

Visiting the Sick and Superstitions

An Essay in Three Parts

By: Norman “Nourollah” Gabay

English Translation by Payman Akhlaghi

نسخه فارسی این مقاله را در فایل همراه ملاحظه کنید.

Part I

The poet **Fereydoun Moshiri** said, “I remember / the most refreshing day of the world, / and I gift it to you. / I was in the pursuit of the loveliest poem in the world. / And I found it! I found what I had been looking for! / What I found was “*I love you!*” / I found the loveliest poem in the world. / It’s my red rose! / And the secret of happiness is for you to spread it. / I swear to God that light will splash / in the hearts of the people of the world. / And you, my dearest, repeat this over and over! / Say “*I love you!*” / **Not once, nor ten, but a hundred times!**” (*Abridged*)

To love and to be loved, it’s a blessing in our lives. However, **a single dress won’t fit every size**. This blessing may assume particular forms and distinct qualities specific to each person, depending on their age and situation: for a newborn, it’s the beating sound of the mother’s heart, while for an elderly or a patient, it’s the footsteps of their children, grandchildren and friends, to see them in person, and to kiss them kindly.

To be certain, a life without mutual love wouldn’t be worth living; and to maintain friendship with everyone, especially with the sick in bed, we need to express and prove our friendship. When it comes to children — contrary to our parents’ common beliefs, who stopped kissing the child once they turned 3 or 4, **lest they would be spoiled** (*sic!*) — a child needs and desires love from the moment they are born; otherwise, how can he know that he is loved, and how could she learn how to love? Likewise, how may an elderly or a sick person understand that their relatives and friends love them and accept them as they are? To better understand past mistakes, we’d

better compare how today's children receive attention, and are care for, treated and raised, as opposed to the ways of the past.

Joe Namath said, "Till I was 13, I thought my name was Shut Up!" I asked a friend who had come to the United States for the first time, "What attracted you the most in the synagogue?" He said, "The attention paid to the children, especially during the *bar mitzvah* and *bat mitzvah* ceremonies. It contributes very much to the youngster's self-confidence and personality."

Fortunately, the new generation has come to understand more than ever before that **whoever said, "He is just a child! He can't get it!" — it was them who didn't know and couldn't understand. Education, caring attention, encouragement, and setting good examples, these have many lifelong effects on everybody's life, especially those of children.** Michelangelo was asked, "How did you become the greatest sculptor in history?" **He said, "With the loving kiss of a mother."** Love and kindness won't distinguish between the big guy and the little one, young or the adult. Humankind needs love and kindness, and we are slaves to it. Sadly, the world has been rendered unsafe by those who never saw the color of kindness or love.

To paraphrase an English proverb, **"Consider yourself lucky as long as just one heart is still beating for you somewhere in the world!"** Crying out aloud when even that single heart won't be there to beat. For the Jewish people, those single hearts were such great men of history as Cyrus the Great, so far as to date, thousands of years later, this grateful people continue to name their children after **Cyrus**.

"Life is the warmth of joint hearts: / Devoid of friends, all doors are closed. / We ought to love! / With a look wherein the joy screams, / With a Hello wherein the light showers smiles, / Let us shake hands, / And let us do so in the warmth of love." (*Moshiri, Abridged*)

After spending three years in bed, a relative of mine passed away. During those years, aside from his family members, his kind and educated nurse treated him truly like a mother; and once he had died, she attended all ceremonies like another member of the family. Over the dinner following the memorial service, the nurse approached me and said, "As you know, I was the full-time nurse of the deceased for the past three years. All this time, aside from his immediate family members, I didn't see more than ten people come to visit him. **So where did they come from, the rest of this thousand people** who've suddenly shown up for the lunch and dinner ceremonies?" What a misplaced custom it is! Whereas it's necessary and useful to be kind to the

patient while they're still alive, expressing regrets, offering condolences, or asking for their forgiveness, these have little use once they have died. Let's bear in mind that in our ancestral culture, hosting meals during the mourning period, a tradition that continues to date, was originally meant as a way **to feed the poor, not to throw a party.**

Drink me now the water of life and quench my parched throat!

Don't wait to cleanse your eyes with the tears once I'm gone.

How could you *will* a prayer to be answered, O Saadi?

Who are you to pursue a desire, if she won't grant your wish?

It's useless for you and me to pray for the forgiveness of the dead. The Shiite Muezzin chants, "**hayye alA khayr -el-amal**", i.e. "everyone to his own act of goodness." And a Persian saying goes, "this is a *hakkerna* world", a world that preserves "our memory" — or as a poet put it, "This world's a mountain and our act is the voice. / And the mountain spreads in every which way an answer to each voice." If we hesitated then to help calm down our friend and alleviate her pain in illness and loneliness, then there's no point now to our condolences or in praying for her to be forgiven. As the poet said, "What's the point of loving God's essence, / If you don't understand the world of existence?" Don't we know that we don't know?!

The Divine secret is on the outside of the tent, and

What do we know of what's beyond the blue dome?

My friends, no doubt, it's our duty as fellow humans to attend funeral and memorial services, to sympathize with the survivors, and to console and encourage them. **But when it comes to visiting the elderly and the sick, I'm afraid, our respected nurse is quite right. "If you don't ask of me while I'm still alive, / There shall be no point to your sighs, howls and tears, once I'll be gone."** If you didn't visit his home while he was alive, what's the point of you staying everyday with his survivors in grief?

Sometimes, the kind of exaggerations that you hear at the memorial services make them quite interesting. They tend to remind me of a Persian proverb, "Suppose your father was a learned man, but / What's the fruit of his knowledge to you?!"

Many years ago, the mentally slow brother of a successful businessman had passed away. His family had organized a memorial service for him in the synagogue of Etefagh School, a temple

donated by the late Abdollah Meir. A friend of mine and I attended the ceremony. As the late Chacham Yedidia Shofet assumed his position behind the microphone, the two of us whispered and wondered what the Chacham would say of the virtues (!) of the deceased! The Chacham took a look at the huge crowd and said, “The light within humans is more or less akin a light bulb. Some are 10 Watts, while the others maybe 60 or 100. **The deceased, may he rest in peace, was a 10W light bulb.**” Suddenly, the memorial service turned into a little party of secret laughs and held-back snickers.

Keep in mind, however, that as they say, “Even the broken clock lying in the attic is right two times every day!” We can’t ignore or underestimate the worth of any light bulb. Sometimes, even a 10W bulb can light the road before thousands of people. Remarkably, the late Chacham Yedidia, may he be remembered in fondness, used to say about a deceased whom he hadn’t known in person, “I’m told that the departed, may he rest in peace, was a good man!”

There’s an admirable custom in the United States, according to which the rabbis or priests go to the hospitals to visit the patients known to them and to pray for their health. It’s an act of kindness which gives hope to the patients and a boost to their morale. However, please allow me to share with you **a trifle of my bitter personal experience** in meeting with some Orthodox rabbis in the hospital. However, to avoid any misunderstanding, I proudly recall and emphasize in advance my **positive experience** during my long collaboration with two dear Orthodox rabbis from the **Rav Tov Organization**, namely **Rabbi Eliezer Peer** and **Rabbi Needleman**. During the 1980’s, the two of them offered their selfless services to the settlement of immigrant children, an effort that was led by the late **Manouchehr Ghodsian**. I assert with confidence that we can find some of the best and most informed philanthropists among the Orthodox people; and I personally feel proud of talking to the knowledgeable members of the Orthodoxy. My dear readers, I share an aim with the Orthodoxy, and that is to preserve our ancestral heritage, and to make it proud. Let’s throw away our dark glasses, and let’s make a bridge instead of the walls, so that this small circle stops shrinking any further, and our children will be able to get married to one another. Unsuitable marriages have been partly produced by this narrowing of the circle based on a bunch of nonsense and superstition. Let’s keep the roots alive so that the mother tree shall not wither.

I witnessed some incredible services by these two rabbis that were founded on their beliefs. For instance, **one day we had an urgent need for \$50,000.** The Iranian Jewish community had yet to settle in their new land, and we were searching for a solution. Rabbi Peer, without hesitation and without a word to anyone, took out a loan on **his humble house** in Brooklyn, where I had first met him, and he covered our financial need — and neither Manouchehr Ghodsian, nor Rabbi Peer, nor Rabbi Needleman did rest until the children had settled and made it in their new home. On another occasion, I saw how Rabbi Needleman reacted the moment he heard that two of the children had fallen ill and one had died. He immediately stepped over all traditions, including the Shabbat, and went and saved the child. When I thanked him, he explained, “The Jewish culture says, **‘To save a person is to save a world.’**” As such, even as I admit that people, groups, or religions, they aren’t all the same, and **it’s wrong to abuse the words “every” and “all”**, I offer a criticism of certain deeds by the so-called Orthodox rabbis — even though to hear about something isn’t the same as seeing it for yourself.

On many occasions, these so-called rabbis appeared in a modern hospital, holding what they claimed to be bottles of a “healing water”. They came to visit us, and when the doctors were away, they drank of such water to the patients — an affair that I blush as much as to recount. They also told my wife that if she covered her hair, ate in a certain way, and so forth, the incurable patient would be healed.

**They say that the pain and ill in the world,
It’s all because of the naked hair of women!
They say that God is only in their hands,
And He is just concerned about that hair.**

The leader of this group, who had already received hundreds of thousands of dollars from the patient as “aid” (*sic!*), told me, “If you pay us as much money as it starts to pain you, we will pray together with thousands of our students; and the patient will surely be healed!” The reasonable people stand in disagreement with this sector of the Orthodoxy, and not with their erudite majority.

The prayer isn’t something you can buy, nor does a healthy mind agree with such nonsense. These people are oblivious to the fact that the more illogical the acts, words and writings on which they depend, and the greater such things disagree with modern science and understanding,

the more they are subjected to ridicule, negative response by those on our side, and abuse by the strangers and enemies. No wonder that it was said,

**For how long will you complain that the ill-wisher and
The jealous one keep finding faults “in this humble man:
Sometimes they rise to pour my blood,
Sometimes they sit quiet and wish me the worst.”**

Don't think for a moment that the superstitious people prescribe such nonsense only for the others. Holding onto their irrational beliefs, as it is the case with the extremists of all religions, they treat their own children too by resorting to superstitions, each in their own way. **Anton Chekhov** was right when he said, and I paraphrase, **“The most dangerous man is the man with a strong faith who understands little.”** Such believers with a growing faith don't realize that their negative beliefs bring about negative reactions for the society, even as they provide the enemies with an excuse and hand them some considerable power. The terrorist who assassinated the late Yitzhak Rabin considered himself to be a most faithful man, and he acted out the crime based on this faith. Faith is a good thing, but *what* do we believe in? The knowledgeable and well-informed Orthodox individuals maintain doubt toward beliefs and words, both theirs and those of the others, as they constantly research them and try to raise and improve their beliefs.

My friends, I am fully aware that there is no pride in repeating the nonsense and superstitions...

To Be Continued...

Part II

We must not underestimate the advocacy and promotion of the nonsense and superstition. To that end, I paraphrase **Voltaire**, who said, “Ideas have caused more ill to our little planet than the plague and earthquakes combined.” The horrible fratricide that is currently taking place in the Arab countries finds its roots in a single phrase — **“ashaddA al-al-koffAr, va rahmA baynahom!”** — i.e., “to be cruel to the infidels, but merciful to their kind.”

Who are the infidels? According to the zealots, anyone who doesn't belong to their religion, sect or tribe, even though they may follow the same book, that person is an infidel — today it's

the Kurds, whereas tomorrow it could be the Izadis or the Coptic Christians — basically, whomever the mullah decides. This major problem is produced by relying on one seditious phrase, which ironically has made trouble for themselves, as well. If only they knew of the Persian proverb, **“Don’t dig a well to trap the others, / For you shall be its first prey.”** If we fail to prevent a regional conflict in the Middle East by eliminating the seditious writings and ending their instruction, then given the interference of the regional politics intent on fishing black oil from the muddy waters, **the current war of ignorance on science** will turn into World War III. Let’s prevent the advocacy and spread of some nonsense currently preached in the name of religion. Let’s **drive away from the society and especially from our schools** anyone who believes that to promote and preserve the religion, they must maintain such nonsense. Otherwise, tomorrow, throughout the world, the students trained in such schools will follow their path, and they will grow into examples more dangerous than today.

If we stay indifferent, then the current trend will continue, and every month, thousands of people will graduate from their schools, having mastered their philosophy; and countless more will be recruited by them from a pool of good, modest, polite, naïve and gullible children of vulnerable families. Thence, the extremists will gradually find a majority; the current majority of the reasonable religious people, Orthodox and others, will turn into a minority; and they’ll have no noteworthy religious people before them.

On a larger scale, the silence of the absolute majority of all religions, who are indeed against the practice of violence, continues to reinforce the violence and help it spread farther. Alas, societies may come to recognize their mistakes too late to understand the problem and to rectify their mistakes in time. As Jack Welch put it, “Change before you have to!” The world is waiting for an end to the reign of religion over science, because it has realized that understanding the religion is more important than holding onto blind faith.

My friends, I know too well that the Orthodoxy is not all the same, and that the listener should be the wiser. I know that sages and fools can both be found among all sects and nations. I am fully aware that the Orthodox philosophy is based on knowledge and preserving the outward manifestations of religion. But alas, the superstitious members of the Orthodox community, who might even make their enemy happy, they continue to shun and ignore what the rational people have to say. If so, what can be the solution?

This author believes in a means far more effective than weapons and wars, which can provide for the safety and security of all societies around the world. That is, we need to eliminate the shortcomings of **the religions, Jewish or gentile, particularly in the hands of the reasonable sectors of these religions themselves — including the alert, intelligent and informed sectors of the Orthodoxy.** To that end, we should better inform the people, even as we are removing the writings that by now are no more than some unworthy, if not seditious, words. And we should prevent these from being taught at our schools by keeping away those teachers who preach such nonsense and promote divisiveness. To be certain, the classmates and allies can act effectively and productively to solve the problems of the classroom which they all share. **The believers of various ideologies hold a mistaken philosophy, as they imagine in essence, “Who is not with me, he is against me!”**— Whereas in this arena, nobody is against anybody. Our survival, honor and future, these are at risk — yours, mine, and those of everyone else, especially the adherents of all sects and religions; and that includes the Orthodox people. Suffice it to recall our problems of the past and of the modern world to realize that irrespective of religion or sect, the global condition is more dangerous than it seems, for everyone, especially for the minorities scattered around the world.

The short-minded people are deluded to think of themselves as the dominant majority, and to impose cruelties on the others. They are oblivious to the ways of the world, where like it or not, a single spin of the globe can turn any majority into a wandering minority, virtually overnight, somewhere around the world — an ongoing tragedy that has been happening before our eyes to the citizens of numerous countries, including those of the Middle East and North Africa. But as the distances diminish by the day, everyone will come to understand that we are all citizens of a single land, namely the Planet Earth; and that only who knows more has earned himself superiority.

Humankind is the only being who understands the concepts of the “past”, “present” and “future”, that there was a time behind us, and there will be a time ahead of us. Who imagines to know everything, and that everything is found in the books, he hasn’t been asked all the questions. Every generation should become a bridge for the next generation to tread safely. If we fail to remove the shortcomings, then the strengths and the potentials will turn into miseries, and the wise people will be trampled under ignorant feet.

Let's be realistic. Today's ignorant people are an ignorant bunch equipped with the light. Sadly, as we may already see, the reaction of the world, the United Nations, or the powerful religious authorities, in the face of such cruelties as the Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide, or the mass murder of the Coptic Christians of Egypt, Kurds, Izadis, the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and so forth, has been disappointing and often limited to merely issuing some resolutions or expressions regrets. **(The only country to step forward and save the Bosnian Muslims was the State of Israel.)** We should put to good use the gift of freedom in our time, hold one another's hands, keep step with the reasonable people of all sects and religions, and make an effort to remove the weaknesses.

Sectarianism has been in the interest of no religion. A sure cause of the Jewish survival especially in Iran was the evenness and harmonious unity of the Iranian Jewish community. The Vatican Court ignored the Armenian cries in need and withheld rescue, since they belonged to a different Christian sect. The Allied forces even rejected requests by Jews to bombard the railroads in the desert routes which led to the Nazi mass murder camps. The United States, a member of the Allied forces, also rejected the S.S. St. Louis at its shores, an ocean liner which carried a crowd of people who had managed to flee the claws of the Nazis, in effect returning them to the cremation chambers. Altogether, they proved a Persian proverb, that in this world, **nobody's going to scratch my back, save my fingernail.** Also, if we build a house of ice, we shouldn't cry the day it melts. Realism is the key to success.

Certainly, any person has the right to choose their own way of life, as long as it won't harm the others. Also, to preserve the codes, customs and traditions of any group or religion, you wouldn't have to repudiate the other people's ideas. This author, without being charged with a mission, aims to present his own thoughts. For this novice, **I am, if I'm writing so far as I can; I won't be, if I don't write.**

Bertolt Brecht wrote, "There would also be a religion, if sharks were men. It would preach that little fish only really begin to live properly in the sharks' stomachs." Read, "...in the *olam ha-bA* or "the Afterlife"! It's no "service" to make tens of thousands of Yeshiva (Jewish seminary) students every year dependent on God, *ha-shem*, or the "afterlife", instead of reinforcing the self-confidence and positive potentials of the youth. Let's remember that the Jewish culture emphasizes three things, "*Torah, avodah, gemilut chasadim*", that is, "the law,

work, and acts of kindness.” If so, what happened to the *avodah*, with so many people left jobless?! People can’t help themselves and the others by a lifetime of studies alone without a paying job. Sadly, even though the commandments are logical and reasonable, their practice at times is due to mere expediency.

In agreement with the **rationalist ideas**, we read in the books of the *Psalms*, *Job* and *Ecclesiastes*, and I paraphrase, “God built the world on a foundation of reason and intellect; and the hidden **truth awaits to be discovered by human intelligence.**” As such, human beings can discover the truth and act upon it by themselves, **by valuing education and giving it the priority, an education guided by intellect and logic**, and not by brainwashing or imitating the others. The Rumi says, “**The contrast between the Muslim, the Christian and the Jew, / It’s a product of their points of view.**” Humankind will achieve peace when human beings, irrespective of any religion or tradition, arrive at such degree of civilization that the existing oppositions and disparities in taste, especially between a variety of religions and sects, will no more lead to irrational divisiveness and group formations. We must make the path before the coming generation safer.

The fate of each beloved victim of the Holocaust is a unique and alarming history in itself. When it comes to the Holocaust, the motto “Never again!” is not enough, but we should also identify what may lead to potential historical recurrences — and eliminate them. To that end, one solution is to end the culture of the slavish period of the *ghettos* and to stop preaching it. Back then, it was mandatory for the Jews to wear a mark, but what compelling reason is there to do so today? Based on which command of the *Torah*? No wonder that the Danish government, a friend of the Jewish people, has officially advised Jews to avoid wearing the *yarmulke* or *kippah*, i.e. the small traditional religious hat, in public!

We began with “visiting the sick”, a moral obligation, and we continued with a critique of “visiting the sick by the extremists”; although due to the oversight of the respected editor of the *Payam Magazine*, we couldn’t say everything we wished to say! For, she first performs a *chikkah* (*sic!*) on the essays, scrutinizes them, and only then has them published. The late Iranian Prime Minister Amir-Abbas Hoveyda once told the Shah, “There’s only one man in my cabinet, and that’s Ms. Farrokh-rou Parsa!” Likewise, in the publishing world of our community, there’s only one woman, and that’s Ms. Behnaz Dilmanian, the editor of the Persian weekly *Payam*,

who deserves much appreciation for her hard work. She practically tells me, “A child once asked his father, ‘Dad! When will I be old enough to do and write anything as I wish to?’ His father said, ‘My dear son, nobody ever grew that old!’”

Instead of merely criticizing the current situation, it’s best for us to find ways to disperse the countless large and little dangers of the extremists’ acts, both at the level of our community and the larger scale of the global society. Thus, we may hope that societies and their governments will be better informed of the potential risks, and our efforts will bear fruit, as they will care more with knowing minds.

Curing an illness begins from the outside of the body, whereas the healing begins from within; for the main factor in the healing process is the body’s power of self-defense. The same applies to the societies. When establishing the internal calm of the societies is at issue, it’s the healthy families that provide for the defensive power of the society from within, as the main factor in social stability. The institution of family needs to be protected from the outside — as breaking an egg from the outside ends the potential existence of the chicken, but hatching the egg from the inside is her beginning. This author also believes that to fight extremism, that is, to bring about the security of individual societies and the global community, the healing process should be carried out from within. The reasonable sectors of each religion should do the right thing and prevent the dangers posed by the extremists of their own faith — even as curing many illnesses became possible only when their vaccines were produced using the microbes of each illness itself to make the human body immune. We may assert decisively that the silence of such rational people has helped the continued growth of extremism, whether that extremist who is content with brainwashing the youngsters, or the other extremist who blows up the brains of the others! The contrasting tastes of the rationalists and the extremists, whether in our society or on the global scale, is about the contrasting interpretations of religious writings, rather than disagreements over the basis of the religion itself; nevertheless, in the meantime, the religion itself will be harmed. At the end, only those societies shall deserve to stay which have braved themselves to change, and to reject the wrong.

If we are justified to claim that we have a rich culture and laws that agree with modern civilization, then we must allow that this rich culture and the laws can also provide answers against the extremists. If so, why be silent? Identity is not a matter of inheritance. Our true

identity is what remains of us. Religion reminds us of our obligations, of our duty to fulfill our responsibilities as human beings. **A truly religious person understands his responsibilities, understands the rational commandments, and puts them into practice.** When our ancestral religion is humiliated through the spread of some nonsense, all of us are duty-bound to defend the truth of the reasonable commandments of the *Holy Torah*, instead of excusing some extremist words. We speak in unison of “The law! The laws of the *Torah*!”, yet some of us, in the guise of “practicing the commandments”, utilize some irrational words and interpretations as the basis for their ideas. They are not aware that even the uprising led by Moses was meant to fight superstitions and to practice justice, and not to promote some superstitions in the guise of religious advocacy. We’ve had far too enough experience to need of it anymore.

You reap today what you sowed yesterday.

Don’t lust for grapes of wheat from the barley seed.

It’s good to care for the religion, but it’s more important to prevent contaminating it, even as we would protect our children against such corruption. Thus, when a group of people are after corrupting the religion, in the guise of religious advocacy, and by offering a bunch of nonsense and superstition, each of us has the duty to defend it against such a threat.

No doubt, the Jewish people are proud of the rational commandments of the *Holy Torah*. As a parable goes, they asked a tree, “Why don’t you say a word?” He said...

To Be Continued...

Part III

... “My fruits are my words.” This author cries out aloud that spreading some nonsense and superstition is beneath the dignity of the religion, our intellect, and the common sense. The shaky authenticity and the feeble meaning of the empty nonsense that are too often said and written, these give a means into the hands of the ill-wishers, and drive the reasonable people away from the religion. Let’s inform our children of the sensible commandments of the *Torah*, and let’s avoid teaching what doesn’t conform to modern understanding and civilization. When asked, “How could we ruin and end a society,” **Socrates** answered, “Place ignorant people at the helm of major tasks.” And what task more important than teaching? A dry environment is the primary

cause for the spread of the fire. Likewise, I warn, if the extremists continue to stay at the helm of teaching our children, then we will advance years in their way of religious practice, but fall centuries behind in modern science and civilization. To believe in the religion which we inherited doesn't entail accepting it unwittingly and practicing it without understanding its content.

**You do good so that the wicked minds
Won't find a chance to talk ill of you.**

I respect everyone, including who may disagree with what's expressed here, but nevertheless understands me correctly. Humankind is not a fruitless robot; rather, his deeds, his impact, and what products he leaves behind, such as these writings, they do stay, and they will be judged by his contemporaries and the future generations.

Let's return to our main topic, "visiting the sick". A few years ago, I called the late **Agha-jan Shadi**, the president of The Elderly Center under the auspices of Tehran Jewish Association, and an acquaintance of mine, and I asked him, "Please tell me what you need, and what I can do for you." He said, "We are dealing with a major problem every day. A few of the elderly are too lonely, as their children are abroad. They constantly call for their children and grandchildren, but their children don't seem to pay attention! They have nobody else to visit them, and they keep saying, **"If you mean to visit me once I'll be gone, / Then beware! Come and see me, for the time's already here!"**

**Every footstep that I hear, I think it is yours.
Come! My beating heart's leaping out of the chest!**

I said, "Mr. Shadi, if you give me their names, and I promise to protect their identities, I'll go and see their children." He said, "I'm duty-bound to protect the honor of the others," and he refused to disclose their names to me. May the parents never fall in the need of their children, for as it's been said, "The angels laugh when children seek help from their parents, but they cry when the parents need help from their children." The *Talmud* says, "God will not help two groups of people: First, who mistreated his parents, and second, who has no contracts in his business dealings."

Apparently, there were lawyers among the Talmudist, too!

I remember a bitter argument that took place many years ago between two resident merchants of the Amir Chamber of the Grand Bazaar of Tehran. **One ignorant merchant** scolded his 60-year old neighbor in front of the people, telling him, “With all the money that you have, **aren’t you ashamed** that your father is collecting cigarette butts in front of the movie theaters?!” Suddenly, the neighboring merchant broke into bitter tears — adult tears rise from the pain within — and said, “No matter how much my family and I pay our father, no matter how many packs of cigarettes we buy for him, no matter how much we implore him to the contrary, he doesn’t give up his ugly habit and keeps collecting trash like many other old people! You dare tell me what to do! Why do you embarrass me without knowing the truth before **my conscience** and in front of the others? I shall never forgive you, and I shall never forget your ugly behavior. It’s said in the *Pirkey Avot (Chapters of the Sages)* that **‘who judges the others without knowing the truth, he’s the worst of people.’** And you *are* the worst!” We can’t judge a book by the title or by the cover. We can’t accuse the rare and precious children of those who reside in the Elderly Center, Tehran, or the children of the elderly who collect the trash, of being heartless and hurt them as such, without knowing the whole truth. Because,

It’s easy to pave a coarse mountain.

What’s tough is to pave the rough words.

Conclusion: To visit the sick, or just simply ask how someone is doing, it says something, that we care about them, that we wish them health, and that we want them to let us help them to recuperate. Such an act can be called but “expressing our kindness.” On the other hand, however, to offer superficial sympathy with the patient and his acquaintances, to mix this moral obligation with some religious affairs, and to relate it to the religion for no reason but to recruit new members, especially at such vulnerable times as of illness and grief, these cannot be named but “opportunism”. All too often, such opportunistic acts are carried out by resorting to some nonsense and superstition unrelated to the religion, the uttering of which isn’t something to be proud of, nay, it’s beneath the dignity of anyone dressed as a rabbi. Those who have made religion into a means to serve their work and their intent, they don’t notice that **for every generation, the religious and traditional commentaries do better if they rely on the**

scientific ways and understanding of that same generation, instead of depending on some writings that don't agree with contemporary understanding.

The *Mishnah* prefers the *Babylonian Talmud* over the *Jerusalem Talmud*, for the former was newer and fresher, as it was completed later and was more up-to-date, closer to the knowledge and understanding of the time. It's a pity that some things haven't changed. In the past, the extremists used to spread rumors about whomever contradicted them, claiming that the person "has left the religion!"; and today, they protest against any criticism of them as a criticism of the religion. But nobody listens to such things anymore, because **everyone knows** that making progress and correcting ideologies and traditions is possible through constructive criticism, instead of stagnating and rotting in a swamp. The best friends of a person or the society are their sensible critics.

A friend better tell my flaws

To my face, as the mirror does,

Not to speak of them behind my back,

Thread by thread, as the comb plows.

Let's eliminate our weaknesses. The words, the writings, even the uniform attire and appearance of the extremists which they share with their knowledgeable allies, these are not something to be proud of. We read in the **Kherad-nameh, "The Book of Wisdom"**, "A sage saw a man who wore the mullah's attire but spoke beneath the dignity of the clothes. The sage told the man, 'Do one of two things, either speak as it befits the attire's dignity (the Orthodoxy!), or dress up as it suits your words!'" An extremist who suffered from stuttering was asked, "Were you always like this?" He answered, "No, only when I speak!" We should listen to them carefully so we can better judge.

My tears didn't assume the scent of loyalty till my heart was aflame.

Not every dew that drips down a petal is the well-scented rose water.

Not everybody is qualified to bear the proud title of "rabbi".

George Bernard Shaw said, and I paraphrase, "Experience is a good teacher. Pity, it's quite expensive!" It's fair to say that the Jew cannot afford anymore to pay for the punishment.

Currently, the world is entangled in a thunderous storm. Human life is rendered the cheapest commodity, while the market of hypocrisy is quite hot. It seems as if no one knows that once the forest is on fire, not a single tree will be spared. **The best proof of a claim is for it to happen naturally.** For an evident case in point, think of a human newborn, who is scared of strange faces, and cries, but once he has received love, and as he gets more familiar with the people, he climbs into their arms, laughs and dances with them.

It's a fundamental problem with the human condition that we don't know one another. They say, "Flowers **smell so much better**, once you've cured your **common cold!**" How much more pleasant life would be if people got to know one another. Alas, some ignorant religious advocates, instead of providing the grounds for people to get to know each other and connect to one another, they generate hatred between them. **Let us be awake so that we'll sleep more soundly.** As **Shafiei Kadkani** put it,

**Do you know why, like a wave of the sea,
I diminish as I go, as I run away from me?
For what I want I can't find,
And what I see, it's not what I want.**

(Abridged)

**We put forward our just complaint,
And spent a long while on this matter.
If our words didn't suit the people's ears,
Then it was meant for the messengers alone.**

*Norman "Nourollah" Gabay,
May 2017, Los Angeles*

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.

(The End)

Translator's Website
www.ComposerPA.com