

The Generation Who Lost to Win

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I asked the old man of the tavern, “What is life?” He blinked and said, “Oh, it just passed by!” “And what is love?” I asked. He emptied the cup down his throat and sighed, “It passed by everybody, to each his own share...” Every generation experiences “love” in their own way. The generation of the Iranian immigrants of the past few decades, the generation born during the reign of the Pahlavi Dynasty, this most fortunate generation in our recent history, it’s been a history-making generation in particular that won’t be repeated.

We people create the environment, and in turn, the environment creates us. The circumstances that led to such a massive migration, the grand change that brought misery to some and prosperity to the others, that cannot be repeated. This was a generation whose understanding of religion and politics changed within a short period of time, and some of whom realized personally that **the true identity of a human being — before their religion, ideology, way of life, race, ethnicity, nationality or color of the skin — it was that identity which was common between each person and their fellow human beings.** This was a generation who understood that superstitions and a hatred of those who thought differently were the fruits of ignorance, violence was the fruit of bigotry, and contempt brought about misery. This generation is a protector of our past and present history, duty-bound to pass an ages-long experience, theirs and that of their ancestors, on to the coming generation. It’s been a generation that like an adaptive university student forced to sit at the first grade, reached the waters and proved to the world that if they could find clean and calm waters, they could be some great swimmers!

**We were given promises void like the wind,
And words wrong, each one a hypocrisy!**

**If only the pot of meat-stew remained covered,
Or the cat knew honor and didn't snatch the food!**

Today, according to an email in circulation, 30% of the NASA employees, thousands of university professors across the United States, 500 of the CEOs of major corporations, and 4 out of 10 young persons, hold a doctorate degree. In such a world, the Prime Minister of Canada said, and I paraphrase, "We were the true winners of the transformations in Iran, for our country won for itself 30,000 educated young men and women." A country that once imported brains, was then exporting them; even as one generation was acting like a pencil eraser, giving up so much of itself so that the next generation could keep step with modern times.

This was a generation that began in repeating superstitious mantras and centuries-old tradition of seeking answers from the mullahs, and arrived at finding its answers with that Sage's Sage of human history, the one and only Mr. Google. As the new inventions were pouring out into the world, this one of a kind generation was not only displaced in space, but it migrated — or rather, it was made to migrate — also in time. It's been a generation who began with abacus, the fortune-telling beans and peas, and the rough massage and flirtations of the bullish bathing help at the public bath, and arrived at the soft massages in the tender hands of heavenly beauties in Palm Springs hot baths, and at the comfort of Jacuzzis at their own houses.

This was a generation that used to listen to the voices of lovelorn drunkards in their back alleys, who sang to the rings of the caravan bells,

**Seize the moment, for it passes fast overnight,
Sometimes in sorrow, and sometimes in festive joy!
My life and yours resemble a smile, as it
Disappears the moment it's appeared on the lips!**

Who once fell asleep to that street lullaby, he now joined the 20,000-strong audiences of the grand concerts at Las Vegas's unparalleled light-drenched halls. It was a generation who unwittingly and unwillingly "was led to the bride-chamber, without haggling, like a confused bride!" And who were "her grooms": the American and European "grooms" who "couldn't speak a word"! The brides and the grooms didn't learn Persian; but nevertheless, the Iranians managed to adapt themselves to their new lives in no time.

It's said that on the day when the Shah of Iran was to inaugurate the Sepid-Roud Dam, General Khosravani arranged for a high-diving contest into the deep lake behind the dam. Moments before the race, the king noticed someone jump into the water from the highest and riskiest point of the lake. Once the race was over, the Shah asked for the man to bestow upon him the first prize! As the man was brought to the Shah, everyone was surprised to see him dart confused looks around. "What are you looking for?" They asked the man. "I want to find the son of the gun who pushed me off of the edge into the lake!" The man answered.

Our generation too may not still understand who or how pushed these immigrants 100 years forward; but the future generations will likely figure that out, and they'll be grateful to them.

This was a generation who left behind billions of dollars in wealth and properties, besides irreplaceable precious material and spiritual possessions that had been saved and accumulated over the centuries. They lost their family relations and business connections, and especially, they were ripped of the knowledge and awareness that came with a familiar environment. They had to endure innumerable hardship, while they could only hope for a better life elsewhere, mainly for their future generation. In effect, they lost their lives to build a future with the efficient help and efforts of the coming generation. Among the key elements of this grand leap were their children, who had arrived before them to study in the developed countries. The younger generation's knowledge, mastery of language, and physical and mental prowess, combined with their parents' experience, created a potent space whose certain outcome would be the success of large numbers of immigrants. It was proven that the parents' personal merits, foresight and timely decision to provide their children with the best education possible, had formed the key to their success.

This was a generation who set out to emigrate in rage, recalling what a poet said, **"The sage's words with his heavenly-scented breath may only rot already and stink afterwards!"** Yet, most of them managed to resettle and build happy lives in their new homes. It was a generation who left behind the old tribal system of blood relations for the modern forms of social relations. For instance, whereas back in Iran, 80% of the party guests were likely to be family members, and maybe 20% consisted of friends and neighbors, today's parties are likely made of 80% friends and just 20% relatives!

Are both generations aware of their mission to pass their experience on to the next generation? Will the advocates of religion leave them alone? Will the future generation be

prepared to benefit from past experience? The answer to these questions depends on whether both generations will remain alert, recognize the values, and fulfill their responsibilities.

One dark night, lost in the desert, a master and his disciple spotted a dim light. Thirsty and famished, they walked slowly toward the flame. There stood a humble shack, the lowly abode of a mother, her little son, and their sole property, a she-goat. The mother explained, “Ever since my husband died, we’ve lived on two cups of milk a day from the goat. She feeds on the desert thorn bushes, and we drink her milk.” Then she gave the master and his disciple a day’s worth of their only food; and having regained their strength, the master and his disciple returned to the town. Time flew by. One day, the disciple told his master, “O Master! That kind woman did such a big favor for us, but we didn’t do anything in return. Let me go back to the desert and hand them both a gift.” To his amazement, however, the master advised his disciple, “If you want to do them a big favor, then go back overnight, steal the goat, and run away.” Thus, although hesitant, the disciple stole the goat on a dark night and fled the scene. The mother and the little son, sad, broken and empty-handed, walked the long way to the town. The mother started work as a housemaid, and the compassionate host sent her son alongside his own children to the school; and when the time came, given his talents and intelligence, the son was provided with a higher education, as well. Years flew by. One day, the disciple walked into a government office to take care of some important business. The director of the office looked strangely familiar to him. A few questions down the road, and the disciple realized that the director was that very little boy of the desert whose mother had fed them the milk on that difficult night.

The office director said, “One night, a thief stole our only goat. We wept and sighed and cried. Then suffering much hardship, tired and starved, we made it to the town; and our story got to the point where you stand. I’m married to a beautiful wife with two kids, and my mother lives with us. In the early days, we used to curse the thief, but today, we pray for his well-being,



because had it not been for him, who knows what would happen to us once the goat stopped giving milk.”

At this point, the disciple confessed, “I was the thief! I’m the one who stole your goat on my master’s order!” The two of them hugged and kissed each other, and the disciple took the mother, the son and the master to a hearty breakfast of well-scented goat milk and cheese. Blessed be the memory of our family elders, whose common phrase was, “May you grow old and have a happy ending!” Although as I’ve grown older myself, I tell my father in the mind’s conversation, “Dad! You prayed for me to grow old! Where are you to see what curse you offered me in the guise of a blessing?!” Anyhow, sometimes the longer we live, the more we suffer. The walking stick whispers the truth constantly into the old man’s ear, “You won’t see youth again but in your dreams.”

**I wasted my youth to make life the merrier,
But what’s there to life when I wasted the youth?**

For countless immigrants, it turned out far better that “their goats were stolen”, for their children received better education, and together, they built better futures. They could now drink the proverbial wine from the crystal glass, for even the vintage wine wouldn’t be much fun in a clay cup. Many of these people say today, “If only they had stolen our goat sooner!”

What happened that the developed countries, especially the United States and Canada, accepted so many refugees, whose elderly, without having paid a dollar in taxes, were paid monthly allowances, medicine and treatments; were provided with further assistance and privileges; and even their average life expectancy was dramatically raised? What happened that the loss endured by a group of immigrants led to their own winning and provided for the future of their next generation, so far as they began to pray for the well-being of “the goat thief and his master?”

(To Be Continued...)

(Continued From the Previous Issue...)

The secret to the success of such immigrant-friendly countries as the United States, Canada, Australia, and Israel, is the blending of diverse cultures, which gives them their daily dose of

energy mixes, devoid of xenophobia or religiously motivated hatred. They practice intelligently and eclectically mainly such old or new laws which agree with our modern understanding, and they continue to pursue the freedom of speech without religious interference. Let's keep in mind that the majority of people in Australia, America, Canada and Israel, are the descendants of the early immigrants and founders of those states. Altogether, contrary to the claims made by the extremists — or by those who intent on protecting the religion and closing the windows on science, advocate to keep children in tight cocoons — the civilized countries and their people did not close their gates to the world, but instead, they made every effort to change.

Among the Israeli government's earliest decisions after regaining the independence was **a proper decision which went against the commands of the religion**, that is, the abolishing of the death penalty. This author has been crying out aloud, even as he respects the precious commands of the religion, that to keep up with modern understanding and civilization does not mean to insult the religion or to turn away from it. Rather, making the religion conform to our contemporary world would raise the status of religion and **would help it persist and survive**. Time itself will judge between these two paths, and no one could fight such formidable foe. A realistic mind is the key to success, whereas bigotry, stagnation and dogmatism, these would lead to an irrational inability to change and a tendency for regression.

Gandhi said, and I paraphrase, "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be closed. I want the breeze of the cultures of all lands to blow into my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off of my feet by any strong wind."

The secret to the establishment and unique growth of such developed countries lies in that they leave their windows open and allow diverse and precious cultures of the world mingle there freely. Let us not close the windows on ourselves in the name of religion! No bird ever learned to fly in a cage, and no cage would be tighter than such ideological box.

No doubt, the waters rot if they remain still. And

The beloved laughs hard at the displays of our piety.

It is for good reason that invaluable scientific news arrive everyday from these countries, including the nascent State of Israel. I read in the newspapers that no less than 84 languages are spoken in Israel today! Clearly, the large and diverse populations of immigrants, each with their

own unique ideas and qualities, have mixed and mingled there, making such countries flourish to such extent with their contrasting contributions.

I am certain that in the long run, as it was with the early immigrants of the aforementioned countries, the immigrant communities of the world will establish the Global Government which will inhabit the long wandering cosmopolitan spirit! I even dare think that the first step toward that stage of global social development was already taken this past year, when at the opening ceremonies of the Rio 2016 Olympics, Brazil, an elite group of refugees from various national origins, these “stateless” group of athletes, joined the processions, carrying the international flag of Olympics, a move approved and recognized by the United Nations. It is conceivable that far in the future, that day will be recognized as The First Step to Found the Global Government. **Only God’s essence knows / The games that Life will play tomorrow.**

Until quite recently, who could have imagined that the Soviet Union would collapse, or that India, Pakistan and tens of other countries would achieve independence?

Nothing’s certain in the world save change; and every reasonable change is another step on the path of evolution. In the meantime, those convinced otherwise will just “embarrasses themselves and gives us undue trouble.” No person or nation can achieve success for free and without expending the required effort; as they say, “Free cheese can only be found inside the trap, and a true friend in the mirror!”

You can’t change the world, but you can change yourself.

Change how you see things, and your pains will be cured.

The current president of India, a country with more temples and religions than all of the temples around the world combined, has emphasized the impossibility of observing matters of hygiene in India today. Thus, in his July 2016 speech, he summed it up when he said, “**Building restrooms takes priority over building temples!**” Is it not a sign of change and awakening? Today, things are said about religion that you would not hear before. The destinies of societies are determined by the rational decisions they make. A generation who unwittingly lost so much, including the citizenship of a third world country, and joined the developed states, that generation should not forget that at times of danger, even at times of famine or epidemics, our ancestors could not move to other places, nor could they save their money elsewhere in safer locations at all. This generation understands that our surest savings are science and alert and

informed minds which are devoid of hatred. **One could argue that a literate xenophobic idiot is more dangerous than an illiterate xenophobic idiot.** Let's appreciate the opportune circumstances that were given to us, and the host countries which provided them for us. Members of a generation who was put through the experience of enduring some staunch xenophobes, they have continued to shine outside of Iran, and someday they'll also prove to be instrumental in reviving the Ahurai culture of that country, devoid of religion or politics. This massive immigration will be remembered and compared to the Israelites emigration from Egypt. Alas, humankind is born informed, but he is misled by persuasions. Let's help the next generation understand that no seditious individual, words or texts, could bring peace and comfort to any group. About 700 years ago, **Attar of Nayshabour** formulated what NASA scientists confirm today, when in a prophetic vision, he spoke of the humility of our world and the *de facto* insignificance of humankind and his lifespan.

**This world, in a corner of the nine azure glass ceilings,
It likens the fruit of a poppy flower, floating on the sea.
Look and see what fraction of this poppy fruit you are,
And you'll find it worth laughing at your own beard!**

The young America, without the vacuous claims of some thousand-year old bloody civilization, has managed with its policy of "open gates" to transform the world, and to do so merely by the knowledge and expertise of its elite and handful children, some of whom were immigrants, such as Edison, Ford, Einstein, Jonas Salk, Steve Jobs, or the British-born Tim Berners-Lee, recognized for the invention of the internet in March of 1989; and so forth. Whereas those who boast of millennia-old civilizations, such as that of Egypt, still lead camels to graze in the deserts, the young America is taking a walk on the moon. Today, with the globalization of science, invention is no more bound to the individual, but rather, most innovations are born out of group efforts. In the meantime, scientific and higher education facilities are provided for the coming generation of immigrants, as long as they wipe away time-tested seditious elements, such as religious and sectarian hatred, off of the minds of the future generation.

They asked **Buddha**, “What have you gained from praying so much to God?” He answered, “Nothing! But I lost many things, such as anger, fear, anxiety, depression, a sense of insecurity, and the fear of death.”

My friends! Success is not always in gaining things, but we may sometimes achieve success by losing something, by giving up our weaknesses.

The immigrant generation of the past forty years lost much of their wealth, achievements, memories and memorabilia. Yet, by taking the advantage of better opportunities, they provided the conditions to liberate themselves from the causes behind backwardness. Time taught them that religious observance did not equate xenophobia, closing the windows on the lights of science and humanity, or staying on in a tight cocoon; and that, culture, not religion or politics, was the jumping-board for the future generation. They showed that it didn't matter if they immigrated with empty hands or little money; what mattered was what they did with those empty hands and pockets. Dreams alone aren't enough; dreams need to be realized to decide destinies. And what helps dreams to be realized and leads a man to success are his reasonable decisions.

Not to forget that it takes a lion's heart and a Kashani's liver¹ to walk into the arbitrarily forbidden zone of religion! I'll try and find or build a courteous way that would allow me the more to show the shortcomings. As **Kafka** said, and I paraphrase, “To write is to pop out of the rows of the dead,” something that a generation who experiences the freedom of expression afresh would understand perfectly. I believe that responsible constructive authors attempt in earnest to remove the shortcomings of the society, because the persisting weaknesses continue to cause history to repeat itself and make us endure hardships, over and over. The generation born in the Iranian kingdom is duty-bound to pass their experience on to the next generation and to help them understand why we may fall behind. Learning from the past is the leavening for making progress; and who doesn't know the past, he can't build the future.

The youngsters, too, should make an effort and benefit from the experiences of the elders, while bearing in mind that this mixed soup of our last generation shan't be cooked again. Before we knew it, in the blink of an eye, a third of them passed away, reminding us of the words of the poet,

¹ In the Iranian folklore, the people of the city of Kashan are generally associated with the stereotype of a sensitive, peaceful person who may be easily frightened. – P.A.

**Life is a candlelight in the meadow of existence,
Put out by the soft breeze of a blinking eye.**

History is like the final coroner to examine and judge the past. The societies that remain in the darkness of hatred toward those who think differently, they won't need lights, **for a blind-minded man is blinder than all blinds; and the blind won't have much use for lanterns.** Only the societies who dare to invite change and abandon past mistakes, they deserve to make progress. Otherwise, sooner or later, the words shall ring in the air,

**As children we went to the teacher,
Then we rejoiced when we became teachers.
Hear the end of our story, for we came
From the dust and were gone with the wind.**

An individual or a society's reaction to a problem is similar to our body's natural reflex to the sting of a needle, and as such, it demonstrates humankind's status of thinking and his native understanding. An evident case in point was the Shah of Iran's response to the uprising of his people, as compared to the reaction of the current leader of Syria in the face of his own people's rebellion. The Shah of Iran chose to sacrifice himself so that his people would not be harmed, while the latter chose to sacrifice his own people so that he could stay in power. Thence they say that our actions consist mostly of our reactions informed by our understanding of the daily events; and that history manifests the outcome of the reactions made by men of history.

**Better be good and let the people talk ill of you,
Than to be wicked and have people call you good.**

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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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