

Family Ties: The Key to Happiness

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“What can you do to promote world peace?

Go home and love your family.” — Mother Teresa

Upon returning from a party, Nasser-addin Shah was asked by a minister, “I hope that his Majesty, the Center of the World’s Prayers, enjoyed the ceremony.” The Persian King of Qajar coldly replied, “It was a topsy-turvy, “bustling donkeys” kind of party; and our Royal Highness was present there, too!”¹ Indeed, it’s a topsy-turvy world and the people are there to enjoy themselves, each country in its own way. A tragicomic case in point was the scene of the recent United States free Presidential elections, whose extreme liberties led to quasi-promiscuity. Like “a mirror that shows more than a thousand pictures,” these events showed the true face of the ignorant American masses, and help everybody understand the words of the poet,

The monk looked at a book and thought of himself a sage.

Narcissist boarded the ship and thought of himself the captain.

All of the candidates aimed to reveal the worst about one another, oblivious that, **The grace of God bears with you very much, / But once spilled over, it’ll reveal your disgrace.** No doubt, such scenes are necessary to help freedom better find its true niche and make people realize the disarray that has permeated the political environment and the cases of the politicians. People had to see that what happens on the surface of the water is far different than the thick and dirty mud at the depths. And they had to see why those who most deserved to lead, they volunteered less often for leadership positions, forgoing its good for its pains. In contrast, the opportunists follow the wind whichever way it blows, pause and applaud for everyone that suits their aims. In the world of politics, they may even dance to a tune if the need be — one dancing a Viennese Waltz and the other a Persian Baba-Karam, while the third one is singing, “You play so that I dance! You play so that I dance!”

¹ «مجلس خرتوخری بود، ما هم تشریف داشتیم!»

An amateur thief broke into a house at the middle of the night, but he found nothing worth stealing. Disappointed, his eyes landed on a young couple sleeping together. Few feet away, a Persian drum called “tombak” stood next to a dance dress that lay on the ground. He figured out that they must be street entertainers. The mischievous thief hit hard on the tombak, and the poor couple woke up startled to see the dangerous man holding a knife. As the two began to beg for their lives, the thief suggested, “I’ll do you no harm if the man plays and the lady dances for my pleasure!”

Thus, at the middle of the night, the husband cuddled his instrument and the wife started to dance. The discerning thief also joined in to dance and snap alongside the lady, until the opportune moment, when still twisting and turning his body, he managed to flee the scene. The thief gone, the husband scolded his wife and said, “You devil! Why did you dance so well?” The wife stammered between the tears, “You saw it for yourself! You played by force, and I danced by force!” The husband said, “**Yes, you had to dance, but lifting up your legs was sheer mischief!**”

Many politicians dance and “tease” and make others dance, too, albeit at the cost of the people being badly beaten. A clear case in point is Mr. Trump’s wise tactic, who is offering prominent positions to some of his staunchest critics, perhaps even converting them to friends! Bravo! Gandhi was right when he said, “To forgive someone who wronged me, it won’t change the past, but it’ll change the future.” Albeit, the best of them already know that,

The wise man won’t seek a throne.

He thinks instead about tomorrow.

Let us ask why so much ignorance, chaos, addiction, social issues, economic complications, and promiscuity among the ignorant masses, exist today in America and around the world, and why the opportunists are given the chance to take advantage of this chaos.

This author believes that today, the fundamental failures of America and many other countries stem from **a lack of family ties**. In part due to this very real flaw, as a result of some wrong traditions, and in the absence of proper guidance and leadership, an immensely ignorant mass has been produced. No wonder that in this highly developed, rich, prosperous, invaluable and independent country, despite its golden opportunities and countless useful laws that apply to all qualifying people, there exists to date so many homeless and so much disarray, crime and

murder, prisoners, patients, psychotic addicts, social issues, economic problems, and insecurity. That's because the termite of "the void of family ties" has been chewing at the bases of modern American civilization and those of other countries.

To be homeless is not just about living on the streets. Many are survivors of broken families who live together without morally binding commitments; and once in awhile, without any appreciation for mutual responsibility, they bring a child to the world, thus adding another innocent being without support to the homeless sector. And as we know, who has not received love, he may not hesitate to carry out inhumane acts. A first-grader shows a picture to his classmate and says, "My mom got married for the third time, so I've got a new father. His name is Christopher." His classmate says, "Oh, Christopher! He's such a nice guy. **Last year he was my father!**" If only the political and religious leaders cared to see that **to weaken the families**, whatever the reason, **it's to weaken the defensive power of the whole society.**

In the past, people got married first before living together, and most children enjoyed parental protection. Today, however, the world is unaware that a lack of familial cohesion, disrespect for the family framework, and the dismantling of the family structure, these are leading to the breakup of societies. In such cities as Chicago, Detroit, and their likes around the globe, with higher levels of disarray and broken families, we may also observe increasingly larger numbers of prisoners, addicts, homeless, psychotic people, and a variety of crimes. Take a look at the statistics. Such lack of family ties, the absence of support and protection for the illegitimate children or many children of divorce, the unreasonable laws that divide people further in the "I v. You" divorce scenarios and their associated troubles, these have had adverse effects on the security, unity and cohesion of families. This also explains why so many people in the United States and Europe adopt pet dogs, these loyal animals, as a remedy for their loneliness, the lack of family ties, and a shortage of family love; and that by necessity, they substitute these animals for family love and even children. Certainly, without this remedy, the void of love, the pain of loneliness and the vacuum of family and friends, these would have made things even worse — and without the shepherd, more sheep would fall prey to the wolf. Fortunately, in the Jewish culture, "family" is referred to as *the parents' beith hamikdash*, i.e. "the sacred house of the parents". It's also been said in the name of God, "**Better for my name to be washed by the waters than for a family to break apart.**" Crying out aloud when vulnerable families are poisoned in the name of religion or politics, or for the interests of certain

special groups. Who breaks up families in the name of religion, he doesn't realize that he's driving others away from religion. Then we'll see how children, parents, and siblings are driven apart, and how the families break up. And that's fertile ground to produce the kind of people who in the name of religion, travel from one continent to another, only to kill strangers; and they kill and are killed.

The problem with the world of religion is not only that "the infidel thinks everyone believes in his religion." Rather, the main problem is that the extremist *wants* everybody to follow *his* religion. Whereas we are not responsible to change the others and the commandments, **but each one of us is responsible to change ourselves.**

The chronic illness of Religious Extremism, and a misplaced interference in other people's affairs, these have plagued today's Europe. This comes after the long, shameful and brutal age of the Inquisition and the past cruelties of the Popes, after the Holocaust, and following the destruction of countless rational and insightful human beings in the name of religion, only to replace them with millions of regressive people with no insight. Altogether, this suggests practically that the region is going through historic punishment and a stage of recuperation. **An eagle** sighed in the cage, "My suffering in the cage is a punishment for my cruelty in the garden." Many innocent Europeans suffer much pain today because of the cruelties that some of them carried out when cooperating with the Nazis. In comparison, in Arab countries, incitement has just been ignited, where **the pot calls the kettle black**, because both sides can't tell that the main problem is some senseless writings and those who preach them.

**A tree of a bitter nature,
Plant it in the Garden of Eden,
Water it from the heavenly rivers,
Or feed pure honey to its roots,
Yet it won't yield you gold,
But only its old bitter fruit.**

In contrast, the Far-Eastern countries such as Japan are going through a period of post-recuperation. In 1971, I met the CEO of a Japanese company on train from Ozaka to Okoyama. Following the distasteful Iranian habit of asking about people's religion and misjudging their character by it, I asked my Japanese company, "Do you belong to Buddhism or to Shinto?",

aware that the majority of the Japanese belonged officially to one of the two religions. The gentleman gave me a surprised look, the meaning of which I wouldn't recognize then, and he said, "To both." I asked, "How?" He said, "I participate in the happy days of both religions." I realized that happiness had the priority, and that their philosophy of preserving the religion was **akin to what wise parents did, i.e. to make their followers laugh so that they wouldn't cry**, in contrast to those who made people weep a lifetime of sorrow for sins they never committed, so far as they forgot how to laugh! I saw that for civilized countries and families, religion was not the main part of people's private lives, whereas in the less developed countries and families, it's turned into a means of incitement, spreading hatred and producing global religious psychopaths who might give or take lives for the sake of religion. This conflict in turn reflects the balance and cohesion of healthy families versus the shattered frames of the extremist families. Let's keep in mind that healing begins from the inside of the human body, while treatment begins on the outside; for what contributes most to the healing process is the immune system and the defensive power of the body. Likewise, the main factor in bringing about public welfare, comfort and peace for everyone, it's the defensive power of the society, which is the same as the strength and power of the family.

During a speech, an American rabbi told the 1500 Iranians in the audience, "We Americans should learn about family ties from the Iranians, while the Iranians should learn punctuality from us."

An American man told his Iranian neighbor, "I'm happy that we are neighbors, and that our 18-year old daughters are best friends. Could you please tell your daughter to encourage mine to leave our home? Her mom and I, too, left our family homes at 18."

The Iranian gentleman replied, "You have such a beautiful 18-year old daughter, who most needs her parents' love and guidance at this age. Where can she possibly go empty-handed? What an ugly tradition is this! If my daughter or son were away for an hour, their mother and I would go mad!" The American neighbor said, "This is our tradition. She should leave, gain experience, and find her own way." The Iranian man said, "Haven't you seen the likes of her, who after awhile, return to their father's home, but with an assortment of children and a host of prostitutes' illnesses?" The American father said, "**That day, it will be her problem to solve, not mine!**" There's a difference between a child who has grown up in her parents' center of

peace, love and grace, versus one raised in an atmosphere of constant parental quarrels. And there's a difference between those children who go to college dorms, or perhaps with parental consent and support, move into their own apartments, versus this American tradition.

My Friends; no doubt, parents should let their children make mistakes, fall down, and learn how to walk, but not so far as letting the child break a leg and be rendered handicapped for the rest of his life. By heeding the bitter experiences of the past, and by the demand of Time, everyone should throw away their wrong and obsolete traditions. There is no nation or religion whose beliefs and traditions are entirely correct and unchanging; and the older a religion is, the more mistakes it's made. Our beliefs and customs, too, will not be entirely comprehensible or acceptable to the future generations. Let's remember that the Jewish culture emphasizes *tikkun olam*, that is, "mending the world."

The television reporter asked an old couple, "Is this 96-year old gentleman your first husband, madam?" The old lady replied, "Yes, he is! We don't exchange things. We fix them. This man's fixable!"

So is the changing culture of Judaism. This culture doesn't reject books or people, but rather, it speaks of *tikkun olam*, of "mending the world"; that is, **it insists on keeping up with times, and adapting and adjusting to the contemporary culture.**

All too often, we've seen how the anti-Semites rely on some void and obsolete Jewish religious law to write and preach against Judaism, or to make movies about it. Whereas for hundreds of years, according to the principle of *tikkun olam*, the laws which did not agree with the contemporary knowledge, including 323 of the original 613 laws, were annulled. If so, crying out aloud when a Jewish person is unaware of this and continues to consider such obsolete laws to be holy (sic!). We'll all do good to heed the words of the poet: **Run in shame and regret from your mistake, / For to persist that you were right, it's another mistake.**

Fortunately, even though children believe in Santa Clause — or "The Crow", "Amou Nouruz", or "the new born child" — to have brought them a certain toy from the air, down the chimney, or from the hospital, or to have said some nice things about them, as adults, they will surely recognize these as just some soothing parental lies; even if they'll likely repeat those lies to their own children! On a larger scale, humankind has gradually arrived at a stage where everyone understands, to the extent they can, that many words attributed to religion or politics

are akin to the “Ahoy!” of Santa Clause — or the presidential candidates. They were meant to serve some expediency, and it remains for their intelligent and realistic audience to find the truth for themselves.

The Rumi wrote the following masterpiece of a poem about the dividing line of “knowing” among human beings:

**Who knows and who wants to know,
He'll climb to the height of happiness.
Who knows and knows that he knows,
He'll jump Honor's horse atop the azure dome.
Who knows but doesn't know that he knows,
He holds the canteen yet remains parched.
Who knows not and knows that he doesn't know,
He'll limp and ride his mule to the destination.
Who knows not but who wants to know,
He'll save his body and soul from ignorance.
Who knows not and knows not that he doesn't know,
He shall remain forever in twofold ignorance.
Who knows not and doesn't want to know —
Pity for such a creature to remain.**

A lady told her 3-year old neighbor, “Congratulations, honey! Yesterday, your dad bought you a sister!” The child said, “My dad never buys anything that he can make by himself. This one mom brought home from the hospital!” Oh, my dear, today's children!

Today, most countries are afflicted more or less with the problem of unacceptable traditions and a loss of respect for the spiritual aspect of family. The rich people for their wealth, the poor by their poverty, and the lesser developed countries as before in the hands of religious profiteers, they are all held back, oblivious to the wisdom of a thinker who said, “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.”

Indeed, the shame of homelessness, the psychopaths, and the prisoners and addicts, these have plagued most countries and continue to embarrass their nations. A warning is attributed to

Lenin, that “America will achieve the apex of power, but it will be defeated by the trouble of addiction.” Writers can criticize easily, but what about a solution?

During the Clinton presidency, I saw a television program regarding the American homeless and the negative consequences of the issue. The program spoke of the homeless being sent by the Cities in cold-weather states to such warm-weathered states as California, Florida, etc. It also included interviews with a number of the homeless and even the prisoners among them. I was surprised to see how educated some of them were, and that only bad fortune, the absence of family, and the void of government attention, had pushed them down such misery. Some of the others were lost wandering souls, like a family of five, a husband, a wife and their three children, who in the first few days of their wandering, had lost one another. It was utterly painful to watch them in such predicament.

I wrote a letter to President Bill Clinton in which I spoke of the Israeli *kibbutz* concept as a potential solution. I wrote that the Israeli government, especially during the early years of the country’s independence and the incoming flood of penniless immigrants, many without skills, managed to develop numerous *kibbutzim* (large and shared agricultural, scientific and industrial villages) to settle countless immigrants in these communes, where they could work, study, form families, and do everything without exchanging money; and thanks to their schools, lead very honorable and useful family lives. Gradually, *kibbutz* was transformed into one of the respectable foundations of the Israeli economy and a center of the country’s scientific family, so far as it helped to settle the new immigrants with remarkable success. Thus, within 60 years, in an unprecedented miracle, the state had expanded to 10 times its original population.

In that letter, I recommended that the United States government could apply the useful experience of the Israeli government to the housing of the homeless sector in several limited capacity *kibbutzim* that could be established in this vast and prosperous country. These people could have a chance to live and work in such communal hamlets, provide a future for their families, and help make the national economy flourish, fortify national honor and put an end to the current corruptions. Thereafter, they could live anywhere they wished as useful members of the society.

A few days later, I received a letter signed by the President, in which his honor had thanked me for my idea and had promised that it would be reviewed. Although, I didn’t hear anything

about it afterwards, I hope that the government of Mr. Trump will pick up and study this idea. **Let life put forth a thousand pictures: None could match what we hold in the mirror of our imagination.**

At any rate, people's choices in the free elections reflect the intellectual maturity and the merits of the voters. **Bertrand du Juvenel** said, "A society of sheep must in time beget a government of wolves." One reason for Mr. Trump's success was that during the last days before the election, none of the parties supported him, and ironically, the people who had been bitterly disappointed by both parties, ended up voting for him.

Right after the wedding, a spoiled and clumsy groom tells his mother, "Mom! I'm afraid of going into the bride-chamber!" His mother consoles him, "Don't be afraid, my darling son! You just walk in, and I'll be right here, behind the door, drumming for you!" A few minutes later, the groom is heard calling out from the inside of the chamber: "Mom! Mom! Play a fast folk dance!" Perhaps we should be playing a "fast folk dance" for the new groom of the White House, too.

A young lady with dark eyes and brows came to me for a job interview. I asked, "Are you Persian?" She said, "Sadly, not. I'm Lebanese Armenian." I asked, "Why sadly so?" She said, "If I were Persian, I would have married sooner to an Iranian guy who could make me happy."

It's not a matter of weather, or the eyes and brows, but it's the precious Ahurai culture of Iran that makes the difference, even as by "the lesser developed countries" we speak of their people and their underdeveloped cultures rather than their land or climate. Every genuine parent in the world, including those raised in the Jewish and Iranian cultures, from pregnancy to death, they see themselves as the guardian angels of their children, responsible for their protection and flourishing, even if it meant that they had to sacrifice their own lives for their children. For the sake of their children, such parents are prepared to pay any price necessary, devoid of the divisive mentality observed in the others. In return, genuine children respect and support their parents throughout their lives, as well. **This is the one true prescription for the health of a society, instead of wealth or illusive powers.** I hope that Iranian immigrants will preserve their reasonable and invaluable traditions, will abandon those traditions which contradict modern understanding and knowledge, and will stop the plant-lice of religious, political or social divides to crawl into the colorful gardens of their lives. We've had enough poor experiences.

“No problem, even Death, can be timely.” We must remove the causes behind the problems, and behind death, and among such causes are the artificial religious and political divisions. The youngsters should bear in mind that family ties, the comfort of family love and familiarity, and the parents’ interest and behavior at the home where their future spouse was raised, these are far more important than beauty or wealth. **Don’t scold me for growing in this lawn, / For I grow up as they nurture me.** A child raised in a house saturated with the parents’ mutual love is rather different than one who grew up in a family full of tension. People grow wiser in the embrace of wise parents, and they blossom through life’s crises. Achieving humankind’s happiness calls for enormous storms to blow away the dry leaves, i.e. all forms of corruption, off of the path before us.

Such a storm has started to blow, in few places in the name of religion, but in the advanced countries through the internet, **this boundless talking and listening treasury of knowledge,** and as it continues to march on, it carries along the weak and the strong alike to change the face of the world. The signs of this transformation can be seen everywhere, so far as we may say that the world is on a path to a grand leap akin to the large leap from the cave life to the urban life, from the Stone Age to the Bronze Age, or from jungle animals to human beings. This transformation will take place in the long run, as by the demand of Time, humankind will realize his ideas and beliefs. The day will come when instead of promoting divisiveness in the guise of sect or religion and sending out political and religious ambassadors to other countries, the ambassadors will be exchanging up-to-date scientific information between themselves, a topic that demands its own dedicated discussion.²

A poor lady wept and confided to her even poorer neighbor, “The children will be home soon, and I still don’t have any food to put on the table.” The neighbor replied, “My situation is far worse. Not only we have no food for the kids, but also I’ve got guests over for the night!”

The United States carries its own burden but also the heavier burden of the global troubles; and leading this complex mass requires much power and wisdom. One way to succeed in this matter is to support and establish certain institutions that could provide the grounds to protect

² The original Persian of this essay contains the full version of a poem by Rumi, a masterpiece that employs the word “I” or “Ego” 70 times to serve the poet’s mystical insights. An English translation of the poem would neither do justice to the poem nor to the narrative of this essay. The Persian-speaking reader, however, is encouraged to find and enjoy the poem known as *Mathnavi-e Haftad Man*, «مثنوی هفتاد من», in the original version of this essay. — P.A.

and preserve families and long-standing genuine ties, such as we may see in smaller American and European towns.

Conclusion: A chain is as strong as its weakest link. Likewise, in today's America and many other countries around the world, the unit of "family" finds itself as the weakest link of the unity and health of the world, and thus, a potential threat to global sanity and security. That's because only "kindness and love" can conserve this vital link and help it survive. By its strength, however, this link can sustain the various other links in the life of our species and solve the related problems. To solve a collective problem we need collective cooperation. As such, the collection of nations, governments, and religious and social authorities will need to work together and promote the invaluable gift of the unity of families; otherwise, guns and canons, freedom, politics or religion, can do nothing. All societies are built on the foundation of the continuity of family. It's the collection of families that form the positive multi-billion population of the world, and the healthier the families are, the calmer will be the world. Naturally, this is not by itself a solution for every problem; but family unity is able to solve many problems by the virtue of its own management. May we appreciate our family ties and make constant effort to preserve them.

Finally, in smaller American towns, guns are permitted, too, but their abuse of guns to kill people is next to zero compared to larger cities, because in those places, family ties are intact, the garden is green, and the gardener's happy.

**Pity that at the prime of youth, I was not
The old and wise sage who'd seen everything.**

*Norman "Nourollah" Gabay,
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To receive copies of this and other essays and writings by Norman Gabay in English and Persian, including his book entitled *An Invitation to Reason*, and *The Glossary of the Kashani Jewish Dialect*, please visit the following website: BabaNouri.com.

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