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Editor’s Note: My Architect (1930-2007)

Mohammad H. Tamdgidi
University of Massachusetts Boston, mohammad.tamdgidi@umb.edu

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Editor’s Note:
My Architect (1930-2007)

Mohammad H. Tamdgidi

University of Massachusetts Boston

mohammad.tamdgidi@umb.edu

For years,
I was constructing myself to build a house.

And he was busy with his work.

In childhood,
Construction toys for building model houses,
Crafting boards, glue, and scissors,
Carpentry wood, saw, nails, and hammer,
Brushes, watercolors, oil paints, and canvasses
planted the joy of architecture in my heart.

And he was busy with his work.

In the primary and secondary schools,
And then in Tehran University’s Technical College (of civil engineering),
and U.C. Berkeley’s Department of Architecture,
Arithmetic classes, and those on geometry and mathematics,
Classes on algebra and spatial geometry,
Design classes, and courses on drafting and architectural styles,
Planted the techniques of architecture in my hands.

And he was busy with his work.

The uprisings of homeless construction workers,
Raising new questions in my head,
on the other side of the earth,
Planted the critique of architecture in my mind.

And he was busy with his work.
Advancements in industry and technology,  
in printing and computer systems,  
Planted the art of architecture in my words.

_And he was busy with his work._

Dialogue and research with professors  
in sociology, world-systems studies, and beyond,  
Planted the notion of “human architecture” in my thoughts.

_And he was busy with his work._

Following much curiosity, doubts, and uncertainties,  
Following relentless toil, pains, and suffering,  
I thought that I should separate my ways from his,  
That I should separate my pocket from his coins,  
So as not to remain a tool in his hands,  
My heart and life dependent on his water and bread.

_And he was busy with his work._

Yet, the more I struggled and searched within,  
To build a life apart from him,  
The more I found all my heart, brain, and blood are his,  
All my words, hands, life, and works are his.  
How can I take pride in being independent of him,  
When, from the cradle to the grave, I have been the house and he, the architect?

It was he who bought me the toys,  
And the crafting and painting tools.  
It was he who bought me the education,  
And the tools for sharing my thoughts.

So, I kissed him and said:  
“Dear father. You and I are parts of the same life-time.  
“Either, divided, we become the means for the oppression of and by others,  
“Or, as your name ‘ahad’ (‘one’) implies, together we can share in designing and building a  
better humanity.”

_And we got busy with our work._

(1995)
O Man, you think you own the world,
Yet, death is chasing you day and night.
What you ate were eaten by the ants, and what you took, taken by the grave.
Among the inheritance you leave, what you gave up is what you actually own.

The above short poem adorned the house of my beloved father, the late Mohammed (Ahad) Tamdjid. ... expressing the values of a pure heart. He passed away, quite unexpectedly, on August 26, 2007, in Tehran, Iran. Despite his success at work, and his tireless diligence, my father always remembered the passing nature of life and the need to devote it and his resources to helping others in need. He was a father to many, and not just to us—a father to the young and the old, to relatives and non-relatives alike, to friends and strangers. He was an expression of fatherliness, that of giving to and helping anyone who approached him. His good deeds and name was known to many, and for many decades.

My late father loved life, and from the bottom of his heart believed one must live as long as one can, like a flower. However, even when approaching old age and critical illness, he thought of death in terms of how it could give life to others. Among the papers and notes we found on his desk, was the following quote in a newspaper clipping—expressing the extent to which, even when confronting death, he loved giving life to others:

When the time comes, I do not want you to keep me alive using all kinds of wires and needles. Don’t turn my bed to a place of death, and instead give it to one who is promised to live. Take my body from that bed and use it to give life to others. Give my sins to the devil, and my spirit to God. And instead of building an elaborate grave, lend a helping hand to a needy, or tell a soothing word to one who is thirsty for love and kindness. And know that if you do this, I will become immortal.

My beloved father left us. A great and free-spirited human being said good-bye and flew. He who had a big heart, with the majesty of his humbleness and conscientious devotion to others’ well-being, left our presence. But his heart did not beat for himself, but for others, and for humanity and humanism. His heartbeat still echoes in the chests of many who were touched by his life, and he will be alive so long as he is remembered. His diligent and self-reliant spirit, his steadfastness and honor in keeping his words, his patience, forgivingness, and good deeds, will continue so long as we remember to do the same. And so, his heart will continue beating in what he left. As the Iranian poet Forough Farrokhzad wrote, important is to fly, for the bird always dies.

For those whose thoughts adorn the pages of this journal, and for those who read them, my father’s passing and his remembrance may seem to be those of an outsider, of one whose life and death were simply matters having to do with the personal troubles of the editor of this journal. Yet, the very existence and continuity of this journal, for what it is worth, would really not have been possible without the life, the toils, and the joys and sorrows of this good man whose proud son I was. So, let’s cherish more of the voices from our classrooms made possible by this, our common father, voices of those who have had the courage to move beyond insider/outsider dualisms dividing our common lives. “Other” is a product of false imagination, for we all are insiders, mirroring one another back and forth. And in this continual reciprocity, as Morrie Schwartz said, love always wins; and if it has not yet, it may perhaps be because the game is not still over.

Listen to how this reed is weiling,
About separations it’s complaining.
From reedbed since parted was I.
Men, women, have cried from my cry.
Where is the heart, torn-torn, longing,
To hear my tales of belonging. ...
(Rumi, from the Song of the Reed)