

Lucky Are the Children of Wise Parents

&

Prosperous Are Societies With Informed Moderate Leaders

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The great Swede thinker and statesman **Count Axel Oxenstierna** wrote, “Do you not know, my son, with how little wisdom the world is governed?” On a smaller scope, one might conclude, “it’s surprising to see with how little wisdom the families are governed.” Whereas,

Without reason’s lens, the eyes can’t see well.

Without aged wisdom, there’s no road to religion.

Wisdom alone guides us toward goodness.

Who lacks reason, he’s deprived of religion.

About fifty years ago, I was at a reconciliation meeting between a young couple from two reputable families who had been nearing divorce. I pulled the groom’s mother to the side and asked what was wrong. She said, “Cooking oil!” I asked, “You mean the groom sells oil for a living?!” She answered, “No, Mr. Gabay. We come from a cold climate and traditionally, at times we cook using the dairy oil. Our bride hates the smell of it, and the moment she senses it, she leaves the table if not the house! In return, my son hates the smell of sesame oil, and he runs away from his Tehrani mother-in-law’s food! This little issue has grown into some nasty quarrels between the two sides.”

I said a hundred points unveiled, yet

There’s one that won’t fit in a book.

If told, it’ll only twist more, further

Veiling the form and the idea of it.

At the same time, another groom had brought a complaint about his wife to his father-in-law. The ignorant father-in-law advised him, “If she (his own daughter) gives you any more troubles, beat her back into her senses!”

Such parents need more guidance than their children do, and they can’t help us contain the plague of divorce. Neither can we wait idly to blame the failure of the marriage on *kismet*, like the bird too lazy to fly who calls the cage its “fate”.

The wise enemy, though the soul’s thorn,

Is better than a fool for a friend.

The following inspirational tale befits our story.

The little Thomas handed a piece of paper to his mother. “It’s for you, mom” the boy said. “It’s from my teacher.” The mother’s eyes welled up as she read the letter aloud:

“Your son is a genius. Our school is short of good teachers for him. Please school him at home.”

Years later, his mother gone, then the world-renowned genius inventor Thomas Edison found a paper folded for years in the back of a drawer. It read, “Your son is mentally handicapped. We can’t have him anymore at our school.”

Edison sat down and cried for long. Then he penned in his diary: “Thomas Alva Edison was an addled child who thanks to a hero mother became the genius of the century.”

No doubt, without his mother’s lessons, Edison couldn’t have become the great man that he was. As the Jewish sage **Hillel** put it, “God created mothers because he needed their help.”

Wise parents advise their children, who soon enough are bound to complain of their spouses, “My dear! Do not expect everything to go your way! The two of you will need to join hands, and like the two wings of a bird, fly together the happy home that you wish to have. Successful marriages are built foremost on tolerance and understanding; and mutual tolerance, knowledge, and understanding begin at the engagement. Two people raised in two different airs, to the dictates of separate cultures, they’ll need agreement and compromise to build their *beith shalom*, their house of peace, hope and joy.” On the other hand, many an ignorant parent who destroys their child’s home by a wrong word and misplaced intrusion. There’s a vivid difference between a wise mother such as Edison’s in our story, who brightens a world by changing few words, and the nosy fools that we see everywhere. It’s all too natural to expect good children. But **lucky are the children** raised by intelligent parents; and **prosperous are the societies** that are led by wise leaders free of complexes. Let’s take care of our families; and let’s trust the affairs of the world into the hands of competent statesmen. As the **Rumi** said,

**You can’t heal the pain by crying about it.
Speak of honey won’t sweeten the mouth.
Stamp your feet, but it won’t cure the pain,
And this sick man won’t rise from the bed.
Our freedom must be penned in knowledge,
Or else, the scribbling won’t read legibly.**

People are different for their individual knowledge, understanding, and psychological issues. One brings about ruins, while on a higher order, the other could make a world shine. Evidently, a considerable portion of our problems have roots in people’s psychological issues and inherited habits. As **Charles Duhigg** wrote in *The Power of Habit*, “[a study] found that more than 40 percent of the actions people performed each day weren’t actual decisions, but **habits**.” And habits grow in part from psychological and hereditary issues. Habits are hard to give up, even though Dostoevsky wrote, “Man is a creature who can get used to anything.” For example:

Talk to people wounded by religion who’ve become atheists. They may claim that they don’t belong to any religion or even a social group, even as they insult their old creed. You may realize, however, that due to their habits and psychological and inherited issues, they’ve remained intolerant of the others, perhaps even quite anti-Semitic. It’s been said that “**the best way to defeat a bad idea (or culture) is to offer a better one.**” Alas, there are many atheists who yet have to substitute the better culture of “altruism” for their earlier culture. Our inclinations lead to habits, and like it or not, reveal them to the world.

Some people, though unable to recall their age, still cling to their old and inherited prejudices and refuse to understand that you need to love to be loved. The person who grows fanatical about an inciting idea would ignore his gifts of reason and insight. A child who has first learned logic

wouldn't accept the nonsense; but if he got used to the nonsense, then he would run away from reason. Who that pretends religion he isn't truly certain that some secondary matters have nothing to do with the religion. To be religious is different from using the religion by the way of habit to exercise hatred and impose cruelties.

Toward the end of *The Great Dictator*, **Charlie Chaplin** reminds us in his priceless speech that we need humanity more than machines, and kindness more than hypocrisy. Sadly, humankind learns little from the past, doesn't remove the dark lens of religious and sectarian hatred, and returns kindness with oppression. A Jewish person may allow to donate his child's heart in earnest, but she can't be sure if the recipient wouldn't hate her in return. The late **Nourollah Kharrazi** wrote in a related essay in Farsi (and English) under the title *The Weeping Heart*, "On November the 17th, 1989, reserve **Sgt. Zeev Traum** of the IDF lost his life to an attack by the Palestinian terrorists in the Gaza Strip. On the same day, with his family's consent, his heart was transplanted at the Hadassah Hospital into the chest of the 54-year old Mr. Hanna Khadhar, a Palestinian Arab."

Kharrazi continues, "I cried when I heard the news, and I cried even as I wrote about it. This incredible story should not be forgotten or underestimated, for it means far beyond just a Jewish heart transplanted into an Arab chest. It's a symbol of forgiveness, purity of the soul, and the generosity of a people oppressed far too long, a people who forgives a world that has yet to forgive their Jewishness. This article doesn't aim to praise Judaism and reject our opponents and foes! The aim is much higher. Together, let's review this confrontation and imaginary struggle and learn from it."¹

A Kashani patient complained to his doctor, "Oh dear! My stomach aches. My back hurts. My head is in pain. My legs are killing me. And as for myself, I am not feeling well!" This "not feeling well" is about humankind's psychological issues. Today, science recognizes that many global insecurities in the name of religion or politics are caused by those who have some psychological illness.

May such people never rise to religious and political power. An Arabic proverb puts it succinctly: *إذا فسد العالم، فسد العالم*. That is, "When men of knowledge (or power) become corrupted, the world corrupts." The world should have nipped in the bud the teaching of hatred the moment it understood that preaching hatred in the name of religion in countless schools and homes – say, in the mountain-skirts of Afghanistan, Pakistan or other places – would drive humanity to misery. It's not too late; but the problem grows worse and spreads farther by the day. Because,

**The shame that the throne brings to the fool,
Not a hundred Amir Arsalans would do for love.
When the fool turns into a prince or the king,
The desert floods with snakes and scorpions.**

Often, what the psychotic men of power do is not of their own choosing, but it rather reflects their mental wounds and shameful inherited habits. Pity families or societies entrapped by psychopathic rulers, for once the troubled seize power, they begin to relieve their complexes. As a proverb goes, "when the flock returns, those fallen behind become the harbingers." The poet **Fereydoun Moshiri** wrote:

¹You may read this beautiful article in full, in Persian and English, at my website, www.BabaNouri.com, under *The Weeping Heart* (قلب گریان), with an introduction by the erudite Mr. Mohammad Zarnegar. –N.G.

It's not about a withering leaf. / Crying out aloud! They turn forests into deserts! / No human would do to their kind, / What these ruthless men do to the bodies and the souls.

It would suffice to remember the likes of Gadhafi, Saddam, or Pol Pot, these infamous psychotic despots. Among his many crimes, the Cambodian dictator Pol Pot ordered anyone who wore glasses to be murdered (sic!) for he claimed glasses as symbols of capitalism! Altogether, he murdered about three million people, before the passive eyes of the world.

Unfortunately, the world is full of psychologically ill people. According to a former New York police chief (October 18th, 2015, CNN) about 40 million mentally ill people live in the United States. Statistically, 48% of American hospital beds are taken by psychological patients; how many are there in the prisons?! Clearly, America is not alone in this, but since it relies on statistics, it better reveals the issues. Many other countries either don't have any accurate statistics, or what they offer is tailored to the order. Thence, such places try to cover up their many flaws by vacuous self-grandeur even as they exaggerate the flaws of others, or even ascribe their own savagery to them. **Sadegh Hedayat** wrote, "We revere our temples as holy but those of others as stupid, for we enter our temples with emotions, but those of others with reason!" We should judge things by our reason rather than our emotions.

In my view, the **roots** of many psychological disorders and irrational behavior can be traced back to the dismantling of the foundation of family around the world, especially in the United States. Many children today have never known their biological parents or siblings, or sadly, have never had a family to taste parental love; and there is no substitute for parental love. Could we expect love and humanity from a child who never received love from wise parents? As **Bahar** puts it,

**If a heart were the throne of God,
It'd only be the mother's heart.
Her every fiber's the meaning of love;
If love took a form, it'd be the mother's heart.**

A person's proper deeds reflect a good upbringing and the sanity of mind. Alas, you watch the news and it seems as if some crazy people are leading the mad, and the planet is caught up in misery! Woe the day when today's homeless kids, schooled in religious hatred, grow up only to be played in criminal hands.

Sadly, as scientific progress makes the world smaller and more connected, people are drawn farther apart in the name of religion and politics. And occasionally, someone who never tasted kindness and love, holds a gun, walks into a crowded place, and lets himself be killed to have killed! One writer was so upset with the misdeeds of yesterday's parentless children turned into today's wicked men that he advised, "Feed the children dog's milk so they may grow into loyal men."

The words of American author **Harriet Beecher Stowe** are worth volumes: "The bitterest tears shed over graves are for words left unsaid and deeds left undone." It's no big deal to only see the flaws; **true art** is about to see, to discern, to tell right from wrong, and to call out and act in time to prevent a plague.

I warn: If each of us fails to do our share and fight regression, we may advance hundreds of miles, but fall thousands behind science and civilization. **Bertrand Russell** wrote, "Men are born ignorant, not stupid. They are made stupid by education."

People aren't born with their prejudices; rather, they create them in many names; and the religious or sectarian bias is among the ugliest. The hitherto history of religion suggests how too often people have failed to realize the first step toward civilization, that is, to think humanely, to observe ethics, and to prevent divisiveness and discrimination.

People of all ages lived by the mores.

The mores gone, and they withered.

Without conscience, there'll remain no worthwhile religion to have noteworthy followers.

Fortunately, amid the bustling psychopaths' market, the Iranian immigrants, wounded by time, have shined beautifully, for they've maintained their family bonds and Ahura culture.

Viewed realistically, the mass emigration forced by the Iranian upheaval was an ironic golden opportunity and a rare leap worth centuries for the majority of the emigrants, especially the youth of the next generation. One of the first blissful and unique fruits of this migration was that an absolute majority of our youngsters received their education at the best universities around the globe; and as I read in the paper, one in every four of them holds a doctorate degree. Happily, this majority has managed to keep their inherited family bonds. Sadly, many of them haven't given up their wrong beliefs and habits; and some uninformed parents still try to pass on the nonsense to yet another generation! But the goal is not to form bad habits. **The goal is to give-up harmful habits and time-tested divisive nonsense.** Otherwise, in a more liberal environment, wrong beliefs and deeds will grow even faster; and our children will suffer, too.

It's said that Moses prolonged the short trip from Egypt to Canaan for forty years to ensure that the symptoms and habits of slave life would vanish among the Israelites. No doubt, Iranian immigrants hold more rational viewpoints than they did 37 years ago. If so, could we hope for better habits, as well? Indeed. Adaptability, to be able to change, it's the key to success. The world and all therein is in constant change. **Change is the only thing you could be certain of.** Miserable are the people who mistake regression for religious observance, "break the mirror" instead of themselves, and do so in the name of religion or sect. They fail to see the mighty force of human progress toward perfection. The ruthless bulldozer of time, alas on occasion costing millions of lives, moves forward without a pause.

For instance, I refer to the following words attributed to **Pope Francis** toward his followers:

It is not necessary to believe in God to be a good person. In a way, the traditional notion of God is outdated. One can be spiritual but not religious. It is not necessary to go to church and give money. For many, nature can be a church. Some of the best people in history did not believe in God, while some of the worst deeds were done in His name.

– Attributed to Pope Francis; *Rah-e Zendegi*, No. 1325, October 2015

Students of history would remember the past catastrophes carried out by the popes in the era of Inquisition, which included burning innocents at the stake for nothing but their words and beliefs. To us, such a drastic change in position coming from a successor of those popes would be as welcome as it is surprising.

Conclusion: Clearly, a few people can't fairly judge the world's politicians, but as Nasser al-Din Shah, the King of Qajar, once commented, "It was a topsy-turvy party, and our majesty was there, too!"² We may say as much that "it's a topsy-turvy world, and we the people are present

² «مهمانی خرتوخری بود و ماهم تشریف داشتیم.» Literally, "It was a (crazy) donkey-donkey party, and our majesty was present there, too." The unwitting irony and humor of the original is not quite captured in either translation.

here, too!” Sadly, global security is in a shape worse than we imagined. The primary danger is that our civilization doesn’t face a traditional concentrated force such as a country with clearly defined borders. The germ of insecurity is spread much too far. It’s being taught everyday at schools and at family dinners in the name of religion. Every now and then, it bursts out in some unexpected corner. It’s impossible to quarantine it. Akin to the Crusades, it may take centuries before this germ of incitement will go back into hibernation. Let’s hope that someday, religious people will develop immunity against this microbe by the vaccine of reasonability.

Where can this vaccine be administered? At schools and in the families, where for thousands of years a culture of hatred and discrimination has been taught. Particularly, we should appreciate the microcosm of family, and together try and protect this precious jewel to ensure the happiness of future generations. Let’s find out our strengths, appreciate them and be grateful for them. Wealth, religion, and even science, they won’t protect the spiritual values of families. Only you and I, “we” can figure out how to remove the causes of our failures. To be “lucky” means to be prepared to benefit from emerging opportunities, such as the incredible chance that is before the Iranian immigrants today. As a first step, let’s cleanse our schools and societies of a culture of “antique-worship”, religious and sectarian hatred, and imitation. **Religion and reason complement each other; and both survive as long as they go hand in hand.** It’s reason, not the book by itself, that in step with times, makes religious codes fit the level of understanding that the modern world deserves.

Combining a few verses, I admit that,

**I dress poorly, not that I practice religion (to help it survive reasonably),
But as a cloak to cover up my hundred hidden flaws.**

Because I believe that,

**Piety is the purity of intention not the clothes:
Many a polluted soul who wears a clean dress.**

What I mean is that,

**Burnt twigs (the nonsense) couldn’t light our road.
We need to kindle a torch that sheds true light.**

As such,

**Don’t waste the jewel of time with carelessness.
After all, this precious jewel has too high a price.**

After all, this precious jewel has too high a price...

*Norman “Nourollah” Gabay
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