiums, one upstairs and the other downstairs, facing a huge, green garden. This was to be our home and workshop for the next several days.

Saturday, we started our session with a meditation and special prayer after the blessing over the candles. Since our place of gathering was a very important historical location, where America as we know it had its beginnings, it also had great positive energies. A very bloody war between the American and British armies had finally ended there, so Mitra suggested that we all meditate on the volatile Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East. We prayed that God's Grace may descend on this bloody region and

resolve the enmities between these warring nations. Little did we know how we were all destined to face this conflict in a couple of days, first hand!

After prayer and meditation, we began our series of workshops on the psychological meaning of the stories of the Greek Goddesses. The first amazing validation of our work came when I went to the *Visitors Center* in Colonial Williamsburg to ask where we might find the best seafood in town.

The address I was given was a waterfront restaurant, a half an hour away called **Nick's**. We got somewhat lost and almost did not make it, but apparently it was the "Goddesses' Will" that we should go there. When we finally got to **Nick's**, we saw the most beautiful, full-size statues of the seven Goddesses welcoming us in front of the door and in the lobby of this restaurant! To put it simply, the spiritual and the material food at **Nick's** were both out of this world.

Our van kept us worried as it wobbled and moaned and made the women sitting in the back rows miserable. We drove it with great caution on our sight-seeing tours. Mitra had planned to take us on a one-day trip to Washington D.C. on Tuesday of that week, but she decided it was too risky and changed her mind. Seven members of our group found a tour bus (Operating only on Tuesdays!) to take them to Washington D.C.. The other three: Mitra, Mitra's cousin Farideh and I decided to stay behind and relax.

After a good night sleep and a leisurely breakfast, the three of us drove to an unusual and unique shopping mall, close to the resort. As luck would have it, we met two extremely kind-hearted and generous sisters, the only two Iranian women in that town, each of whom had a big shop in the mall. At about five in the afternoon, we decided it was time to go back to the resort and spend a nice evening with some soup and pizza, and with a movie, perhaps. This time I offered to drive the van, but the car would not start. Mitra tried her hand as well, no luck. We were stuck.

We went back to the nearest Iranian-owned store, where the owner offered us help and allowed us to use her phone. Mitra called the car rental agency and notified them of the problem. Surprisingly, they told her to just leave the keys in the van and they'd come to tow it away within two hours. They said to leave the doors to the van unlocked and just leave! Unbelievable! Had we found a place where people can be still so trusting of each other?

Next, the Iranian woman called us a taxi. It took almost half an hour for the cab to arrive. The driver jumped out to help us unload our belongings from the van into his cab. Once we settled into the taxi, we were in for a treat. Our cab driver turned out to be quite a character. He was an unshaven, husky, and wild-looking man with Mediterranean features, long bushy dark-blond hair, and an endearing accent. His name was Mohammad—an Arab Moslem from Syria who had settled in Virginia some 13 years ago. As Providence would have it, he was one of the only three Syrian Moslems in the entire region! When he found out we were originally from Iran, he became quite happy and excited, naturally assuming that we were, like himself, Moslems.

Mitra who was sitting in front, asked Mohammad if he and another cab-driver colleague of his might be able to take our group around for the next three or four days and then take us back to the airport on Friday. After a short and funny Middle-Eastern style bargaining, we agreed on the fees. Mohammad gave Mitra his cell-phone number

and asked her to call him any time we needed a cab. His voice was totally macho, coarse and forceful, but his manners were thoroughly those of a caring gentleman.

The next day, Wednesday, Mohammad and another cab driver picked all ten of us from the resort to take us sightseeing. We noticed that he was now clean-shaven and had gotten a very stylish haircut. We complimented him on his new appearance. Mitra was, once again, sitting in front, next to Mohammad and she began clapping and moving to the rhythm of the Arabic music playing on the cab's stereo. The rest of us in the back joined in and started clapping and humming to the music. Mohammad was so happy to see us enjoy the music that he took the music tape out of the deck and at once handed it to Mitra saying, *"This is now yours!"* Mitra tried to refuse his generosity, saying she had many Arabic music tapes at home, but Mohammad would not hear of it: *"You must take it! This is yours!"* he insisted, as he pushed the tape into Mitra's bag.

What happened next, gave us the shock of our lives. Putting another music tape into the stereo, Mohammad shouted with an agitated and angry voice: *"Now, listen to this one! It is real Palestinian music."* I asked him: *"What is it saying Mohammad?"* Mitra had sensed right away what kind of polemic music this was and tried to warn me, in Farsi, to keep silent and not to ask about the lyrics, but it was too late.

With a louder voice than ever, and this time with tremendous rage, Mohammad said: *"It says, while we are praying in the Mosque, the Jewish people come and kill us all."* And then he began pounding on the dashboard in front of him: *"Hitler should have killed them all, he should have cleaned them off the face of the earth!"* The four of us sitting in the back were scared out of our wits and became totally quiet, but Mitra just kept on listening patiently to his ranting and raving and even snapping her fingers and swaying to the music.

Mohammad went on and on about how the Jews control the United States government and all the media, and how these horrible Jews have brought nothing but misery to the world. We were now even more scared. Mitra kept on nodding calmly, and without validating his proclamations regarding the Jews, she agreed with him that the Palestinians had gotten a raw deal.

Mohammad was still very angry and did not calm down, so Mitra tried to change the subject. She turned his attention to the beautiful scenery around and what a beautiful place he was living in. This had a temporary effect, but Mohammad soon resumed his anti-Semitic diatribe. Mitra finally hit upon the right diversion and asked our driver about his wife and children.

Mohammad's face lit up and he smiled as he told us about his American Christian wife and his four daughters. *"They are beautiful like their Daddy!"* he declared beaming with joy. *"But I am sending each one to Syria at twelve years old so they can be brought up in my culture and be married there... no daughter of mine is going to go bar-hopping and sleeping around with sleazy men like girls do here!"* Even though he sounded like a male-chauvinist dictator, the deep love that Mohammad felt for his wife and his four daughters was clear and palpable to us all. He was utterly devoted to them and would do anything for their well being.

Mitra took advantage of this opportunity and asked Mohammad if he believed in the power of love. To which he said yes. And then she said: *"See, you and your wife are two people from two different cultures and religions, and you two still love each other"*

and have managed to build a wonderful family together.... Love is the only thing that brought the two of you together.... Don't you think the same kind of love can help the Israelis and the Palestinians become friends and build a fantastic life for everyone in that region?"

Without revealing her own secret identity, Mitra also told Mohammad how she had lived in so many cultures in the world and everywhere she had met both good and bad people. Mohammad was now listening in silence and even nodding in agreement. The rest of us in the back began to breathe again and felt a bit more relaxed.

That night, we told the rest of the group what had transpired in our cab. After the initial shock wore off, as is the Jewish custom, each one in the group had two or three different opinions! Some suggested we hire another cab and not risk getting into the same car with Mohammad. Others said we should just keep on pretending we were Moslems and let things go at that. Mitra listened politely to everyone's opinion, but at the end told us firmly to leave this matter up to her. She also told us that this was an opportunity for us to put what we had learned over the years in our Kabbalah class to work.

"Kabbalah means 'Receiving,' ... to practice Kabbalah means learning how to receive Love, Light, Wisdom and Understanding from the Spiritual realms and imparting it to this material world..." Mitra reminded us, and then challenged us to practice exactly this when we were with Mohammad: *"He is a good man who is hurting understandably because he cares about the unjust suffering of his own people, but he cannot yet feel the suffering of the other side; He does not know yet that WE ARE ALL ONE!"*

"But what if he finds out that we are Jewish and does something to us in his rage?" Some of the women asked fearfully.

Mitra half jokingly replied: *"We are all going to die someday; I doubt that we are going to die here in Virginia, but if we are going to die, at least it is better to die for the sake of Love! What is the point of living in fear?"*

So, once again, we found ourselves riding in the cab with Mohammad. It was now Thursday. We finished our last workshop and called Mohammad to come take us to Colonial Williamsburg. He and one of his colleagues dropped us off at this magnificent colonial tavern where the likes of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson had dined some centuries ago. We arranged with Mohammad to pick us up at around 9:00 pm to take us back to the resort. At 9:00 O'clock, Mitra went ahead of the group to tell the two cabbies that we were on our way. *"Allah Akbar! (God is Great!)"* Mohammad said laughing as he shook his head in jest: *"At home, I wait all the time for my five women.... And here again, I wait all the time for another ten women!"*

Mitra teased him: *"God must love you very much to bring so many women into your life who are worth waiting for!"*

We were still waiting for a couple more members of our group when Mohammad suddenly asked Mitra: *"What is it exactly that you do, any way?"* When Mitra explained to him that she has a Ph.D. in research psychology and that she specializes in spiritual and mystical psychology, Mohammad said to her: *"So you have many 'gradulations' (graduate degrees), yes? Now let me ask you something..."*

He then proceeded to clutch and rub his tummy as he told Mitra about the severe stomach spasms from which he had been suffering periodically for eight years now. He had been to several prominent doctors and had undergone the most rigorous medical

testing; all indicating there was “nothing wrong” with him, physically. His facial expressions made it obvious that he was in a great deal of pain as he spoke.

At that point we were all gathered together and were ready to climb into the two cabs. Mitra had asked those members of the group who were too scared to be with Mohammad to ride in the other cab. Once we settled in the cab, Mitra started asking Mohammad some questions about his stomach pain: *“Did your stomach spasm begin yesterday right after you got so agitated about the Palestinian situation and began cursing the Jews?”*

He replied quickly: *“Yes! Yes!”*

Mitra told Mohammad that she teaches people about Stress Management, and what she has found in her own personal experience and those of other people is that these types of abdominal spasms are sometimes caused by heavy-duty rage and anger. She also told him that learning to breathe deeply, like a baby, can be very effective as a stress management technique, and to consider taking a Yoga class after consulting with his physician. Since he did not know how to write in English, he asked Mitra to write, *“Yoga Class”* on the back of one of his cards.

Right then and there, while driving the cab, Mohammad started using the deep breathing technique Mitra had taught him, and almost instantaneously his stomach discomfort went away! From then on, every time he would get too excited about anything, Mitra would kindly say: *“Mohammad, don’t forget to breathe!”* and he would laugh and take deep breaths.

Mohammad now felt a much greater respect for her and her many *“Gradulations”* (graduate degrees). After Mitra told him about how much she and couple of the other ladies in our group had suffered because of forced marriages in their teens, it became apparent to us all that Mohammad was having second thoughts about getting his daughters married off early without any *“gradulations.”*

Mitra asked Mohammad if he really wanted his daughters to be unhappy and miserable: *“Your daughters have your blood in them, if they are unhappy, your blood will not be happy and you will feel their pain.”* She said.

“Anybody who mistreats my girls will not live to see the light of day!” Mohammad proclaimed with great passion.

“Breathe! Mohammad, Breathe...” Mitra said to him as she pointed to his stomach. We all laughed aloud.

By the end of our last day in Williamsburg, Mohammad had begun to treat us like family. He even refused to charge us the full cab fair. He told us that if we ever came back to this city, we should not go to a hotel: *“You are welcome to stay in my house with my wife and my children anytime!”* And we all knew he meant it.

As we were making arrangements for him to take us to the airport in the morning, he suddenly declared: *“I invite you all to come to my house tomorrow morning for cake and coffee before I take you to the airport!”* Mohammad insisted. *“Are you sure, Mohammad? Are you sure it is ok with your wife?”* Mitra asked. *“Yeah, I am the man in the house, the President, my wife is the Minister of Interior... whoever I bring home, my wife will be happy with, that is why I love my wife,”* he replied.

The next morning, Friday the 11th, at 9:00 o’clock sharp, Mohammad arrived, along with another cab driver, an African American woman named *Leslie*, to pick us up. Mitra greeted him in Arabic and chatted with him as we brought our luggage to the door.

There, he wouldn't even let Leslie or any one of us help him with the many big pieces of luggage, insisting that this was a man's job to carry heavy things.

As soon as all the passengers and their luggage were loaded into the two cabs and we hit the road, Mohammad put on a Palestinian tape and began raising his voice in protest against the way the Jews had made Islam and Moslems look bad in the eyes of the American people, etc. He was once again yelling and getting quite angry. Once again, Mitra calmly and kindly pointed to his stomach, "*Mohammad, your stomach, breathe!*"

He said, "*Yeah, yeah,*" and took a deep breath. Having gotten to know Mohammad better by now, to those of us in the backseat of the cab this whole scene was more hilarious than scary, but we were still worried how Mohammad might react if he were told of our Jewish identity.

After Mohammad calmed down, Mitra told him that she had recorded many good programs about Islam, such as Oprah's "*Islam 101*" and another six hour program about the magnificent Islamic civilization. She said, "*If you want, I can send you these videotapes to watch with your family.*"

Mohammad became very happy and said, "*Yeah, yeah*", as he handed another one of his business cards to Mitra: "*Take this, this has my home address on it, and please send that tape for me.*"

Mitra then said: "*You know, Mohammad, this is not about the Jews and the Moslems, the Israelis and the Palestinians... this is a problem within every one of us; this Hatred and Anger comes from 'Ta-assob'... (an Arabic word for prejudice which comes from the root of 'Asab' (nerve), "...and when you get Asabani (angry), all your Asabs (nerves) in your stomach will give you hard time.*"

Mohammad listened to Mitra and his face started to glow. Mitra continued saying that the same kind of hatred and prejudice exists between the Shiites and the Sunnis (two branches of Islam), between Protestants and Catholics, and between orthodox Jews and non-orthodox Jews. "*It is hatred and anger that kills our bodies and makes us kill each other...*" She explained. Mohammad was listening intently and nodding in agreement.

The conversation was interrupted as we arrived at his home in the woods of a beautiful Yorktown neighborhood. Mohammad's wife, Carolyn, greeted us at the door. She was a gracious, kind, and strong woman. Mohammad introduced his wife to Mitra and to the rest of us. Their home was nicely decorated, American style. His daughter, Samira (whom Carolyn said they named her after her Dad, Samuel, but Mohammad said, no, we named her after my sister Samira), was a beautiful, intelligent little girl and very well mannered.

Mitra took Samira into her arms, started talking with her, and she right away became friends with Mitra and talked to her about things she liked. Mohammad poured coffee in ten beautiful china cups for all of us and Carolyn offered us each a piece of the delicious cake she had prepared. Their warmth and hospitality truly touched our hearts and we were engulfed with such indescribable feelings. When it was time to leave, little Samira was crying and did not want us to leave: "*Why do they have to go? Can't they stay more?*" she asked her mother with tears streaming down her cheeks.

Back in the cab, Mitra thanked Mohammad for letting us into his home and asked him how was it that the other cab driver, Leslie, did not mind taking the time to take this

detour to his house and seemed even to enjoy the visit with his family. Mohammad explained that he always tried to be kind to Leslie who had been recently widowed, and he tried to help Leslie by giving her some of his clients so she could make more money: *"everything is connected, I know if I do something good, something good will come to me."* He said.

Mitra sensed a window of opportunity here and said, *"So, you believe that Allah (God) is Adel (Just), yeah? And Allah wants His Children to act justly and kindly toward one another, right?"* She asked Mohammad. *"Of course,"* he responded.

Mitra proceeded to tell him about a debate she had seen on television between three authors about the Arab-Israeli conflict. One author claimed that the Jews had treated the Palestinian Arabs very unfairly and it is perfectly justified that the Palestinians want to throw them all into the sea. The second author took the opposite position and argued that it is very unjust that Moslems and Arabs should have more than twenty very vast, oil-rich countries, while the Jews only have a small country with no oil or other resources, so it is not fair to expect the Israelis to give up their little piece of land.

But the third author, instead of an argument, offered a parable. He said that there was once this man whose house was on fire, and he had no choice but to jump from the third story window. As luck would have it, he landed on top of an innocent passerby. They were both injured and bruised, but instead of trying to help each other heal their wounds, they began fighting and hitting each other and injuring one another even more! This, he said is the real tragedy that has happened between the Jews and the Arabs in the Middle East. Instead of healing, they continue to blame and wound each other.

Mohammad was all ears and would not say anything. This whole thing was new to him, he had never heard about all this, certainly not the way Mitra was telling him. After hearing the parable, he shook his head with heavy emotion and said: *"It is a sad story... really very sad."*

We were now a few miles from Norfolk Airport. Mitra turned up the volume to hear more of the Arabic music that was playing on the stereo. The song playing was one of Fairuz', an Egyptian singer who happened to be the favorite of both Mitra and Mohammad! Mitra began singing the song in Arabic and Mohammad joined in gleefully.

We were witness to his utter joy at having met someone of another land who enjoyed and appreciated his kind of music. Living in a city where no other people could relate to him, it made him so happy to be singing his favorite song with another person. He promised Mitra to send her all the Fairuz music tapes he can find when he goes to Syria next time.

We reached the Airport around 11:00 am and with the help of a porter, Mohammad began to unload the luggage from both cars. Mitra stood next to his cab, and the other nine of us stood nearby, anxiously waiting, not knowing how the end of this drama might unfold. When Mohammad rejoined Mitra next to his cab, she handed him the cash that was ready in her hand, and as we all listened nervously, she said to him: *"Mohammad, I know we had agreed to pay you \$150.00 for taking us to the airport, but we want to give you \$180.00 instead, because in our religion 180 is a name of God and symbolizes all the blessings of Life; you have been like a brother to us these past few days, and we wish you all the blessings that God can give."* Mohammad's face lit up

with a big smile, and putting the money into his wallet he asked: *“and what religion is this?”*

Mitra said to him: *“Mohammad, take a deep breath, and please promise not to get angry!”* He was now smiling in bewilderment. Mitra looked kindly into Mohammad’s inquiring eyes and confessed: *“Mohammad, I believe in all faiths, but I am Jewish, and so are the rest of the women in our group.”*

What happened next exceeded even our wildest expectations. Mohammad threw his arms around Mitra, hugging her tightly with tears in his eyes: *“I don’t care what religion you have, you are all like my sisters!”* he exclaimed. He went on to apologize for the nasty things he had said about the Jews. Mitra began crying as Mohammad continued to hug her and give her kisses on her cheeks. *“May Allah bring peace to our two peoples as He has made peace between us.”* We all had tears in our eyes as we watched this incredible scene

Mohammad took turns to hug every one of us as he said goodbye to us. None of us was afraid of his anger any more. He kept on asking Mitra to write to him and to call him, and Mitra promised to do so. Leslie and the other cab drivers were completely puzzled.

“Are you all relatives of Mohammad?” Leslie asked.

We replied, *“No, but we just found ourselves another brother in Spirit!”*

Mohammad told me later on that after leaving us that day at the Norfolk airport, he had cried in his cab all the way to Williamsburg!

The following day, back in Los Angeles, Mitra checked the messages on the answering machine in her Irvine office. She was overjoyed to hear Mohammad’s voice: *“Hi, this is Mohammad... you say I’m your brother, so, I’m calling to check on my sisters, to see that you all got home alright. I want to say I love you all, and hope to see you again soon. Please call me when you can.”*

Mitra called Mohammad immediately and she said hello to him by singing their favorite Fairuz song: *“Nahna va-alghamar jiran...”* (*We and the Moon are Neighbors...*). Indeed, *We Are All Neighbors...* and our little group learned first hand in this Mystic Journey to Virginia what it means to truly...

Love Your Neighbor As Yourself.



