

Ignoring Problems Won't Make Them Go Away

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*Two kinds of youngsters I praise the most:
First, the one who points out my weakness,
Second, the one who tells us of his own faults.*

We may succeed and grow only when we've reached such degree of civility, tolerance, and realism, that differences in opinion would not lead us to conflicts, divisions, separations, marriage troubles, or difficulties concerning the education of our children; and when we've all joined hands together to rectify our weaknesses, which could otherwise turn into easy excuses in the hands of our critics and enemies to bash us with.

Let us open our eyes. We've entered a new era, when like it or not, mistakes of the followers of a religion, especially those carrying the dreaded attribute of being "a minority", could be broadcast globally via the Internet, in the name of the majority (sic!), in a matter of seconds, in all living languages, without any censor, and without considering the interests of the particular group, although perhaps with some biased exaggeration. Friends and enemies would learn about the mishap equally, while neither the sender nor the receiver of the news could exert much further control over it. As the eminent Iranian Jewish poetess, Mahin Amid, famously wrote,

*Friends, for their kindness, and conspirators, out for their cruelty,
They both do but the same: painting an untrue portrait of my reality.*

I received an email from a reliable observer, along with an attached photo, about a despicable though symbolic ceremony called *Pidyon Peter Chamor*, that is, "Redeeming a Firstborn

Donkey” by trading it for a sheep. The photo showed a group of so-called religious people in two large cities who claimed to be practicing one of the 613 Commands, in the presence of their Sages. The news made me both sad and embarrassed, and it left me with many questions. I prefer not to elaborate any further on this topic, for it could hit us back like a boomerang, in front of the expectant eyes of many a fault-finder.

It won't serve us any good to let the secret be revealed.

Otherwise, there's no logic in their school, whatsoever.

Marie Curie said to the effect that “humans cannot exist without the aid of other humans.”

It's not about the Orthodoxy versus the Secularism. Rather, it's about community honor and the sad frustration of our reasonable people of faith, versus an utter lack of intellectual responsibility among the practitioners of some superstitious beliefs. Indeed, many of the Orthodox religious people genuinely regret the actions of this marginal group.

The late Mullah Davoud, the grandfather of Rabbi David Shofet, said about 80 years ago, that he could hardly wait for the Independence of the New Country of Israel, so that the inappropriate sections of our religious books would be excised officially. It's a sad truth, however, that despite the extraordinary progress made in sciences, the hyper-advocacy of regressive preachers has led religions backwards.

This author admits that what may be taken from this group won't be added to another; but it **will be taken from of us as a whole, as well**. I do acknowledge how little I know, yet I feel responsible to point out the ill and the pain that I observe all around me. As a poet said,

At the dawn, a cry descended from the skies...

...

The intellect said, "I have a problem!

Consult the party of the scientists!"

Somebody should ask if anyone had to descend from heavens to annul each one of the 325 Commands so far, out of the 613 Commands of the *halacha*, that source of reference for the practitioners of the nonsense and superstitions. **Or rather, has it not been a pride of Judaism, that at every turn, it's been adapting itself to its times?**

Today, considering particularly the wondrous progress made in communication technology, the Jewish community worldwide ought to follow upon its glorious history, and void and annul those segments of its religious texts which contradict modern knowledge and understanding, as we've done so far to the 325 obsolete Commands. This should be done as soon as possible, to prevent hateful divisions, protect the respect of our religion, and guarantee the security of coming generations. Thence, one or another group of fanatics, in various eras and locations, wouldn't find another chance to draw upon those obsolete writings, do shameful things in the name of *mitzvah*, i.e. "a good deed", continue their ignorant behavior, and delight our enemies. Even more than the nonsense offered to us whether by my own kind or by strangers, I'm afraid of the widespread silence and indifference in my community, and of the incessant efforts made by the destructive forces of religions in the name of advancing their cause.

I spoke recently to an expert in *halacha*, the Jewish religious code, about a number of problematic issues and defects therein. I was told that I did not have to worry about it, because those segments had never been practiced, nor they would ever be. So I asked, if that gentleman and many other clerics believed that so much of the material thereof would never be practiced, then why did these people need to heed, preserve, and defend such nondefensible words? Only to repeat the pains of the past, and to make us all suffer through them, all over again?! Besides, whereas we have no shortage of precious words in our sacred literature, codes and Commands, why shouldn't we focus on them, instead? When are we going to wake up from the slumber of ignorance? As the Persian poet, Hamid Mosaddegh wrote,

If I rise, if you rise, everyone will rise.

If I sit, if you sit, then who will rise?

The main problem with all religions is that their adherents are fully aware of their flaws, keep reviewing them, keep discussing them, yet do nothing about them. In the meantime, the jealous, venomous anti-Semites, much like horseflies, ignore the healthy parts of the body of our community, and instead, dash straight to sit down on our painful wounds. Those wounds are the flaws which were written down by us, and as such, they persist in time, and spread across the public. We are duty-bound to recognize such seditious flaws of the past and the present, and make every effort to excise them from among us.

I reminded that gentleman, “You lived for 60 years in Iran. Could you have ever imagined that some day in that country, they would be stoning women to death, based on some centuries-old writings?” **He answered, “No.”** So I continued, “Yet, we all witnessed that some fanatic believers came to power, pointed out those words, and did what should have never been done. It’s naïve to think that **such incidents would be limited to one particular religion or sect.** We may not justly single out one religion to accuse them of such follies and cruelties. We need to desiccate and dry out the roots of such ill, as our ancestors did, when they annulled the obsolete segments of the religious writings according to the needs of their times.” **People die, but the books may stay.** If we don’t do something about it, such texts could perpetuate to function as bad examples for our absolutist, dogmatic friends; or become some poor citations, some easy targets, in the hands of our malicious enemies. This is much true for our time, when we see some ignorant critics, unknowing as they are and unwilling to know, who keep writing page after page against some long-outdated parts of the Jewish religion, parts which might not have been heard of even by most Jews.

Only if I could bring myself to describe the stupid and despicable deeds of some fanatics and the proposed causes behind their ceremonies, such as the one I mentioned above. Only if I could provide a partial list of so many abhorrent books penned by our biased critics, with hundreds of thousands of copies in print.

*I put down these few words, yet I made
Their meaning obscured to strangers,
So you’ll read them with generous eyes,
As you know quite well how to read.*

My Friends! Humankind is not meant to be unconditionally meritorious. Those societies or communities in which merits are taken for granted, where people are “rewarded” without having made an effort to earn the rewards, they are bound to pay for their gross mistake in the long run, with their demise, destitute, pain, and suffering. A regressive person lacks vision and foresight. He is merely an imitator, and an imitator can’t really understand the issues. Such an imitator may wish to practice the very impractical customs of his religions, only so that someday he could travel to an imaginary heaven afterlife. Such a person can’t realize that a society’s identity

consists in part of what its new generation, as well as the outsiders, perceive from that society's actions and beliefs. Only if the regressors would heed the following verse,

*Those who spoke in hundred tongues,
What did they hear that rendered them silent?*

Or, what did they hear that drove them to join the ranks of undesirably married?

The extremists have mastered the texts of the 613 Commands, as well as the reasons behind annulling the 325 out of them, so far; but they've remained negligent of what Alvin Toffler formulated so eloquently, "**The illiterate** of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn." That includes those who can't throw away the improper, outdated, obsolete words of the past. Sadly, oblivious to the time they live in, and blind to the ages of anguish and suffering that have come before, such modern illiterates do not believe in the need to continue the process of excising the negligible parts of the religious books and what stands in conflict with our modern knowledge and understanding. In effect, they don't believe in continuing to learn, and to improve our behavior. They claim erroneously that if such things go away, the foundation itself would vanish along with them. But to me, it sounds more like saying, "There would be no truth without the lies!" Or, "If we preserve the causes behind the ailment, we would become healthy!"

The regressors don't wish to understand that those flaws have long been easy targets for our fault-finders, and have been cited maliciously by our biased critics. Such flaws have long resulted in undermining many of the precious and fundamental principles of Judaism, to dishonor us, and to push many of us away from the religion, altogether.

Let's wait no more to discover the colossal, imposing, crushing power of Time. **The blow of Time is the worst of agonies.** The fast and persistent vehicle of progress would push aside everything on its way. Sadly, there's little hope in sight today for those in charge of religious affairs to join us for the walk; and there seems no hope for their help to convene a Sanhedrin, "The Assembly of the Judges of the Time." So we need to initiate a movement, a concerted effort to do what our ancestors did, and what modern parliaments do all the time; that is, to bring our traditional laws and practices up-to-date. **Without a doubt, it's been a pride of Judaism,** to keep itself up-to-date, and it's left to us now to continue the process that has so far eliminated the 325 outdated commands out of the 613. We do this now, and the regressors of the future eras will

no more have the misleading sources upon which they could rely to spread and preserve some nonsense and superstitions. Thence, our future generations won't have to suffer repeatedly through the pain and catastrophes of the past and present. History has witnessed that as eagles fly between the clouds to keep safe from a rainfall, Jews take refuge in science to remain safe from harm. Let's fit our old books to the knowledge of our time. Let us not forget that our main mission in life as assigned to us by our very religion is *tikkun olam*, "repairing the world", correcting the world to the extent we can. Our mission never was to continue the path of blind imitation, or to give excuses into the hands of our biased critics, even as we'd drive away reasonable minds. The truth of our very progressive religion is not what the fanatics claim it to be. We better take the opportunity and try to choose and introduce our many verifiably glorious codes and Commandments to the world, a chance that was never available so readily to our forefathers.

I warn us that we may not prevent the pain and suffering of the past from repeating themselves by one-sided views of life, or by relying on words and thoughts that are in conflict with modern times. Instead, we would fare better if we join hands with the followers of other religions **to accept religion not as an unchangeable legacy, but as a flexible and evolving gift.**

As Saadia Gaon said, The Ten Commandments of Moses already contained in them the 613 Commands expressed elsewhere. That in itself legitimizes the practice of updating, to continue and eliminate further the nonsensical parts which we find in our religious texts, as it's been done before with the 325 obsolete Commands, even as the Ten Commandments have never changed over the past 3000 years. And they won't, because they are essential, logical, in synch with all times and places, in agreement with modern human rights, and with our nature. Eternal.

No wonder that it's been said, **Depend only on the things that wouldn't change with the passage of time.**

My friends. I can already guess the reaction I might receive from many a dogmatic mind; but as with everyone else, I'm permitted to express my opinion. I know that **the essence of religion is unalterable**; and that no command in any religion was ostensibly assigned to with an **expiration date**. Yet, the expiration date of religious laws is inherent in those very laws

themselves. That is, they should be brought in agreement with the time of practice. **Judaism is proud to have done such updating process as early as 2000 years ago**, if not earlier; and it's bound to continue and do so according to its basic principles and commands, and as time would require of us.

The major trap for any religion is stagnation; while science thrives indeed on the constant processes of change, growth, and progress. The main problem here is not a lack of knowledge. Rather, the real problem is to imagine that we already know everything, comfortably clad in the body of a religion, neatly fortified by an absolutist mentality. Absolutism is what makes religion a means to garnering power. Power leads to corruption; and absolute power brings absolute corruption. Blind imitation, dogmatism, and prejudice, have become the true enemies of free and intelligent thinking, even as they block humanity's view of the reality of the world of religions, a problem which seems to pass unnoticed by intellectual and spiritual myopics. The world did not stop turning after the religious books were written; and it won't stop turning, henceforth.

*Don't wonder if a bird of the night
Can't see well during the day,
For its vision is impaired by design.*

As President Thomas Jefferson said, Ignorance is worse than making a mistake. A person who doesn't believe in anything is still closer to the truth than someone who holds wrong beliefs. The ignorant person who promotes dark-mindedness is not aware that **you can't eliminate darkness with darkness.** We can't heal an illness by causing an even worse pain. The most ignorant people in the world are those who don't learn their lesson from a changing world. **Let's appraise people according to their intellect and behavior, and not based on their beliefs and appearances.**

One weak-spot of our society, which is often manipulated by religious figures to their advantage in their preachings, is the commonly ruinous issue of mixed marriage, or marriage by assimilation. This author, in unison with those respected clerics, agrees that mixed marriages are for the foundation of our community what termites are to the pillars of a bridge. Yet, I humbly remind our religious people that, Alas, to remedy one pain, you've kept causing another! You have fractured our community with arbitrary faults, which have resulted in an internal form of "mixed marriage" between the so-called Orthodox and Non-Orthodox Jews. This has yielded an

even worse pain, unprecedented in our community, with no known remedy in sight. It's not uncommon today to see two Jews, both unwilling to marry outside the Jewish community, to avoid one another like two strangers, only because one is deemed more religious than the other. This is what your vacuous religious advocacy has brought upon us.

Some Iranian Jews imagined that the grass was greener on the other side of the fence. They tried to imitate the proverbial walk of the Eastern European Jews, but in the process, as the Persian saying goes, they neither learned the new style, nor could they remember their past walk anymore! No longer who they had been; never to become who they wished to be. They weren't aware that, contrary to the ways of our ancestors, for whom religion had almost never been a source of income, today's religion is often little more than a means of sustenance.

You've further tightened the already limited space available to the followers of our religion, and in the name of promoting the religion, you've continued to scatter our children away from our community. These children once had the right to choose equally, to live in a more or less uniformly harmonious atmosphere within our community. Today, however, thanks to your teachings, against the public interest, without deference to the authenticity of, and the contrasts within, the intellectual Orthodoxy, such as its realists vs. its myopics, our youngsters seem to have become lost in an absolute state of bewilderment; although they haven't yet renounced their religion altogether. We see that the Orthodox and the non-Orthodox, sometimes close relatives, even siblings, are avoiding each other, as they've become worse than strangers towards one another. Consequently, you've succeeded to introduce a whole new set of arbitrary categories of mixed marriages, in addition to the old, more tangible types. Despite this dilemma, you don't seem to be willing to let go of this *sin'at chinam*, this "unfounded enmity", wrapped in the disguise of religion; and instead, you simply shrug off the likes of this protesting author by such platitudes as "We know best, and you just don't get it!" Well, dear, that's because you can't see the light of truth from behind the dark glasses of prejudice.

My Friends. An inexperienced author writes of a journey, without having been on that trip; and he speaks of sights and scenes which he's never set his eyes upon. But this author, along with many other families who've been harmed and hurt in a like manner, has tasted the pain of the trip, and has seen the painful scenes, unnecessary disagreements, irrationalities, annulled engagements, even the severing of long and close friendships, which took place because of the

influx of some new and detestably divisive ways which had been unprecedented in our community. Thence, I've understood to recognize where the logic of religious advocates consists of blind imitation; where they begin to abuse religion as a means to stupidify their people. **In the hands of such people, identity preservation, advancing the cause, spreading the religion, even the very name of religion and religious writings, are no more than mere excuses in the service of some ulterior motives.**

I warn us: Let's appreciate our traditional family connections, our more meaningful religious practices, and the sincere marriages of our forefathers. Let's remind ourselves that the basis of the survival of their faith, our faith, a faith devoid of the kind of superstitions which could rightly be attributed to the culture of the Ghettos, has been the Holy Torah, our true understanding of its essence and significance, and nothing else.

Come tomorrow, once your children have been contaminated with superstitions, you'll no more be able to save them from their predicament; for no matter how skilled the life-guard might be, he can't save the drowning man in the mud-pits without drowning himself along with him. First, let's supervise our children's teachers and evaluate their textbooks. The best way to get to know our teachers is to learn of their beliefs. Soon enough, you'll realize that you can't talk rationally with those among them who believe it to be a *mitzvah*, a good deed, to separate your children from their families by changing their ways.

Have no doubt that if you leave the education of your children to a servant, you'd only end up with two servants! Don't forget that **the reward of fulfilling a responsibility on time would be tomorrow's peace for the family.** Let us not deal casually with illogical thoughts and words; otherwise, they would show up tomorrow on everyone's breakfast meal. A person or a society, who can't maintain balance in all affairs, is doomed to fall and fail.

Our forefathers lacked the kind of great opportunities and convenience that we readily enjoy today. To provide for the happiness of our offsprings and grandchildren, let's make every effort to rectify the flaws in our community.

We earn happiness by taking the correct steps on time, and one at a time. Happiness will not come until humanity has made himself deserving of it; until humans have stepped out of the hate-mongering narrow cage of religious and sectarian prejudice.

Khalil Gibran, the famed Christian-Lebanese author, was so hurt by the irrational beliefs which he faced all around him, that once he wrote:

“The Scarecrow”

By Khalil Gibran

Once I said to a scarecrow, "You must be tired of standing in this lonely field."

And he said, "The joy of scaring is a deep and lasting one, and I never tire of it."

Said I, after a minute of thought, "It is true; for I too have known that joy."

Said he, "Only those who are stuffed with straw can know it."

Then I left him, not knowing whether he had complimented or belittled me.

A year passed, during which the scarecrow turned philosopher.

And when I passed by him again I saw two crows building a nest under his hat.

Indeed, only one stuffed with straw could possibly enjoy scaring and stupidifying others.

The poverty of a society has its roots in the minds afflicted with superstitions; consequently, it could become drowned in a sea devoid of healthy thoughts. I'm reminded of Freud, who told us that the anti-intellectualism of religions should be seen as a kind of illness without a hitherto known remedy.

Once, an old man looked himself in the mirror and sighed, "Ah, they don't make mirrors like they used to anymore!" They don't make Mullahs either like they used to anymore. The late Chacham Yedidia Shofet, once said in his beautiful Kashani accent and gentle spirit, "People, please, just don't do this..."

For those capable of seeing the niceties,

There's a story full of meaning

Behind the facade of the story.

To receive more such articles, and the book, Invitation to Reason, in Persian or English, please visit the following site: **www.BabaNouri.com** .