

The Intellectual Revolution

No Revolution Brought Forth Freedom and
Welfare But the Intellectual Revolution

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The illiterate of the future will not be the person who cannot read. It will be the person who does not know how to learn.
– Alvin Toffler

The 1979 Revolution, followed by an eight-year long war between Iraq and Iran, threw the majority of Iranian Jewish community into a state of uncertainty and chaos, a sad situation which was nevertheless true of some other sectors of the larger Iranian society. However, unlike the earlier times, traveling was more easily accessible, and many families decided readily to resettle elsewhere on the globe. (My generation might quip, as a matter of social humor, that the Jews of Kashan acted more swiftly than those of Shiraz!) Some of them emigrated depending on none other than themselves. Others hoped to join the company of their most cherished treasures, their children, who had been studying abroad since before the revolution. These emigrant families often left behind not only their life-time memories and affiliations, but also their considerable wealth and properties, essentially the hard-earned savings accumulated through the centuries by their ancestors, with an estimated total of more than 53 billion dollars, according to some claims. They went through much hardship to arrive in those countries and cities wherein their children, friends or relatives had already been living.

Gradually, small communities formed primarily in various European countries, as well as in Israel, Canada, and the United States, particularly in Los Angeles and New York. They must

have felt like a group of high school students forced to go back and sit behind the desks in an elementary school! They realized that they had to start it all over. They set out to build their new lives in their contrastingly new environments, often substantially different from their homeland, sometimes decades ahead of Iran. All by themselves, they had to draw upon the youngsters’ knowledge and creativity and the parents’ experience, as they started it all anew with more than their share of hardship.

In the meantime, families were largely scattered, unstable, even temporarily fallen apart. Many unsettled parents lost control over their children’s lives, so far as a number of the youngsters were lost with no trace. An untold number of others, however, seeking visas in Pakistan or Austria, were ensnared by the promulgations of fanatical Jewish groups, and lured into the Eastern European *ghetto* culture, which stood in sharp contrast to their moderate upbringings. The latter phenomenon continues to date amid the silence of those parents who have been concerned of losing their ancestral identity to the mingling with the “poisonous” atmosphere of their host societies! These religious preachers much have felt like some shopkeepers casting their greed on a batch of new customers. They came to fish in the wandering caravan of the Iranian Jewish community, and they caught more than you could wish. **We acknowledge that a minority of them were intent on offering genuine public service; but sadly, most others had set their speculative eyes on marketing and recruiting efforts when they stepped into this lucrative chaotic market.** Each carried a tool of his own to spread his own way of religious practice; and none agreed with the other!

To be sure, some of them such as **Rabbi Pear**, aided by the constant company and caring supervision of the late **Manouchehr Ghodsian**, **did some incomparable public service.** I look forward to another opportunity to provide a more detailed record of their services for the purposes of our history. For now, let’s recall that Mr. Ghodsian, given his connections to international Jewish organizations, and receiving much precious help from the rabbi, made numerous visits to Karachi, Quetta, Vienna, and New York, genuinely serving more than 20,000 of the immigrants, even though none knew of his name.

Nevertheless, today, **by conducting objective and unbiased surveys**, we may better **judge** both the services and the harms done to the Iranian Jewish community by the religious people. We may see whether their promotional activities have provided our society with comfort or

attrition, freedom or captivity, **unity or divisiveness**. We may ask what scientific, economical and social positions our meritorious youngsters managed to achieve when they swam for the first time in the proverbial waters, when they found themselves in the right environments. We may see what was gained by those who went to universities in comparison to those who took the path of religious seminaries, aka. *yeshivot*. We may recall that whereas the philosophy of religious schools is based on learning primarily from the words of the ancestors, the rational-minded people aim to preserve the culture of the past alongside acquiring modern knowledge.

For the record, this author does not mean at all to reject the *yeshivah* system altogether; to be fair, *yeshivah* has done much services in the past. But I ask whether it's reasonable to keep teaching some material whose expiration date is long behind us. We should ask if everything that was written is significant enough to be taught, as it's being done today in the religious schools, even though they might not agree with modern understanding and science. This author aims to portray the undeniable rational truth of the sensible commandments of the holy Torah, far from common exaggerations and superstitions. **It's the rain which helps the plants to grow, not the lightning and the thunder.** What help our students grow are not the empty slogans of the self-righteous extremists, some of which are downright insults to the common sense of our society.

But we should keep in mind that to limit the breadth of education to some ages-old religious commentaries would be to drastically undermine our educational system; and to ignore modern education and culture would be to facilitate the spread and tyranny of the kind of beliefs which utterly disagree with modern science and culture. You be the judge. There are people who based on some 2000-year old commentary believe that success depends on fate, determinism, God's will, even as they remain oblivious to the perspective of reason, intellect, wisdom, and ignore individual aptitude, content of the knowledge, acquired skills, and other influencing factors in reality. On the other hand, there are others who aim to achieve success by relying on their up-to-date knowledge, power of understanding, developing skills, and modern science, instead of waiting for someone to descend from the skies and fulfill their wishes. Ask yourself, which of these two groups has consistently achieved more? For how long can we continue to gaze at the skies of superstition on the basis of some old writings by ignorant commentators on the Jewish Bible? Do a survey, consider the facts, and judge for yourself as to which path has been more fruitful for our intelligent youngsters, and by extension, for our community?

This author doesn't intend to "make the pen cry and the enemy laugh"; otherwise I could cite here from the many examples of extremists' beliefs to compare and contrast them with the scientific aims of reasonable minds, as well as the sensible commandments of the holy Torah. Let us evolve ourselves according to the demands of time. **Instead of merely wiping away our tears, let us eliminate the causes behind chronic ills and running tears.** No one ever reached the destination by keeping on the wrong path. Fortunately, moments of pride abound. The success of the educated Iranian immigrants was so remarkable that the Canadian Prime Minister once said that Canada was the true winner of it all, because it had won tens of thousands of praiseworthy young and educated people. Let us build on that heritage.

My Friends: Parents' pride in their children is a blessing from God, as is children's pride in their parents. Why then do you drive families apart by some nonsensical indoctrination? The adherents of the religion better be proud of the sensible commandments of their tradition, so that others would in turn feel proud of them. Why not benefit from the pleasant honey of such commands as the Ten Commandments of the holy Torah, instead of the deadly poison of some dangerously obsolete superstitions? Why discourage and disappoint the reasonable people and afflict the regressors any deeper? Sadly, the majority seems to maintain silent indifference, until the day when one such spoiled troubles shows up at their own dinner table.

Proud parents may appear as a mere pair of humans, yet they can be a world of pride to themselves and their societies; that is, as long as the preachers of superstitions leave them alone and don't interfere in the affairs of their families. The religious writings could be causes for pride or for shame, not only for the individual who preaches them, but for the whole religious group, many of whom clearly disapprove of the superstitious parts of such writings. Promoting the progressive aspects of the religion would strengthen both family bonding and communal cohesion.

The secret's hidden in the high and the low of the pitches.

If I expressed it openly, I'd create chaos in the world.

And,

Until you're intimate, you can't hear a secret from this musical mode.

The stranger's ears are no place for the message of heavens.

The bigoted religious fanatics don't pay attention that humans didn't get out of the absolute ignorance of the Stone Age because they ran out of stones! It took many stages of intellectual revolution, constant conceptual evolution, intrinsic change in abstract thought, accumulation of knowledge, and the eventual emergence of organized science and enlightenment, that helped us exit first the ignorance of Stone Ages, then the darkness of the Middle Ages. But much work remains to be done. This magnificent line of intellectual evolution would be badly hindered unless we take the initiative to excise and reject the unreasonable words that are attributed to virtually all religions.

The problem is no more about the clash of contrasting traditions, but it's about the very religious extremism of all bands of zealots. As such, it would help us all to remember that our view of religion and the world reflects on our personality and the worth of our beliefs. Let's be more realistic.

Our clear and sensible religious commandments need no stupefying, imitation, or extremism, to be spread. For thousands of years, our community had no such things in Iran. The religious people should replace hours spent on repeating the same words day after day with studying new things and learning about the latest of scientific discoveries, **as it had been the original intent of such daily reading assignments**. If everyone did that, the world today would be a much better place to live. If the mature followers of religions carefully study these texts with free minds in accurate translations which they could understand, preferably in their mother tongue, **no doubt they would change dramatically**; because human beings cannot remain unchanged even as our understanding and interpretation of the subjects are changing with time.

Human beings may achieve balance only through **flying freely, making mistakes, and gaining more experience**; and **the more experience we have, the less mistakes that we would make**. Thereafter, by continuously sharing the experiences, our collective knowledge would become evermore rich, in sharp contrast to the stagnation of some absurd and endless repetitions. True knowledge lies in acquiring contemporary knowledge; and **Knowledge through Intellect could lead to Success**. Whereas human body is born as developed inside the mother's womb, our intellect develops over time. We accept subjects and propositions by sound argument over the available facts, and not on the basis of blind faith in some vacuous text. There is a world of difference between "authority" and "demanding blind obedience". Be careful. There are many

who know as much about their religion as they can make profit from it. Let us remember Talmud, where it says, "Who's the wise? The one who learns from everyone."

Let's carefully evaluate the reasons that are offered to us before accepting them. Fifty percent of the success of any society is about realizing its own weaknesses and to rectify its shortcomings. For a moment, ignore this article and ask in the intimacy of your mind whether the actions of so-called religious people lead to *Shalom Habayit*, i.e. the "Peace in the Family"; whether they facilitate the blessing of marriage for our youth, this most important issue in our community; or to the contrary, whether the words and deeds of the extremists lead to our humiliation, divisiveness, perplexion, and chaos – even to the perplexity of some rabbis who go all the way to the extreme left and start acting fanatically, oblivious to what Saadi, the Persian poet, expressed so eloquently,

**Many a name kept good for fifty years,
Which was ruined by one ugly deed.**

Some others, who have no fear of the rational people, still join the extreme right for other baseless fears. Then all sides, along with anyone else caught in between, wander around in the ensuing confusion, while the speculators are reaping the grapes! They are unaware of the fact that what represents a religion are the actions and the breadth of the thought and knowledge of its followers; **and when religion replaces intellect, the result is the insecurity of today's world.** To cash on God's name, to assign oneself as the representative of God in order to gain more power and fulfill one's own desires, it has no outcome but the despicable scene of kissing the hands of a cleric! As the Persian poet Hafez said,

**I'll ride the horse fast to the tavern from this assembly,
For the advice of men of no action must be left unheard.
O Hafez, don't kiss but the lips of the beloved and the cup,
For it's wrong to kiss the hands of those who flaunt virtue.**

We've put up for centuries with much hardship rooted in religious discrimination and prejudice. That should be more than enough to motivate the religious people to get rid of their inherited ideological and conceptual handicaps, and begin to walk in step with time. Why should anyone be mistaken to think that the Jewish people have more tolerance to suffer such torturous experiments? We are proud that the State of Israel, soon after its independence, decided to go

against a literal interpretation of some archaic religious commands, and instead, with the approval of the Knesset, i.e. the Israeli Parliament, which also included the religious parties, almost completely banned the capital punishment in that country. Note that this was no smirk flashed at the Jewish religion. In fact, this victory for civility and decency across the world was not only in the spirit of modern ethics, but it was in line with the long progressive tradition within the body of Judaism that in practice and for many centuries had already banned all forms of execution.

Thanks to science, the human civilization has come a long way since we carried things around on horses, carts, and mules, to the age of spaceships and a walk on the moon. We've advanced a long way in communication technology since the time of bull horns, riding messengers, messenger doves, bells, smoke signals, or telegraph, to the era of the wireless communication, the Internet, and the emailing. Altogether, science and civilization are always in progress, and they will not stop behind the walls of religious bigotry. **As for those who still choose the cocoon of oblivion, sadly, they'll be left behind.**

To be succinct, the world needs of the religious people to go through their own share of the intellectual revolution. You live in a world wherein a Google search may answer your questions more broadly and accurately than any religious cleric could possibly do. You already have the tools for this overdue revolution, and that's the Internet. Frankly, you're left with no more excuses.

The Internet has taken away the exclusive hold on knowledge and knowledge-based power from the clutch of religious and political institutions, who used to almost completely control the temples, and much of the media such as radio and TV, and the press. Today, however, devoid of fear of censorship, the news and information travel within an instant from one point of the globe to another. Even the print versions of some well-established and decades-long newspapers and magazines are gradually giving way to their online sites, including *Readers' Digest*, *Newsweek*, or the Iranian *Keyhan*. There's no wonder as to why, since for example a little known website such as www.BabaNouri.com has more visitors than the number of copies in print of the magazines and newspapers in our own community.

Thus, science has already produced for us the means that we would need to have our words heard by the world. The next step to be taken would be to have something sensible and useful to

say, to observe the path of reason, to better practice what's reasonable, and of course, to avoid those ideas and beliefs that do not agree with humanity's common sense.

Perfection means in practical terms to do things as better as possible. We can try to better practice the eternal and rational commands of the holy Torah, and thus, prolong the survival of our religion. No one can go back in time, but everyone is able to have a fresh start Now. Every belief is acceptable to the extent that it "sustains life", rather than extinguish it; to the extent that it leads to our unity, and not our divisiveness. A religion which is promoted based on factional and sectarian attitudes, based on hatred and bigotry, such religion better not be at all. Even though it's not the fault of the religion per se,

**Everyone receives from the grace
Of eternity as much as he can hold.
The ocean's not to blame
If your pot's too small.**

I'd like to paraphrase **Martin Buber** who said that societies in their great struggle for action, should cultivate thinking, so that they could experience the greatness of thought. To keep pace with time is to keep on the road of progressive evolution. Otherwise, those who preach superstitions practically arm the enemies and disarm friends, though they may call it religious observance. As long as the intellectual worth of the commandments of the Holy Torah is not concerned, all forms of imitation and pretention are worthless.

The greatest difference between the rationalist and the regressor is that the **rationalist** considers **the ability to change and to be in sync with time a virtue to be proud of**, while the **regressor** deems an **ossified inflexibility worthy of praise**. A clear example of it is when the regressors send our children to stagnating religious schools, while the rationalists send them to accredited progressive universities.

My Friends, the day comes when all that'll be remained of us will be some memory in the minds of a few. Let's rely on our sensible beliefs, and try and leave at least some reasonable and logical memories of ourselves, so that it will not be said of us,

**Yesterday, there was no other like you.
Today, may no other be like you.**

An old man looked himself in the mirror and sighed, "Ah, mirrors! They don't make them anymore like they used to!" Likewise, one could say, "The religious people! They don't come anymore like they used to!" But humor aside, day after day, I'm convinced increasingly that our ancestors best observed the religion, acting within their contemporary means, without having the kind of interfering in their lives that's become commonplace today. A successful society would study today's conditions to foresee the future state of affairs, to warn the coming generation, to be prepared and to prevent probable disasters, and if the need be, to build a proverbial dam to avert the devastating flood of poisonous preaching when or if it may arrive. One day, a grandfather advised his grandson, "My dearest, inside every person, there's an ongoing war between two beasts. One is an intelligent, wise, calm, happy, modest, hopeful, and honest being. The other is an angry, lying, pretentious, and cheating creature." The Grandson asked, "But grandpa, which one succeeds more to dominate us?" The grandfather smiled, "The one whom you feed; the one whom you allow to meddle in the affairs of your life."

We've aged for long, we've traveled far and beyond,

Yet, we're worth no more than a withered leaf on the path of time.

It's always sad when children are raised to become so-called religious, only to end up wasting their immense gifts and unique abilities; it's even worse when in practice, they're set up against their parents, when they are separated from their families, without regards to the fact that how precious, yet rare, limited, and fragile is the blessing of a family being together. If goodwill dominates, we may help the family without deference to our own preferred ways; we may help enhance infinitely the kindness, bonding, loving relationship, and communication, between members of the family; we may help them grow their self-confidence and self-reliance, devoid of any need for praise and prayers; and self-confidence is two-thirds of success.

My friends, let's avoid cultivating the young minds to absorb prejudices. Let's draw upon the fine example of rationalism and don't bar the speculators from polluting the minds of our children by superstitions offered in the name of religion. Let's teach our children how to fly as we wish them to; otherwise, others might teach them flying according to their own crooked ways, and no children is immune to such indoctrinations. Wherein prejudice enters, intellect flees. It's not enough to only ask where we came from; our knowledge of the destination is equally vital. Let's be awake, so that we could sleep in peace.

**Such war and tension is the product of short-sightedness;
Look with clear eyes, and you'll see that the Kaaba and
The Temple of Idols are but the same.
Everyone sings his song of joy in his own tongue;
I look more closely, and I see that the moral of the stories
Are always the same.**

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