

# MY TWO YEARS AT NOVA

I attended university in the States from 1969 to 1975 and although my degrees were in mathematics and engineering, soon after my return to Iran, I found myself publishing a daily newspaper. Publishing my translations of articles about Iran from the world press and being an independent newspaper were not welcome by Khomeini's regime? The paper was shut down in 1981 and I was lucky to escape the country.

I was on a searching path to find new ways of life after the catastrophe I had witnessed in Iran. I had seen how the people who wanted to challenge the dictatorship of the Shah fell prey to the sweet words of fundamentalists in the absence of any better alternative. I told myself that there should be a better way to live beyond the industrial society, without returning to a pre-industrial medievalism. I wanted to find a more fulfilling approach to life than being a cog in the industrial machine (socialist or capitalist!)

I have followed the developments of the new technologies for years and I expect the human side of these technical advancements to happen where the technical progress is at its peak — the Silicon Valley. I view the Silicon Valley as the birthplace of new socio-philosophical ideas. To facilitate this process is my dream, so I began my Nova project. I wanted to make a place in the South Bay where people who are interested in finding new solutions to world problems can exchange ideas. Sunnyvale is the center of Silicon Valley and Town & Country Village is the center of Sunnyvale. So I picked my location. It was four years after my return to the U.S. that I finally opened Nova Bookstore on February 17, 1986.

The path of materializing my dream was not an easy one. There were times of despair when a fundamentalist would walk in the door and ask me if I was the "anti-Christ!" This was not the welcome I had hoped for! The San Jose Mercury did not consider the opening of Nova, the first science-oriented new age bookstore, to be of interest to the community. There were reviews on Nova in the international papers such as WFS Newsline and in the Times Tribune of Palo Alto, but the South Bay mass media virtually ignored us.

Slowly, I realized that the so-called "common housewives" of this area were more concerned about the future of this planet than the ones who were busy working. Housewives were probably witnessing the "yuppie" deterioration which was not yet visible to the ones in the workplace. In my experience, whenever I was busy in the midst of anything, I needed a shock to be awakened to the loose ends, whereas an outsider would see them much sooner. It was probably the same with the Silicon Valley. "The outsiders," i.e. the "housewives" were seeing something which the main backbone of this valley was not observing.

I still look at the first encouraging comments on my guest book every so often. There were women and men, who had witnessed the burn-down of a family member in this pot, had written "welcome to Sunnyvale — Stay." They knew what I was going through, trying to erect a monument of peace in the middle of the battleground.

In 1986, many layoffs occurred in the computer industry which shattered many euphemisms that technology would solve its own problems. The hardship of layoffs was not better than the dehumanizations of smoke-stacked industries. Many of the people who did not view the need to enhance the spiritual and social side of life, as related to their individual well-being, changed their mind. An imbalanced personal life was no longer fulfilling to this searching soul.

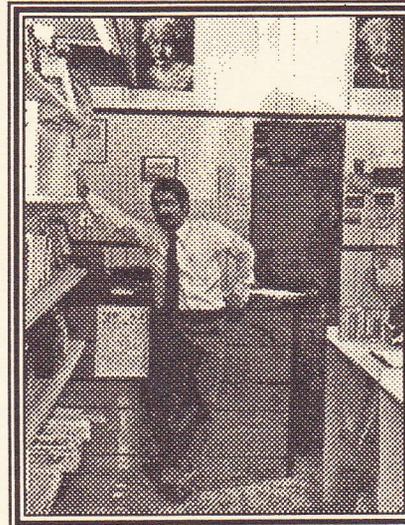
The taking roots of the tertiary population in the area changed the nature of the South Bay, by crystallizing a new group of "permanent" residents! A larger portion of the South Bay population began to partake in the new age movement through their search for meaning in life. Their strong educational background brought more sophistication to the new age perspective. Their national and international connections facilitated the blossoming of the global nature of the new age movement.

I met people who had one foot in the computer technologies of this area, and another foot in the Bali villages of Indonesia with top university degrees from Harvard. Symbiotically, the meeting of professionals and new age thinkers is forming a new culturally advanced social group with fresh sophisticated thought-forms which is more responsive to the needs of this critically uncertain time of human life on this planet.

I am now meeting people from all walks of life, from different fields ranging from science and engineering to social sciences and humanities, who reflect on the general questions of our times. Questions ranging from the origins and fate of the universe to progress, justice and the ethics of our human community in a post-industrial society. Synthesis is their interest but everyone depending on her/his background has a different perspective of this synthesis. Being in the midst of it all is like the Delphi method "reincarnated." I remember when I gave a lecture on future studies at the San Jose State University in 1986, I was glad to see the students and faculty of their Cybernetic Systems program interested in the general questions. Today, I am happy to see a great number of general public interested in these mysteries.

The most rewarding experiences are the intellectual discussions I have with many of my fine clients whether in the store or outside. I cannot believe my eyes and ears when I find so many individuals perplexed and interested in the same questions and subjects that have been boggling my mind and attention for years. We discuss meditation, metaphysics, interpersonal relations, futurism, ethics, crystals, new age music,.... Name it, we have all kinds of dialogues.

At first Nova was looked at as just "another bookstore." But as time passed, many recognized that if other places are like supermarkets of music and books, Nova is like a boutique with customized attention to individual taste with a relaxing ambience. For example, I contemplate on my customers' musical taste as though it is my own taste



and "tailor" the music to their individual aspirations. I remember many people telling me that I know what they like better than they themselves. It is true in a way, because I have about 4000 works of new age music in my repertoire to match for different moods.

If Nova is not a Tower or a Dalton and I am giving free music and book consultation, my clients are not just "customers" either. We are co-developers of a new ethic. The same ethical relationship I hold with my suppliers. If they teach me or recommend a work to me, I never buy it cheaper from another source. This way they can keep on existing and bringing happiness and fine service to me. In fact, my continuous support has increased their volume and

they are now able to offer me a good price too. It is a different ethic from that of "shoppers" and "discounters." But is not the new age supposed to be introducing better ways of life! I try to make it happen at least within my own territory. It is to put spiritual concerns ahead of material ones. In short, we care for each other.

Working within an ethical system so different from the common social ethics is very hard, but it is very fulfilling to work within a relationship of trust. I do not essentially characterize Nova by the type of products I sell, rather hopefully my work will corroborate this new way of working and living. This is why I view Nova's development as part of the unfolding of the new age movement in the South Bay. My approach has essentially attracted the most honest sentiments among everyone who has come here. This fact shows the potential of new age ideas for personal transformation at least within our small community.

Some of my clients frequently told me that I was ahead of my time and encouraged me to be steadfast. In spring 1987, I observed an objective event to support their belief. A radio station by the name of KLRS (FM 99.1) was born in Santa Cruz. It was the first radio station in the nation that decided to play new age music 24 hours a day. Its selections, the area it started to cover (South Bay), and its ethical and yet business approach to its work separated it from similar attempts in the past. In a way, they approached their goals somehow similar to me.

We have reached similar conclusions from different paths. KLRS is a local station yet with global vision and as the first new age station in the North America, it has taken a global challenge for itself as though it is the "voice of the world" station. We are both addressing the general public and not just a limited esoteric group of space music enthusiasts, crystal enthusiasts, etc. We both envisioned the need for the human side of the new technologies. I am happy that the KLRS has not given into the fads and trends of radio broadcasting industry and has retained its high standards and quality in the midst of business imperatives.

In my opinion the birth of KLRS was a turning point for the new age community in the South Bay and its significance may be better realized in the future. I extend my warmest gratitude for their integrity.

I think beginning with 1988, we are entering a new stage of the new age movement in the area. I think the esoteric and localistic phase of the movement is ending and its existence as a global social development is gaining momentum. I think the significance of ethical congruity is central at this juncture of its life and I would echo Eric Chaissan's Life Era by emphasizing the need for an ethical revolution in which any cultish, nationalist, racist, or sexist mentality could have no place. Only global approach to life would be meaningful as the foundation of such ethics.

At this time it is the most necessary to differentiate between genuine new age ideas and the so-called new-agers who sell the most backward ideas as "new age." I think it is important to prevent the estrangement of many individuals who are potentially interested in new age perspective but may reject the movement if experiencing deceitful abuse as "new age." "New age" is now being posed at a general public scale and silence in the face of misrepresentation is not a personal issue anymore. For example, the publishers of Penthouse had a headline article in OMNI on the new age movement a few months ago, in which they tried to discredit the new age movement by