

Hope

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**Were it not for *hope*, no mother
would feed her milk to the child.**

No doubt, most every Jew has always wished to understand the reasons behind anti-Semitism. Much research has been done to perchance uproot this wicked phenomenon by appreciating its causes, and thence, to jettison for once and all, this toy in the hands of history, and this pressure gauge of the civilizations wherein we lived. Alas, religious and sectarian discrimination continue to be tossed and played by the destructive forces of the world, with roots that extend deep into the inciting content of many a religious scripture, and spread throughout the minds of their followers. For centuries, such discrimination has persisted akin to a chronic illness hand in hand of those divisive words. Far too often, it has flaunted its ruinous nature in some corner of the planet, in the hands of some seditious power, not the least in the holy name of religion. Time after time, it has risen against anyone who dared to think differently, including the Jews. And given the power of a majority over that minority which was at hand, it has flashed all too often its ugly face at humanity, if ironically, sometimes at the cost of destroying the very inciting forces that might have drawn upon it.

Alas, though religion does inform humankind of our problems, it's never managed to solve those issues. For one, not much has been done to remove the seditious content of the scriptures and commentaries, and their end seems nowhere in sight. About identifying the oppressing agents of cruelty, the Czech philosopher and former president, **Václav Havel** (1936-2011) wrote, and I paraphrase, “We may judge a civilization by the way it treats its minorities.” To his valuable words we may add that “we can get to know **nation** by the content of their scriptures,” by their accepted norms and teachings. After all, the practice of such prefabricated “holy” commands has for long brought out the best and the worst in people.

Thus, according to the commands of the Holy Torah (*Deuteronomy*, 17), **Time** makes it necessary for us to establish the *sanhedrins* and international parliaments that would allow us to revise and update the religious code, and to bring it in agreement with contemporary spirit. Otherwise, tedious problems will recur *ad infinitum* or until a time when humankind will have accepted change. Human beings may learn from two teachers, **the learned master**, and **life itself**; and whatever they don't learn eagerly from the master, life will force them to learn bitterly.

For over 2500 years, the Jewish people have wandered about in desperation and have faced discrimination. Similar to a tree planted in a vase, their roots have been missing the soil to which they belong. In their forced and prolonged migration, they have received many wounds and have

seen many droughts – yet not for a moment they lost hope.¹ As they gathered much experience from both the masters and life itself, Jews learned that to cure the chronic ills of homelessness and discrimination, they needed to maintain their ages-long *hope* and to try and realize their *dream*. That would mean to finally regain their independence in order to provide for self-defense and to bring about justice. For in the “mobile lands” of their wandering days, they had been afraid of both the thief and the cop, the cleric and the disciple, the judge and the prosecutor, because everyone followed what endorsed self-righteousness and promoted intolerance and hatred toward anyone who thought differently.

Jews had been living in Iran for a documented 2500 years, but even there, until the signing of the Provisional Constitution of 1906 by Mozaffar al-din Shah, they were considered **foreigners**, and their official matters were addressed as **alien citizens** (*sic*) by the Foreign Ministry (*sic*) of the time. *What foreigner?! Whoever Iranian could boast a 2500-year old Persian birth certificate?!*

Throughout history, the most dangerous of enmities was that of governments against their own people. Examples abound. Think of the animosity of the Ottoman Empire against its Armenian citizens; the Nazi Germany against its own Jewish population; Stalin against his Russian subjects; Pol Pot against the people of Cambodia; Mao Tse-tung against the Chinese; Idi Amin against the people of Uganda; Saddam Hussein against the people of Iraq; Assad against the Syrians; and so forth. Still, throughout the centuries of the diaspora, Jews were subjected to even more pressure from the anti-Semitic governments of their host countries than the ordinary populations would receive. Thus, the thirst, love, and hope for regained independence never died in the Jew. Jewish tears in strange lands were not signs of weakness; rather, akin to the crying of a newborn, they meant life. But a hand has to receive a burn first to let us feel the pain and seek the cause of it. As a poet said, **It’s pointless to speak of honey-bee to someone who’s never been stung by a bee.**

Consider the shameful religious, sectarian, or racial discrimination by dark-minded people, and compare them to our modern world, where the children of immigrants and foreign citizens can even be elected president in a country such as the United States. Historically, the anti-Semites, in their infinite prejudice, ignored the merits of the Jews and their services; instead, like horseflies sitting on the wounds, they kept pressing on the real or fabricated flaws of our people. Take the case of **Alliance Israélite Universelle** and its valuable services in Iran beginning in the late nineteenth century, which led to the establishing of Alliance schools in 23 Iranian cities. (See *The Foreign Cultural Record in Iran*, by Dr. Homa Nategh; 2001, Persian, Iran.) Our badly biased critics choose to ignore these schools, where countless students, Jews and Muslims alike, received their education. Whereas as the older generation would tell us, the majority of the statesmen of the proud age of Reza Shah the Great were graduates of the Alliance system. The Jewish and Muslim communities of Iran alike owe much to the generosity of the Alliance. At a time when the old-style *maktabs* pervaded the Iranian society, Alliance sent us European teachers from France, who had to endure the hardship of long journeys on horses, carriages, or camelback palanquins, before they would land in Iran.

And in what kind of atmosphere? Suffice it to say that about that time, the late **Mirza Hassan Roshdiah** (1851-1944) founded the first modern school in Tabriz, Iran, only to face an

¹ Given this context, it’s less of a surprise that the German American Jewish thinker and psychoanalyst, Erich Fromm, would name his 1968 book, *A Revolution of Hope: Toward a Humanized Technology*.

edict by the *mullahs* that demanded the school to be destroyed. The late Roshdieh cried out aloud, pleaded to people not to ruin the school which he had built with much suffering – with his heart’s blood – and assured them that soon enough, there would grow as many schools as the number of its bricks. They say, Don’t be afraid of your flaws; be afraid of the faultfinders. Jews have always been under the faultfinders’ microscopes, though ironically, this might have contributed as much to our success. If so, as a Persian proverb goes, **The enemy could deliver us blessings if God wishes so.**

The world is moving on, albeit slowly and running into one obstacle after another. The world is passing from the frightening stage of **dulling religious deception** to **benevolence and scientific thinking**, and from **extremism** to **moderation**. Any nation is bound to become desperate as long as they substitute imitation for thinking, vacuous prayer for persistent effort, lazy contentment for ambitious thinking, hatred for kindness, fate and *kismet* for human will, despair for hope, and evil eye for understanding!

(At this point, I draw my reader’s attention to a very insightful article by the eloquent author, the late Nourollah Kharrazi, entitled *I was Jewish For a Week*, and to a beautiful poem by the valued poet, Mehdi Zokayee Nousha, both of which are available on my website at www.BabaNouri.com.)

The Jewish people lived for centuries with a burning desire for independence, until a young Hungarian named **Theodore Herzl** (1860-1904) stood up with the motto, **“If you will, it’s no fairytale.”** He organized the First Zionist Congress in 1897, Basel, Switzerland – *Zion* being the name of a mountain in Jerusalem. That resulted in founding the (World) Zionist Organization to work toward achieving our modern independence, and thus, to turn the millennia-old Jewish dream into a reality. Jews had believed that **the true death was the death of hope**, and their hope was about to bear its long-awaited fruit.

As a result of the activities initiated by the World Zionist Congress, after 2500 years of exile in the diaspora, and following immeasurable suffering that included the catastrophes of the Nazi Germany, the Jewish dream turned into reality, when on **October 29th, 1947**, by the vote of the United Nations, the formation of two neighboring states, one Jewish and the other Arab, was officially recognized. This was concurrent with the newly acquired independence of a few other states, including India and Pakistan, which like Israel had been thereto colonial extensions of the British government. The Israeli government accepted this vote, which in fact guaranteed the right of return to our millennia-old homeland; and many other countries around the globe supported the resolution and recognized the state of Israel. Sadly, however, the Arabs rejected the vote.

Ominous religious hatred surged. Subsequently, five well-equipped Arab countries **ignored the U.N. vote to form an Arab and an Israeli state**; and together, they attacked the small nascent country which thereto lacked an army and a fixed defense budget. Despite the circumstances, the war ended in an Arab defeat. Hundreds of thousands of the Arab residents of the country became refugees, and subsequently, hundreds of thousands of Jews were forced out of their Arab homelands. For decades, those Arabs who became the victims of the war have become the occasional plaything in the hands of various seditious groups; and to this date, the 22 Arab countries in the region haven’t been able or wished to provide these refugees with permanent housing within their countries. Meanwhile, the hundreds of thousands of the Arabs who *remained* in Israel have continued to live there; and to date, **they’ve been the happiest Arabs in the world and enjoy equal rights and benefits alongside the rest of the Israeli**

society. Moreover, since the day of its independence, the state of Israel has been able to accommodate more than five million immigrants from tens of countries, including hundreds of thousands of Jews who were forced out of the Arab states!

The fundamental obstruction that has fueled the Arab opposition, and which is shared by all the anti-Semites of the world, has been **their intolerance for the right of Jews to defend themselves.** To this date, despite all the misery endured by all sides, with roots in various inciting content, not one true partner in peace appears on the horizon, even as inherited hatred subsists as before. That's especially sad, since it was possible from the get go to combine Jewish knowledge and Arab power and create two independent countries, based on the U.N. vote, which could live side by side in safety and prosperity.

Nelson Mandela (1918-2013) said, "Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies." Hatred, especially of its religious variety, is an outcome of toxic flaws that have formed in the minds of the believers. Their actions project their psychological inadequacies and fatal beliefs, which may be directed at their adversaries or even their own parties. To be "stingy" is a personal trait that has nothing to do with one's wealth or lack thereof. Likewise, "wisdom" is about true knowledge and understanding, and it has little to do with one's academic degrees. Anti-Humanism, which includes religious animosity as well as anti-Semitism, has nothing to do with the good or the bad of the victim who's been subjected to the bigot's jealousy and cruelty. A living point in case is the number of people from around the world who've been going to a slaughterhouse named Iraq. They commit acts of cruelty against **people whom they've never met or known before**, yet they suppose themselves to be fulfilling some religious obligation. True knowledge, wisdom – it's about comprehension and common sense, and it wouldn't have anything to do with the innocent victims of such cruelties, whether they be Christians or Muslims, Yazidis (Izadis), Coptics, Kurds, etc. who are captured by and suffer in the hands of an ignorant bunch. It's said that "the tears of sadness taste like brine, whereas the tears of joy taste like sweet water." They asked a wise man, Where did all that salt water in the oceans come from to cover two-thirds of the planet? He replied, They're the tears of sorrow shed by those who suffered oppression and religious discrimination throughout human history. That's why fresh water is much rare and scarce in comparison.

My friends: **You don't truly love your friend** if you don't point out his flaws. Let's begin with ourselves. Some people notice the flaws of their religion, such as the kind of content that doesn't agree with modern knowledge and understanding. But instead of trying to modify their texts and update them to agree with contemporary sciences, they deny such deficiencies and even teach them to the others! **Such followers don't love their religion**, and consequently, cause themselves and the next generation to re-live past disappointments. Sadly, failures will be repeated on and on, until they realize that **to teach and respect some superstitious nonsense is to spread regression.** In today's world, truth is unraveled with increasing transparency and ever decreasing censor; hence, childish commentaries and some "excuses worse than the guilt" can no more work for the alert minds. The world has realized that you can't turn the proverbial charcoal white by washing it!

To reflect a Persian proverb, **The house is ruined at its foundation, yet the prince – read "governments and religious advocates" – are busy with the flourishes of the porch!** Raise a goldfish in darkness, and it would turn out "white". Parents should be aware that their free-thinking children, once captured by the dark-minded people, would gradually turn into some mindless toys in the hands of wicked men, prepared to walk into the slaughterhouse. The world

is changing fast, but it needs little historical background to gain a better perspective, for this generation can witness for themselves the endless recurrence of history. Let's be realistic. History will continue to repeat itself until the causes for its ills are removed. Although we can never omit completely the seditious content of religions, we can wipe them off of the minds of their followers. Consider the following: None of the three dominant religions forbade slavery; instead, they each offered some regulations to improve its practice. Those words are still there in the scripture, engraved, intact. Yet, by the demand of Time, without any special privileges offered them in return, slavery has become practically forbidden in all three faiths, and it's been wiped off of the minds of their followers. If so, we may reasonably hope for *change* instead of waiting for *miracles*!

Teach "humanity" and you'll raise "good fellows". Teach "cruelty" and you've raised "brutal oppressors". Empathy towards fellow humans is what distinguishes us as human beings. Conscience is what sets us apart from the beasts. Once humankind views religion from the standpoint of humanity, he'll render a world devoid of pain and suffering. Otherwise, as we've seen before, ignorance persists. To paraphrase a wise man, When a book – or a person – makes life a *de facto* Hell for a deceived ignorant crowd, it finds it necessary also to convince them of a Heaven that shall await them after life! Let's wake up. We may not make the future for our youngsters, but we can make our youth ready for the future.

To paraphrase **Gilbert Berger**, If your ideas have not changed for the past many years, you're probably suffering from intellectual and spiritual stagnation. Faith is a precious jewel as long as it's combined with a sane mind; one can't worship God without the guidance of a healthy intellect. Every generation is duty-bound to teach and inform the next generation and share with them their experiences. That's especially true of the current generation of immigrants, for we not only migrated from one place to another, but thanks to Life, we made a hundred-year leap from one period to another, carrying along a backpack of treasured experiences. It's best for us to wipe away all negative ideas and the so-called religious and sectarian notions from our minds and those of our children. Otherwise, as **Baba Afzal al-Din** (died 1214) wrote,

If they make the rim of the jar of precious jewels,

It'll still pour out what's inside the jar.

No matter how fancy the cover, what matters most is the content of the book.

May I add that common sense taken over by hatred will have little to do with reason and logic. A person afflicted with this ill will remain stuck in the mire, fingers crossed in hopes of a miracle. As a poet said, **The wise man hears this story, walks to science, cuts all ties loose with religion.**

Thomas Jefferson (1826-1743) was a thinker, inventor, and the third President of the United States of America. It's said that he did not believe in miracles; so he took scissors to the Bible, cut out those sections that dealt with miracles, and explained, "This is the Bible that I believe in." If Jews had continued to wait in hopes of a miracle or some *deus ex machina*, they would never achieve independence, and they would go on their scattered existence in the polluted waters of discrimination. Jews understood well what's been aptly captured in a Persian proverb, that **no one will scratch my back but the tip of my fingernail.**

Deficient understanding made people deem life's sudden events and inexplicable incidents as "miracles". As we've seen, when the advocates of superstitions **are unable to understand**

something and to explain it in clear terms by reasonable argument, they take immediate refuge to the nonsense of “miracle”. They need to realize that **to attribute feeble and unreasonable words to religion** is to cast doubt and throw insults on the fundamental and reasonable beliefs of its followers, and to let it shake badly by friend and foe alike.

To paraphrase a German proverb, A clear mirror says more than a thousand pictures imagined. “Miracles” are fancied pictures. To echo an image described by **Tagore** (1861-1941), Those who hang their lanterns on the back, cast long shadows before their feet.²

It’s been this author’s constant plea: Please do not blindfold our youth against science; do not tie their wings against flying; do not chain their feet against progress; and do not confine their hopes with the empty excuse of “miracles”, all in the guise of advocating your religion. For they would become sterile, paralyzed; and before long, they would drown.

To paraphrase a possible quote by **George Bernard Shaw** (1856-1950), “Those who can, do; those who can’t, criticize (teach).”

Still, if we’re hard pressed, we may boast our own example a “miracle”, for, the independence of the modern state of Israel was a miracle in the true sense of the word – a miracle of the constructive thoughts of Jewish pioneers. It emerged to face wide-spread anti-Semitism disguised as religion, for the anti-Semites could not bear Jews’ right to defend themselves. Well, thankfully, that’s already a done deal. **The barrel broke, and the full cup poured on the ground.**

To conclude,

**Like the waves of the ocean, our peace would be
Our demise. We are alive, for we are restless.**

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² “The watchman swings his lantern and walks with his shadow at his side, and never once goes to bed in his life.

I wish I were a watchman walking the streets all night,
chasing the shadows with my lantern.”

– From *Vocation*, a Poem by Rabindranath Tagore.

See: <http://www.poetrysoup.com/famous/poem/3474/Vocation>