

# Faith

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Faith is a blessing for the humankind. Who has faith, he has trust; and who has trust, he shall have peace. Faith is a God-given blessing.

It's said that in a time of draught, people gathered at a prayer site nearby their village to ask for rain. A child stood out in the crowd, for he was carrying an umbrella. People realized the child had believed so firmly in the power of the prayer that he had come prepared to shield himself against the rain on his way back.

It's also said that in a time of draught, people gathered at the base of Mount Sinai. A call of inspiration asked for one of them to climb to the peak, and bring the good news to the people, should the prayer be answered. The pious man of the town started to climb, whilst the people stayed behind and prayed in unison; but there was no sign of rain, whatsoever. The pious man climbed further up, and waited for another hour at the peak, but to no avail. He thought to himself, “I told the people that if their prayers were answered, I'd climb down dancing. Now, what should I do?” Then he thought, “O God, you did not answer our prayer! Still, for the sake of the crowd, who've gathered at the base with expecting eyes, I'll shall go down dancing, so that even if for a brief moment, they would become happy,

thinking their prayers were answered.” Thus, he started down the mountain, dancing and snapping his way toward the people. Meanwhile, pleased by the kind act of His good servant, meant to make his people happy, God answered their prayers, and it began to rain.

Indeed, faith is a good thing, but... unfortunately, and as it happens, ironically so, the most faithful of people in our time, and perhaps in all history, have turned out to be the very terrorists who wrap themselves in bombs to blow up themselves and kill others! If you consider it carefully, you'd notice that in certain ways, these are the most faithful of people on the planet — so far as when they caught one of them before he could succeed to blow himself up, they were surprised to find the man's male organs carefully wrapped and cushioned for full protection, like a well-hidden mouse trap. Asked why, he explained, “I didn't want my male organs to be injured, so that I wouldn't have any trouble having sex with the *huris*, the beautiful maidens in heaven!” So strong was the man's faith in his vicious act.

Given the above, we conclude that although faith is the best and greatest of Divine blessings, there is a caveat: faith in what and in whom? Clearly, to believe in some senseless writings or some insane people, it's no faith but sheer madness. The true and sound faith applies to an intelligent and informed person, who believes in something right, constructive, forgiving and useful to humankind. Otherwise, to have faith in some nonsense, it means to nurture terrorism, it means to produce corruption in the world by these very corrupt people, who have faith in some misleading writings and ideas. The long chain of wars and massacres, since antiquity to this day, has stemmed from but this faith in the wrong ideas and the wrong people. Let's think about the crime of October the 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, committed against Israel, and its consequences. As we can see, a bestial group of people, who claimed to believe in some violent and inhumane ideas, committed an utmost

savage, murderous and ruthless crime against innocent people, and triggered a destructive domino, through which they forced Israel to defend itself vigorously, and as a result, more people get killed. Once more, the immortal words of the late Golda Meir resonate in the space, and I paraphrase, “Over time, we may forgive our enemies even though they killed our children, but we’ll never forgive them for making us kill their own children.”

By studying this painful example and other cases, we conclude that blind faith in some wrong words, whether written or spoken, has driven humankind recurrently to committing indescribably horrible mistakes, catastrophes and crimes; and for that reason, no book that commands to kill people can be a guide for humankind, nor could it pave the road to his or her happiness. The Persian poet Nasser Khosrow’s alarming words are a waking call for humanity at large: “You who were killed, why did you kill, to be killed so wretchedly; / and yet again, who will kill the one who killed you?” As we say in the Persian culture, “*khodā* i.e. God, it means *beh khod ā*, that is, ‘wake up!’ or ‘become aware!’” Each one of us has the moral obligation to “wake up” and endeavor to dispose of violent ideas and acts, but also to abandon those who fan the flames of violence, so that we may end this vicious cycle, once and for all.

In short, faith is good, but only if the faithful believes in the positive and true things of the world; and no doubt, the violence-oriented individuals and beliefs have always stood at the exact opposite of true faith. God has given humankind the intellect, so that he could tell the proverbial road from the pothole before their feet. We should think more openly and more freely, expand our field of vision, and not be content with a limited perspective. As a father advised his four sons, one can’t judge the fruit tree by watching it merely for three seasons, for it would only bear fruits in the fourth season. Let’s view the commands and beliefs from multiple

angles; let's study things from every aspect, before we come to believe in them unquestioningly. Also, let's find out who we truly are, and come to realize that the ultimate goal is human happiness. "You were the purpose, and you're the end."

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Speaking of faith, I'm reminded of a wonderful story. Agha-Khan Mahallati, or Agha Khan IV, leader of the Essmailieh, or the Isma'ili sect, visited Iran in the time of Muhammad Reza Shah. The late king of Pahlavi received Agha Khan well, and appointed a meritorious military officer to attend to the guest. The two men gradually became friends, so far as one evening at dinner, when the two were alone, the officer asked, "Your highness, Agha Khan, I wonder how in such times as ours, people could still worship you and consider you to be their prophet. Doesn't it surprise you, too?" Agha Khan laughed and said, "In times when people worship cows and deem the animal's urine to be holy, why should anyone be surprised if some people worship a human being?" The witty response threw both men into a big laughter. The reader can clearly see the manifold significance of this anecdote beyond the evident humor. May I reiterate that the followers of the Essmailieh do indeed accord Agha Khan the status of a prophet, and each year, they even offer him as much gold and jewelry as he weighs; and he puts this infinite wealth to use, not for his own benefit, but for the welfare and happiness of his followers. Personally, I don't know much about this sect; but I ran into some of them in Singapore, and they looked to be a very quiet and peaceful people.

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The mere mention of Agha Khan brings back to me a memory, which is relevant to the present essay. In those days, when the late Manouchehr Ghodsian and I were helping the refugees, we were informed that two of the children, who were staying in Pakistan, in those unhygienic environments, had fallen sick with

cholera. One of the two died of the disease, and the other wasn't feeling well. At the time, two American rabbis, the late Rabbi Eliezer Peer and Rabbi Needleman were working with us in Los Angeles. I told Rabbi Needleman about those children. This honorable man immediately obtained a ticket on Friday afternoon, that is, on the Eve of Shabbat, and left for Pakistan, wherein introduced by a member of the Essmailieh who was a friend of Manouchehr Ghodsian, he took the surviving child to the Agha Khan Mahallati Hospital in Pakistan. The hospital received the child; and thereafter they would fully take care of anybody whom we sent to them, whether child or adult.

That was my personal memory regarding the Agha Khan Mahallati Hospital. However, an important point stands out in this story, and that is Rabbi Needleman's faith. Once he was back from the trip, I thanked the rabbi and asked him, "Dear rabbi, although I don't believe in this matter, you do believe that one shouldn't travel by car or airplane on the Shabbat. So how come you rode a car to the airport on the Eve of Shabbat, wherefrom you flew on a plane to Pakistan, wherein you saved the child on the Shabbat?" Rabbi Needleman laughed and said, "Look, that's because you don't know enough. The Jewish religion says, 'To save a person is to save the world.' I had a duty, and I fulfilled it." Please notice: to save a **person**, whether he or she be Jewish or not, devoid of all religious, racial, ethnic or national considerations. At this point, I applauded the rabbi and his faith and belief, and I added, "It's your very faith that has redeemed and will redeem you and the like of yours." Such sound attitude and behavior stems from one's true faith and believing in the right things — which, needless to say, would exclude having faith in a cow or her urine! Both might be called "faith", but there's a world of difference between them. This is the main question: Faith in what? What matters

most is *what* we believe in: To have faith in the truth, in knowledge, in reason and common sense, in the good and right deed, and in such deed in itself.

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Indeed, what is the root of all the misery and massacres, which have taken place throughout human history to this date? Consider the following case: As I explained in my previous essay entitled *Reza Shah & Negotiation With Hitler Over the Jews of Iran*, in the 1940's, Amin al-Husseini, the top Palestinians Mufti of the time, went to meet with Hitler more than once to encourage him in murdering Jews. But indeed, why? After all, back then there was yet no State of Israel, no talk of the purchased or seized land, none of such things. Then why such animosity? Ultimately, the root of his enmity was none other than Amin al-Husseini and Hitler both suffered from the ominous gene of "the hereditary aspect of religion". Their animosity stemmed from this very issue: the unwritten law of the heredity of religion, which had contaminated both Hitler and Amin al-Husseini, as well as the millions of others whom we see flow into the streets and thrust out their chests in protest, even though they don't know what they're talking about, or for whom or to what purpose they do what they're doing. It's all because this defect, akin to the defective genes of the brain, blood or bone-marrow cancers, has been embedded in the human nature, and at various stages, it rises and leads people to catastrophes, without them knowing why. Thus, if there be any cure, it'd be none other than purging this ominous custom of the heredity of religion. This defect has been the root cause of all those massacres and miseries. It's because of the heredity of religion that humankind accepts things uninformed and without understanding them, and acts against himself and the whole humankind.

Blind faith and imitation is not a problem limited to some particular time, region, or people. As I remember, in the 1970's, the years of upheaval in Iran, a

large mob had gathered before the offices of a national newspaper, chanting in protest of the paper's editor. A reporter asked a protestor, "What did the paper publish that you disagree with?" The interviewee responded, "How should I know? I can't read!" Before we'd haste to ridicule that fool, we'd better look ourselves in the mirror: this problem in essence remains relevant everywhere, even — or perhaps *especially* — in countries which more or less offer freedom and democracy, such as the United States or Israel, notwithstanding that every now and then, they get punished for these two vital words, due to some misunderstandings. Humankind should understand what freedom and democracy truly mean; to whom and where freedom finds its meaning; and which people and places we have in mind as we speak of democracy, i.e. the rule of the people by the people. It's a prerequisite of true freedom and democracy to educate and inform the people, and enhance their understanding; and in our time, the only thing that merits to serve as our moral compass, to show us our values, the one true source of hope and object of faith, is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Let's pay a closer attention into our mirror. As we shall see, the problem goes indeed far beyond any particular institution, society or country. Today, most all members of all religions practically lack any knowledge of the language of their religious texts, including Hebrew, Latin, Arabic, etc.; and as such, they basically don't understand what they worship! The languages of such books are quite old, and the vast majority of these people simply don't know them; and yet, they all continue to respect these books and the ideas therein, i.e. those of their ancestors, rather dutifully. Some centuries or millennia ago, our ancestors accepted and began to imitate certain things as they were; and we in turn follow in their footsteps, accepting those things all together, imitating them as they were. If we were honest, we'd admit that more or less, we're all mere copycats, who continue to follow

without question what was handed down to us through the ages by repetition and insistence. The famed director Cecil B. DeMille was once asked why he mostly drew upon religious stories for his films. He replied, and I paraphrase, “What better story than which has been publicized for centuries?” That’s the whole point in a nutshell.

Most people would find it difficult to suddenly abandon the habit of imitation. But if we wake up and better understand what such writings mean, we could at least become better imitators. It’s also to say that for the humane essence of these writings, and their followers, to survive, such works better be revised and brought up to date to agree with modern knowledge and language. Revising something doesn’t mean at all that it’s deemed nullified; it simply means that we need to rectify the work, and make it as good as it can be. This is a well-known task, which, I repeat, has nothing to do with invalidating a work. To the contrary, such upgrades would even help the commandments to last and endure. Sadly, however, the important task of revising and correcting the religious texts and ideas has been largely neglected; and as such, mistakes of the past and of our forebears have lingered on, and past calamities continue to recur.

If so, then what’s the solution? As I mentioned, currently the cure for this pain is to bring all religious books to accord with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; or to put it carefully, the only text that could partially replace the content of such writings is the said Declaration. Humanity today ought to accept and promote the Declaration of Human Rights, instead of any religion or such books. Will that day ever come? Certainly, even though at the end of a long road and at an enormous cost, Time will finally make everyone understand the truth; and humankind will come to realize this weakness of his, and will move to rectify it. No doubt, such a day shall arrive.



The State of Israel is proud to have abolished the death penalty in that country. (Note: The execution of the wretched Eichmann, one of the murderous Nazi criminals of WWII, was an exception to the rule.) Was abolishing the capital punishment in the Jewish state a resentful disregard for the commands of the religious writings, or to the contrary, did it mean to keep in step with the modern civilization? Undoubtedly, this important legal improvement in itself has helped maintain the positive aspects of the religion, including its good laws, presently and for the future.

My point is as follows: The best way for humankind to achieve security and happiness is to eliminate the seditious content of all books; otherwise, it's clear that building and stockpiling the tools of mass destruction, at an astronomical cost in the scale of billions of dollars, has never been the solution. In other words, we dare say that most wars throughout history have stemmed from religious roots. Yet, unfortunately, humanity has yet to rightly understand that the main seeds and roots of such wars have always been lurking in those religious writings; and regrettably, the world has always reacted to such wars by making the more weapons to kill the more people. Such books should be corrected, for corruption to be eradicated, and for the world to see peace; otherwise, nothing is going to change. At the risk of repeating myself, at a minimum, for the very religious writings and their good laws to last, their seditious content must be purged entirely, that content as a result of which millions of people have been killed to this date. Here's hoping for that day.

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As I conclude this essay, I'd like to add a few words on the matters of freedom and human rights.

Alas, those countries which more or less enjoy freedom and democracy, and particularly profess thereof, such as the United States or Israel, have also been punished more than other countries for the word of “freedom” — for humankind has yet to become perfect. Today, as we can see, if a high-ranking professor, a government Secretary, a businessman, a student, or perhaps anybody else, makes a mistake on the American freeways, the police would treat them as they would treat a verifiable murderer: hands placed against the wall, or body spread on the ground, etc. In my view, such approach is not right, even if a person has done something wrong.

I’m thus compelled to repeat the words of Vaclav Havel, who said, in effect, “We can measure a civilization by the way its people treat the minorities among them.” I find it to be a great saying. We can even tell a housewife’s character by the way she treats her maids. I personally believe that today, we can measure how civilized are any country and its people — be it the likes of Switzerland or the United States, those of Zambia or South Africa, whether be a Western or an Eastern country — by the way they treat their own prisoners. As they treat the people on the freeways, so do they treat the good and the bad similarly in prisons, or to quote a Persian proverb, “they burn the dry wood and the wet altogether.” The matter is a cause for much shame and regret; and it proves yet again our claim, that alas, humankind has a long way ahead to perfection.

Amid this long eclipse, however, we have one solution: we should not sit idly and wait, but instead, we ought to kindle a light and do our part, until the sun of goodness and benevolence rises in full within the humankind, and spreads its light across the entire world. Here’s hoping for that day.

One takes in from the Divine Grace as he can receive;

The sea is not to blame if your cup is too small.

Or as another said,

Some read a word one way, while others do so another way;  
Each would grasp the meaning so far as their mind can take.

Thank you.

Wishing you the best,

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