

Here and Now, From the Far Side of Time & Across the World

An Essay in Three Parts

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

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Part I

Watch from the river bank as life streams by:

It's hint enough at the transience of the world.

“Change” is an absolutely certain aspect of life; and no Change is without its own share of issues. Thence, the happy, fortunate people are not those individuals or societies who face no problems, since basically, Life can't be without problems; why, in a way, what we call Life is an aggregate of all problems! Instead, happy people are individuals or nations which have no problem with their problems; that is, they can solve their problems intelligently and in time, and get ready for their next ordeal. After all, in the words of the **poet**, “Waves we are, and we'll be no more if we stand still. / Alive we are, for at rest we never are.”

Life's like a flowing river, constantly in motion, and the water that passes us by at this point of the riverbed won't be the same as what did just a moment ago. Changes themselves are not all the same. Changes don't remain the same, and they're different from time to time, and for one

individual, small group, or large nation, to another. Thus, our collective life, the life of the Jews of Iran, who rose from the far side of Time and landed on this side of the World, carries the weight of 2700 years on the back, a baggage always in change, as we moved forward through time and across the space. Yet, the Jews of Iran remained akin to **water lilies**, which may grow in malodorous swamps, yet would never assume the stench of the waters. We're proud that throughout the past 2700 years and to this date, even at times when religious discrimination against us was at its peak, without a *yeshivah* or "Jewish religious seminary", and without teaching such books as *the Shulchan Aruch*,¹ we have remained committed to maintaining our precious heritage. As **Dr. Taghi Arani**² put it, "the flow of history is a pure and holy river that pours into the sea of progressive Evolution. In this holy river, let us be among the droplets that will reach the sea, rather than those that stagnate on the brinks of the swamps, and rot away contaminated in the mud." My earnest plea to our friends, especially the religious advocates, is to please, let our children keep in step with the times.

Recounting if briefly a selection from our eventful past would be interesting, and at times useful and instructive, especially for the future generations, for as it's said, "To know what you are, look at your past; but to know what you will be, look at what you're doing now."

Nearly one hundred years ago, as Reza-Shah the Great, the founder of the Pahlavi Dynasty, rose to power, Tehran, the capital of Iran, found itself increasing significance as the center of the country. Thereafter, the Iranian Jews from the smaller cities and towns, who composed the majority of the Iranian Jewish population, began to move gradually to Tehran; and they arrived in the big city with backpacks of diverse customs and traditions which had been produced through the centuries of life in their hometowns. That national mass migration was in certain respects comparable to the mass emigration that would take place in the aftermath of the 1979 C.E. Revolution, to the city of Los Angeles, California, in particular. Once in the Iranian capital, as different as their respective cultures could be, but relying on their shared religion, those immigrants joined the Jews of Tehran. And they went on to live there, as they put to use what they had learned at the Alliance Israélite "Ettehad" Schools, with branches in several cities with a Jewish population, and thanks to the lesser degree of discrimination against them in the Iranian capital.

¹ שולחן ערוך.

² دکتر تقی ارانی

It's of interest to note that the Jews of Kashan left their hometown after the cruel, unjust, inhumane and bloody murder of Dr. Sulayman Berjis in 1944 C.E. As I wrote before in more detail, Dr. Berjis, the son of Hakim Yaghoub a.k.a. Shams ol-Hokama,³ was brutally lynched and murdered for the mere "crime" of being of the Bahaii faith. But most Jews of Iran, whether from Tehran or the other cities, left the country only long afterwards, in 1980 C.E. and after the cruel and savage murder of the late Hadji Habib Elghanian. Alas, as long as they haven't burned their own hand, most people won't believe that fire can burn — and that includes the flames of religious hatred.

Back then, the living condition of the Jews of Tehran wasn't much to speak of, either. Theirs was a pitiful remnant of the ominous era of the Qajar rule. Most Jews of Tehran were living in the Jewish ghetto, located in the Oudlajan area, known as the Oudlajan Neighborhood, or the *Mahalleh* i.e. "Neighborhood" for short; and they lived their lives in the badly filthy and stinking alleys of the ghetto, in hardship and often in poverty. You'd probably ask, "The poverty that ensues from discrimination is one thing, but why dirty and putrid?!" The answer is more painful than the question: because unlike what it did for the other parts of the city, the City of Tehran did not collect and take away the trash of the Jewish ghetto.

Naturally, if you don't take the trash out of, say, a Harvard University or the White House, even those exemplary buildings would turn into some grimy and reeking castles, too, and centers for all kinds of diseases!

Nevertheless, compared to the small town Jews, the Jews of Tehran enjoyed more freedoms and had more social contact with the non-Jews; and consequently, they were more "social", so to speak, and posed a better accent when speaking Persian. Given the above, the Jews of Tehran, notwithstanding their own miserable conditions, felt themselves superior to those of the smaller towns, and made humiliating anecdotes about them! For example, about the Jews of Kashan, they said, "When a Kashani comes to Tehran, he wraps a brick inside a silken handkerchief, carries it under the arm as his business book, goes to the Grand Bazaar, and asks his way around, 'Where's the Amir Chamber?' — and within the blink of an eye, he'll have his own store in the Amir Chamber, too!" Or they would say that when a Shirazi Jew, with their kind romantic heart,

³ شمس الحکما: The Sun of the Doctors, was the given title of the respected Hakim Yaghoub "Jacob".

comes to Tehran, he asks, “Where’s the refreshing garden?” The Yazdi Jew asks, “Where’s the Synagogue?” But the Rashti asks, “Where’s somebody from my hometown?!”

Link to an old Persian song, *Mirom Shiraz*, i.e.

I Go to Shiraz! Shiraz & Isfahan! on YouTube:

https://youtu.be/m0-p6Y_hbAk

Link to an old Gilaki song *Aha, Bogoo!* i.e. *Oh! Tell me!*

from the northern Iranian Province of Gilan, on YouTube:

<https://youtu.be/0FLJv8-R-i4>

What an astonishing story it has been, that of the Iranian Jew, from the far side of Time to this corner of the World! From the city of Damavand in the north of Tehran to Nahavand in the Western Iran; from Yazd, Kerman, Kashan and Hamedan, to Isfahan well-known as Dar ol-Yahood or “Home of the Jews”, to the cities of Golpaygan, Khansar and Garmsar; from the city of Mash-had in the eastern province of Khorasan bordering Afghanistan, to the city of Sanandaj in the west, in the Iranian province of Kurdistan, bordering Iraq; from the towns and cities of Lar and Bijar to Ahvaz, Khorramshahr and Abadan in the south, Babol in the north and Kermanshah in the west; from the less or more known Banian, Touyserkan, Malayer, Boroujerd and Rezayieh, to Rasht and the port city of Pahlavi — they were all bustling to move to Tehran, and from Tehran to Tel-Aviv in Israel, Europe or the United States!

We could write volumes about each of the Iranian cities and the broad and specific histories of the Jewish life and settlement in those places! **I hope that those who were born in those or other Iranian towns and cities** will write about their birthplaces and the history of the Jewish life in those parts. Those historic and unique memories, none of which can be repeated, are not only enjoyable to read, but very much instructive. I seize the moment and further ask that while the respected *Payam Magazine*, this one remaining Persian-language periodical of our community, is still running by your support and mine, please do write for it; for, tomorrow could be too late. As the revered Iranian Jewish poetess, the late **Ms. Mahin Amid** wrote, “A footstep is all that’ll remain of us.” May we all leave behind at the least a footstep for our share;

otherwise, naturally, in not so distant a future, no one will be there to write, and no magazine will be around to hand the stories to people to read. But I digressed.

The Tehrani Jews all agreed on one point, that is, they claimed that most Jewish townsmen were “misers”! But little they knew about the difference between being “wise and prudent” as opposed to being “stingy”, and that a “cautious” person was quite distinct from a “coward”, even as a “religious” person is largely different than a pretentious “hypocrite”, and the difference between a person of “foresight” and a “myopic” is as wide as the gap between heaven and the earth! Moreover, the Jewish people could be very different from one another depending on the weight of discrimination that was imposed upon them.

Thus, we could never compare the miserable life of the Jews of Mash-had or Isfahan, Babol, Hamedan and Kashan, with the life of the Kermani Jew, a city which one could say was more or less devoid of discrimination. A Jew from a small town with an income of, say, \$2 or \$20 in today’s money would try to act most thriftily and spread that tiny amount to provide for few days of life’s expenses; since basically speaking, they had no hope for the future and their next day income. For them, it wasn’t about the quality of life, but rather, it was all about mere survival. This was not “meagerness” but prudence, foresight and caution. Alas, as **Saadi** put it, “Two kinds left the world in regret: who had the food yet didn’t eat, and who knew the right yet didn’t act.”

But of course, the need for such cautious attitude, and the justified habit of such thrift, could at times penetrate the person so deeply that they would lead to the ugly habit of “stinginess”, so far as long after achieving success and wealth, the person wouldn’t — and doesn’t — yet give up the misplaced habit of miserliness. The phenomenon isn’t limited to one particular geographic area; and it may have no relation whatsoever to the person’s hometown to let us generalize it to all members of a community. In any case, it’s paramount to avoid attributing an individual’s good or bad habits to all members of a group. For instance, it’s wrong to claim that “*every* short person is such”, or that “*all* tall people are such and such.” Consider that our genetic properties, our very human DNA, are particular to each of us, so far as they aren’t fully identical even between parents and their children, let alone being the same for all members of a town or country! Even the identical twins, amid their identical genes, develop as distinct individuals with remarkable differences. As such, it’s often wrong to generalize individual behavior to a group.

The Mindset Which Leads to Successful Relationships

Let's take a refreshing detour, and watch and learn from a most interesting and highly instructive short video, on your computer or mobile phone. Personally, I think this short film has more to teach than several books could offer. In this short and serene speech called *The Mindset Behind Successful Relationships* (video, ca. 4 minutes, published June 2019, YouTube) the revered Buddhist figure **Mr. Radhanath Swami** draws upon a comparison between the honey bee and common fly as a simile to describe the selective, positive and goal-oriented mindset which is the secret behind success in our relationships and improving the quality of our life. As he says, we should try and be like the honey bee, that even in a pile of rubbish finds a beautiful flower and drinks from its nectar; and likewise, we should think about the positive aspects of the other person and avoid thinking negatively.

<https://youtu.be/rKSLjWvCa14>

Another version of this video with Persian subtitles has been circulating, which will be soon made available on my website at www.BabaNouri.com for those better familiar with the Persian language.

نسخه ای دیگر از این ویدیو با زیرنویس فارسی موجود است که به زودی در وبسایت www.BabaNouri.com در دسترس علاقمندان قرار خواهد گرفت.

The sermon reminds me of a memorable incident. Many years ago, in Iran, I witnessed a dispute and reconciliation effort between a young married couple with two children. The husband was from Tehran, while the wife came from a small town. As I observed their high morals and outstanding attributes, I was surprised as to how they could have ended up with any conflict at all. I took the young wife's mother to the side, and I asked her, a meritorious lady, "Dear Lady! I can't see any problems here. How could the two of them have any conflict?" She replied, "Oil! Cooking oil!" I asked, "Does the young husband sell oil as a profession?" She laughed and said, "No! My daughter hates the smell of sesame oil, which her lovely in-laws use in their dishes, and she flees their place to avoid it. My dear son-in-law, on the other hand, abhors the smell of animal fat oil in my food, and he escapes from our home, nay, the city, to avoid it!" Finally, banning both types of oil in their food, and apologizing to them for the

disrespect they both had been subjected to, we all sat down to enjoy a delicious dish of Tehrani carrot- and bean-rice made with olive oil. If only the reader were there to enjoy it with us! The meal satisfied both parties, and the affair was thus brought to a pleasant conclusion!

We could do extensive research on the Jewish communities of various Iranian towns or cities. We could do so, given the long history of each of these communities in their respective locales and their remarkable diversity, as it's been done for the Jewish communities that emerged in the other countries, from the far side of Time to this side of today's world. For instance, one day my son asked me, "You've told me that Kashan is an ancient city, with a hot and dry climate, without much of a green life. If so, then how come that long ago, a group of Jews chose to settle in that city?!" I thought for a moment, and I replied, "I don't know!" My son laughed and said, "But I've studied, and I know. As you said so yourself, centuries ago, since about the 2nd century B.C.E. until the 18th century C.E., the ancient historical route known as the Silk Road was more or less active like a mobile exhibition of the contemporary Chinese merchandise. This road, or rather the network of roads, which at its peak extended from China of the time to Venice in Europe, on its way passed by the Kashan Desert in Iran. As you also said, the remaining sites from that period include the ruins of the *karvan-sara*'s i.e. the "caravan inns" of the time, which can be seen today next to the Lut Desert near Kashan."

My son's explanation opened a window to light before me. Given my own experience and observations, I said, "You're probably quite right, because during my childhood, as in the centuries before then, the absolute majority of the Jewish women of Kashan prepared the raw silk threads to be dyed and used in weaving Persian rugs and the premium velvet cloth. Also most Jewish men, including members of our own family and my ancestors, as well as Chacham Yedidia Shofet's father, were professionally in the silk thread business." They bought the raw thread from those who cultivated the silk worms and produced the silk thread; and as I wrote in detail in my previous articles, they "worked it" or developed the thread, getting it ready to be dyed and subsequently used in weaving.

One remarkable point, so far as I saw and remember, was that this profession was exclusive to the Jewish men and women of Kashan. The question is wherefrom and how this industry had

arrived in Kashan, and how it had become the de facto specialty of the Jews of the city? As we know, ever since the antiquity, China has remained the world center for farming the silk worm and producing the silk thread for use in weaving fine carpets, velvet, and the delicate silk cloth. I think it could be said that it was a number of Jews, who centuries ago, together with the Chinese merchants and to do business with China, happened upon Kashan as they traveled the Silk Road; and that some of them, having learned from the Chinese how to dye the silk and to weave a variety of silken products, stayed in Kashan and pursued this profession. Or could it be that instead, it was the Chinese who learned this art and industry from the Iranians and spread it in turn? Up until less than a hundred years ago, this profession in Iran was almost exclusively a specialty of Kashan, and exclusive to the Jews of that city. This fact attests to the truth of this theory that, even if stated cautiously, the Chinese brought the silk industry to Iran, and the Jews of Kashan learned the craft from them and spread it across the country. Anyhow, God knows! But I think that centuries of producing silken carpets and velvet in Kashan and the excellent quality of their products suggest that this city was the original site of the production of silk and silken goods in Iran.

Moreover, as we know, past its heyday, as the Silk Road had begun its decline during the 15th century C.E., the rulers of Spain, in about the year 1492 C.E., expelled the Jews and Muslims of that country. According to the oral history passed down to us through the generations, at that time, a number of the Jews of Spain came to the cities of Isfahan and Kashan, Iran. It's of interest to know that some old families of Kashan had children by the name of Sinior, and everyone called them by that name. Was it not the same as the Spanish word *Señor* for "Sir" or "Mister"? Also the Jews of Isfahan refer to watermelon as *sandi*. Is it not the same as the Spanish word *sandia* for the said fruit? Or the Jews of Isfahan use the word *kazeh* for "home". Is it not the same as the Spanish *casa* for "home"? Wherefrom and how did such words find their way only into the dialects of the Jews of Isfahan and Kashan? It seems certain that a number of the Jews of Spain came to these two cities, where they settled for life. Alas, Life didn't allow my good friend and the great historian, the late Professor Amnon Netzer, enough time to further explore this side of the story, as well, and to inform us more of this history.

Well, let us get back on the road.

As we return to the story of Jewish migration from the Iranian towns and cities, from the far

side of Time to this corner of the World, let's remember a little about how the Jews of Iran kept in step with the traditional customs of the rest of Iranians, including the *zoor-khaneh*, this traditional gymnasium for an ancient sport particular to Iran.

Oh, speak of the good old memories of the *zoor-khaneh* of the Ordon "Jordan" Club! Mr. Elisha was the *morshed*, i.e. the "singing guide" of that traditional gym; and Mr. Ebi Kalimian and Mr. Jahangir Sulaymani, dressed in the special outfit of the *zoor-khaneh*, acted as the professional athletes or the *miandar's* who led the routines. As for us the youngsters, we would gather around the *goud* or "arena", and repeat the movements of the *miandar's*. And at the ring of the *morshed's* bell, instead of the *Salavat!* which was the traditional call of the Muslim athletes, we would chant in Hebrew, "*Adonai, hu hA-elohim! Adonai, hu hA-elohim!*" That is, "God is the Almighty!" Oh, how for so many years, we woke up every morning to the immortal voice of the famous *morshed* Mr. Shir-Khoda, which was broadcast on the Iranian radio.

(*) Those interested can hear a sample of the voice of the late **Morshed Jafar Shir-Khoda**, the first *morshed* of the Iranian National Radio, via the following link on YouTube.

<https://youtu.be/JVoZbzKkcyg>

Part II

An unprecedented era of growth and blossoming had arrived for the Iranian people; but regrettably, the nation didn't appreciate the blessing, and they brought upon themselves a ruinous and irredeemable change. The famed Qajar Prime Minister **Amir Kabir** had once said, and I paraphrase, "I used to think that the country needed a learned Prime Minister. Then I thought perhaps it needed a learned King. But now I realize that what the country needs is a learned people."

Nations, religions and governments, they need not only progressive and useful books and laws, but also **the wise and learned persons** to implement them. Alas, the Iranians didn't appreciate their own success and achievements; and as a result of that painful negligence, the useful majority of one of the best generations in the history of the country, one born by the rise of the Pahlavi, also left the country at Pahlavi's twilight.

Yet, it's not all too late. The immigrants would better notice that even as important as it is for their children to master modern sciences, they first need **to purge their wrong heritage**. Such harmful heritage often results from the teachings of the religious books of the inherited faith pertaining to sectarian and religious hatred.

The hereditary religion is what nearly everyone in the world follows, albeit each in a different name, even though they had neither a say nor any right in choosing it for themselves. They have accepted it without any understanding of it, and they act accordingly without knowing what it's all about. If such people were born in parts of India, then they would be worshipping cows; whereas born in China, they would be bowing to some statues! Thus, divided in patterns that more or less reflect the geographic map of the world, each group, in one or another name, stubbornly defends its inherited religion, and its members see themselves duty-bound to preserve it. In that respect, to them a "friend" is whom their ancestors thought of as "friend", while the "enemy" is whom their ancestors deemed as the "enemy". In their view, to carry out such duties is to do good, whereas neglecting or disobeying them would constitute a sin. Moreover, one way or another, these religious groups are each concerned that their respective traditions will be abandoned by the future generations. But as such, they're unaware that the very philosophy of the "hereditary religion" is on the downfall throughout the world, and that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will gradually come to replace our ancestral religions, yours and mine. That'll be when, as **Saadi** put it, "humankind will come to see nothing but God."

That blissful day shall arrive when humankind will have realized that the best form of religious observance is "to be human" in the true sense of the word. This is the very principle that the progressive religions have meant to spread from the outset. As the *Holy Torah* says, "*ve-āhavtā le-re'achā kā-mochā*"⁴, that is, "Love your kind as you would yourself." If the people of the world merely practiced this fine 3300-year old dictum, which the great **Hillel** considered to be the essence of the whole *Torah*, then there would be no more need for any religion and their books, the leaders and the pulpits, or the huge buildings and houses of worship.

As I've pointed out before, the enriching and fruitful, albeit compulsory, emigration of a considerable number of Iranians during the past few decades was not a mere displacement through the space, but rather, it was a vast migration from the far side of the world to this side of

⁴ "ואהבת לרעך כמוך." "

Time. For that same reason, their success depends on giving up their inherited inciting teachings, and on preparing the ground to keep in step with modern science and adapt themselves to the modern civilization. Otherwise, nothing will change, or as the Persian proverb goes, “the soup and the bowl will both remain the same!” A well-dressed yet superstitious generation, even if they live in a far better social environment, and enjoy a more pleasant climate!

It’s said that history repeats itself, whether at large or in pieces. About a century ago, when the Jews of smaller cities emigrated to Tehran, most families had children who had come already to the Iranian capital for work — including the author himself, at the age of 12. Better familiar with the big city, and more secure in their situation, these children often became the metaphorical walking sticks for their fathers to rely on.

Similarly, about forty years ago, most Iranian Jewish families left Iran during a fruitful if obligatory emigration; and they too joined their children, who for the most part had been studying in the American, European or Israeli colleges and universities. The modern knowledge of these children, combined with the parents’ precious experience, became the catalyst for their scientific and economic achievements today. But of course we can’t ignore one important exception, and that is the youngsters who were taken into the Jewish religious seminaries.

Thus, whereas the academic students were acquiring the modern knowledge, the students of those seminaries were learning the ancient religious subjects, which covered in part such non-holy books as the *Mishnah*, *Gemara* and their collection known as the *Talmud*, as well as a mixed pile of myths and commentaries. Such texts and the like, though with their own share of quite useful and instructive content, were abundant with incorrect, illogical and irrational words.

Although the author admits that from a religious standpoint, he is not qualified as an expert on the subject, he may nevertheless express his personal beliefs and knowledge most modestly, naturally, as anybody else could. As such, following extensive studies, the author has concluded that without a doubt, and beyond some readymade explanation, one principal reason behind the problem of anti-Semitism across the world, a phenomenon that has persisted through the centuries to this date, has been the improper content of the religious books and those ascribed to the religion. I’m certain that those who are justly fond of the worthy content of the scripture, the commentaries, and the like, yet ignore the absolutely unfit parts of these writings, they would object me for saying this. However, the author holds his share of arguments, such evidence that

would show that this group's defensive attitude and protests are unjustified, and the studying of which could reveal the truth to every realistic person, even though he doesn't find it prudent to present some of those arguments.

About 2000 years ago, according to the command of the *Holy Torah*, a congress of the contemporary judges and sages was assembled, namely the Sanhedrin, led by Hillel the Sage. The author believes that back then, even as they wished to void and expire 323 of the 613 commandments, a group of people, just as they do today, opposed any such changes! But at the end, against the conservative wishes of the opposing group, those 323 commands, which didn't agree with the knowledge and understanding of the time, they were rendered obsolete, and were thenceforth removed from the Jewish practice. Certainly, revisions like that will continue to take place as Time demands. Otherwise, such books will be deemed backward and regressive, like a child who has failed to improve upon the parents. To continue and teach such regressive subjects today, it will only lead to repeating and extending the regression into the future generations.

The author believes, even as he accords due respect to the instructive content of such writings and more, that a single unfit sentence with a fundamental flaw would misguide some people. But also, that it could become poisonous evidence in the hands of the fault-finders, and hence, the proverbial spoonful of yeast that could waste a tanker of fine milk into a useless mass!

I dare say, based on their evident flaws, that it's been a persistent mistake to teach all such writings whole-sale and without being reasonably selective; and that we need to stop teaching them as a whole with everything in them. We need to do so as soon as possible, so that the coming generations won't suffer the outcome of repeating mistakes and failures of the past, but also, so that such shortcomings won't fall into the hands of our enemies. No doubt, as always, our enemies will be seeking our weaknesses.

Who spoke ill of me, Evil was his nature.

Who spoke kindly of me, himself was Good.

The speaker's condition is manifest in his words:

What's within only can trickle from the jug.

Like the nocturnal blind bats which can't bear the daylight, they can't bear seeing the services of thousands of Jewish scientists to humanity. Consider that the Iranian government has for years established an office in the religious city of Qom to translate every Jewish religious

book from Hebrew to Persian, English and Arabic. Could they have any goal other than finding our weaknesses? As the **Rumi** said,

Should you not know about the composition of colors,

Don't judge the flower's beauty, or its ugliness.

To be human, we must see with kind eyes.

Don't go hunting for the fault in the others.

Alas, the word Freedom around the world, supervised by a host of incompetent politicians, and especially in the free America, has been acting against itself, so far as all too often, it has led to chaos, has been exploited by the opportunists, and has been subjected to misinterpretation by the enemies.

For instance, in the United States, during a recent critical situation, instead of strengthening the police forces, the services of hundreds of thousands of selfless dutiful officers were ignored; the regrettable mistake of one or ten ignorant officers was blamed unfairly and at a sensitive moment on the entire American police force; the budget of this institution was hurriedly reduced; and consequently, the police power as a whole was weakened. Whereas the right thing to do was to **punish the guilty minority**, on the one hand, and encourage and support effectively the meritorious majority of the police, who number more than six-hundred thousand, on the other. That's why those with foresight, especially in the aftermath of the Corona virus pandemic, are already worried about the future. This issue is so important that today, not only the United States but the entire world have arrived at the critical and momentous three-way fork of **public health, economy and security**. These three areas are interdependent, and their coordination is vital for running countries everywhere. There's no way other than the cooperation and collaboration of all governments and nations in order to find a balanced and effective solution. And politicizing these three areas to weaken one another will bear no outcome but remorse. As **Voltaire** said, in effect, "Ideas have caused more deaths on our small planet than earthquakes and illnesses combined."

Meanwhile, according to the news from the other side of the planet, the Chinese government, apparently in an attempt to prevent the growth of terrorism, instead of prohibiting the teaching of inciting books, has sterilized the Muslim Uighur women and incapacitated their men! One weakens the vital power of the police, and another renders fathers and mothers impotent! The

Persian culture has an apt proverb for such misplaced acts: “To blow into the horn from the bell side!”

That the Corona virus may have been spread deliberately reminds me of our primary school compositions. “Fear who does not fear God!” Indeed, we should fear those who by any name — whether in the name of God or religion, morality, or even claims of humanity — are not committed to conscience; for, Conscience represents all of the humane attributes and beliefs in humankind. As such, we could rather say, **Fear who has no conscience!**

We’d better be realistic. I’m sure that in not too distant a future, for the survival of the religion, to eliminate our collective weaknesses, and to keep step with modern science, not only the non-holy textbooks taught in today’s religious seminaries, but the religious writings in their entirety, especially anywhere they order people to “Kill! Kill!”, they will all be re-examined and revised. The greatest betrayal committed against the humankind has been the inciting content of the religious books. Alas, the religious promoters of such books, and ignorant parents, under the illusion of religious advocacy, have been injecting those harmful words like a deadly poison, generation after generation, into humankind’s mind and spirit. It’s the more painful that in turn, the profiteers continue to make such words into the means of exploitation. Such a process has been producing hatred to the point of killing and burning one another, under the illusion of “religious advocacy”. This regrettable phenomenon has recurred for centuries and has persisted to this date in various forms; and it’ll continue to do so until when those books with the seditious and so-called “holy” (*sic!*) content are recognized for what they are, and their unconditional promotion comes to an end. Not long ago, about a century ago, **the late Chacham David**, the father of the late Chacham Yedidia Shofet, may they rest in peace, said in Kashan, “I can’t wait for the State of Israel to be established, so they’ll come and remove the unfit writings.” Let’s pause and ponder the depth of this wise statement. We could know people truly in life and death from what they said or wrote.

But let’s now talk a little more on the current affairs...

The Covid-19 pandemic and the suspension or halt of a large portion of life in the United States and elsewhere in the world since the beginning of the year, and thereafter, the mass protests across America in response to the killing of Mr. George Floyd, these drove the year 2020 C.E. onto a bumpy road. Some well-meaning or ill-wishing critics of America wrongly

called these protests “the Black demonstrations”. Whereas the majority of the demonstrators were the white people, who often organized peaceful rallies, and alongside the black people, protested the cowardly and heart-wrenching way one human being was murdered in the hands of few who had been expected to implement the law. Indeed, the lack of Conscience in a person devoid of this faculty set in motion the flood of conscientious people. Conscience is what sets us humans apart from animals. Not only **people of the same color** have a shared pain, but also **those who share in thought empathize with one another**. As we saw in the past, during World War II and that horrible crime namely the Holocaust, a large number of non-Jewish people sympathized with the plight of Jews and cooperated with them. Also, toward the end of the 20th century and during the Bosnian war, while the Muslim population were being killed ruthlessly in the modern Europe, for long the sole government that did anything to stop and end the cruelty that was inflicted upon those victims was the State of Israel. One who has felt the bitter taste of discrimination, one who has experienced the devastating force of oppression, he or she would recognize oppression and feel the suffering of the others under the crushing stomp of cruelty. For, besides the faculty of intellect, humankind also follows his or her feelings, and it’s the emotions and feelings that bring along our empathy.

It was empathy with the pain of the murdered George which **drove millions of people to the streets**, because the victim by no means had deserved such suffering. On a broader international scale, it was the particularly painful, heart-wrenching, and unjust way that Jesus was murdered in the hands of the unconscientious Roman rulers, those military figures who were supposed to implement the law at the time, which strongly affected people and led to the growth of Christianity. Such was the suffering of that painful event that to date, more than 2000 years later, a piteous sculpture of the heart-wrenching scene of crucifixion evokes the truth of Jesus in the minds of his followers, and his victimhood and innocence in the eyes of the world.

The author believes that the best way to improve the present and future lives of the African American people is to nurture and educate their children properly at the schools; to guide the parents in how to raise their children; to place an emphasis on the institution of family; and to rely on the families from the moment the children are born; and consequently, to raise an informed generation by the help of the government. For, the majority of the criminals in the United States, whether black or white, have been people with no family ties. Indeed, in today’s America, there isn’t as much discrimination between the white and the black as one may have

imagined. But there is discrimination between people in their share of good guides and mentors, the blessing of family, and the emotional and family ties.

People of all colors need change, always and anywhere they be, and today's America is no exception to that rule. Here's hoping that even as the blessing of Freedom in the United States is maintained and strengthened, some day that ominous word namely "kill" will be omitted from the religious books, state laws, and the very mind of humankind; and that humanity will come to realize, free of all laws and religion, that no matter what the cause is claimed to be, breaking someone's proverbial leg won't improve the victim's walk, nor the perpetrator's. To the contrary, to think positively and humanely, to care for the others and to wish them well, to try and heal, and to help and cooperate with one another, these will lead to success.

Part III

Reza Shah the Great, the founder of the Pahlavi Dynasty, once said, and I paraphrase, "Sometimes you have to force good fortune and happiness upon the ignorant people."

One day, Reza Shah, called "illiterate" by some ungrateful people, was informed that the economy of Iran was in poor shape, and unemployment was running amok. The **King of Iran** said, "The way to revive the country's economy is to enhance the construction of roads and buildings. It'll benefit all occupations and professions, and it'll generate more jobs." He ordered to encourage people in all Iranian cities to construct buildings; in some places, he even demanded to give the land-owners a two-year deadline to begin construction. I remember how several acquaintances who owned land on the Shah-Reza Avenue, in between Alborz High School and Ferdowsi Square, stated, "We built what we did because of the threat from Reza Shah!"

Following that edict, the Jews of Iran built so far as a bunch of stupid jealous people told Reza Shah, "If things go on like this, the Jews will soon own the whole country! May your Majesty prevent that outcome!" But the wise King responded, "They won't be taking the buildings with them from the country!" Instead, the King ordered to encourage the Jews further in that important effort. It's been justly said that a person's or a society's worst enemies are their jealous friends.

**We can't tell apart a false friend
From our true friends.
The wick lurks at the candle's heart,
Yet it's the candle's true enemy.**

The Hebrew word *binah*⁵ means “wisdom and understanding”, and the word *sekhel*⁶ means “intellect”. The faculty of intellect is the guiding light of humankind, so that we could tell the paved road from the pothole. A wise person possesses the power of imagination, and can visualize things. If Edison hadn't been able to visualize beforehand the light bulb and its shining rays in his imagination, he would have never endured failing at a thousand and one trials, to succeed at last in the thousand and second attempt and brighten a world. As **Albert Einstein** said, “Imagination is more important than knowledge.”

Although Reza Shah was “illiterate”, he was endowed with something more significant, that is, wisdom and common sense. Think about how far ahead he carried his country within merely 16 years, and imagine how much farther he would have taken it, had he reigned for another 50 years! Alas, humankind appreciates his blessings only after he has them no more; and the gift of “health” is a good case in point.

The author believes that if the American statesmen today were as “illiterate” as Reza Shah was (*sic!*) then they would be allocating some of the money, which is currently injected into the market to keep the economy rolling, as zero-interest loans to the land-owners. Thus, by constructing more residential buildings across the United States, more jobs would be created, and the economy would thrive, but also the major issue of the high cost of housing and the shortage of residential units will be resolved. Surprisingly, today, the American middle classes spend more than 50% of their income solely on rent. **The problem is not sustainable**, and as long as it persists, it'll only be adding to the number of the homeless people.

A famous adage advises us to instead of giving fish to a man, “teach him how to fish!” The recent noble generosity in the range of trillions of dollars has been more of “giving the man a fish to feed him for a day”. It just won't be effective. The effective way to do things is “to teach people how to fish”, and to provide them with the means to do it. Otherwise, such money won't

⁵ בינה.

⁶ שֵׁכֶל.

have the slightest impact on fixing our present and future problems, and it won't go anywhere beyond "feeding a meal of fish" to a limited number of people. On the matter of wealth and wrong expenses, it's **been rightly said** that, "Even a fool may gain wealth, but to keep the money, you'd need an intelligent person." The partisan games played today in the United States and Israel remind me of a famous saying, that "**Power corrupts**, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." I realized that even **desiring power corrupts**, and the more intense the desire is, the worse the corruption would be.

At any rate, it's said that "people's knowledge is an outcome of their experiences; while their experience is a result of their mistakes." For how long more should we continue to be deceived by the swindlers, and harmed by our gullibility. As a humorous story goes, once upon a time, a farmer took his ox to sell at the country fair. The prospective customers, ignorant as they were, asked the farmer, "Hey pal! How many bowls of milk can your beast fill a day?" The shrewd farmer replied, "My 'cow' ain't give no milk, but praise the Lord when he gushes urine!" Likewise, the word "freedom" doesn't heal by itself, but *Hallelujah!* for the cruelties that are carried out in its name!

On that note, imposing cruel punishments, by the command of the law or religion, on those who have committed wrongs and cruelties, it's never been effective. As such, as hurtful as it is, it should come as no surprise that currently, according to the statistics, oppression and cruelty in various parts of the world continue to be on the rise. To uproot cruelty, the true skill is not to raise cruel people. The cruel person is a product of the society; and to say so is not to deny individual responsibility. We can't defeat the purpose and impose reciprocal cruelty, whether by the command of the religion or the law, in the name of Punishment and so forth, and yet expect to correct the oppressor. The religious or the civil law, and or strict, cruel, even perchance violent discipline imposed by parents and governments, such means are not effective in essence, and they can't help raise conscientious children. Basically, the right and humane deeds of a conscientious person are not contained neither controlled by the religious and civil laws. The conscientious person doesn't fear the religious and common laws, but instead, he respects them in practice through his humane behavior, and thus, lives in peace and comfort of the mind.

If so, is conscience inherited? Not at all! To raise conscientious people, we need to be models of conscience for our children. We should teach them kindness and love of their kind in practice,

and we shouldn't let the seeds of cruelty land in them. As it's been said, "Governments can withstand blasphemy, but they would collapse by injustice and cruelty." Today, people have realized that we are not limited to our bodies; that the body and the mind are interconnected; and that we can solve a pile of psychological and physical problems by the way of psychotherapy. For that reason, we would best purge and abandon the traditional and religious forms of physical punishment for good. Those and a multitude of other forms of punishment have been evidently without results. Having failed their purpose, they were no more than figments of the primitive imagination from the ages of savagery. Instead, we would better follow the example of some civilized Scandinavian states, and try and cure the criminals via psychotherapy. Moreover, to prevent deviance and crime in the future, we ought to raise our children already as moderate, balanced and conscientious individuals. If only some of the religions advocates could wake up to the truth, and instead of brainwashing the youngsters, would let them be free to find their own path and to grow into informed individuals, instead of a bunch of lifelong imitators!

As history attests, change cannot take place until Time has willed it so, and the circumstances are ripe for it. A fortunate case in point has been the opportunity provided for the education of the generation of the Iranian immigrants, in Europe and the United States, in the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution in Iran; and as we can see, practically more than 90% of the young people of the immigrant generation have received higher academic education. The wisdom of this educated generation will answer the future needs of the Iranian communities around the world, as long as the advocates of religion won't hinder their understanding, education and progress.

Furthermore, from a historically informed perspective, we should be warned that if the ill of religious and or racial discrimination persists in the United States and most other countries around the world, then no bright future awaits humanity. Let's think of a beautiful future, and let's do what we can to bring it about. Let's keep in mind that foresight is the key to success, and being realistic is a necessary condition for it.

In conclusion, as the **poet** said,

**Make peace with your subjects,
And remain safe from the enemy.
For the subjects of the state
Are the just king's true army.**

When asked to name his best article, an experienced author replied, "Of course, the next one!" I hope to meet you soon at the next opportunity. In the meantime, I'd like to invite you to visit my modest shack on the internet at www.BabaNouri.com, where you may find some of my earlier writings, and more. See you soon...

Norman "Nourollah" Gabay

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To receive copies of this and other writings by Norman "Nourollah" Gabay in Persian and English, including his earlier essays, as well as his three books, *An Invitation to Reason*, *A Dictionary of the Jewish Dialect of Kashan*, and the upcoming *Be Up to Date*, please visit the following website: www.BabaNouri.com.

(The End)