

*A letter from Saeed Abedini to his wife, Naghmeh
Received March 21, 2013*

Hello to my dear love and wife,

When I saw my family for the first time behind the glass walls, I could see my mom four meters away. As she approached me and saw my face, she broke down and could not get closer. She was crying. I understood what she felt because after weeks of being in solitary confinement in Evin Prison, I also got to see my face in the mirror of an elevator that was taking me to the prison hospital. I said hi to the person staring back at me because I did not recognize myself. My hair was shaven, under my eyes were swollen three times what they should have been, my face was swollen, and my beard had grown.

It was a few days ago when one of my family members, with weary eyes and after running around for 15 weeks in trying to get me out of prison, said that my dad says every single day that “this week I will get my son out of prison.” But this does not happen and he is not able to get me out of prison. In that instant I looked into the wrinkled and tired eyes of my dad. I could clearly see that he had ran around for months and he had no more strength left in him. It was very hard seeing my family in such a situation.

You, my wife, on the other side of the world, alone with the kids. Alone and worried. My family here in Iran, being interrogated, tired and under so much pressure.

With the loud voice of the prison guard, our visitation had ended and they put covers over our eyes and we returned to the dark room void of any natural sunlight.

I started praying for my family. My dear Naghmeh. You are the love of my life. I am always in love with you.

Dear Naghmeh, I have been stung so many times that I have become full of poison. This is an Iranian saying. A lot of people say that they have been stung by so many people that their whole being is full of poison like a poisonous snake. It

means that we have been bitten by the snakes of this world so many times that, that all of the poison has collected in us and that we are like the poisonous snake. But if we sting anyone, we will die. This Iranian saying is full of spirit of revenge and unforgiveness and every time I would hear this in Iran, I would get very sick hearing it.

A few days ago they brought a young war veteran who was disabled in 80% of his body in my cell. He had been put in solitary confinement with his horrific condition. And this had made him very mad and he kept saying “why did they do this to me? I gave my whole life for their sake. See what they have done to me!!!” And when he would get very mad he would say “I will take my revenge!”

I spoke to this young man until 4 in the morning. I spent time with him and spoke to him to forgive. When we don't forgive, we drink the poison ourselves and then wait for the other person to die. And we take the knife that has hurt us and we stab ourselves with it again! And this is the will of the evil one who wants to destroy us.

But when we forgive, we pour out the poison of the enemy and of the devil and we don't let the poison stay in us and we don't let the poison make us into poisonous snakes! So that we don't become like the person we despised and who persecuted and tortured us.

Maybe you ask, what is the secret of being so happy in such a hard situation?

Forgiveness and a change of attitude. When we forgive, we become free and we become messengers of peace and reconciliation and goodness. And whoever stings us, we can take into our embrace and love them. And in this dark and evil time, we can live full of love and full of peace and full of joy and shine like the stars! Glory be to His Name.

I forgave the prison doctor who did not listen to me and did not give me the medication that I needed. I forgave the interrogator who beat me. Every day when I would see the interrogator and for the last time when I saw him, I forgave him. I smiled at him and with respect shook his hand and I said my goodbye. The minute I forgave them and loved them, that second I was filled with unspeakable

joy. I saw in the eyes of the interrogator that he had come to respect me and as he was leaving, he could not look behind him. Love is as strong as death.

We have to get rid of the poison in our body because if we don't, we will die. We have to get rid of both poisons; first the poison of the snake that bit us and also the poison in us that was created by that bite. We can get rid of the first poison by forgiveness and we can get rid of the second poison by humility, by dying to ourselves, and allowing the band-aid of love and goodness to replace the empty place of the wound. So that we are not a tool of darkness and revenge, but that we can be light and love and a vessel of forgiveness and we can be transformed in the process.

Surely you have someone in your family, city, work or environment that have become like poisonous snake who have bitten you and tried to make you poisonous. So, forgive them and use the antidote of love and be Victorious!

One of the chances of forgiveness came when I was blindfolded and a guard was holding my hand guiding me. He asked "what are you here for? What is your crime?" I said "I am Christian Pastor." All of the sudden he let go of my hand and said "so you are unclean! I will tell others not to defile themselves by touching you!" He would tell others not to get close to me. It really broke my heart. The nurse would also come to take care of us and provide us with treatment, but she said in front of others "in our religion we are not suppose to touch you, you are unclean. Baha'i (religion) and Christians are unclean!" She did not treat me and that night I could not sleep from the intense pain I had. According to the doctor's instructions, they would not give me the pain medication that they would give other prisoners because I was unclean.

I could not fall sleep one night due to the pain when all of a sudden I could hear the sound of dirty sewer rats with their loud noises and screeches. It was around 4 in the morning. It sounded like laughter in a way.

Even though many would call me unclean and filthy and would not even want to pass by me and they had abandoned me and they were disgusted to touch me because they were afraid that they would also become unclean, but I knew that in the eyes of Jesus Christ, and in the eyes of my brothers and sisters, I am like the sewer rat, beautiful and loveable – not disgusting and unclean – and like the rats I

can scream with joy within those prison walls and worship my Lord in joy and strength.

The Joy of the Lord is my strength. Amen.