

Flowers Smell the Best Once We've Cured the Cold

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It's related from **Confucius** that "as a big fire can grow from a matchstick, so can the world change by realistic eyes and an insightful word."

It would be refreshing if everyone observed the 3300-year old command of the holy Torah, *ve-AhavtA le-rey-achA kA-mochA*, "love your neighbor as yourself", and kept their minds devoid of all prejudice.

Not only the Torah has such precious aphorisms, but fine words can be found in the writings of all other religions. Sadly, however, in an artificially competitive market, one-sided merchants of religions past and present, have been excavating and preaching the negative aspects of their scriptures, to keep sharp their tools of hatred, as much that the nonsense has overshadowed the worthwhile and beneficial words of their scriptures. Whereas the efficiency of any belief depends on the natural intellectual range of the followers of that religion or group. As such, when the followers' minds are confused and contaminated with dark and bigoted ideas by the speculators, both the individual and the scripture would lose their authenticity.

**Man comes to by the roar of science. Alas,
One still hears the moans of superstition.**

To grow is to change, to move out of stillness, to stop the free fall. In contrast, an inability to change translates into "it is what it is." Such people better take note of the Darwinian theory, **that if human brain had stopped growing, our species would have remained the ape that it once was.**

**The form and the look are but the surface of the skin;
The meaning lurks inside, my friend, like the seed.
Let go of the name and heed the attributes, so that
The attributes will show you the way to the essence.**

Books do not grow. Humans do. Humankind isn't a tree to stay in one place; and if he stops growing, he'll dry out. No; books do not grow, but their followers do. Religious commandments reveal their value in their adaptability to times and places. Let's stop fooling ourselves and others. Until the seed hasn't grown to burst out of the soil, it won't get to see the sun. Let our youngsters remain informed and free, far from all prejudice, so they could grow naturally. To fly to the peaks, the little bird has to first hatch out of the shell (of bigotry).

**To grow green, the seed must become intimate with the soil.
Whichever seed settled in the soil found itself the plumage.**

**You'll reach the truth once you've become naked.
The seed grew for the cup that spilled on the soil.**

Alas, there's little hope for reason among the regressive preachers. From the beginning, superstitions attributed to religion were not founded on reason; thence, we can't confront the regressors with logic. From the outset, superstitions were put in their minds by way of imaginary miracles and baseless fears; and the chaos and destruction that we see around us are the results of that indoctrination. **Today's world war** is not a war of traditions, soils, or economies, but **it's a war of cultures**; and cultures are not concentrated in substance to let us hope for easy change. Today, our practical mission is to make our children for the future, if we can't make a future for our children. There's no hope that the preachers will change their ways. We must begin with ourselves.

**The world is sound asleep, and so are you.
How could one sleeping man awake another?**

Let's hope for the day when people everywhere — as we pray daily, *ve-hAyA ba-yom ha-hu yih-yeh adonAi echAd u-shmo echAd* — will all “worship one God and follow the law in his name”, so that mono-dimensional views and absolutism will be rendered obsolete. Could the practice of the holy law of Human Rights be the harbinger of this dream? Yes, as long as people remain flexible; and Judaism can be proud that the holy Torah itself is flexible. **Talmud** says that we can interpret the Torah in 49 (or 70) ways; and the body of the Torah (*Deuteronomy*, 17) commands us, and I summarize, “when you run into a problem, refer to the judges of the time and follow their advice.” This stance, contrary to the one-sided minds, speaks by itself of the resilience and the free spirit of this book; for it allows for differing interpretations that would benefit the reader's understanding at contrasting times and places.

This self-taught author doesn't consider himself qualified to judge religious matters, for as **Oscar Wilde** said, “**I am not young enough to know everything.**” But considering that today the millennia-old dream of “freedom of expression” has been realized, I consider expressing my opinion, as well as others', legitimate, beneficial and even a duty of the followers of all religions; because,

**If there were no chance in the world to speak,
How could there bloom the flower of meaning?**

The righteous followers of all religions agree that “faith” has been useful even a necessity for the primeval man; but they can't agree as to “faith in what?” To describe the stone-minded bigoted believers, one may cite the “most faithful of people in history”, that is, the very terrorists who having faith in some divisive beliefs and inciting words, let themselves be killed to have killed. That's because the cold, i.e. their sick minds and those of their teachers, has never been cured, and they never had a taste of humanity to enable them distinguish between believing in the practice of justice versus imposing cruelties.

Order without freedom, and freedom without order, are both destructive; and the wrong faith is thousand times worse than a lack of faith. When it comes to human beings, the best of yokes is to help them better understand things, rather than drawing upon fear or stronger ropes; shackles are not meant for men. **Kant** answered the question of what made people intellectual or ignorant, and I paraphrase, that a human being reaches intellectual maturity the day he begins to rely on his own reason and won't need the guidance of others.

**When my head and the tavern wall submit together in love,
Who can't fathom our word should put his head to the brick.**

The late Israeli Prime Minister **Golda Meir** remarked that the problem of terrorism would be eliminated once it became global. Unfortunately, she proved right. Governments neglected the issue at the outset as if “death was meant only for their neighbors”. Some mad men, such as Gadhafi, Saddam and their likes, celebrated the destruction, even encouraged the terrorists and the teaching of hatred and incitement at schools. Thus, the fire first caught the cloak of the preachers themselves before it spread around the globe. To date, the vicious cycle of fear keeps running. As the poet said,

**Whom did you kill that you were killed?
When will your killer be killed in return?**

My friends; many a modern illness has grown as a side effect of some medicine which was meant indeed to heal. Likewise are the wrong advice and commentaries that come from ignorant religious teachers in the guise of religious advocacy, and which have made our world insecure. It's related from **Pasteur** that “who we are today is a fruit of what we've learned in the past.” The stability of a society or family doesn't solely depend on their religious commitment, but it depends on their intellectual grasp and standards, and the proper education of the individuals, which would lead to a humane balance and mutual compromise.

Throughout history, both reasonable and regressive people have emerged in all religions. They included two renowned Jewish rabbis, **Hillel** and **Shamai**, who lived long ago in the same city. One day, a gentile visits Shamai and asks to become a Jew – as quickly as possible! Shamai dismisses him without care. The man then visits Hillel and repeats his wish. Hillel welcomes him and tells him that “even if you only accept and observe the one command that says ‘love your neighbor as yourself’, you could call yourself a Jew.” It should make us wonder if changing a man's convictions requires any kind of pomp and circumstance. Why stigmatize people? In order to discriminate!

The true human being, wherever he is and whatever name he may assume, always carries reason and humanity within. A Persian poet described beautifully the relation between wealth and wisdom:

**Reason sent an envoy to Wealth,
“I wish us to be friends!”
Wealth answered, “Why ask for the obvious?
Wherever I'll be, you too *must* be there!”**

Names and labels won't matter; where justice is, there *must* be humanity.

Sweet memories. As kids, we used to do role plays. One of us would be assigned as the king, another as the minister, the next as the caretaker, and the fourth as the court jester; but soon enough our group would melt into one. We understand today that it's futile to draw lines between people; and the best of colors is to have none. Everyone can join a club, for the choice of a club isn't inherited!

A rabbi becomes friends with a priest and eventually converts to Christianity. Following the tradition, the priest baptizes him before the church congregation. Seven times, the holy water is poured on him and a verse is repeated to the effect that “he was a Jew, he is now a Christian.” To

keep watch over him, they give him a room to live in the church. His conversion falls on the days of Lent, when the believers abstain from meat, but allow themselves the fish.

A few days into his new religion, the rabbi catches the sight of a chicken scurrying in the yard. He takes the bird secretly to the kitchen, grills it and sits down to eat when the priest and his entourage arrive at the scene.

The priest protests and asks why he's acted against their religion. The rabbi says, "This is no chicken; it's fish." His answer drives the priest and his company even angrier and they scold him with insults. The rabbi says, "Guys, keep calm. From a religious perspective, this is a fish, and I can prove it. You poured water on me seven times and prayed, 'he was a Jew, he is now a Christian.'" **Likewise, I poured holy water seven times on the chicken and prayed, 'It was a chicken, it became a fish.'** What worked for me must have worked for the chicken. Please, have some fish!"

If one could deny the essence by reciting some words, then the chicken and I could in fact change as what you read. But even two people from the same religion never fully share in a single interpretation of the words. Thus, to change colors in the name of a religion or a sect would be no more than children's role plays. Wash the charcoal seven times or pray on it seven-hundred times — it'll still be pitch black. Those who truly share a religion have common viewpoints, even if not a common name. It isn't like you can change such colors by changing your clothes. Such foolish games won't last forever. Colors will fade over time; and people will come to understand what a poet said,

**To love the color is no true love.
Such love is doomed to shame.**

As long as there are colors, the profiteers will paint over and try to fool everyone, although we may keep up hopes that within hundred years the colors will fade, that perhaps the roots of discrimination will dry out. In 1970, in the city of Osaka, I asked my Japanese friend whether he was a Buddhist or a Shinto. He said, "I am both! I just participate in the happy holidays of both religions!" I knew then how wise were those who were devoid of religious hatred and prejudice.

In the era of the fascist dictator Mussolini, a young Jewish woman who was eight months pregnant was trying to reserve a hospital room for delivery. Her many attempts at finding a hospital in Rome to register her went to no avail, because she was Jewish. Finally, her husband suggested, "You have only one week left. We've got no choice. This time tell them you're a Christian. They'll take you in." Some religious people are myopic enough to imagine that by saying "I'm black", I'll become one.

**If those who lack reason can't see reason's worth,
The shame isn't mine, for I know its true worth.**

This time, when asked about her religion, the young lady lied. "I am a Catholic," she said. To make sure, the hospital staff member asked further, "Who was Mary?" She answered, "Jesus's mother." "Where was Jesus Christ born?" "In Bethlehem." "Which part of Bethlehem?" "In a barn, surrounded by sheep!" "Why in a barn?" At this point, the young lady, who couldn't take it anymore, shouted angrily, "Because she was Jewish and they wouldn't let her in a blessed hospital!" The same culture and mentality contaminated with the same abominations persists to date, although it may resurface everyday with a different name, be it in Burma against the Muslims, or in Iraq and Syria against the Christians, and so on, unaware that,

**Were it the Kaaba, a temple of idols, church, convent, or pantheon,
I searched them all, and I found nothing but lies and hypocrisy.**

Democracy can't be an answer to religious discrimination. Democracy can never reconcile itself with any unchangeable prefabricated law, made of hearsay and the superficial judgment of some ancestors. For, to tell the truth, **whoever wants to see with other eyes, he's blind in essence.** What are we to do? We ought to preserve our human identity, which is common between us and others; and we should love our kind, devoid of all labels, colors, or religions. That is another way of saying, *ve-AhavtA le-rey-achA kA-mochA*:

וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Et diliges proximum tuum sicut teipsum.

وتحبُّ قريبك كنفسك.

Et aimeras ton prochain comme toi-même.

而爱人如己。

همنوعت را مانند خودت دوست مدار.

**Of death I know, but tell me if you know
A road shorter to the home of the friend.**

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