

# Fate or Foresight?

An Essay in Three Parts

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لطفاً برای خواندن نسخه فارسی این نوشتار به فایل همراه مراجعه کنید.

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## **Part One**

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**If it's fate, then what about foresight?**

**But if it's foresight, then what about the fate?**

**Maurice Maeterlinck** once quipped, “How often did I see the very people who believed in fate watch the traffic carefully before crossing the road.”

**Indeed, what is fate — or what will be our fate with poor foresight?**

During our temporary stay in the religious settlement of Ramat Shlomo, Jerusalem, we became neighbors with a super-religious family who lived in a house near our apartment. They lived in self-inflected poverty, and thereto had merely 17 children (*sic!*), besides a handsome bridegroom.

In our first few days in the settlement, they wouldn't answer to our greetings, and the children ran away from us, because we didn't wear the *yarmulke* or *kippa*, the small hat worn at all times by religious Jews. (Crying out aloud for a belief that can change by a slice of cloth.) But my wife's immense kindness towards their children converted them, and the family gradually

befriended us so far as to show their peak of love, they invited us over for a Friday night to have dinner with them on the Eve of Shabbat at their modest yet love-rich abode.

As we entered the kindergarten — strike that out, their little house, the children not used to seeing strangers for guests were so excited that we grew happy to be there. Soon, we learned of the parents' secret to managing a crowd of children, that is, the elder kids in turn took care of the younger ones at every corner of the house, even under the tables! All of the children watched us. The mother of 17 kids, frail and exhausted, on the one hand, and her husband, the cheerful and healthy *ba'al*, not yet 60, on the other hand, both insisted that, “according to our tradition, who is with us for the Shabbat dinner, they must also stay with us for tomorrow's breakfast, lunch and dinner!” (The Hebrew word *ba'al* stands for both “husband” and “owner”. You may draw your own many conclusions! I still wonder whether the custom of trading coins at the weddings, somewhat evoking the trading of merchandise and real-estate properties, has roots in this second sense of the word, as to imply “taking the ownership of” something, or someone.)

We had already fulfilled our duties, so we observed their custom, which would also give me a good chance to learn and debate. The host, with a world of warmth and sincerity, placed my seat next to his and the bridegroom's, while the ladies took their places at the end of the table on colorful seats of various heights. The ceremony included some joyful Eastern European songs, directed by the *ba'al*, the bridegroom and the elder children. My wife and I had never seen such exuberant performance at any of the homes in Beverly Hills or Kings Point. The happy air reminded me of the annual Thanksgiving ceremony in the United States, and I quipped, “Thanks God, for instead we have one thanksgiving every week, together with the whole family, absent his honor the turkey!” May they rest in peace who left for us a colorful bouquet of festive gatherings; otherwise, I dare say that many cousins wouldn't have known one another.

The dinner was delicious, less in size than the dessert served at some other homes, but better than those extravagant meals meant for twenty guests but prepared for fifty. Afterwards, we joined the host to recite, as he whispered fast and softly through a variety of prayers.

The bridegroom wore the large and rounded fur hat that was otherwise particular to cold regions. Even though he was perspiring from the heat, he wouldn't remove the hat, lest his faith would go with the wind! I asked him, “Where are you from?” He said, “The Great Britain.” I asked, “What do you do these days?” He answered, “I've been studying at the Yeshivah for the

past 7 years.” I asked, “How long does it take to finish your studies at the Jewish seminaries?” He said, “There are no limits.” I asked, “What textbooks do they teach?” He said, “*Shulchan Aruch* and *The Book of Zohar*, although the content of the courses varies depending on the sect.” (*Shulchan Aruch* or “The Spread Table” is the most comprehensive and most referenced collection of the Jewish religious code, which was written based on the *Talmud*, itself a collection of the *Mishnah* and *Gmarah*.)

So, even the religious people are composed of several sects! I’m baffled as to why more than teaching the holy *Torah* itself at the Jewish seminaries, generation after generation, they continue instead to teach monotonously a variety of commentaries. They should be aware that there are as many interpretations, ideas and commentaries among the adherents of any religion as there are people in the world, including especially the rabbis and other religious devotees. But any two people may understand the same thing differently, and even the intellectual powers of the siblings are no two the same. As such, there’s no reason for infinitely repeating such outdated thoughts. (In my experience, there are many moody and naturally inconsistent people around. They resemble lost drivers who change directions unwittingly. Demonstrably, such people, in their quest to find what they lost, even after converting from the religion or sect into which they were born, still intent on finding their imaginary idol, they take refuge to the bricks and mud of the buildings, the gravestones or some photos, and expect support from them.) **I tried and failed to see why / The pious man worshipped the lifeless?**

Our conversation continued, as the bridegroom seemed eager to speak. I had observed that the people of the settlement didn’t watch the television, nor did they listen to the radio. In practice, as late as the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they continued instead to deliver the news to the blessed ears of the town’s religious citizens via the heralds! So I asked the bridegroom, “Do you use computers or the internet?” He said, “*Assoor!* Never!” (The Hebrew word *Assoor* means “forbidden”.) I asked, “What about the radio or the TV?” With a condescending look he said, “No.” I sighed in pain silently. As they say, the pain that makes us silent is heavier than the pain that makes us cry aloud. It was a painful silence. I told myself,

**It’s the hubbub of science that brings us awake!**

**Alas, the howling of superstition can still be heard!**

Unfortunately, religious advocates don't notice that today's illiterate is who doesn't know and doesn't want to know how to use such modern conveniences as computers or the internet. The tens of thousands of the students of such religious seminaries, many a future leader of our society, they won't be able to provide for themselves and the society by praying. We can't stay in some cocoon in hopes of *ha-shem* or "God", and yet expect to succeed in our goals.

Clearly, to blame our self-made miseries on an inaccessible "god" and to blame our mistakes on "fate" and the will of such "god", it's a colossal mistake! As **Parvin E'tesami** said,

**The story of fate is one of madness and not of fortune —  
To fall off the roof and to blame it on the fate.  
You can't redeem the time past, so take my advice:  
Don't sell your time short, for priceless is this jewel.**

On the one hand, to be a happy mystic, to appreciate the moment, to be faithful and trusting, and to lead an ascetic life, denying pleasures to oneself; and on the other hand, to stay in a cocoon, to rely on the religion for bringing children into the world without planning, and to raise them haphazardly inside a cage — and to be an eternal burden on *ha-shem*, God! I thought to myself, "Who has understood life better — these folks or those who constantly seek to increase their material and scientific wealth, and to put it confidently, 95% of whose children have received higher education?" I answered myself through the voice of the poet, "**Perhaps, Who made the seven worlds, / He gave to each person as they deserved.**"

**Whether you see the rich, or the poor,  
They are as they should have been.**

I asked myself, alongside the poet, "**Then what's the nature of fate, / Or what's the wise thing to do with a poor fate?**"

And I concluded,

**One people ponders the religion and faith,  
Whilst the other wonders between doubt and certainty.  
Suddenly, a messenger shall appear from the ambush, saying,  
"O ignorant bunch! Neither this nor that is the right way!"**

I was reminded of the superstitious Nasseraddin Shah, the King of Qajar, who was in the habit of throwing lavish memorial services managed by his Chief Treasurer. At one such ceremony, the King noticed that his Treasurer had assigned three separate booths to three religious groups, namely, Jews, Armenians and Zoroastrians. The King asked the Treasurer, “How come you gave booths to these people in a memorial service?” The Treasurer answered, “Because who knows? They may prove themselves right in the Afterlife, and if so, we better get our own booths there in return!” Should we be thinking of our own booths, too, that if perchance, these folks were right, we wouldn’t be left alone in an imaginary heaven?!

Anyhow, I told myself that children shouldn’t be raised blind, in the name of religion, for fears of seeing evil. There’s no reason for denying ourselves the pleasures of life. The philosophy of religion is to bring about the welfare of humankind. **The holy Torah has given priority to protecting our own lives, where it says, “*tishmor et nafsheyehA*,” “protect your life.”**

Remarkably, the guidebook for the emergency oxygen masks on the airplanes instructs us that when children are onboard, we should first wear our own masks before putting on the child’s, so that should arise any danger, we’d be conscious and able to care for the child. O dear self-proclaimed religious advocates! You ought to be the moderate and healthy bread-winners of your families so that you can raise balanced and meritorious children — otherwise, an army of “extras” will have little to offer.

One evening, in New York City, a married couple climbed the stairs on foot only to arrive at the eighth floor, exhausted, panting and perspiring. One neighbor saw them in that misery and asked, “Is the elevator broken?” They answered, “No, it’s the Shabbat! Today we are obligated to close business and to rest. We can’t [according to some fabricated religious code!] use cars or the electricity.” The neighbor was surprised. “What kind of rest is this?!” He asked. “You’re hardly left with enough energy to speak! What does “rest” have to do with cars and electricity, which are ironically some means of convenience? Wouldn’t this be an insult to the religion and the religious person? Aren’t you already using the light of the bulb and the blow of the air conditioner? Is it more of religious observance or self-deception?” The couple said, “We’d better have a *kosher* elevator. (*Sic!*) We’ll ask the management of the building to address the issue.” The curious neighbor asked, “What’s a *kosher* elevator?” The couple answered, “It’s an elevator

that won't run just for me (*sic!*) and it'll stop automatically at every floor." The neighbor said, "But then, won't you be using the electricity by just stepping into such an elevator and by letting it carry you to your destination using the electrical power?"

**My friends;** believe me that this author suffers discussing the nonsense more than anybody else. But as we see, the society's silence and indifference has given some nonsense an official status. The people are to blame, for a shop without customers would be closed. The expression "*kosher* elevator", the idea that it's okay to step into it but a sin to touch its buttons, it embarrasses us as an insult to the common sense and to the religion. We can't deem such a religious shame as "observance". We can see here that any lie may be thought true by merely repeating it. Tolerating such believers would put a stamp of holiness on the nonsense and superstitions — as today's anti-minority trends worldwide and the plague of regression evidently demonstrate.

## **Part Two**

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The next day, our conversation continued. I said to the bridegroom, "You and your teachers know well that your textbook, namely the *Talmud*, this collection of rabbinical debates from thousands of years ago, tells us, **'Don't limit a child to your own learning, for he or she was born in another time.'**"

Thence why this author has said repeatedly that **if the children won't turn out better than their parents, they'll be deemed behind their times.** "Dear bridegroom; is it not true that the textbooks must always depend on the scientific ways and the understanding of the generation who receives the lessons and on their times?"

"To teach over and over, generation after generation, some books full of material that may or may not agree with today's understanding and modern civilization, and to do so in the guise of spreading the religion, it's against that talmudic advice; why, it means to revolve in a circle and to stagnate in the darkness. I know that the philosophy of religion is different than that of science. Nonetheless, we may question as to why a Nobel Prize has yet to be awarded to any Yeshivah student. A young person has no reason to pray all his life in order to learn some religious subjects. The *Talmud* has referred to people who don't work as *moley olam*, i.e., "those

who waste the world”. To be without work, to remain a burden, and to be constantly intent on praying, these are no answers to our daily lives; rather, they’ll lead to self-aware poverty.”

I continued to speak. Reason tells us, “You act, and God will send his blessing!” Alas, the superficial person says, “Action from the prayer, and the blessing from God!” I asked why we couldn’t be like many other religious people, such as the intellectual and reasonable Orthodox Jews, who remain active far from superstitions, receive higher education, and yet are religious. Our forefathers, under the despicable shadow of discrimination, didn’t preserve their religion by spreading some nonsense; rather, they did so by promoting and practicing the proud and timeless commands of the *Torah* and the Jewish culture. In today’s world, and based on our contemporary needs, from a 4-year old child to a hundred-year old adult, everybody constantly benefits from the blessings of computers, the internet and other electronic achievements, and more; so far as our world cannot lead a single normal day without such modern means. Thus, to avoid using such achievements in the name of religion, and to raise tens of thousands of otherwise meritorious students, these parents of tomorrow, intellectually blind, it would embarrass the entire society and make it fall behind. At the least, please don’t try to take the others back with you; instead, try and follow the sensible material of your own textbooks and your reasonable Orthodox fellows. To the world, a Jew is always a Jew, whether be superstitious or rational. Please stop the nonsense. We have no control over the textbooks full of lies which are taught at the schools of some psychopaths, nor over the movies, writings or the kind of misguidance which the likes of you almost gift out as ready-made excuses into the hands of our enemies in the anti-Semitic countries. Nevertheless, I do ask why in the world some long-expired material needs to be taught as before.

**Erich Fromm** says, “The history of man is a graveyard of great cultures that came to catastrophic ends.” For an evident contemporary case in point, we may recall the Soviet Union, which despite its stockpile of tens of thousands of atomic bombs, caved in to the Times. For, they couldn’t offer a rational, measured and informed response to the fresh new demands of their time. To break up families in the name of religion is not protecting the religion, but it’s a sure preamble to the decomposition of the society.

I pointed out to the bridegroom that the good writings which agreed with modern knowledge and understanding, such as the *Pirkey Avot*, a.k.a. “The Counsel of the Sages”, they resembled

the honey produced by the efforts of a thousand bees, meant to sweeten the palate of their readers. Alas, bigoted people are allergic to this honey! Let's look and see how, given our time and place, we may benefit the more from both the reasonable commands of the holy *Torah* and modern sciences. Our religion doesn't need to expand by spreading superstitions. Moses's uprising was meant to but fight oppression and superstition, even as it aimed to raise justice. Enough of imitations! Lost people shouldn't surprise us; the real surprise is when we see the flaw but don't recognize it.

My friends; the very nature of bigotry makes the superficial person accept blindly whatever is written or told by his fellow group members, for he likes the goal but can't see the damages on the road. **Khalil Gibran** said, "Pity the nation divided into fragments, each fragment deeming itself a nation."

Regressive teachers, as varied as they are, can never be taken as the realist teachers and counselors of the society, particularly at the schools.

The former French President, **George Pompidou** once said, and I paraphrase, "There are three major causes for destruction: War, Earthquakes, and the Counsel of the Fool." Instead of consulting with an ignorant bunch in the name of religion, let's learn from our mistakes and those of the others. And let's fix our society's shortcomings by the aid of such knowledge.

**Napoleon** said, "Fear not those who disagree with you, but those who disagree with you yet are too cowardly to let you know." Only the hypocrites play both sides and align themselves with which way the wind blows. Otherwise, who has no pebbles in the shoe, who has no skeletons in the closet, he has no fear of expressing his thoughts.

You can't show the truth forever upside-down by a facade of holiness. It's high time for the religious seminaries to teach and promote the religion in a scientific way, to present the commandments in the language of modern science, and to make them understood. Past behind us are the times for scaring people of God and the mullahs, for-pretense transactions, tying threads around our wrists, tying our hopes to one mausoleum or another, and other embarrassing nonsense, such as almost converting our homes and offices to spectacular altars by hanging pictures of the mullahs on the walls. We cannot fight Time and the contemporary civilization. Those societies will succeed which complement each other, not those which face off one another. Today's dangerous divisions among the people have their roots in the old sectarian trends.

My friends; all evidence and explanations fall flat before who doesn't want to understand. The author's words are the glass showcase of his understanding and common sense, and it's up to the reader to judge what the speaker has offered.

This is what I mean: Let's remain steadfast in our loyalty toward the reasonable, proud and eternal commands of the holy *Torah*; and let's be flexible and in step with our time when practicing them. As Sa'eb said, **“You won't win against the autumn wind's slaps (i.e. Time). / Shed your leaves and the load before the autumn arrives.”**

History bears witness that the first step to spread divisions and an aversion to religion has always been to follow the superstitions to promote the religion.

I share a common goal with the religious people. However, whereas I say that religion should be preserved by being in synch with, and adapting to, modern science and civilization, the honorable religious people say that to preserve the religion, we should teach and advocate some long expired and obsolete material.

It's said that the people of Tous, Iran, asked the renowned sage and mystic **Sheikh Abu-Saeed Abul-Kheyr** to grant them a sermon. The Sheikh obliged. A raised platform was set up in the *khanghah*, that is, the temple of the Dervishes, for the Sheikh to speak.

The crowd was too large for the *khanghah*, yet the people kept pushing to enter the place. As the Sheikh was about to speak, a man barely reached inside and shouted, “God bless who takes a step forward from where he stands!” — by which he meant that if everyone took one step forward, there'd be more room for the others to enter. The Sheikh heard him and said, “What I wished to say and what every sage ever meant to say [including this author's writings!], this good man summed it up in so few words. God bless whom takes one step forward from where he stands.” He then descended the pulpit and left the place.

Indeed, religion does not naturally evolve to perfection; rather, it's up to us to keep step with the times and walk a step forward from where we stand.

The famed poet **Ahmad Shamlou** was so hurt that once he wrote, “God exiled me from the Paradise, / and frightened me of the Earth. / You exiled me from the Earth, / and frightened me of God. / At long last, I've found peace beside Satan, / who neither rejects me, / nor frightens me of anything.” See for yourself if centuries of regressors' efforts have produced anything but a

low Jewish population and the countless frustrated people in need, captives of the skin of superstitions. The answer is negative. Six million of our dearest fellow Jews prayed, and yet, what happened to the answers they should have received? **“Comrades! Let us make a pact! / We shan’t endure infamy and darkness upon us! / We either lose head to salvage the truth, / Or we shall win and close the road on the enemies.”**

Who promotes superstitions, aware or not, they wrong both themselves and the society. May the day never come when the cliff of religious superficiality becomes the cliff before the entire society.

Those who earnestly imagine some nonsense to be true, who’re deluded to think that they’re telling the truth just because they aren’t lying, they are repeating the lies which they heard. We should pay attention to the meaning of what’s being said, instead of how the speaker may look. The truth is what the healthy mind favors, not what an imitator prefers.

**It’s hard to tell what cannot be said.  
It’s not the tongue’s but the heart’s task.  
I’m wanting of new eloquence and rhetoric,  
New idioms and a different language,  
To tell the story of my ills,  
My weaknesses and my miseries.**

Let’s give bluntness and the courage to act to the countless rational arguments offered by our very own reasonable rabbis. We don’t need fear-mongering, seizing upon superstitions and self-deception, to practice the precious commands of the *Torah*. The counsel of religious advocates presented through fear, prayers, and swimming against the flow of life, it’s had no outcome but regression. They can do no other. To draw upon the superstitions is to reject the commandments.

**Don’t look at every beggar, for you belong to us.  
Don’t sell yourself cheaply, for you’re priceless.  
The mines have no jewel\* such as you, and  
The world has no soul such as yours.  
For, this is a shrinking world, but  
You’re a life-enhancing soul.**

(\* In this context, the jewel of reasonable commandments.)

**If we don't appreciate the worth of Time, then we'll be much ashamed of the outcome of our wasted moments.** At the end,

**Good and Evil are born and raised by our thought.**

**One slips away from our hands, and the other shall pass.**

### **Part Three**

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As I continued to speak, I said that who was ripe and ready for his mind to be confiscated, he'd be miserable; and the more miserable were who surrounded him. We can't accept all readings of a text, especially the nonsensical commentaries of the past. Let me offer an example.

**A Hindu said in irony, Comrades! There are two Gods!**

**Damned be who said that there was just one God!**

The poet was criticized. "Why the blasphemy?!" They asked him in protest. He replied, "I said no blasphemy, but you read it wrong. I meant, 'A Hindu said in irony, 'Comrades! There are two Gods!' Damned be who said that! There was just one God!'" Indeed, sometimes with a single change of punctuation, and depending on the reader's mindset, the passage changes meaning completely, and blasphemy turns into prayer. Ultimately, the meaning depends on the reader's understanding and interpretation. God gave us not a book of prayers but the intellect, so that we would nurture it and tell the road from the pothole! If prayers were effective, then we wouldn't need all those sciences, medicine and hospitals, but instead, a con-man writing spells for us would suffice. Prayer has no use for anyone but to console the one who prays. May the day never come when someone finds themselves in trouble, and the opportunists find a chance to exploit a victim. Let's ignore whom practices superstitions, and let's close down the shops of the swindlers.

**God's grace will much tolerate you,**

**But once the line's crossed, it'll shame you.**

**Today, no professor** relies merely on the somewhat **old printed textbooks**, but they show up before the class with their most **up-to-date notes** to include the latest findings.

Your religious textbooks belong justly to libraries and museums, not to modern classrooms. Please don't cut off the wings of our youth in the name of religion; lost wings won't grow back! Humankind did not move out of the Stone Age by the way of religion, but it was science that liberated him from the primitive times.

The bridegroom, who up until that point had remained silent, gave a sigh from the depth of his heart, and then assumed a new silence — **a two-sided silence which signified a two-sided discontent.**

Following the Shabbat ceremonies, the respected *ba'al* noticed that we were still surprised by the number of children. (The Hebrew word *ba'al*, “husband” and “owner”, also stands for “host”. It's interesting that the people of India, before regaining independence, used to call the British people as *sAheb*, i.e. “owner” or “boss”.) To comfort us, he showed us the photograph of a large group of people. It looked like the group photos of college graduation ceremonies. As he explained, “This is our latest family photo. That old man at the center was my father, who passed away recently at the age of 95. He too had 17 children, as I do. Some of his children have even more than 17 kids.” I asked, “How many family members are there in this picture, including the grandchildren?” He said, “About 850 heads!”

In times past, farmers harvested maybe ten seeds of wheat from a planted seed. Today, it's said that they can harvest as many as 200 per a single seed. May God bless such lands! In the old times, people had to climb a good palm tree like monkeys to harvest say at the most about 170 pounds of dates. Today, in Israel, they harvest up to about 900 pounds per year from a short palm tree! (It's of interest that the unit word for the palm tree in Persian is *nafar*, the same unit used for people. It's likely a remnant of the Arabic language which suggests that given the low population of the Arabian deserts, camels and palm trees were also referred to as *nafar*.) May God bless the science of agriculture in the advanced and self-sufficient countries — and the young Israel is one of the only six such self-sufficient countries worldwide which can produce their own food supply.

Has religion kept step with the advancements made in scientific, economic, hygienic, agricultural and defense areas? Could there be any possibility of growth if such pillars of human

survival didn't flourish — or instead, to live and to grow, we should keep praying around the clock?

Indeed: to merit the modern life, and to deserve and benefit from the means for a better living. This takes me back to 80 years ago. The old public baths included something like a pool called *khazineh* in Persian, or *mikveh* in Hebrew, which were incredibly polluted. Thence we may fathom why the average life expectancy used to be very low, for certainly the use of *mikveh* was a cause of premature deaths. Hundreds of people used the green-dirty and muddy water of a *mikveh* for ritual bathing, whereas water is the same everywhere, the goal is to be clean, and the cleaner the water, the better is served the purpose. Eventually, the bathing showers emerged and their gradual and spreading use replaced the extraordinarily non-hygienic *khazineh* or *mikveh*. In the meantime, some mullahs who didn't merit, nor deserved, nor understood the benefits of the improved means of living, declared that “the shower isn't deemed legitimate water, and the right way to do *ghosl* or the ritual ablution remains the way of *khazineh* or *mikveh*, that is, by full bodily immersion!” — Very much like the “*kosher* elevator”, into which you'd need to jump on the Shabbat!

We've seen public *khazineh-ha* and *mikvot*. We know that the water used by even one other person is too contaminated for us to use. We know of various contagious diseases. As I read in a recent issue of a magazine, the Hepatitis B virus could transfer from a carrier to the door knob by merely touching it, and thus, it could potentially pass on to the next person who touched the knob. If so, then there's little room to defend the *mikveh* and the nonsensical exaggerations about it — so far as they dared perform the embarrassing act of “feeding the *mikveh* water” of a certain mullah to a patient, right before my eyes! Some thousands of years ago, for hygienic practices, they advised the Stone Age puddles in the form of the *mikveh* and thought them legitimate — for they knew nothing about the germs and contagious diseases, and instead, when people got sick due to such ignorance, they would blame it on “the evil eye!” Alas, although it's been awhile since Louis Pasteur discovered the true cause of “the evil eye”, there are still people around whose bodies dwell in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, yet their minds are stuck back in the Dark Ages! They stagnate in their antiquated beliefs, repeat a bunch of baseless ideas, and call the outcome of their ignorance as “fate” or “evil eye”. My grandfather, may he rest in peace, used to tell us, “To think that you could get hurt by ‘the evil eye’ is nonsense. Just don't do anything that would make your enemies jealous, who could hurt you for it.” Please, stop it.

To immerse but also your dinnerware in the *mikveh* is no virtue but all ignorance! Apparently, such believers can't tell between cleansing in the hot dishwasher and the "ablution" in the *mikveh*, or they don't wish to tell, since they are "religious". At the least, please don't attribute some inappropriate acts to the religion.

**See the flaws of the world by the inner eye,  
For the visible eye can't see what's hidden.**

As another poet said,

**If you did a wrong, run in remorse,  
For it's yet another wrong not to regret one.**

**Alfred Nobel** said, "One decision is enough to change a destiny." We can follow modern sciences, and yet optimize our religious and traditional commands to help them stay and be of better use. For instance, we may upgrade the religious and traditional *khazineh* or *mikveh* to meet the modern standards of hygiene, and thus, preserve the practice of the commandments and fulfill the intent of the lawmaker. Or to the contrary, we could stay in the cocoon of ignorance because of some empty claim that "the religion itself does not change", continue on our wrong path, endure hardships and diseases for generation after generation, and call it religious observance. Alas!

Indeed, one wrong decision could be enough to change the fate of an individual and a society. And the choice is ours to make.

My friends; let's examine the outcome of spreading the superstitions. The fundamental problem is Ignorance. There's no insult above having a young educated lady in our modern world tell her audience that "the *Torah* says we should avoid the evil eye!" — whereas this isn't the case at all. These inappropriate words, similar to, say, "Thank you God, for You did not create me a woman!", were uttered by some superstitious rabbi in the ancient times. Then following Gutenberg's invention of print in 1440, like so many other manuscripts with improper content, they were issued in large numbers as "holy scripture" without proper evaluation — and to date, 577 years later, they continue to be reprinted without change as "holy books". Many Jews haven't agreed with some of such texts — like "O God, keep us safe from the evil eye!" or "Thank You that I wasn't made a woman!", etc. — but nobody could alter them until the recent

decades, when the Reform community dared and removed them from the scripture, a move still protested by the radical religious groups! Indeed, which side is right? Well, Time will certainly tell. But for the time being, maintaining the balance receives the top priority.

### **Conclusion:**

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There is no doubt that a person's right to choose is among his or her most fundamental rights. And this certain right is respected and acceptable so far as it doesn't lead to violating the rights of the others. A main problem with our society today is the issue of zealot advocates. Some people in their own mind intent on doing good or *mitzvah*, insist on recruiting the others to join their way, as they believe immaturely, to best practice some nonsensical traditions. And unheeding their target's particular family situation, they bring them into their own company. Thus, parents taking pains to drive the metaphorical car of their family, suddenly see one wheel fly off; and together with their children, they're left stranded on the road of life. Thence, a supposedly good act, or rather, a baseless *mitzvah* taught by an unqualified religious advocate, has ended up disturbing *shalom ha-bayit*, "the peace of the family", a family now struck with a catastrophe.

Alas, such advocates ignore that an individual's thought and culture, and those of a family, resemble our fingerprints, two of which are never the same, for a person's and a family's thoughts stem from their beliefs. It's no *mitzvah* to break up a united family. This is not about comparing beliefs and their cons and pros, but a much larger and far more fundamental danger lurks ahead of us.

**It's not about a withering leaf: / Ay, they turn the forests into deserts!**

**True people won't do to another / what these ruthless do to the bodies and the souls!**

As the collection of my writings bear witness, this author is proud to consider himself committed to the rational commandments of the holy *Torah*, and that there's no intention involved but rectifying the weaknesses. My family and I are proud that I'm committed to this matter, and to the task of writing and expressing the facts, because as I believe, **"Better hide my head beneath a stone, / Than my name be remembered in shame."**

To overcome the shortcomings, I ask for your help, all of you my dear readers, especially the reasonable Orthodox community and those who've received modern higher education. No less than the interests and the honor of our society and the coming generation are at stake. Look around and see for yourself the agitation of the minds, the breakup of the families, and the causes behind the regressions and discrimination.

The internal danger, that is, the promulgation of superstitions in the guise of promoting the religion, it's heavier than enemy strikes. No more silence! A sense of responsibility, and the public want and will, these will lead to creation.

**My pen lacked the tongue to recount the secret of love.**

**God's attributes are beyond the limits of the fate.**

And finally,

**I've thought of giving up wine and sins,**

**If the fate will align with my foresight.**

*Norman "Nourollah" Gabay*

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To receive copies of this essay and other essays and writings of Norman Gabay in English and Persian, including his book *An Invitation to Reason*, his *Glossary of the Millennia-old Dialect of the Jews of Kashan*, and soon, a digital book that will contain his more recent essays, please visit our website at [BabaNouri.com](http://BabaNouri.com).

(The End)