

## SR REVIEWS

# Travel

## That Persian Feeling

BY RENÉ LECLER

I am sitting in the Persian caravanserai garden of the Hotel Shah Abbas in Isfahan. The night is falling gently and the roses Omar Khayyám wrote so many poems about are blooming all over the place. The muezzin next door is calling the faithful to prayer from the top of his glowing minaret, which looks like an exotic cigar being smoked by an invisible giant. Like a true tourist all I can do is sit there, order my Scotch without any regret, and hope that tomorrow is going to be just like today.

Which it won't be. A moment or feeling never seems to repeat itself in Persia, or Iran as it is now called. That is the trouble with Omar Khayyám. He draws you to Persia, but when you arrive, you find that all he is known for is his mathematics. Some mathematician. Some poet.

This is Persia all over—incongruous, commonplace, and utterly beautiful. The surprises never end. For instance, the Persian word for "thank you" is *Merci*. Some Persian. Every car and almost every taxi has its own wall-to-wall Persian carpet, which, as status marks go, beats a two-note horn. Persians are strange people, too—they don't seem to hate or dislike anyone, which, in today's world, is very odd. One Jewish-American fellow traveler told me last night: "You know, I just don't understand these people! They know I am Jewish and they know by my passport that I have just visited Israel. They are Muslims, but they just smile. When I mentioned this to my guide, he said: 'Well, we did have a little trouble with the Jews, but that was 3,000 years ago and we have forgotten about it!'"

A cup, or rather a glass, of tea in any Persian village costs the best part of one cent, and some say that before inflation reared its ugly head, it was even cheaper. The ice cream tastes like frozen molasses—where is that sherbet of yesteryear?—and on the

Caspian coast I saw a sturgeon that tipped the scales at 1,200 pounds and yielded 320 pounds of caviar.

I was told at Bandar Pahlevi that the Iranians rear baby sturgeons and float them back into the Caspian. Although they go to feed in Soviet waters, they always come back to spawn in Persian territorial waters, which is very patriotic and also very good business for the shah of Iran, who owns the fisheries.

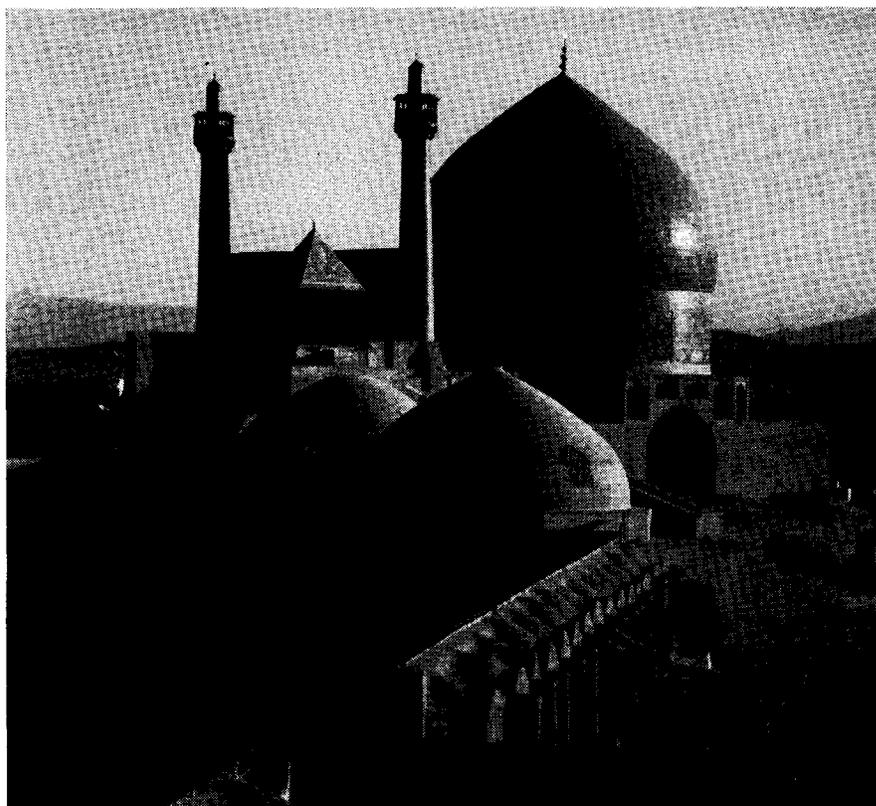
For me, the most interesting part of Persia is Isfahan. You can fly there in forty-five minutes by an Iranair plane from Teheran. I preferred to go by road, 250 miles full speed ahead, skirting the Great Salt Desert. This is an experience in itself—a succession of elemental landscapes changing under the sun from light champagne to dark brown and from hazy blue to the violent green of the fields on the banks of the *wadis*.

But it is at the journey's end where the real revelations begin. Isfahan is one of the most beautiful places on earth. In famed Shiraz, further south, there is a garden called Heaven, but

heaven for me is here. If Oxford has its dreaming spires, Isfahan has its dozing domes, each one perfectly shaped, ranging from cerulean blue to sea green—each one guarded by a posse of slender minarets, a procession of archways, and a gurgle of fountains.

Isfahan was the creation of the Safawid kings and the personal masterpiece of the grandest of them all, Shah Abbas the Great, the Sun King of Persia. He and his family knew a thing or two. They practically invented Turkish delight, were all top mathematicians, hybridized roses to the point where they got the maximum amount of scent from the tiniest rose, and discovered the ultimate relationship between water and vegetation. Here, amid a sea of little houses that resemble freshly baked cottage loaves, they taught their contemporaries how to live.

The center of this seventeenth-century Safawid Empire was the great Maidan Square in Isfahan, which is practically untouched to this day. It is the size of the Place de la Concorde, but infinitely more graceful and better pro-



"This is Persia all over—incongruous, commonplace, and utterly beautiful."

René Lecler is the travel editor of *Harpers & Queen* in London.

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Then there was psychology for the masses, ranging from cute news items about the psychology of sex and marriage to self-help books on how to control yourself and others.

Meanwhile extraordinary, world-changing discoveries were being made in campus behavior labs, analysts' offices, and encounter-group workshops. Discoveries that could quite possibly lead to ending war, preventing crime, wiping out illiteracy and prejudice, saving marriages—as well as help you stop smoking, lose weight, and win at chess. But it was hard for you to find out.

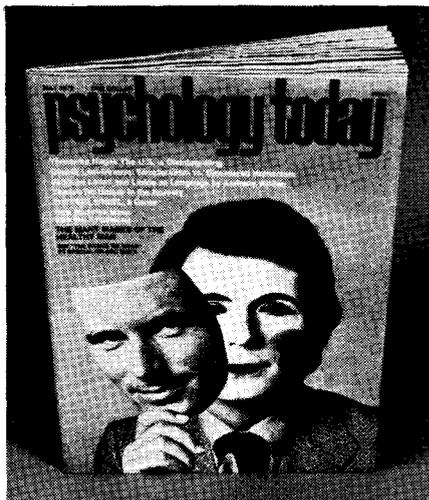
Psychology Today was introduced to bridge the gap between the laboratory and the living room, the professional and the educated layman.

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Just a few examples:

**Could Psychology Today have prevented Vietnam?** "How could we have been so stupid?" President Kennedy asked after the Bay of Pigs. But stupidity was not the answer. The men who had participated in the decision were brilliant.



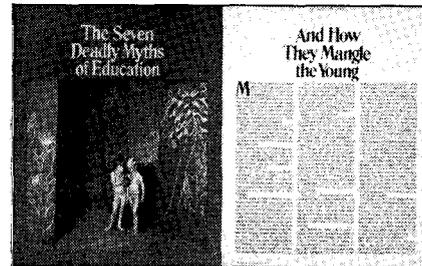
Irving L. Janis spent two years looking for the answer. He studied not only the Bay of Pigs but also Pearl Harbor, Vietnam, and other policy disasters. In each case he found that the decision-makers appeared to be the victims of certain clear laws of Groupthink that result in the distortion of sound collective judgment. And he made 9 recommendations for doing better, whether in the White House or your local P.T.A.

**All the world loathes a loser.** Why do we tend to hate martyrs? In a controlled experiment designed to find out, observers watched a 10-minute video tape of a person reacting with apparent pain and suffering to supposed electric shocks for incorrect responses. The observers were then asked to rate the attractiveness of the victim in terms of cooperativeness, maturity, kindness, etc. One startling finding: when the observers were powerless to alter the victim's fate and believed that they would have to watch the victim suffer again, they saw the victim as an undesirable, unattractive person.

**Persuasion that persists.** In just 40 minutes, using no coercion, a psychologist can alter your basic values and change your behavior. Students at one university showed changed behavior as long as 17 months after the experiment, says a social psychologist as he ponders the ethical implications of his work.

**Do you have what it takes to be a successful investor?** 64 students were asked to manage imaginary stock portfolios. Later, psychological tests showed that the successful investors—those who did substantially better than the Dow Jones Industrial Average—had definite personality patterns. Then 60 stockbrokers were studied, and all 9 of the traits that identified successful student investors were found to be reliable predictors of actual career success.

**Spare the Rod, Use Behavior Mod.** Instead of spending years searching for the cause of troublesome behavior by a child, argue the behavior modification theorists, why not just change the behavior? Douglas was an 18-year-old who hadn't been able to sleep for two years. He consulted his mother about his worries 25 or 30 times a night. He had tried tranquilizers, a psychiatrist, a psychologist. After two weeks of behavior modification therapy, his bedtime visits ceased.



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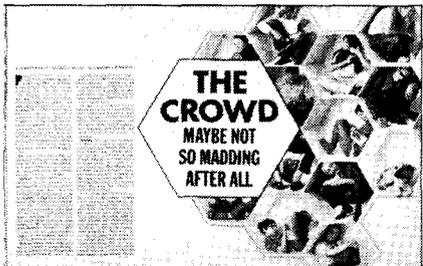
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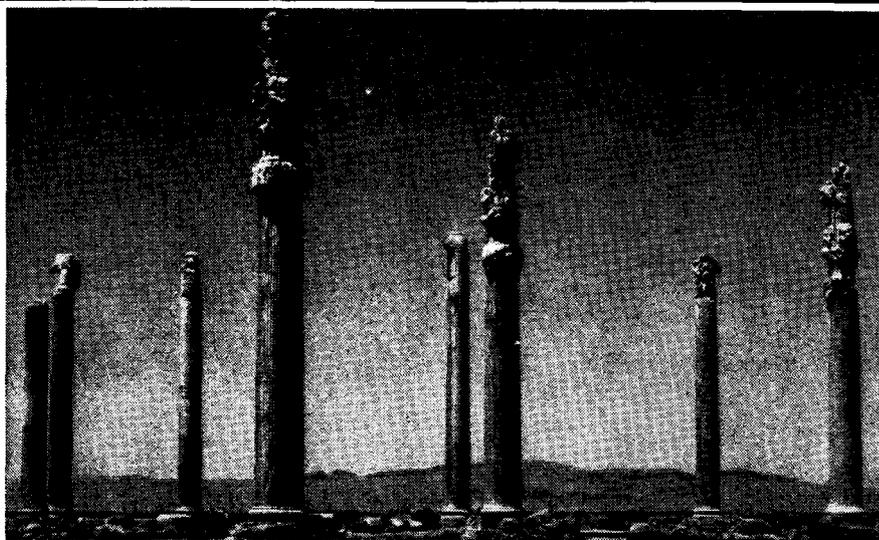


portioned, lined with houses and shops with perfectly curved Persian windows. On one side is the Ali Qapu, a spindly, delicate wooden pavilion, a kind of Persian Malmaison where Shah Abbas entertained his guests and watched polo (another Safawid invention) being played on the Maidan below. One side of the square is the ornate entrance to the bazaar. On the other two sides are the two masterpieces of the Persian renaissance, the Lotfollah Mosque and the Shah Mosque. I climbed gingerly to the top of the Lotfollah—the place, as the legend has it, where you feel closer to God than anywhere else. The dome is superb mosaic work of delicate biscuit color belted with a vast frieze of turquoise tiling.

From behind it I caught my second sight of the Shah Mosque, resplendently blue, but of a blue so rich and subtle that it turns to aquamarine and then to a deep watery green in the daylight. Lacy minarets, 150 feet high, rise above the high dome. With its courtyards and its arches, its whispering galleries and its secret gardens, the Shah Mosque is like a huge, yet exquisite, jewel box, empty save for the prayers of men.

And all around in this astonishingly beautiful and entrancing city are the descendants of the craftsmen who built it—tilers and masons, gunsmiths and leather men, painters and gold-leaf makers, copper beaters and furniture makers—each one happily at work in the beehive of a labyrinthine bazaar. They know how to relax, too. I saw a whole crowd of them on a Friday night sitting where Shah Abbas himself used to sit, in the lovely arches of the Allah Verdi bridge, catching the cool of the river and smoking their hubble-bubbles.

In the center of this city, next to another mosque where little Persian boys sit reciting their Koran in thin, high voices, is one of the world's unique hotels, the Shah Abbas. The Shah Abbas is an authentic Persian caravanserai, where caravans used to roll in from the desert with their protesting camels and their loads of Chinese and Indian silks. It stands foursquare, and each bedroom, with its authentic carved persienne shutters, looks over the central gardens that are filled with singing birds and gushing fountains. The dining room, in Safawid style, is so ornate with wall paintings of hunting scenes that one almost forgets the food. The bar, like some secret harem, is tucked away where true Muslims won't be offended by the smell of liquor. Here the nights go by velvety and scented, and the



The Apadana terrace columns in Persepolis date from the reign of Darius the Great.

dawns explode, all pale blue and gold.

What else in Persia? I only can speak for a little of it. Teheran is best avoided, but that is almost impossible since all the roads and airlines lead there. It is a huge, sprawling city built in what Iranians fondly believe is Western style and what foreigners could hope Iranians would never copy. One of its saving graces is the Royal Teheran Hilton, which is one of the best of the line. Another is the inevitable procession into the vaults of the Bank Melli where the shah keeps his

magnificent Peacock Throne and the crowns of his predecessors. In one room small wooden barrels line the walls, each barrel neatly numbered and containing the shah's gold, sapphires, diamonds, emeralds, and rubies—all very useful for a rainy day.

There is also Shiraz, the city of the poets and, not far away, the vast and monumental Persepolis of Darius. There is more history half-buried in the sands of Persia than anywhere else on earth, with the exception of Greece. It is also a country where people take most casually what we marvel at, like a banker's ransom of Persian carpets being carted in a great lumbering truck to a little hill pool to be washed and dried in the sun next to a priceless bas-relief of ancient Persia.

For me, Persia was also the discovery of the Caspian shore. The drive from Teheran up the majestic Elbruz Mountains is the Cresta Run of the Middle East and more than a little frightening until you reach the green hills that line the biggest inland sea of all. Over the horizon lies Soviet Russia. Here are fine beaches, vast stretches of paddy fields where the women work bent in two, great tea terraces from which the Persians get their tchai, and way-out little villages where houses of timber and wattle stand on high, sculptured columns. In the Northeast, on the way to the heart of Asia, there is also the holy city of Meshed, which, I am told, is better than all the rest put together.

Maybe. But I shall return to Isfahan—to walk in the bazaars, to gloat over the blue of the Shah Mosque, and to stand, with some reverence, in the Maidan Square, the center of the world for a nation that was once great and is now trying hard to preserve a rare and splendid identity. □

A fifth-century (B.C.) lion still grimaces.



# Letters

## Marriage Contract

I have just read "The Radical Guide to Wedlock" by Norman Sheresky and Marya Mannes [SR, July 29] and agree wholeheartedly with the points relative to the idealism of marriage versus the reality of divorce. The problem does seem to stem from the fact that although people are entering into a contract, no more thought is involved other than the usual blood tests, license application, and questions about who will attend the wedding. In my particular case, I was married at the age of nineteen; at the age of twenty-five I found myself crushed with court battles, identity problems, and a son to support. If wishes were horses, beggars would ride, but I wish that I knew the reality of divorce before I entered into a seemingly happy marriage.

People just assume that marriage is forever and the possibility of its failure isn't even considered. This attitude must be changed before the entire marriage structure crumbles.

Sandra K. Greifzu  
Havertown, Pa.

While parts of the Sheresky-Mannes premarital contract do make for equality of both partners in marriage, some parts do seem very oppressive for the female partner. Why should the woman agree that the place of residence shall be based on where "Donald" rather than "Ina" may be employed . . . regardless of whose earnings are greater? The right to be domiciled in an area of one's liking is just as precious to a woman as to a man. It does not seem that the woman should have to give up this right, as Article III (a) of your contract would have her do. Further, I fail to find any delineation of sharing of household duties and child-rearing, including payment for the woman's work done in the home, apart from her outside job.

The value of the wife's homemaking labors is not covered under Social Security; nor does she have the psychological satisfaction of having her homemaking services included in our Gross National Product. Unpaid labor makes for inequality. Since whoever does the homemaking labor contributes to the family income, I would suggest that this is a most important part of any premarital contract. Without this definition of the homemaking labors, your article is not truly contemporary.

Marjorie B. Plastina  
Niantic, Conn.

From the vantage point of one barely out of adolescence and, as yet, untouched by marriage on the immediate, personal level, I find the Sheresky-Mannes article far from being radical, but more a last-ditch attempt to save marriage as a legal, and

thereby, socially acceptable institution. If anything, their proposal for a marriage contract does more to invalidate it than to sell it to an ever-growing number of skeptics who are wondering if it's worth it at all. What Mr. Sheresky and Ms. Mannes are talking about is a merger, not a marriage—and I consider the latter as being a far superior act. They completely ignore the concept of marriage as the bringing together of two halves into a whole, the spiritual reason for its existence. This concept needs no material, legal binding to keep it together, no physical contract to remind the participants of just what it is they're getting into. Marriage is spiritual (which is not by any means synonymous with religious); marriage is giving, not getting. And how I've managed to survive with an ideal like that, I'm not sure, although I have my upbringing to thank for having it at all. It is this ideal that just may result in my refusal of marriage as Sheresky and Mannes visualize it and as it is being sold to the public now—in a strictly legal wrapper. (Although one must not overlook the potential irony of a 'common-law' marriage.)

Debbie Groves  
Newton, Kan.

I would like to point out one omission that in my opinion is almost as great an issue as sex and money in marriage—that is personal services, or, who does the grunt work? Husband, wife, both, or a hired helper?

In addition, I believe the marriage contract should be renewable every three years, regardless of "life" intentions or parties or the cumbersome process described in Article VI (f). People change (hopefully)! If people know their contracts are renewable, this may offer the time to get out grievances that can mount up, keep communications clear, and lessen the likelihood of divorce even more.

Barbara Tan  
Edinboro, Pa.

Self-ignorance in a first marriage is a serious enough tragedy for the parties and the nation. When it is carried into multiplied marriages, further sets of damaged children and thus into future generations, the results are obviously disastrous: increased social ills from addiction through murder to lives of quiet desperation. The RGTW contract offers the challenge for change and growth with self-understanding.

I'm a Protestant worker with the national Judean Society, Catholic based, serving women in divorce distress. (This does not preclude realistic concern for male misery.) If apathetic citizens could, as I, see intimately the damages of self-ignorant divorce—from destroyed children

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