Dr. Sa'eed of Iran 1863-1942

Kurdish Physician to princes and peasants, nomads and nobles



Sa'eed was born on June 1, 1863 in the Kurdish part of Iran into a fanatical Sunni Muslim family. The name Sa'eed means "happy" or "fortunate." His father, Mullah Rasool, came from a long line of Muslim clerics. Orphaned at an early age, his uncle employed him on the farm and as a night watchman. Rasool didn't like this peasant life. He had a thirst for knowledge. He fled from his uncle's home and made his way to Senneh where Muslim theologians congregated.

His piety won him permission from the city elders to write prayers for the sick. Soon he became a mullah. He married Mahenessa – a worthy girl of his own people. As a mullah's wife she was involved in many religious functions among the women. Many came seeking her advice. Eight children were born to this couple but one after the other they died. When Sa'eed was born the only one left was Kaka – a boy of eight.

His father soon saw that Sa'eed was a very bright young boy. Aged four he had already memorized chapters of the Quran. Each evening he sat on the floor beside his father and recited the six essentials of Islam – **belief in God, his angels, his books, his prophets, the day of judgement and the predestination of good and evil**. Before his children could read or write, Rasool spent many hours telling them tales of Muslim saints and heroes.

Before he was six years old Sa'eed was attending the school his father had opened for teaching Persian and Arabic. Here 20 or 30 boys sat cross-legged for 8 hours a day swaying back and forth as they recited passages from the Quran or Persian poems. Here Sa'eed laid the foundation of his education.

Sa'eed was very gifted linguistically. At a very young age had already learned not only the Kurdish language, but also Persian, Arabic and – a little later – Syriac. He was a diligent student with a retentive memory. He had a good voice and often gave the Call to Prayer from the mosque he attended.

He was never happier than when he went with his father to the mosque and listened to the mullah's conversations with his friends. As he listened, his thirst for knowledge and hunger for holiness deepened. His father's greatest gift to him was his personal example – the spontaneous expression of a deeply religious nature and upright character.

In the early 1870s clouds were gathering over Sa'eed's happy life. The famine was raging and an epidemic of cholera was claiming the lives of many. Mullah Rasool had a struggle to provide for his family. To add to his troubles, thieves broke into their house and stole their small reserve of flour, their meagre savings and Mullah Rasool's sheepskin cloak. By now there was a new baby in the family. It was decided that Rasool and his two sons would go away to a healthier place till the cholera and famine subsided. His mother stayed behind to look after the baby. On their return in the spring of 1873 they found Mahenessa weak from malaria. She died soon after their return and her baby soon followed her to the grave.

Rasool developed a fever in 1876. He became very weak and it was clear that the end was near. As he lay on his deathbed he could hear Sa'eed sobbing quietly. He called him over and took his hand. He tried to comfort him. This was the parting advice he gave to his beloved son. **"Dear child, if you pursue the path of wisdom, though I be dead, you will not be fatherless. But if you should seek the ways of the foolish, even though I were alive, you would be an orphan."**

As the news of Mullah Rasool's death spread, hundreds of people gathered in the mosque. With great ceremony, the Sheikh bound a white turban around Sa'eed's head showing that he was formally invested with the title of 'Mullah'. He was only 13 years old.


Sunni and Shia Clerics in Senneh

A few months later a well-to-do Assyrian Roman Catholic asked Sa'eed to tutor his son in Persian. Sa'eed's impression of these Christians and their worship is recorded in his own words, **"Their indulgence in drink, their apparent worship of images, their ignorance of the Bible and repetition of prayers in the old Chaldean language – all these made Islam seem more glorious before my eyes. Often I thanked God that he had created me a Muslim, born in the true religion."**

Three years past and Sa'eed continued his search for knowledge and holiness, but he remained unsatisfied and restive. A Persian New Testament came into his hands through a pupil. He read it from curiosity. There was much that was unintelligible and he threw it to one side in disgust. He had some discussions with Catholic priests but these only served to convince him of the superiority of Islam.

In Senneh there was a branch of a powerful order of dervishes known as Naqshbandis. Sa'eed had heard rumours that some of these mystics after 40 days of fasting and meditation had wondrous visions. He thought perhaps this was the way he could attain the perfection he craved. He applied for membership and was initiated.

They held their sessions in a mosque each night after evening prayers. They sat in silence in a circle on the floor. The leader repeated two special chapters of the Quran and the others recited after him. Then each one said different prayers inaudibly an odd number of times keeping count by passing pebbles from one hand to the other. After that there was a pause when each person was to think over his sin and picture himself in the flames of hell. These imaginings were so vivid that there were moanings and tears. The leader would bear the breast of some overwrought devotee and breathe a holy breath over his heart whereupon he would have a vision of paradise and break into songs of praise. Sa'eed met faithfully with these Sufi mystics for three years performing their rituals and seeking the contentment of heart that still eluded him.

His first contact with a truly born-again believer came at the age of 17. Three men arrived in Senneh. They were an Assyrian national pastor, Kasha Yohanan and two colporteurs educated and trained in Urmia (north-western Iran close to the Turkish border). Yohanan planned to stay for some time and so needed more fluent Persian. Mullah Sa'eed was recommended to him as a tutor.

Sa'eed had heard from his Catholic acquaintances that Protestants were heretics. If he looked down on Orthodox Christianity as inferior to Islam to what degree should he look down on these 'Christian dissenters'? He believed it was unlawful for him to greet them with the customary greeting, **"Peace be upon you"**. So he arrived at Yohanan's door and gave the simple greeting, **"Good morning"**. Quick to perceive the implication, they responded, **"But we are 'People of the Book' and it is lawful to wish us peace."** This reply astonished Sa'eed as it was clear they understood Quranic teaching.

One day Sa'eed arrived at their house just as they were having devotions. He was invited to join them and given a copy of Psalms to follow as they read in turn. Then one of them prayed in Persian. He was amazed that they prayed for both their friends and their enemies. He had often been hired by people to write prayers for the destruction of their enemies.

The two colporteurs left for Baghdad. The relationship between Sa'eed and Yohanan deepened. Their conversation often turned from language to religion. Sa'eed dared to ask some of the questions closest to his heart. Yohanan gave him a New Testament in Syriac. He showed it to his older brother Kaka and told him of his conversations with Yohanan. Kaka was very angry. Sa'eed realised he must continue his investigations without Kaka's knowledge.

Kasha Yohanan often had discussions with Jews. Sometimes he asked Sa'eed to act as referee, looking up Bible passages to prove that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Sa'eed was being convinced without realising it. He pondered these prophecies concerning the Messiah. Could Muhammad be worthy of such predictions? What about Isaiah 42:1-3? Muhammad spread Islam



Inside the Great Mosque in Senneh

by the power of the sword. He watched the life of Yohanan very carefully to see if it was a witness to what he said.

Later Sa'eed wrote: **"From day to day I found myself more drawn to the pastor. His love, his truthfulness, his pious life, his meekness and his honesty affected me deeply. I used to listen to his conversations with those who came to him. I weighed every bit in the balance of reason. I could see how true his points were and how weighty his arguments, but above all, his life was a decisive witness to what he said."**

Sa'eed became more and more confused and dismayed. One night he took a live coal from the fire. He pressed it first against one leg and then against the other. The pain was excruciating but he held it there until two deep wounds were formed. This was a Kurdish practice. When a Kurd makes a vow he makes a scar on his body as a permanent reminder to keep him faithful. One of Sa'eed scars was to remind him of the vow he had just made never again to speak with Christians about religion. The other was to remind him of his shameful contact and help him avoid evil.

He sent word to Yohanan that increasing duties meant he would no longer be able to visit him. Later he wrote, **"As time went on I soon discovered that though the burns on my body had healed, the wounds the words of the man of God had produced in my mind had not."**

He decided to study the Bible and the Quran and delve into the life history of his prophet. He was ready to meet with Yohanan again. Soon it would be time for Yohanan to leave Senneh after almost a year. Sa'eed was very sad at this prospect. Into his mind came the stirring call of Isaiah to captive Israel, **"Arise, shine; for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you!"** The words came to him with a new depth of meaning. This was obvious in his face and Yohanan asked him what had happened. They knelt and thanked God that Sa'eed now accepted that Jesus was the Saviour of the World and his Saviour.

It was time for Yohanan to return home. He gave Sa'eed a New Testament in Persian and one in Syriac. He left him with words of encouragement and warning, **"My dear boy, out of thousands of people in this town of darkness God has chosen you alone as the object of His mercy and led you to your Saviour. The light of Christ has indeed risen upon you. Be diligent in prayer that you may be kept from temptation. You may say to yourself, 'My learned ancestors knew better than I. I had better follow in their footsteps.' If you do, your end will be worse than your beginning."** Down through the years these words never left him.

After Yohanan left, Sa'eed felt very alone. He continued his duties as a mullah, giving the prayer call from the minaret and teaching Islamic doctrines in his mosque school. But, in secret, he read the Bible and spent much time in prayer. During his earlier days of indecision he had learned Hebrew to better understand the Old Testament in its original writings. The Quran teaches that the original Scriptures have been corrupted by Christians; so he wanted to read them in the original language.

Sa'eed was living a deceptive life. To the outside he was a devout Muslim; but in his heart he knew that he had put his faith in Jesus Christ. He soon stopped saying the prescribed prayers and often didn't even show up to lead the mosque prayers. In their place he recited, in his own heart, the Lord's Prayer and the Apostle's Creed. He had had no instruction as to how to communicate with the Lord in believing prayer.

Kaka saw the changes in his brother and realised what had happened. Sa'eed had already shared his newfound faith with two of his closest friends believing they would never betray him. Seers in the town saw the change in him. He tried to flee from Senneh, but his plans were discovered and thwarted.

In his loneliness he met Mar Shimmon, a Catholic bishop, who had arrived in Senneh. He was 80 years old and well versed in the Bible. He was a great comfort to Sa'eed. They read the Bible

together for many hours. Soon a call came and the Bishop needed to leave. Once again loneliness overwhelmed Sa'eed.

His brother threw him out of the house saying, **"A dog and a man cannot live together. Clear out."** Kaka lay in wait for him and was determined to kill him. Rumours continued to multiply about his becoming a Christian. Although Kaka was prepared to kill him himself, he wasn't prepared to turn him over to the mob. Eventually he allowed him to return home as a Christian. Sa'eed would never leave the house at night for fear of a sudden assault.



Present day Hamadan

In his study of the Word of God, Sa'eed knew it was the Lord's command that he should be baptized and that the Lord's Table was to be observed. As there was no pastor to baptize him or serve the Lord's Supper, he felt compelled to baptize himself by immersion, which he did in a bathtub. He also observed the Lord's Table by himself following the order in 1 Corinthians 11.

In 1881 Sa'eed received an invitation from James Hawkins, an American missionary in Hamadan, to come to that town as his language teacher. He pleaded with Kaka to allow him to go and eventually Kaka agreed. They went secretly by two different routes to meet with a caravan outside the town. Kaka carried Sa'eed's few belongings. They exchanged farewells and at last Sa'eed began to feel more secure. This didn't last long!

Kaka, his friend Habib and some relatives soon overtook the caravan determined to take him back. The whole city was in uproar. The Governor had determined to destroy Kaka's house unless Sa'eed returned. Sa'eed pleaded with them to kill him right there. When they saw there was no way to persuade Sa'eed to return with them they bid him farewell again. After five anxious days Sa'eed reached Hamadan safely.

He settled happily into the security of the home in Hamadan and enjoyed fellowship with Armenian and Jewish Christians. He decided to dress as an Armenian and let the hair grow on his shaved head so he wouldn't seem odd among his new friends. Instead of his white turban, he wore a black rimless dome shaped hat. 'Mullah Sa'eed' became 'Mirza Sa'eed' – 'mirza' being a term of respect marking a person of some education. He asked to be baptised but it wasn't thought wise as it might stir up the Muslim community. He gave Persian lessons to Mr Hawkins and received instruction in English and the Bible.

In the autumn of 1882 new workers arrived in Hamadan – Dr and Mrs Alexander and Miss Annie Montgomery. Soon Ms Sherwood arrived who later became Mrs Hawkins. Sa'eed was their language teacher. The following year Dr Alexander's medical supplies arrived and he opened a clinic. Sa'eed had made rapid progress in English and acted as his interpreter and helper.

Sa'eed was greatly encouraged by a visit from his brother Kaka in the autumn of 1883. Kaka had lost his old fanaticism and accepted Sa'eed's faith as an established fact. He spent much time in prayer for Kaka and not long after this Kaka began a serious study of the Bible. He was soon ready to confess his faith in Christ. Kaka was an evangelist for many years, passing out Gospel literature and engaging people in conversation concerning faith in Jesus Christ.

In the clinic Sa'eed met many of his fellow countrymen who came to Hamadan to trade or to find better medical treatment than was available in Senneh. In the waiting room he read the Bible to them or gave them Scriptures to take away. He realised that medicine was a powerful instrument for breaking down prejudice and generating confidence. These men, normally unapproachable, were ready to discuss Christian teaching in the clinic. Sa'eed resolved to study medicine. Dr Alexander was in full agreement with this and became his enthusiastic teacher.

Another crisis occurred in Sa'eed's life when he fell in love with Rebka the daughter of Yohanan who had led him to the Lord and was now the national pastor in Hamadan. Yohanan disapproved of their

relationship as he believed it would bring trouble on the Christian community. It was decided that Sa'eed should spend some time in Tehran. On arrival he fell ill. Although it was a hard time for him, it was also a time of spiritual growth as he had many hours in which to develop the sense of God's presence.


A Kurdish Village near Sannadaj

In the spring of 1887 Dr Alexander returned from furlough in America. He wanted to re-open his clinic and called for Sa'eed to come and help him. It wasn't long before Sa'eed again asked for Rebka's hand in marriage. Kasha Shimmon agreed to the marriage on the condition that Sa'eed should be publicly baptised. Sa'eed was jubilant! On April 10, 1887 in a large meeting with both Muslims and Christians present, Sa'eed, confessed his faith in Christ and was baptised. His joy knew no bounds. Rebka's father now gave his full consent to the marriage. Yohanan himself performed the ceremony on June 4, 1888. Rebka was a devout Christian and a faithful helpmeet to Sa'eed for more than fifty years.

Unfortunately the date chosen for the marriage was the 21st day of Ramadan when Muslims in Iran are stirred to religious fervour in their commemoration of Ali's death. Notices were posted in the marketplace calling the faithful to avenge this outrage of a former Muslim publicly marrying a Christian. A mob soon gathered. Some vowed they wouldn't rest until they had killed Sa'eed. Two of the most influential men in the town were under obligation to Dr Alexander for medical services. At his request they were able to restrain the mob and get them to disperse. Sa'eed was calm but Rebka suffered from great anxiety always fearing that harm would come to her husband.

Sa'eed continued to focus on his medical studies. He shared his faith with all kinds of people. Medicine and evangelism went hand-in-hand. This was his life purpose. In 1891 he decided to make a trip to Urmia. Rebka had gone ahead of him with their daughter Sarah to visit her relatives. The journey gave him the opportunity to share his faith in his native town and in some of the border towns in Kurdistan and to visit his dear friend Yohanan.

On his return to Hamadan Sa'eed was asked to renew his contract with the mission and take over the management of the clinic that was closed because Dr Alexander had returned home and the patients were in desperate need. He agreed to work for another year until a new physician arrived from America. He was now in full charge of the dispensary – doctor, druggist and often nurse as well. His health began to suffer from this heavy workload as well as the strenuous study at night – both medical and religious.

In 1892 a son, Samuel, was born to Sa'eed and Rebka. Towards the end of the year the Muslims in Hamadan threatened to massacre their Jewish neighbours. Sa'eed and Rebka were living in the Jewish quarter of the city to be near the dispensary and Rebka was teaching in a school for Hebrew children. For their safety they moved into the dispensary compound.

In April 1893 Dr Holmes arrived to take up Dr Alexander's work. Sa'eed decided it was time to end his service with the mission. He has served faithfully for 12 years as language teacher, doctor's assistant and then physician. He felt he had repaid the great debt he owed to these missionaries for their spiritual help and all they had taught him – English, medicine etc.

He felt the need of a change of climate and rest from his heavy workload. There was also a dream close to his heart – the thought of obtaining 'spiritual perfection'. He had been introduced to this idea by a Swedish missionary, Mr Hogberg, who now invited him to Sweden. His time there was very disappointing. He saw no evidence of anyone obtaining spiritual perfection. One morning he was praying when all of a sudden there flashed into his mind the words of the apostle John, ***"We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."*** These words struck him with great clarity. It is **"then"** that we shall be fully like Him not **"now"**! The anxiety about achieving spiritual perfection left him and he experienced an overwhelming measure of God's grace.

He resolved to go to England and complete his medical studies. The North Sea crossing was very rough. He was ship's doctor and was called upon to help fellow passengers Mr and Mrs Cavanaugh with their seasickness. They were fascinated to hear his story. They agreed to introduce him to a friend of theirs in London – Dr Charles Warren – who would help him spiritually and advise him about his medical studies.



Mosque in present day Senneh (Sannadaj)

He found England a depressing place. He visited many churches but didn't find any real fellowship. Dr Warren was a great help to him and introduced him to a group of Christians called Plymouth Brethren. Here he found real fellowship and quickly warmed to their custom of taking the Bible as their guide for life and worship. He worked very hard at his medical studies. He took courses in anatomy and physiology. All he had learned at home had been from books since Islam forbade the dissection of human bodies. He also studied pharmacology and bacteriology. In addition he devoted much time to ophthalmology. In Persia he had been struck with the amount of damaged eyesight and actual blindness due to neglect and lack of timely treatment.

In the spring of 1895 Dr Patrick Manson, who later became the founder and director of The London School of Tropical Medicine, offered a special course at St George's Hospital in this speciality. Sa'eed was the third student to enrol in this course. In all his studies he gained the respect of his teachers and so his years of study in London came to an end. They had begun with difficulties, but finished full of promise with joyful anticipation of a more effective service to his own people.

His Brethren friends held a farewell tea in his honour and prayed that God would sustain him through the difficulties and dangers he may have to face. Dr Warren went with him to Cardiff where he set sail for Batoum on the Black Sea. As a parting gift he gave him a beautiful doctor's bag supplied with all sorts of medical necessities. He reached Hamadan on October 30, 1895. He had been away from home 2½ half years.

Sa'eed found Persia in a state of disorder and turmoil with the ever present threat of a popular uprising. Friends in England had given him some money for the support of his family. By careful management Rebka had saved enough that together with a small loan she was able to buy a new house for the family.

His medical practice was much in demand and he was able to earn enough for the family to live in reasonable comfort. Many payments for his services were in kind – carpets, sheep, grain, butter, sugar cones etc. some of these they were able to sell for cash. Friends in England had given them a sewing machine. Ladies came from all around to exclaim in astonishment over this marvel!

The political situation continued to deteriorate. In May 1896 Naser-ed-Din was assassinated. He was succeeded by his son, Mozaffar-ed-Din. The authority of the monarchy continued to decline. The mullahs usurped more power. It was becoming increasingly dangerous to bear witness to the Christian faith. Sa'eed continued to hold Bible readings in his house. Riots broke out between two parties of mullahs. In the midst of all this Rebka gave birth to their third child – Lemuel.

One of the Kurdish patients who came to Sa'eed was a zealous Muslim, Mirza Hosein, from Mihabad. In their discussions he found Sa'eed could answer all his arguments. Sa'eed always responded to his hard words with gentleness and afforded him honour. He began to be sorry he had come to Hamadan and expressed the wish that God would grant him to die a Muslim. Sa'eed took off his shoes and socks and showed him the scars on his legs. He said to him, **"I trust the same gracious God who, in spite of the scars, gave me no peace until He had led me to know Him, will do the same for you."**



Sunni Mosque in south Iran

At the turn of the century Sa'eed received a called from Prince Ain-ud-Dowleh, son-in-law of the Shah and Governor General of several provinces in the South West of Persia, to attend his wife. For a year after this he served as private doctor to the prince and his retinue of 5000 people.

The Shah wanted Sa'eed to become court physician, but he declined the offer not wanting to spend his time on the select few. He felt his life and abilities should be at the service of all who were in need of his help – privileged and under-privileged alike.

In January 1901 Sa'eed decided to make a second journey to Urmia. He went with a servant on horseback. It was a hazardous journey with biting winter winds as well as blinding snow and sand. They finally arrived after a journey of 89 days. Sa'eed declined invitations to speak in churches preferring to spend his time with individuals. He challenged the Christians to send evangelists to Kurdistan where he could not go. His brother-in-law, Dr Jesse Yonan had just returned from medical studies in America and he responded to this call. They took the first part of the journey together. In the village of Chayana they were guests in the home of Kasha Yohanan. This was the last time Sa'eed saw this dear friend who had been the means of his coming to know Christ.

Before leaving Urmia the doctors were warned not to go through Saujbulagh because of rumours that two men from Senneh had made a special trip to that town with evil motives. What route should they take? While they were considering, they remembered how they had exhorted the villagers they had met to have faith in God's protective power. They must do no less. They decided to stick to their intended route. The governor of the province invited them to be his guests, but they preferred stay in the home of Deacon Shmuel the evangelist there. The governor put on a dinner in their honour. Many mullahs were present to meet Sa'eed and hear from his own lips why he had left Islam. He spoke to them for an hour about the love of God as revealed in Christ. The two men from Senneh embraced Sa'eed. They were old school friends from Senneh. After four more days travel the two doctors went their separate ways – Dr Yonan to Senneh and Dr Sa'eed to Hamadan. Sa'eed was overjoyed to be with his family again after an absence of more than six months.

For a year or two life continued on quite quietly. Many were in need of Sa'eed's services. One day, in the home of a friend, Sa'eed was accused of accepting Christianity for material advantage. His friend responded. **"That was my impression once, but I've been watching him for some time. Now I am of the opinion that he is a man who has found a heart-satisfying truth – so much so that he cannot listen to anything else."**

In the spring of 1902 Sa'eed made another trip to London. His son Samuel was 9½ years old. He wanted to put him in an English school. He also wanted to further his medical studies. He took postgraduate studies in typology and bacteriology as well as special studies in ophthalmology and eye surgery. He was able to hear a lecture on leprosy by the discoverer of the leprosy bacillus – Dr Hansen of Norway.

Back in Hamadan in the summer of 1904 a cholera epidemic broke out and Sa'eed's services were much in demand – especially in the royal family. With the return of cold weather, the epidemic subsided and people resumed their normal occupations. Ten percent of the people of Hamadan had died. As Sa'eed resumed his practice in town friendly mullahs warned him that some were stirring up people against him saying, **"That vile man never ceases to invite people to accept his religion"**. People urged him to leave town. Sa'eed was puzzled and perturbed, but waited quietly for God's guidance. The motives behind this renewed outburst were professional jealousy and political intrigue. The Jewish practitioners were envious of Sa'eed's success. Others hoped the disturbances would force the governor to resign. As the uprisings continued to gain pace the Prime Minister urged Sa'eed to go to Tehran.

As he said his goodbyes, Miss Montgomery's parting words were, **"God wants you to witness for Him with power in Tehran. I am sure of it. Someday you will bear your testimony for Him in your own home town in Kurdistan. I hope God will allow me to live to see that day."** Her prophecy and her hope were both to be fulfilled.

Sa'eed set out for Tehran on New Year's Day 1905. As he tore the cover off his new calendar he saw the Bible verse for the day, ***"For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land … a land where you will eat bread without scarceness. You will not lack anything in it."*** With a full heart, Sa'eed knelt with his wife and children to commend them to God. He rode out with his Armenian student and two servants of a friend to a village 20 miles away to catch the mail wagon. The temperature was below zero and the whole countryside was blanketed in a heavy frost. He was reminded of the words that had helped him as he fled from Senneh to Hamadan, ***"There is no man that has left houses or brethren or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for My sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive 100 fold now … with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life."*** He felt a great comfort.

There were two other travellers in the wagon – a cheerful young man and a merchant from Tabriz. They obviously didn't know who Sa'eed was. As they approached the sacred city of Qom the conversation turned to religious subjects. The merchant turned to Sa'eed and said, **"Whatever became of that apostate doctor in Hamadan who wrote a book against Islam and created such an uproar?"** Sa'eed calmly replied, **"I am Sa'eed the apostate doctor, but I didn't write the book in question."** They gaped in astonishment. He explained to them how professional jealousy had caused a commotion and they were satisfied. Sa'eed reached Tehran in safety.

The following morning the allotted passage for his devotions was from Acts, ***"Be not afraid, but speak and hold not your peace: for I am with you and no man shall set on you to hurt you, for I have much people in this city."*** Sa'eed had many offers of hospitality but he didn't want to bring trouble on his friends and he was anticipating the arrival of his family, so he rented a house for two years. The day he signed the lease he finished his reading of Acts which ended with these words, ***"And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house and received all who came to him, preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching those things that concerned the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no man forbidding him."*** This is exactly what Sa'eed did.

In the autumn of 1908 Sa'eed was asked to attend the wife of Ilkhani, chieftain of the Kashgai – one of the great nomadic tribes of Iran – in their summer headquarters beyond Isfahan. The travel party consisted of nine people as they made the difficult journey to the Kashgai encampment. Sa'eed was introduced to his patients – Bibi Khanum, the chieftain's wife, and Naser their son of 3 years old. After a short rest Sa'eed sent gifts to Ilkhani including a gilt-edged New Testament bound in leather.

In the camp there was a remarkable young man acting as personal doctor to the chief. Sa'eed had never seen a man better versed in the Quran and Muslim traditions as well as philosophy, metaphysics and Arabic/Persian poetry. He was also an Islamic lawyer and a doctor whose medical knowledge was remarkable since it had all been gained only from books. At first he resented another doctor being called. But he and Sa'eed were soon firm friends as Sa'eed explained the various ailments to him. One night this young man opened his heart to Sa'eed, **"In spite of the books I have read, my critical mind has given me no rest. I have found no satisfaction in Islam. Bahaism I have found shallow. I know there is a God. I want to find salvation."** Sa'eed shared with him his own journey to faith and the young man listened carefully saying he would like to read the Bible.

The chief was very happy with his wife's recovery and asked Sa'eed if she was now well enough to travel. When Sa'eed said she was, he decided to leave for their winter quarters in Shiraz. Sa'eed journeyed with them. It was one of the most hazardous journeys he had ever taken. On reaching Shiraz, Sa'eed bid them goodbye and set off by mail wagon for Tehran.

The next 7 years in Tehran (1905-1912) were a busy time for Sa'eed with a growing practice seeing patients from all classes – rich and poor, mullahs and sayyids, merchants and government officials.



Mausoleum of Esther Hamadan, Iran

He carried on Bible readings in his home. At first only Armenians came, but gradually Jews and Muslims joined them. These were quiet years as far as his personal life was concerned with little or no persecution.

In the summer of 1911, Sa'eed and Rebka, together with Samuel who was back from London for the summer, went to their country place outside Hamadan for a vacation. Their daughter Sarah had been married three years before to a prominent Armenian physician of Hamadan.

During the political unrest 1909 to 1911 many of the royalist captives taken to Tehran by nationalist forces were Kurds including some from Senneh who had once vowed to kill Sa'eed. On his return from vacation Sa'eed went again to Tehran and visited many of these prisoners treating the wounded and giving them money. Through his influence he was able to obtain the release of many. They returned to Kurdistan back to their homes with unbelievable stories about the apostate doctor. One of them said, **"He truly works miracles! I was one of the men who swore to kill him, but he cured my eyes, gave me money and clothing and sped me on my way home."**

In the summer of 1912 Sa'eed returned to Hamadan. At the end of September he was summoned to Khosrovabad, a village on the edge of Kurdistan, to treat an important nobleman – Amir Ala-ed-Din. The Amir was famous for his beautiful penmanship. He was suffering from mental decline following inflammation of the brain's surface. Sa'eed was able to produce extraordinary results in a short time. Sa'eed's reputation as a brilliant doctor grew and he received messages to visit important noblemen from many different cities. He was summoned to treat the governor of Senneh as well as another important man from a similarly fanatical city. After prayer for God's guidance, he decided he should go to both cases. He went first to Senneh. He had fled from there so many years before! He never expected to enter the city again. As they made their way through the town, instead of threats there were shouts of **"welcome back"**. The governor was suffering from chronic nephritis and Sa'eed was able to help him so that he felt much better the next day. As he read his Bible that morning Sa'eed's eyes fastened onto the words, ***"Call unto me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things that you know not"***. How wonderfully his welcome to his native city after 30 years had fulfilled this promise.

Many patients were soon waiting for Sa'eed. He set up a clinic on huge porch with a beautiful view of the city. He treated all the patients without charge. After 5 days the governor was much better and Sa'eed left instructions for his future care with his eldest son. He planned to make his way to Awraman despite the governor trying to dissuade him since it was such a fanatical place. The journey was treacherous. The mountain paths were so narrow that the slightest slip would have hurled them into a ravine. As they approached the Sultan's village some of the important men went out to meet the travellers. The Sultan was waiting to greet Sa'eed and thank him for making such a difficult journey. After a short rest, Sa'eed took his ophthalmoscope and went to examine the Sultan. He found that both his eyes were diseased with trachoma. Worse than this, his left eye had been operated on two years before by an incompetent oculist with resultant secondary glaucoma accompanied by long and painful headaches. The pressure on the right eyeball was also pronounced. As if this wasn't enough, further physical examination showed other symptoms in the 72-year-old patient. He was a diabetic and everything was against an operation. The Sultan pleaded with him to operate but when Sa'eed explained the possible complications he eventually accepted Sa'eed's decision and agreed that he could leave.

That night Sa'eed read the story of the raising of Lazarus and God spoke clearly to him. God reminded him how he had protected him on the journey and taken him to the Sultan's village since the Sultan had been asking God for four years to send Sa'eed to help them to see again. God

challenged Sa'eed as to whether he trusted his knowledge over the power of God. Humbly Sa'eed answered, **"I obey, My Lord God of resurrection, in Your hands I gladly leave the results"**. As a perpetual reminder of this experience he wrote the date at the head of this chapter in his Bible – November 13, 1912.

Next morning Sa'eed told the Sultan that God had not permitted him to leave and he would stay and do the operation. He asked for a man to take a telegram to Senneh to be sent to Hamadan for his instruments. It would be at least a week before they could arrive. The Sultan's eyes were cauterized and he was put on a strict diet. As a result of this, his condition improved considerably. As Sa'eed waited for his instruments crowds of people suffering from all kinds of ailments came to him for treatment. From morning till evening he was busy seeing patients. After the clinic he was busy preparing medicines and boiling instruments and gauze.

The day for the Sultan's operation arrived. It was late in the day when the Sultan was ready and the light was fading. The cornea had become a horny mass. With a quaking heart Sa'eed cut. Now the room was in twilight. He wrote later, **"I had no faith in my instruments or my skill, but my trust was in Him who raises the dead."** He closed the eye with instructions that it stay shut for 4 days and the patient be kept quiet. He left the room dazed and tired and wondering what the outcome would be. On the fourth day he went for the second dressing. As he uncovered the eye he asked, **"Do you see anything?" "Yes I do!"** came the answer. Just then the Sultan's daughter entered the room quietly. The doctor said, **"If you can see, who is that?"** The Sultan answered, **"That is Firuzeh."** They wept for joy.

It was time for Sa'eed to leave. He examined the Sultan's eyes to see what type of glasses he needed and promised to send them without delay. He set out on the dangerous journey back to Senneh with an armed escort of 50 men – 20 on horseback and the rest on foot. At last he arrived in Senneh. His friends were delighted to see him. Many rumours had a circulated about what had happened to him in Awraman. He telegraphed his family to let them know he was safely back in Senneh. In the middle of December he set out on the return journey to Hamadan. What a joyful reunion it was with his family and friends. The comforts of home seem like royal luxuries after the hardships of his journey. He gave thanks to God as he recalled deliverance from so many dangers and enemies that plotted his death. He knew it was only by God's help that his medical endeavours had succeeded.

Conditions in Iran changed dramatically after World War I. An Army officer rose swiftly to power becoming Minister of War and then Prime Minister. In February 1926 he was crowned Reza Shah. He brought in sweeping reforms that lead to greater security. Sa'eed and his family decided to settle in Tehran. He continued with his busy practice gradually slowing down he moved from his 60s to his 70s. He continued to be highly respected and his services were always in demand. He possessed an unusual accuracy in diagnosis even without much laboratory support.

Sa'eed continued his Bible readings twice a week. On Sundays the gatherings were especially for Christians and on Thursdays Muslims and anyone else interested came. His home was characterised by hospitality. It was always open for anyone to drop in and there was always enough on the table to provide for visitors.

Of his three children, Sarah was living with her husband and family in Hamadan. Samuel had completed his studies in England and volunteered for British Army service. He was wounded on active duty and once recovered was sent to Persia as an officer of the Royal Engineers. After the war he became an architect for the Imperial Bank of Iran – a British organisation. He married an American worker on short-term service in Iran. After 19 years with the bank he resigned and in 1942 rejoined his family in New York. The youngest son, Lemeul, stayed in England after World War I and was employed as an illustrating artist by some publishers. He became ill with a serious spinal disease and died in 1927 aged 31. He is buried in London.

In the summer of 1937 Sa'eed was in Hamadan enjoying a break from his hectic life in Tehran. One day without warning two men arrived at his house. He was arrested and put in prison – first in Hamadan and then in Tehran. This was a time of severe censorship in Iran. Sa'eed had written a letter of condolence to the daughter of a Kurdish chief who had recently died in Tehran.



Teheran early 20th century

The authorities had taken exception to something written in that letter. As far as Sa'eed was concerned, it was a complete misunderstanding. He remained in prison for 99 days. Finally, to the joy of his many friends and family, he was released without trial. His son Samuel had written 140-word telegram to the King reviewing the case and explaining about the misunderstanding. On his release Sa'eed said that it was the best rest he had had in 50 years!

In 1939 Sa'eed's wife, Rebka, was taken ill. After some months it was clear that she was dying. Her one wish was to see her son Samuel one more time. He arrived from America and she was thrilled to hear everything about his wife and his children. Rebka died on November 18 very peacefully, surrounded by her children and grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

It was just 4 months later that word came of the death of Sa'eed's brother Kaka. In the whole of Sa'eed's life the change in his brother, Kaka was the strongest testimony to the truth and power of Christianity. Once Kaka had accepted Jesus Christ as his Saviour there was no turning back. This once proud mullah took menial jobs to support himself while constantly distributing tracts and talking with men in the bazaars or travelling from town to town on a donkey reading and interpreting the Bible to anyone who would listen. For a time he was in charge of the American Mission boys boarding school. When weak in old age and handicapped by deafness he still continued the work of an evangelist to which he had given his life. In 1935 he suffered a stroke but made an amazing recovery. He wrote to Sa'eed, **"While I was at the hospital, one night, I had a heart-to-heart talk with the Lord. I said to him, 'Master with joy I am looking forward to being with You which is far better; but if your will for me is to remain, then graciously give me strength to attend to my daily work of passing out tracts to people on the street until you are ready to call me home.' Now I spend two hours each day giving out tracts and pamphlets. I am deeply glad of this opportunity."** While on the streets one-day, Kaka was knocked down and run over by a carriage. He died in March 1940 aged 84.

After the deaths of Rebka and Kaka and the departure of Samuel back to America, Sa'eed returned to Hamadan. He felt a deep sense of loneliness. He was glad of the comfort of Sarah and her family. On June 1, 1942 he celebrated his 79th birthday. It was a joyous occasion, but his physical strength was waning. On the July 29, Sarah saw that he looked haggard. He said he had not had a good night. He gathered his books together into his favourite corner of the veranda where he liked to study and write and then took his morning walk. On his return, he was in great pain and asked his grandson to run to the hospital for a stretcher to carry him to the American Mission Hospital just a mile from their home. He was taken to the hospital and while preparations were being made for surgery, he died on the operating table.

His funeral took place the next morning in the beautiful chapel Mr Hawkins had built in the Protestant cemetery in memory of his wife. The chapel and grounds were filled with men and women of many nationalities and creeds. The service was conducted by Rev H C Gurney of the CMS in Isfahan who was spending his vacation in Hamadan. So came the fulfilment of the hymn Sa'eed loved so much:

In the radiance of the glory
First I saw His blessed face
And for ever shall that glory
Be my home, my dwelling place.

How can we sum up the character of this amazing man? Here are 4 traits that stand out clearly:

- **Rugged independence**

He was unwilling to accept ready-made beliefs handed down from others. He investigated and tested everything. In his investigation of Christianity he made a thorough study of the Bible comparing it with the Quran. He learned Hebrew to check if there was any corruption in the Old Testament translation.

- **Deep spirituality**

It was his desire for satisfaction that caused him to turn, while still a Muslim, to the Naqshbandis. The same urge caused him to go to Sweden investigating sinless perfection. The Bible was the key to his spiritual growth. It was his constant companion and source of information. God's presence was very real to him and he felt a sense of intimacy with his Heavenly Father. He often quoted a much loved verse of a hymn:

I have seen the face of Jesus,
Tell me not of ought beside
I have heard the voice of Jesus
All my heart is satisfied.

- **A bold evangelistic spirit**

The faith he had struggled to gain was not for him alone. It must be shared. His medical practice was a means of evangelism. He wanted to care for spiritual needs as well as physical ailments. Much of the persecution that came his way was due to his constantly talking about his faith. Like the apostles he, **"Could not but speak of the things he had seen and heard"**. His testimony was telling and effective.

- **A generous and forgiving spirit**

If anyone obeyed the command to, ***"Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you"***, it was Sa'eed. One day an army captain came to his clinic in great pain from an abscess on his neck. As Sa'eed sterilised his scalpel, the captain spoke to the people in the waiting room, **"Long years ago I tried to kill this man, but this is the way he has treated me and my relatives all these years."** After the minor operation was over he took a cup of tea and left. Many were the testimonies of those who had persecuted Sa'eed. It was the power of Christ that made Sa'eed the noble man he was and changed him from a proud fanatical Kurd into a humble self-giving Christian.