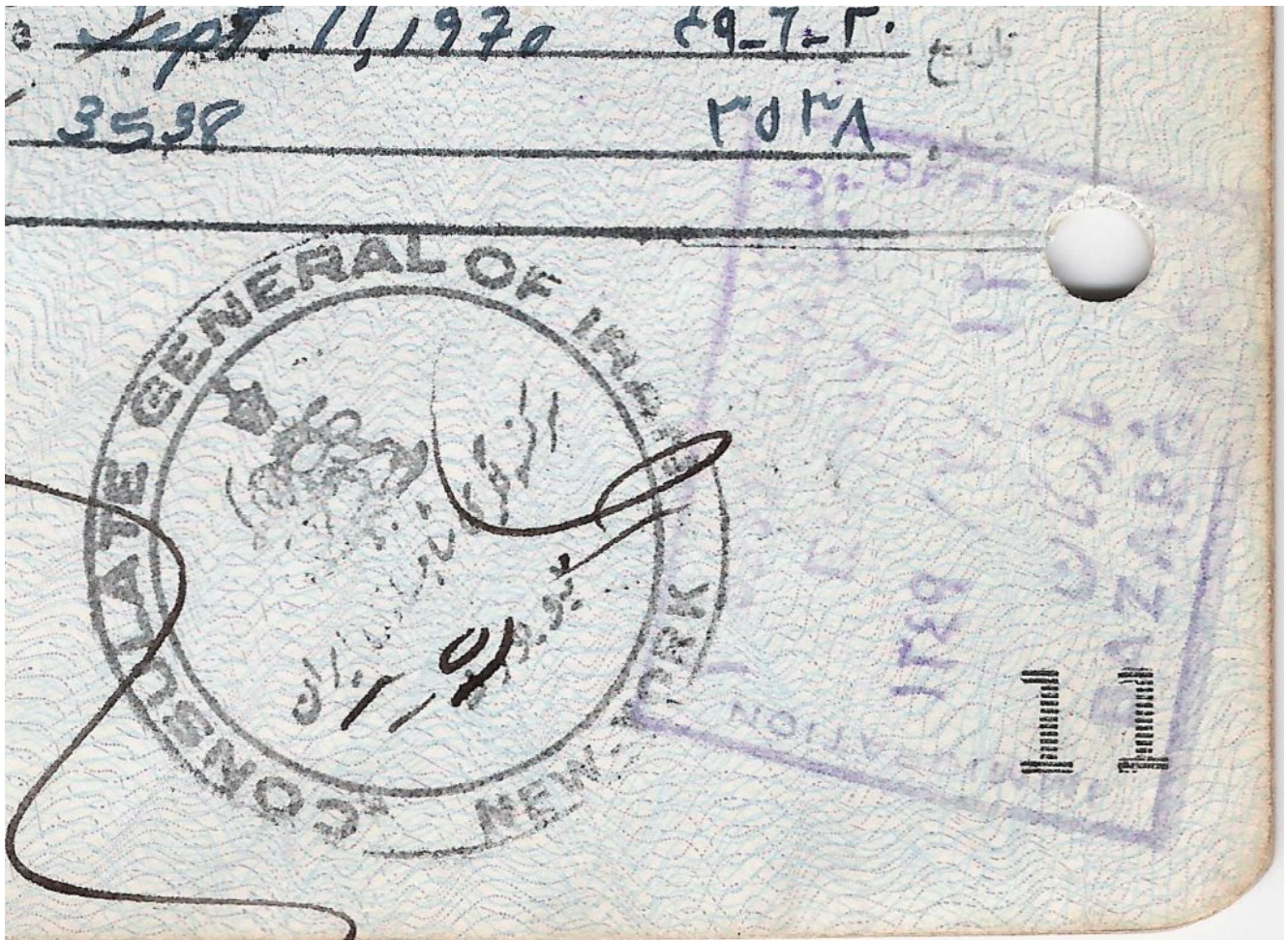


On to Afghanistan

I realize that I've said very little so far about my spiritual quest. The reason is fairly straightforward. The breakneck pace of the trip thus far and the barrage of new sights and sounds (and smells) left me totally distracted. I haven't mentioned my initial plan once I arrived in India. I had become fascinated with an Indian guru (spiritual teacher) – Sathya Sai Baba. Sai Baba was noted for his apparently genuine ability to materialize holy ash and small pieces of jewelry out of thin air. His ashram (spiritual center) in southern India had attracted many Westerners as well as Asians. It was my plan to head to Sai Baba's ashram. Looking back, I'm glad that God had other, far better plans for me.

By the time we got to the Iranian border, I was feeling pretty marginal. Having abdominal cramps while traveling by bus and having to use filthy squatty potties when the bus stopped was extremely unpleasant. The border crossing into Iran was fairly smooth; this was back in the day when the Shah was still in power and the US had a good relationship with Iran.



In Bazargan, just across the border, my English friend Peter and I got a motor coach headed for Tehran by way of Tabriz. I think it would have been a fairly enjoyable trip if I hadn't been feeling so marginal. Once in Tehran, I found a reputable clinic and was able to get some meds to help me get back to health, including a shot of gamma globulin to boost my immune system and anti-malarial drugs for India. Peter and I only stayed a day in Tehran. I was feeling marginally better, so we decided to push on to Mashad in eastern Iran, not far from the border with Afghanistan. If anything, the scenery in Iran was even more wild and desolate than in eastern Turkey.

In Mashad, Peter and I met up with three German couples in three VW minibuses traveling in caravan, and we were able to get a ride with them. We drove all day from Mashad to the Afghan border. We enjoyed the relative comfort of riding in

private vehicles with agreeable companions. We arrived too late in the day to cross the border, so we slept under the stars. I'm glad we were able to get some sleep before tackling the border crossing into Afghanistan. But, that's a story for another post.