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It was July, 1977, and I was traveling overland by bus from Greece to India. With me were my two best Yank friends (Joe and Rick) and a motley male/female assortment of Brits, Aussies, Kiwis and Cannucks, off to experience exotic Asia in our mid-20s.

In Meshed, Iran, we stopped for the day. My friends and I left the group and wandered around town. Suddenly, we saw a golden-domed, walled complex in the distance, with what had to have been three or four thousand people milling about or in line to enter. We didn't know it, but this was the sacred tomb of Imam Ali Reza, accessible to devout Muslims only! Suspicious stares greeted us as we walked up to a doorway leading inside. Police quickly appeared and blocked our entrance. What we didn't know was that they were trying to warn us, and save our lives! Blinded by ignorance and arrogance, we walked around the complex and tried to get inside once again. This time we succeeded, and we beheld the awesome golden tomb of the Imam, surrounded by a packed crowd of believers pushing and wailing as they tried to touch the grave. It was then that Joe decided to innocently take a picture with his Nikon. Well, once the camera clicked, dozens of people in front of us turned and beheld us with scorn and hateful gazes. Several began yelling in Farsi, and pantomimed the "cut your throat" gesture, at which point nearby police intervened and, holding the attacking crowd back, motioned for us to run!

Rick, Joe and I ran for our lives back to our hotel, with several younger Iranian men fast on our heels, even a few miles later. Luckily, we lost them at the crucial point. We fled to our room, bolted the door, and lay on the floor until nightfall. Later, we carefully peeked out our second-story window, only to see several Iranians still outside our hotel, conversing hotly among themselves and obviously still looking for us.

We snuck downstairs and found our group leader, explaining what had happened. He said our entire group should leave in the middle of the night under cover of darkness and drive into nearby Afghanistan quickly before something dreadful happened. So, around 3a.m., we were smuggled (by crouching down) in a large herd of our fellows onto the bus, where we laid on the floor until we left the Meshed city limits. We sweated and prayed silently until we got to the Afghani border. The wait until the border opened in the morning was slow agony, for we feared that a mob might have followed us in cars with less than kind intentions!

The warning moral of this true tale is: "What you don't know can hurt you..."

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