

Daddy's Spoiled Child

An Essay in Two Parts

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لطفاً نسخه فارسی این نوشتار را در فایل همراه مطالعه فرمایید.

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Part I

"Necessity, it's what turns the lion into a feeble fox." — *A Persian Proverb*

Let us give our children a chance to learn from their mistakes and those of the others.

Over the summer of 1971, our 14 to 15-year old sons, while still in high, worked for a couple of hours every day at a local restaurant in the city of Fullerton, California.

Back then, you could expect to run into far fewer Iranians in the United States than you would today. One day, an aging Iranian gentleman, a university professor, visited the restaurant, and he was happy to find our children speaking Persian. He asked about them and why they weren't enrolled in the summer courses. "We have taken classes," our children explained. "But we also work for two hours a day." The professor, as the distinct accent of an Iranian small town spiced his words, exclaimed, **"Bravo! In our town, they refer to a "laborer" as "daddy's spoiled child!"** You kids aren't some spoiled brats, and therefore, you shall succeed."

Years later, my children recount to their own children the words of the professor, and they can't help laughing at the story.

Certainly, all children are mommy's and daddy's pampered angels. Yet, the "pampered angels" aren't all the same!

Let me share with you some pages from my own experience, spanning from the first grade to this day, around ninety years of age!

Among the vivid memories of my childhood, I clearly remember how in 1935, about 35 of us, an assorted group of little boys and girls, stepped into the first grade at the Ettehad "Alliance"

Elementary of Kashan, where we were greeted by Mr. Moravejian, our first teacher.

As with the other confined small towns, we the classmates knew each other and one another's families. At that time, about 80% of the students at the Ettihad Elementary were Jewish, 10% were Muslims, and the other 10% comprised of the Baha'is.

Our fathers worked at vastly different jobs. One traded in textile, another in spices. One was a traditional doctor, another a real-estate dealer. One sold threads, another wove carpets. One was a traveling salesman, another a farmer. And so forth. The absolute majority of them were retail businessmen, except for one or two pampered kids with wealthy dads and comfortable upbringings, who were as distinct as the proverbial hairy head amid a bald crowd. Eighty years later, I look back at our lives then and now, like a movie passing before my mind's eye, and I see that the children or even the grandchildren of the then poor families have fared far better in life and enjoy more comfortable lives than those "rich kids" do.

Indeed, it's inherent to our nature for a child to grow up into an irresponsible person when raised in the shade of the parents' ignorance, albeit disguised as love. Such a child would hardly harvest other than a lifetime of indolence. As the poet said,

**Fulfill a man's wish, and
You'll have an obedient servant.
For he won't rule against his desires,
Who has found what he sought.**

**Bend and twist the wet branch as you wish,
For only fire could straighten a dry twig.**

After all, successful people don't necessarily possess all virtues. Rather, driven by necessity, as an outcome of innovation, and via learning from the mistakes of the others, **they tend to take the most out of what they already have.**

**The elephant's tiny eyes let me see that
The richer a man, the more his needs.**

The tumultuous transformations, which swept across Iran of 1979, led to many unwanted misplacements. And Time itself commanded countless members of various classes, such as the former students who belonged to different social sectors, to go back and sit in the metaphorical

first grades in their new environments— and they did. Many of them found themselves on the banks of fresh waters, joined their children to swim, and showed the world that things didn't work out by merely relying on one's wealth and location, but that "self-reliance" was a God-given gift, and that **life demanded of us to swim well**. Time showed that to be raised in the comfort of a wealthy family was a rare treasure, but also that lacking in life experience would hold us back. We may notice that ever since, at several stages, when many of those daddy's over-protected darlings were faced by life's troubles, they fell behind and were destroyed — because they lacked in experience and instead relied on their parents' wealth. If only they knew of that Persian adage, "Appreciate the heritage, for a father dies only once in a century." And by "heritage" we don't mean just the material wealth and assets. We saw for ourselves how by a single political turn,

**The farmers' learned children became the king's ministers,
But the foolish minister's sons went on to beg in the village.**

**Alas, it's tough to take orders once you've fallen from the throne —
To suffer people's cruelties, whereas you had known a life of comfort.**

An addict gets high on the opium and explains modestly, "Zhe good charcoal had shometing to do with it, too!" **We should avoid hubris**, for it's Life itself that may now grant the glory, but then, crush in humiliation. **"What matters most are to know how to do the job and what will come out of it. Otherwise, we'd all be masters at backgammon if the dice sat well with every throw."**

A close friend of mine, a student of Chemistry, graduated first in the class from Tehran University, and he went on to receive the Royal Medal from the Shah of Iran, who also granted him with a six-year scholarship to study at the best American universities. But then I witnessed how his mother stood in his son's path when she didn't let him use that scholarship — because she loved him too much. And she proved that misplaced friendship was but well-placed enmity!

**A king entrusted his son to the school,
And placed a silver tablet next to him.
At the top, the tablet read in glittering gold,
"The teacher's cruelty is worth
More than the motherly love."**

Fortunate are the children of reasonable parents. Indeed, many parents need a life-coach more than their children do. Such children will pay for the parents' ignorance; because a newborn is akin to a blank page, upon which the parents, then Life itself, write both the good or the bad, making one child into a laborer, but another into a master of the trade. After all, there must be thousands of merits besides the virtue of beauty. **“It takes much traveling for a person to mature.”**

The Protestant motto goes as follows, “God helps those who help themselves.” Self-confidence is the first step toward success, and it's up to the parents to reinforce this valuable attribute in their children — or to the contrary, to halt them from taking any steps — and thus, the daddy's over-protected child is created. Let us give the children a chance at the possibility to make mistakes, and to learn from them. People won't learn to drive in the freeways until they've got lost in one!

Let's help our children understand that as clean, transparent and honest as the mirror is, it can and does lie to us. For it shows the right as the left, and vice versa, telling us in effect, “Don't even trust your eye, but instead consult your intellect — especially when it comes to choosing a spouse for yourself! — so that you can tell by yourself the right from the left, the good from the evil.”

Let us repeat to our children and instill in them, **My dearest,**

You're a copy of the Divine book.

You're the mirror that reflects the regal splendor.

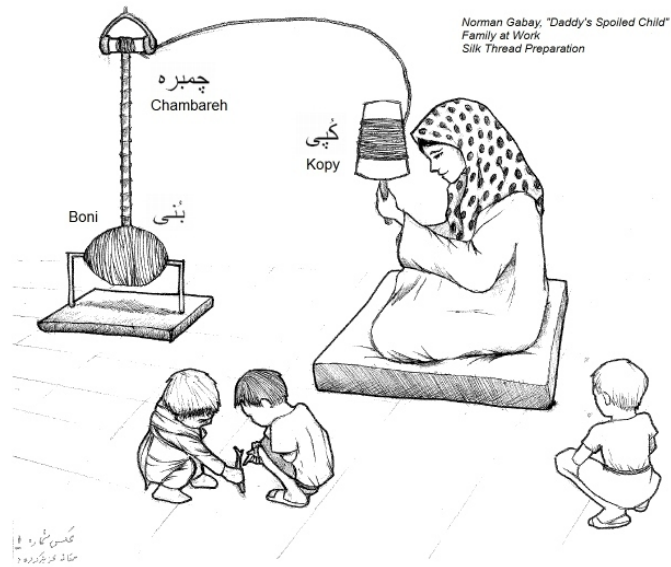
What's there in the world, it's all inside you.

Ask yourself for your wishes,

For, what you seek, it's all you.

The life-cycle of the silkworm, the caterpillar which secretes the silk thread from the mouth, is rather relevant to our topic. My grandfather and my father used to buy the raw silk threads from the original producers to have the final threads prepared for weaving such fine fabric as velvet, Persian carpet, or cloth. To do so, they handed the raw thread to the Jewish ladies of Kashan, whose the absolute majority worked for an income. These ladies graded and sorted the

threads into yarns of thin and thick strings, known in Persian as *daneh*, *poudeh* and *rishoundeh*,¹ and they did so via some basic methods, using a simple set-up that consisted of the *bony*, *chambareh* and *kopy*.² I was responsible to visit several homes after school, take the prepared yarns, and deliver them to my father’s shop. If memory serves me well, this was a particular art of the Kashi Jewish ladies. Such artisans were called *naghad*, i.e. “the cash maker”, for they took some worthless thread and made it into “readily valuable” strings. And may I dare say that the absolute majority of the Jewish women of Kashan were *naghad*.



I witnessed up-close how so many mothers, their small and big kids by their sides, worked so hard washing the clothes and dishes, ran their homes in the basic ways of the day, and yet worked late into the night to bring in an extra income. Many of these women earned more than their husbands did; but would anyone acknowledge this fact? Never!

But how was the silk thread produced?

One of my sweetest childhood memories belongs to when my father, may he rest in peace, brought me a few silkworms. I kept the worms in an empty shoe box. I provided them every day with their only food, the leaves of the white mulberry. And I kept them safe through the night, next to my pillow, because I was afraid that the grownups might kill them too, as they had done to Ziba...



¹ دانه، پوده و ریشونده.
² بونی، چمبره و کپی.

Part II

Ziba “Beautiful” was the domesticated rooster who grew up beside me ever since he had been born. I fed Ziba from my lips. I woke up every morning to his crows. Every afternoon, as I returned home from school, he would fly and sit on my shoulder. I sang and danced along with Ziba. Until that dreaded day, when I came back from school only to find my sister sitting on the ground, as she plucked the feathers off of the lifeless corpse of Ziba. I screamed aloud, and even as I wept, I bit my sister’s toe-thumb so terribly that blood gushed out. Eight-two years later, I’m still angry at my parents as to why they did that. But which parent did pay the slightest attention to how the children felt? Which parent had read or heard of a book by Sigmund Freud or Dr. Holakouee’s speeches? As late as forty years ago in Iran, if you spoke of mental illness to some people, they’d snap back at you out of ignorance, “It’s you who is crazy!”

Not until mental illness had been studied scientifically, did the world realize that a significant percentage of our species, each for some typically unknown cause, suffered from curable psychological issues. It hasn’t been long since a significant number of people began to understand that a bunch of superstitions, or some old and arbitrary religious or secular laws — such as those calling for the punishments of flagellation, imprisonment, burning the people at the stake *à la* the dark ages of Inquisition, throwing people off of the cliffs, mutilation, or at any rate, killing people in various forms — could never resolve any of such problems. Also, nowhere in the religious books, these millennia-old guides of people, we find any mention of the psychological illnesses, because this category of illness was not known at the time. Neither did people know that as with the other illnesses, these could be hereditary and be passed on from one generation to another. As such, there’s little wonder that today, according to some annual statistics and for various reasons, the miseries and the wrong-doings of the psychotically disturbed people, such as joining the violent seditious groups, savage shooting at schools, suicides and so forth, have been on the rise.

Currently, the first proper step taken by the police is to investigate the homes of the culprits, such as those who’ve been shooting at the schools. But so far, nobody seems to have thought of investigating the “mental homes” of these criminals, their families, where they were raised, and their sacred books and textbooks, so that by learning their root causes, we could stop such crimes from being repeated. As we examine the biographies of a diverse range of criminals, we can see

that they've all been devoid of family love and the teacher's kindness. We may thus conclude that maintaining family ties could untie some knots from this convoluted yarn-ball. I'm certain that in the near future, before electing the presidents or other aspiring candidates for the key positions, such as cabinet members, parliamentary members, and teachers, they'll be examined for their mental health. Crying out aloud if a psychopath climbs to the crest of power! Do yourself a favor, and read the history.

But I digressed.

Anyhow, in the past, the grown-ups thought that "the younger was the age, the lesser was the mind", and they often spoke of their children, "He's just a child! He doesn't understand!" Well, let the nay-sayers come and see today how our 7 or 8-year old children have turned into PC engineers in residence at most every household! Why, if only "as children who didn't understand", they took us more often to the ladies' public baths!

One nice Kashi lady complained to the Hakim-Bashi, i.e. a traditional doctor, "My head hurts! My legs hurt! My stomach hurts! My back hurts! And I'm not feeling too well myself!" Little did she know that this "self" was but the psyche part of our being, of which the wise poet wrote,

My heart's broken and tired, yet there's a stranger

Who cries and raises a din amid my silence.

The future generations will surely have so much to tell about our ignorant ways and misconceptions. But again, we digressed.

My father had told me about the many interesting and enlightening stages of silkworm's lifecycle. I could hardly wait to meet them up-close and to learn how they produced those fine yet enduring threads, how they transformed into beautiful butterflies, laid eggs, flew away, and never returned. I wanted to see for myself how in their own right, those little eggs — which looked like poppy seeds or millet seeds — would turn into the new caterpillars, and how that miraculous and wonderful natural cycle persisted. **Einstein** was once asked if he "believed in miracles." He answered, to the effect, "Either Nature is entirely a miracle, or nothing is!"

Day in, day out, I watched my worms, until one by one they began to move. Each silkworm wove a white egg-like cocoon around itself, and little by little, they each caged themselves inside

one, which consisted of the silk thread. Some time later, a little hole appeared in a cocoon. The caterpillar trapped inside it, which by then had turned into an extraordinarily beautiful moth, was struggling to leave its cage to no avail. Eager to see the butterfly in full, and wishing to help the poor thing in its unfair struggle, I took a razor in hand and widened the hole in the cocoon. The butterfly left the cocoon — and before it could lay any eggs, it died. Tears flowed down my cheeks as I took the dead butterfly to my father. He took a sharp look and asked without a pause, “Did you help the moth to leave the cocoon?” “Yes,” said I, crying. “Ah, that’s where you were wrong,” he said. “The body of the moth, those tiny muscles, they were supposed to get ready by that days-long struggle before the insect could survive the open air. You meant to help the butterfly, but in practice, you took away its natural chance for that necessary growth. It was like those parents who overprotect their children and raised them up as irresponsible adults. Not only the moth died, but it didn’t lay any eggs for its kind to survive. This is the outcome of your “lady bear” friendship, who as you know, meant to shoo a horsefly off of her beloved sleeping child, and to do so, hit him in the face with a rock.”



**She brought down the millstone
To shoo away the horsefly. But the rock
Shattered the face of the man in sleep,
Revealing this adage to the world,
“The idiot’s love is surely like the bear’s:
His contempt is the love; his love’s the contempt.”**

Parents who fulfill every unreasonable wish of their child at all the wrong times; who provide their uninformed loved one with “money”, this fatal poison; and who, under various names, raise their child so-called “free” but in fact as irresponsible people; they’re holding back their children unwittingly. Freedom has its share of positive or negative aspects; and one negative side in our time is the risk of drinking indulgence by teenagers and young adults. It may seem to be a trivial issue, yet having studied the matter, I’m compelled to warn, May the day never come when this seeming trivia will have turned into an addiction. For, all addictions begin small before they grow into large flames by the lustful self’s persuasions, until they’ve engulfed the victim.

As the people of Shiraz, Iran, say, “The misplaced bravo kills the man, and the uphill kills the porter!”

Speaking of the silkworm cocoon, I’m reminded of **Dennis Prager**, the renowned speaker and talk show producer, who said about the differences in taste between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews, “In order for a caterpillar to become a beautiful butterfly taking its beauty out into the world, it must first spend time in a cocoon. Unfortunately, most non-Orthodox Jews don’t believe in the cocoon, and most Orthodox Jews don’t believe in flying into the world.”

Back in the old days in our city of Kashan, Iran, having passed the elementary school, most boys were sent away to Tehran or Rasht for work and apprenticeship. Basically, the parents threw their children into the ocean of life — including me at the age of 12 — and practically told them, “Good boy! Now, try and stay alive!” As time went by, I witnessed how enduring life’s troubles and climbing its highs and lows trained those children, many of whom grew up to become some skilled swimmers.

**To become world-famous,
You must endure the pain of exercise.
Everyone gets to notice the moon,
When it’s grown thin and trimmed.**

I believe that the secret to the relative success of this group was, besides the experience that they had acquired through life, that necessity drove them to keep teaching themselves. Self-education can be indeed the greatest university. The difference between the daddy’s over-protected darlings vs. the poor children brings me to the story of a traditional teacher and the smart thing that he did to save the day.

The generation before our presently aging generation of the post-1979 emigrants, that is, the generation before the rise of Reza Shah Pahlavi, they used to send their children to *maktab-khaneh* or “traditional schools”, which had a more or less religious side to them. I too went several times to the *maktab* of Hadji Mullah, the father of the late Eliahu Moreh. Back then, chairs were deemed luxuries. Instead, the *mullah* i.e. “the teacher” and the children would sit on cushions or patches of animal hide, and they all listened as he typically taught in a narrative style. At times, both the *mullah* and the children could fall asleep!

One day, a well-known merchant came angrily to one such *maktab* and scolded the *mullah*, “Why do you pay more attention to my servant’s child than to my own child? My servant’s child can already read the “town-to-town handwriting” — i.e., the mail! — but my own son can’t still write down his own name!” The wise *mullah* told the angry business magnate, “Please, take a seat!” And he rang the bell to let the children out for a recess. Then as the merchant watched, he placed two layers of thick cardboard underneath the cushion of his servant’s child, whereas he placed two clay bricks underneath the cushion of the merchant’s own son.

Next, the *mullah* rang the bell, the children ran back in, and they each took their seat. Few minutes later, the *mullah* noticed that the servant’s son was at unease, looking up and down, visibly irritated. The *mullah* asked, “Why are you uncomfortable?” The servant’s child answered, “I don’t know why the depth of my cushion has changed since I left for the break.” Whereas the Hadji’s spoiled darling had been sitting carefree, oblivious to the thickness of two bricks.

At this point, the *mullah* told the merchant, “You see, it’s the God-given difference between your servant’s and your own child! His child sensed the thickness of two layers of cardboard, but your son didn’t sense the depth of two bricks. Don’t be angry at me. Rather, blame it on God and on yourself!”

People’s ability to understand things has nothing to do with the material wealth. Wealth is a mere illusion. “Lucky the artesian well, for it overflows by itself.” Naturally, we pay more attention to the wise and intelligent people, whereas we run away from the ignorant people. People become friends with, and share in, one another’s intellect and happiness, rather than their stupidity and misery. As we have seen, Time itself grooms the meritorious and proactive people on their path of life, and it shapes them like diamonds. Meanwhile, many others turn into gleaners, collecting the left-over of the harvest, whereas a smaller circle of the daddy’s over-protected children are crushed underneath life’s heavy boots. Even when some inheritance is involved, it won’t solve the issue. For, the virtuous child doesn’t depend on the inheritance, while the undeserving child won’t preserve it. Talent and talent! Nurture and nurture! As **Saadi** put it,

**When the essence consists of a precious jewel,
Nurture could have an impact on it.**

**No amount of polishing can beautify
That steel which bears a poor essence at the core.
Even if they took Jesus's ride to Mecca,
It would come back but as a donkey.**

I used to do business with a trusted factory-owner, who had three sons and two daughters. I noticed that even though his three sons were working by his side, he had entrusted the authority entirely to his second son. I told him, "It's not right to discriminate between one's children. Tomorrow, the other children will be upset with you, and the children will break apart." He paused for a look and said, "They shouldn't be angry at me, but they better angry at God. I can see for myself that my second child is more intelligent than the others, and he'll better protect my assets and my family. This is not discrimination, but expediency!" The *Pirkei Avot* or "The Chapters of the Sages" advises in effect, "God! What you didn't give to whom you gave wisdom; and what did you give to whom you deprived of wisdom?!" At any rate, people interpret things differently, even when they're few siblings from the same parents.

**Silver and gold both emerge from the rock,
But not every rock harbors gold or silver.
That bright star Canopus
It shines the same all over the world,
Yet some skin turns into precious leather,
While another becomes a patch of worthless hide.**

The man handed the cup of hemlock to Socrates and asked the irreplaceable philosopher, in effect, "What would you tell the people presently, were you given a chance to talk to them?" Socrates replied, "I'd climb to the highest point in Athens, and I'd cry, 'O who seek fortunes for the happiness of your family! Instead, pay more attention to your children and your family.'"

It's up to the inheritor to either promote and raise the worth of the family's heritage, be it material, spiritual or religious, or to the contrary, humiliate and destroy that legacy. As for what makes things happen, the child's virtuous nature comes before his nurture. Thence, they said, "One out of seven sparrows turns into a nightingale. Crying out aloud if that one be missing too!" Well, in that case, we should all sing along with **Mr. Aghili**, the famed Persian singer, "O

the light of daddy's home! / O daddy's dearest child! / Let me tell you a story, / one about this sad world. [...] Some day, your dad / will be sitting by himself at home. / Then, you'll give out a big drunkard's laugh / at me and at the world." In any case, people can laugh so far as they haven't understood the tragedy of the last hours of life. For the time being, let's laugh so hard that the world won't dare laugh at our long beard! After all,

**From the murmur of the stream, I understand
That the precious life passes by faster than the river.
Life's is just a single breath. It's not worth our sadness.
Laugh so hard that you won't know what sadness was.**

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To receive copies of this and other essays and writings by Norman "Nourollah" Gabay in English and Persian, including his three books, *An Invitation to Reason*, *The Glossary of the Kashani Jewish Dialect*, and soon to be published, an electronic book covering his more recent essays, please visit the following website: www.BabaNouri.com.