

Heaven & Hell

The False Promise of Heaven Has Become A Most Fatal Means to Convert Our World Into a Hell

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**Many a turn unimaginable that the world makes.
Many a game unthinkable that Time plays.**

Let me start by recounting an incident that took place years ago in the Grand Bazaar of Tehran. Especially in those times, the Grand Bazaar was a major commercial, political, and religious center of the whole country, so much as you might say, anyone who worked there for 20 years could qualify as a Ph.D. candidate in all three subjects! Those who never worked there can hardly grasp the unique characteristics, culture, and colorful learning experiences of that environment. The bazaar is composed of several smaller *sarā-s*, i.e. “chambers” and “corridors”, one of which was known as the Sarā of Haji Hassan. Around 70 years ago, even the unloading dock of the chamber was full of goods and bags of food, such as cereals, dried nuts, and the like, when a host of mice attacked the warehouse. The merchants were extremely frustrated, while the admirable efforts of beautiful cats seemed to be in vain.

Mash Ghorboun Ali, the caretaker of the chamber, asked the merchants for a few vases and several live mice; and he promised to get rid of the infestation without poisons or any further damage to the goods. And surely, he delivered as he’d promised!

But how? The caretaker threw a few live mice into a large vase without food. Soon enough, the starving mice began to eat one another. Then he placed four of the surviving mice next to 10 ordinary mice in each vase. Shortly thereafter, he had come up with **a large number of cannibal mice**, which he set loose in the warehouse. The cannibal mice devoured the entire population of the mice, and shortly thereafter, the infestation was uprooted.

As I read in the news about the actions of “cannibal terrorists”, the kind of whom kill their own kind, I am further reminded of yet another anecdote, which took place decades ago in the city of my childhood, Kashan, Iran. One day, a mad man ran into the women’s public bath, scared the caretaker and the ladies, and made them cry out for help from the inside of the bath!

The neighborhood bully or *jāhel* boasted that he would catch the crazy guy in minutes! So he wrapped a towel around his waist, cracked a rope like a whip, and singlehandedly stormed the bath. Alas, in the darkness of the chamber, he started to hit whomever came into in his reach. **Meanwhile, the mad man jumped out of the bath and began to shout, “Help! A crazy guy’s in the bath, and he’s beating everybody!”** Similarly, once the ISIS had appeared on the scene, all the others before them “put swords in sheaths”—perhaps until a flock of savages crazier than them shows up on the horizon!

The stories of the “cannibal mice” and the “nutty and nuttier” of Kashan aptly apply to today’s “extremist and extremist-er” groups, and to so many “religious and super-religious” boastfuls around the world. **The despicable acts of these groups have no end in sight unless we accurately**

diagnose their root causes. Because once we understand the bases of religious and sectarian hatred, we may seek and find the necessary solutions.

Sadly, the “cannibals”, the “madder than the mad”, and the psychopaths who just hate other people, form quite a sizeable population. Take a look around, and you’ll realize that **the problem has gone global.** From every corner, pilgrims of a promised heaven (!) who often don’t even know one another’s languages, keep walking into slaughter, for now in God-forsaken places. They aren’t all “crazy”—let’s find out **their intentions, the instructions handed to them, their excuses.** Once we know the answers, we may discover the root causes, and hopefully, help them understand the truth, as well. As a poet said, **Heaven is where there’s no harassment; Where no one troubles another.** The frantic efforts of today’s governments seem too shallow and ineffectual to have much fundamental impact, especially when we consider the competition and the conflicts of interests that exist between these governments. In the meantime, those who preach religious and sectarian hatred continue as before and spread their own teachings. After all, they too have long-term interests.

Winston Churchill said it best, that “Nations have no permanent enemies and no permanent friends; only permanent interests.”

To those whose essence, minds, and words have been contaminated from the outset with religious and sectarian hatred, books are little more than a means to impose cruelty. Such people judge books by the cover—while the sanctity of a book depends on the rationality of its content, and on the reasonable relationship that the content maintains with contemporary intellectual and scientific developments. **As long as people believe in some nonsensical theory penned to purport the inequality of human beings based on differences in beliefs, in the name of sect or religion, there can be no peace whatsoever for any group, starting with themselves.** The indifference of the majority only exacerbates the problem, as it helps perpetuate such ready-made religious commands as “Kill!” or “Burn down!” this or that, *ad infinitum*. As a Persian poet said,

**If a tyrant seems fortunate, be certain that
It’s for the wise chose to yield to his cruelty.**

The void promises of heaven and hell, the afterlife, or a savior, as found in many religious writings, have become some never-ending tools to make our world into a *de facto* hell! Blessed be the memory of that humble man, Mash Ghorboun Ali. Only if he could show up today to help out our erudite leaders, presidents, or the United Nations, with some pragmatic advice, even as they seem to be stuck with the stinking swamps of extremism. For they need to be reminded that in the eyes of science, democracy can’t agree with any religion—unless that religion can adapt itself to contemporary science and modern civilization, as for instance, it can be seen from some of the laws of the Torah. (Cf. Deuteronomy, 17:8.) More often, however, religion is about following some ready-made rules, and about seeing and hearing through other eyes and ears; while whoever does so is indeed blind and deaf. Living examples of this ill of mindless obedience abound.

May the world awaken soon to remove the divisively seditious content of religions, lest some day, some “crazier than crazy” appears and drives people to cry, “Blessed be the earlier plague!” Otherwise, as long as adherents of religions rely on their scripture and deem as “good deed” or even “obligation” those acts that disagree with reason, modern science and civilization, there may be no hope or expectation for healthy intellect and reasonable argument to be pursued. Such divisive content need to be omitted, individually and collectively, from the religious literature as well as from the followers’ minds, so that no documents or other such excuses will remain to justify their practice among the present or future generations. As a Persian poet said,

**It’s a custom of the world that all things be repeated;
Who knows what the recurrences shall yield at the end.**

**Many an event that may look new to us, yet the old eyes
Of the universe have seen them all many times over.**

To conclude, my friends, **such superstitions as heaven, hell, or the savior, as trivial as they might seem, have indeed led to colossal tragedies.** It's interesting that the Holy Torah— i.e. the *Pentateuch*, the main body of the Jewish Bible— nowhere asserts the existence of a heaven or hell, or the coming of a promised savior. The minds of adherents of all religions have become corrupted by believing in such superstitions based on a variety of commentaries, quotes or hearsay. Those with foresight can already hear the footsteps of global ignorance, which warn of repeating extensively such historical catastrophes as the Crusades or other religious and sectarian wars.

What is the solution? To state sarcastically, should some human cannibals be produced, as with the cannibal mice—like those savages who served in the court of Shah Abbas the Safavid, or the dangerous Assassins known as the *Fedayeen* led by the 11th century Persian rebel, Hassan-i Sabah? Certainly not; for to retaliate in kind would defeat our purpose! After all, as a Persian poet said,

**If I do evil and you punish me with evil, then
What'll be the difference between you and me?**

Neither can we keep fighting as we do now mainly in one region, for it will merely allow savagery to spread and emerge elsewhere in the world. Clearly, the ultimate solution lies in identifying the main causes behind the cruelty and tyranny; and in drying out to destroy the millennia-old roots of religious and sectarian hatred. Otherwise, we're bound to remain witness to increasing oppression against humanity, today in the Middle East, and tomorrow perhaps in Europe, Asia, Africa, America, Australia, and Canada.

Indeed, history repeats itself because the main causes of past cruelty were not rectified. I don't think it's naïve to wish that the masses of divisive content be removed from all religious literature. After all, Time and human Will, at its most positive and productive, are our highest authoritative saviors.

The power of Time is above all powers. Many things are said and documented today that could not have been expressed before, for a lack of knowledge or courage. Soon enough, religious texts will be examined freely, too, line by line, phrase by phrase; and consequently, they'll be approved or refuted. To *want* is to *be able to*. This is no myth. In the long run, the world will grow more aware of the truth of the matter. We may even point to the ongoing senseless carnage around the world as the painful proof of a tense awakening. **Let us fight with our pens so that there will be no war.** As **George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)** said, "All great truths begin as blasphemies." First, they're considered insults toward what's being held sacred; then they're ridiculed; but at the end, they're accepted as obvious truths, and taken for granted.

The Persian poet Rumi said,

**As long as you seek the mineral, you're the mineral.
As long as you desire the bread, you're the bread.
If you know this secret, then you know indeed
That what you seek to attain, you are the thing.**

Eventually, the world Wills what is right, so that it shall be realized. The sooner this happens, the less misery we'll have to suffer. What will keep the future generations healthy won't be just the right physical nutrition but especially the metaphorical "healthy food", that is, the beneficial literature which they can "eat", better digest, and fully absorb. **Let's stop teaching nonsense in our schools and in our family environments,** so that the coming generations will no more have to endure recurring catastrophes. **Baseless hope and belief in some bogus stories and commentaries**

continue to tarnish the realistic minds of the adherents of religions. Take a look around. Who could have imagined that some day, Europe would change so much so that the host will be on the run, while the uninvited guest brings down the ceiling on everyone?

From 1948-1952 alone, early in the rise of Gamal Abdul Nasser, about 800,000 Jews were expelled from their homelands in Arab countries,¹ without a penny in their pockets, while the Christians kept silent in the face of the horror. Today, those Jews or their descendants live in the comfort of their new lands, while the oppressors and the passive Christians are suffering the worse in their own countries!

Even as today, many Jews are leaving the unsafe cities of Europe; and surely, many anti-Semitic groups, the very type who sympathized or collaborated with the Nazis, are happy about it. However, these groups are unaware that soon enough, themselves and their churches will likely be subjected to similar violations. They'll be served well to remember a poem by Martin Niemöller, a German pastor who after his initial support of Nazism, turned against it and was imprisoned for years, during the Holocaust, due to his opposition. Niemöller wrote,

**First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Socialist.**

**Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.**

**[Then they came for the Gypsies, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Gypsy.]**

**Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Jew.**

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.²

There was no one left to defend us...

Far too long, the world kept silent in the face of unspeakable terrorist atrocities in various countries and locales. Consequently, such criminals began to mushroom everywhere, particularly in their own backyards. As an adage goes, which I paraphrase, “If you remain indifferent to the cruelty brought upon others, you’re bound to suffer cruelty.” Take a look around: **Animals wouldn’t do to one another what some people do to humankind.**

I am reminded of an essay by **Mark Twain (1835-1910)**, the great American author and personality, which was published in *Letters From the Earth*, under *The Damned Human Race*. Observing the savage nature of humankind, Twain concluded that human cruelty had made human beings into the lowest of animals, and not the highest among the creation. He writes,

“I have been studying the traits and dispositions of the lower animals (so-called), and contrasting them with the traits and dispositions of man. I find the result humiliating to me.

¹ See Netanyahu, Benjamin, *A Durable Peace: Israel and Its Place Among Nations*, 1993; “Chronology: Zionism and the Rise of Israel.”

² Cited in: Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_they_came_... The verse in brackets about the gypsies, cited by the author of this article, reflects on some available variants of the poem, even as it remembers the gypsy victims of the Nazi criminal machine. (Translator’s note)

For it obliges me to renounce my allegiance to the Darwinian theory of the Ascent of Man from the Lower Animals; since it now seems plain to me that the theory ought to be vacated in favor of a new and truer one, this new and truer one to be named the Descent of Man from the Higher Animals.

“In proceeding toward this unpleasant conclusion I have not guessed or speculated or conjectured, but have used what is commonly called the scientific method. [...] These experiments were made in the London Zoological Gardens, and covered many months of painstaking and fatiguing work.”

Among other conclusions, he states that,

“the human race is of one distinct species [...] not to be confounded with any other. [...] He is the only animal that for sordid wages will march out [...] and help to slaughter strangers of his own species who have done him no harm and with whom he has no quarrel. [...] There is not an acre of ground on the globe that is in possession of its rightful owner, or that has not been taken away from owner after owner, cycle after cycle, by force and bloodshed. [...] He is the Unreasoning Animal. Note his history, as sketched above. It seems plain to me that whatever he is he is not a reasoning animal. His record is the fantastic record of a maniac. I consider that the strongest count against his intelligence is the fact that with that record back of him he blandly sets himself up as the head animal of the lot: whereas by his own standards he is the bottom one.”³

Today, many of whom purport to be carrying out “religious justice” in the 21st century, are enslaving free children and women for trade! And the buyers? Oil-rich merchants!

I wonder if someday the natural resources of the world will be “globalized” under the auspices of a trusted international banking entity, to the end that they will belong to everyone and contribute to their happiness. If so, there’ll be no resources left to fund the budgets of the villains. Or perhaps, there’s no such hope, for as Mark Twain wrote, the human race is damned. It’s one thing to look human, and quite another to be one.

**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 its old bitter fruit.**

What is the solution? Surely not to remain silent so that someday European cities turn into today’s Syria! We ought not to put up with the pain and be content to sigh every year for the better year behind us. When in 1972, 11 Israeli athletes and officials were murdered during the Munich Olympics, many people celebrated (sic!) the tragedy in Syria, Libya, and Iraq—once the safe havens of terrorists, but today in ruins under their tyranny. Those people didn’t know what a Persian poet put in verse,

**One who wishes ill for others won’t arrive at his destination.
He can’t do one harm without hundreds coming back at him.**

³ For a copy of the complete *The Damned Human Race*, please see:
<http://moodyap.pbworks.com/f/Twain.damned.pdf> .

As **Vaclav Havel (1936-2011)**, the author, philosopher, and former president of Czechoslovakia would say, **Where thinking stops, evil begins.** Where dogmatism rules, the worse is bound to come.

To cite a classic piece of Persian humor, **I asked a sage, “How do you see my life?” He laughed and replied in his infinite wit, “You lead a hard life, you act strangely, and your world is utterly distraught!”** We should ponder. **Where is the way out of this quagmire? For one, will it be practical to remove all the divisive content of religious literature?** I think that by the demand of Time, this won't be an impossible dream. The intensity of the shameful acts of religious extremists is a warning in itself to understand realities. Otherwise, if we continue in our slumber, things will never change.

We live in a truly dangerous world. It's said of a Qajar statesman who asked Nasser-addin Shah returning from a party, “I hope that his Majesty, the Center of the World's Prayers, enjoyed the ceremony.” The Persian king coldly replied, “It was a topsy-turvy, “bustling donkeys” kind of party; and our Royal Highness was present there, too!”⁴ Yes, it's a topsy-turvy, “bustling lions” world, and our Highness is present there too! Lucky are the careless... Alas,

**My shoes look nice from the outside,
But I suffer them from the inside.
From their beauty, you wouldn't know
The suffering my feet have to endure.
The sage of discerning wit laughed and exclaimed,
“Be warned, for your eyes gaze at appearances.”**

A blind man asked a sage if there was anything worse than losing one's sight. The wise man answered, “Yes, to lose one's *insight!*” Crying out aloud when a man has lost his insight and has replaced reason with religion! Far too many times we've witnessed the consequences of such an ill, as different as its might have looked depending on the specific religion. We better stop our wars, better stop wiping tears off of people's faces, and instead, try and wipe away the true causes behind such tears off of our books and the public mind. Otherwise, history will be doomed to repeat itself.

Finally, let's keep in mind that to *wish* is the first step toward *creation*.

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