

### **The genuine art of communication**

**Where does the person across from me like to open up? Where can I enter respectfully and upstanding. There is one who sees the door of my heart.**

**The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep.  
John 10,2**

In his video message to the Iranian government on March 20<sup>th</sup> President Obama offered from the side of the USA to make a new beginning after three decades of strained relations. He spoke of the "great Iranian people" and of "mutual respect", about rights and responsibilities of the Iranian community of peoples. This was an about-face from Obama's predecessor Bush, who had included Iran among the "axis of evil". The offer was met with joyful resonance among the Iranian population and seems to be bearing the first political fruits. On April 18<sup>th</sup>, the "Day of the Army", President Mahmud Ahmadinedschad dispensed with the threatening tone of previous years and referred to Iran instead as the "Nation of Ideals," a nation which advocates for freedom and ideals. Barack Obama found an approach to a hard opponent of the USA – through the recognition of the honour of this people and its foreign culture. It is of decisive significance for world peace, whether both of these power find access to each other before walls are torn down with violence.

The art of finding the correct approach to a person, to a community or to a culture -- precisely this is what Jesus means with the image of the shepherd who enters through the door. Difficult conflicts and tasks cannot be mastered by "bashing one's head through the wall". Jesus seems to have an exceptional talent in finding the door, the opening that gives access to people. People from the countryside with natural intuition become his colleagues. He comes through the doors of people who do bank rip-offs and of dubious women. Handicapped people feel comfortable with him, teenagers and children as well. Doors open up from all sides when he enters a village. But not only the doors of the world open up to him. According to church tradition, after his death Jesus crosses the threshold of the underworld in order to encounter the suffering and injustice of the world and to take everything with him in the resurrection. On Easter morning the old liturgy of Treves prays with Psalm 24: "Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in." Heaven opens up in front of Jesus in order to receive him with rejoicing.

The shepherd who finds the door is a genuine communication artist. He doesn't have to climb the walls, he doesn't have to tear them down nor slyly crawl in through the windows. Barack Obama proves the wisdom of the shepherd by not reducing Iran to fundamentalism and terrorism, but rather by seeing the greatness of the country that produced one of the most important civilizations of the ancient world, the Persian Empire. A great deal of shepherd artfulness is needed in order to see the door of a person: where is he receptive and penetrable, where does she feel protected and able to receive her guest with honour? A certain way of smiling or a twinkle of the eye can make miracles, or a joke, charming criticism, or the talent of taking sadness seriously in silence. But, please wait a minute, I heard something. A soft knock. I must go to my door quickly.