

Audible Silence

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Hassan Hathout

Audible Silence

Thoughts and Remembrances

of

a Muslim Elder



البرنامج الوطني لدار الكتب المصرية
الفهرسة أثناء النشر
(بطاقة فهرسة)

إعداد الهيئة العامة لدار الكتب والوثائق القومية (إدارة المخطوطات الفنية)

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Dedication

*To my grandchildren, Sarrah and Hassaan,
and to all grandchildren of all ages.*

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My little flat in California overlooks a beautiful garden and an expanse of green hills. I usually tell my family, "When you see me relaxing on my recliner seat just gazing nowhere and doing nothing, then please 'Do Not Disturb', for I probably am very busy."

This quiet time once or more everyday has become an essential part of my life and has proven most valuable to me. New ideas and insights just condense on the slate of my mind like dew drops, solutions to problems and queries just float in, proper appraisal and criticism of what I did or plan to do, and, most important, such nearness to God that inspires me to know what He wants me to do. It is unfortunate that modern times have largely denied most people the valuable fruits of this "quiet time". Modern life engages people for all their waking hours and any surplus is taken up by television or other entertainment. The sad thing about it is that human beings are not even aware of what they are missing.

Many of these thoughts have guided my life and found their way to my talks and writings. I feel further enriched to share some of them with whoever is interested.

Taking after modern literary styles, I tried to formulate a "Mission Statement" if I am to compose a book explaining Islam.

Surprisingly, I found it nowhere else than in the Qur'an, where God addresses the Prophet. "We have sent you for no other purpose than Mercy to the worlds."

If we compare Islam to a building, this should be its foundation. It is the most important part of the building, although it does not appear over ground. Without its integrity and strength, the building is liable to fall down.

The building comprises three stories:

- 1. The first floor is the articles of worship. These are the five pillars and they are not separate from the other stories for they are connected and interactive with them the same way as different stories are connected with stairs and elevators.*

2. *The second floor is that of human dealings and relationships ('Akhlaq' and 'Mu'amalat'). These include things prohibited while the rest are permissible, with the requirement to opt for the most appropriate amongst the permissible in a given situation. The Prophet in one of his sayings identified religion as "the way you treat others".*
3. *The third floor comprises the legal system, generally designed to service the other floors. Of course, Muslims, being a minority in a non-Muslim society, cannot impose the Islamic legal system (Sharia') but they should exercise their role as good citizens to carry out their duties to help formulate, through democratic processes, the laws that serve the interests and protect the well-being and the moralities of the society at large.*



During my life, I have seen various classifications of human beings such as black and white, east and west, rich and poor, north and south, educated and non-educated, we and them, and, even religiously, believers and non-believers and then believers into Muslim, Christian, Jew and otherwise.

Now, as I near the acme of my life on this earth as well as the depth of my insights in Islam, I have come to the conclusion that there are only two kinds of people: Those with a loving heart and those with a hating heart.

In my conviction, this is at the root of all the problems suffered by the human race. If this can be tackled, then other problems become amenable to solution. It is like two persons; one wearing green eyeglasses and the second wearing red eyeglasses. They look at the same thing but see them under different colors.

The transformation of hearts from hating to loving should be the primary goal of people of religion if they are honest to God rather than to their limited and selfish view of Him.

This should be done and can eventually be achieved.





Ramadan is the tenth month of the Islamic year, which is eleven days shorter than the Gregorian year so over time it comes in various seasons. During Ramadan, Muslims refrain from food, drink (even water), sex, smoking, anger and various kinds of unethical and unbecoming behavior. The span of fasting is from dawn to sunset.

Aside from the ritual aspect, I clearly see that Ramadan primarily signifies the distinction between a human being and an animal for no animal voluntarily exhibits such behavior. This is for the sake of a higher cause.

Just as exercise, fatiguing one's muscles by sports or weightlifting, strengthens one's body, fasting strengthens one's will power, a much needed attribute in our modern day life.

Sometimes in my wild imagination, I entertain the idea of adding to other celebration days, like Mother's Day, Father's Day, Secretaries' Day, Thanksgiving Day, etc, etc, a so-called "Will-Power Day" of fasting upon Ramadan lines.

I wonder what impact this would have on our turbulent society.



The propagation of a certain slogan to promote a certain idea is not new. In modern times, we have witnessed slogans like “Make Love, Not War” to oppose the Vietnam War, “Be What You Are” to promote certain psycho-sexual behaviors, etc...

I am proposing examples Muslims may use and propagate to the widest possible extent, utilizing such vehicles as the internet, print, postcards, posters, engravings on pens, diaries, billboards, stamps, classrooms, etc, etc... Some examples are:

1. *Be what you are?*

No!... Be what you should be.

2. *No! To generation gap*

Yes! To generation bridge.

3. *No... to peer pressure*
Yes... to God's call.

4. *Your God? My God? Or OUR GOD?!*
(coined by my daughter Eba when she was a child. Now she is a professor of Pediatrics)





VISIBILITY?!

6

Beware of the trap of "Visibility". Don't shy away from selflessness in your work for the cause of God. And remember that a lump of sugar will never sweeten a cup of tea if it insists on preserving its cubical form. Dissolve and disappear and let your invisible molecules sweeten even though not seen. It is sweetness that counts and that is your real worth.



Sent as a card to Christian friends

*As we think of the Prince of Peace,
Peace on Earth is in short supply,
And bitterness and hate increase,
For they aren't his rules we apply.*

*The One Family is torn apart,
The poor family of Adam and Eve,
And the children of Abraham lost heart,
In the message they ought to believe.*

*Two thousand years ago,
God sent His Word as a man,
Yes to love, but to hatred no,
But humans rejected the plan.*

*They all claim God on their side,
But few are on the side of God,
Their god is greed and pride,
At the price of shedding blood.*

*As we celebrate and cheer,
We should heed the message from above,
For the call of Jesus is clear,
God is love, God is love, God is love!*



Following the conclusion of a football game between the Blue team and the Green team, the referee commented, "The Blue team played very well."

One of the spectators responded, "But what about the Green team? I think they played very well too!" to which the referee answered, "The Green team? I did not see it."

It sounds silly and absurd yet this is exactly what happens in the world of politics, and it occurs so frequently that it is considered an established rule. Just cast a look at the world of politics, especially international politics and you will see ample evidence.





It is mind-boggling for me to see the call for banning the production of atomic bombs coming only from the countries that produce them, frantically headed by the only country that did actually use them.

The wider problem of using atomic weapons is not that a country bombs and defeats the country it is at war with, but the ensuing and permanent fall-out that pervades the total atmosphere of planet earth. This leads to total destruction even if it takes a period of time. In reality, therefore, there is no victor and vanquished. They are all victims.

The only solution is, therefore, to get rid of atomic weapons altogether, and I do not mean the mere cessation of producing more of them. Why does this not happen?!

The only answer one can get from the hawks is, "But there is lack of trust." It becomes logic, therefore, that the solution is to build trust. This necessitates a thorough and honest study of the lack of trust, its causes, and how to deal with them. It is astonishing that at the summit of human civilization, this basic and decisive question has yet to be answered.



The common notion is that weapons of mass destruction refers to the atomic bomb and similarly devastating war materials produced by the military industry.

A closer look should tell us that there are even more dangerous threats. Is not the prevalence of crime an even worse threat? Are not alcohol and drugs equally or more destructive? Are not the sexual revolution and its sequel of broken families, diseases including Aids, fatherless babies, and the decline of purity and fidelity, a pattern of mass destruction? And what about the flagrant breaches of commercial and industrial ethics as revealed in recent years by top ranking companies and institutions? Do we also have to quote racism, colorism, colonialism, and selfish exploitation of men and women in one's own country or in other countries, etc, etc, etc...?





Of the five fingers of the hand, the thumb is the most important although it appears to be the shortest.

- *It is the only finger that can reach all the others with ease.*
- *It is essential for holding anything of weight between two fingers.*
- *It plays the maximal role in holding a pen and writing, knowing that writing represents the epic of human ascent. The same is true of its role in creating fine arts.*
- *People of the world are like the fingers of a hand. I would choose to be a thumb rather than any other finger, even though the latter may bear ornaments with gold, jewels, or diamonds.*



Any student of the twentieth century realizes that the cause of World War II was the peace treaty following the victory of World War I. The victorious allies imposed the Versailles Treaty over defeated Germany. This led to the circumstances that bred Adolf Hitler and brought him to power, leading to another devastating war.

After victory in World War II, the Allies, led by the U.S.A., recognized this obvious fact and, instead of retaliation and humiliation, they offered a helping hand, including the Marshall and other plans. This saved Europe from falling into Communism and avoided-~~so far~~-a third World War.

Unless peace is mutually accepted, it is doomed to fall to pieces sooner if not later. Real victory is not military victory over one's foe. Real victory is to make one's foe become one's friend. This simple fact is often eclipsed along the generations of leaders and politicians with devastating consequences. I am wondering what will happen to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict!

In 1948, I witnessed a war between the emerging Jewish state and some Arab countries. I was a newly graduated doctor and was stationed in a hospital occupying the vacated civilian airport at the town of Ramlah.

At a time when Ramlah was under siege, seven wounded Jewish attackers were brought to my hospital. A mob gathered to kill them in retaliation for lost family members. I stood on the stairs in their way spreading my arms to my side and told them, "Over my dead body. The Qur'an orders us to give care and be good to the orphans, the needy, and the captives of war." I quoted a relevant verse and a brief Islamic speech following which the demonstrators apologized and dispersed. Besides the necessary surgical work I went at length to dispel the fears and anxieties of my Jewish patients provided they did not try to escape. Six of them were taken by the Red Cross in a few days but one remained for over a month on account of a serious injury. We chatted every day and even became friends. He

missed his one-year-old son so much. As he was taken by the Red Cross, he shook my hand saying, "I owe you my life."

History rolled on including the Six-Day War, in which Israel defeated Arab countries led by governments that were the primary reasons for the defeat. In 1972, I received a letter from Switzerland signed by a name that was new to me. My prisoner told me that he had been trying to locate me for twenty-four years until he spotted my name and address in a hotel in Vienna, Austria, where I vacationed. He reported his news extensively and that he and his family were so keen on knowing me personally, and that he would take care of all the arrangements for my visit to them in Israel. I ventured to write an answer to an address he gave me in Switzerland but together with the nice emotional talk, I told him it would never be possible for me as an Arab to visit Israel while it still occupied our land.

Weeks later, I received another letter in which he told me of two heart surgeries he underwent and insisted I go and pay them a visit. His letter was abruptly stopped before completion or signature.

After a space of two lines, a different hand concluded the letter saying: Days later he passed away at the age of forty-four. His wife found this letter in his papers and is very keen that it reaches you with their gratitude "Thanks to your efforts, he was given an extra twenty-four years of happy life with wife and family!"



In the fifties of the last century, I traveled to the West for the first time for my post-graduate studies. It was in the dissecting room of the Department of Anatomy at the Edinburgh University Faculty of Medicine that I first met my teacher, Dr. Donald Robertson, whom I soon found to be one of the noblest men I have known in my life.

To break the ice and establish an acquaintance, he asked me what part of the world I had come from. "Egypt," I said. Then he asked me, "What do you think of this country?" to which I answered, "I find it very good except for two things." He eagerly asked me what they were and I said, "The first is that Britain enjoys a real democratic life but when Britain occupies and rules another country, she denies its people democracy such as was the case in my own and other countries ruled by Britain."

He paused a while and asked, "What is the other one?" I answered, "The unfair treatment women are subjected to in Britain and, I believe, in the rest of the Western world." To this unexpected comment, his jaw dropped in astonishment, seeing that the comment came from an Arab Muslim whose people have a widespread reputation of mistreating women and considering them inferior citizens.

When he demanded an explanation, I told him that in the West, and under the deceptive banner of freedom, a man can physically enjoy a woman without bearing the burden of any responsibility, under the guise of equal rights and participating in mutual pleasure. Under this philosophy, I see that women are the losers all the time. If enjoyed and deserted, if pregnant and aborted, or if she delivers a fatherless baby, she is the loser. This cannot be justice."

My teacher enthusiastically agreed with me and I found out that he had been sharing the same views. This was the beginning of a strong lifelong friendship for several decades until God recalled him. His message continues in his daughter and son, who are still very dear to me.

In a village at the top of a mountain, some playing children fell down and died. Their wise Elders embraced the idea of building a hospital at the foot of the mountain to receive future casualties and try to treat them. It did not help much. A simpler and really effective idea would be to build a fence around the village to prevent the falling of the children in the first instance. Amazingly, their view is still largely ridiculed by so many allegedly knowledgeable people.

If this obvious logic were adopted, wouldn't it prevent so many sufferings of contemporary humanity ranging from wars to crime to AIDS, just to mention a few?!





I lived in Great Britain for a few years during the fifties of the past century. During that period, an epidemic of armed bank robberies afflicted the country, triggering a public outcry and stirring a political crisis. In a hot debate in Parliament, the opposition scolded the government, demanding that armed police should be stationed in the banks (at the time, British police officers carried no firearms). The reply of British prime minister Harold Macmillan still rings in my ears and even louder in the recent few years as he replied, "We are not willing to sacrifice our way of life in a desperate attempt to protect it!"

Sometimes, it is sad to see so many politicians but so few statesmen.



"God is love," Jesus said. And he said, "To the people of old, it was said: love your relative and hate your enemy but I say to you: Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who trespass against you."

As a Muslim, I fully believe in this and would have expected Christians also to. I am, therefore, surprised and dismayed to find that many of them don't. On television and on the radio, I heard many, including clergy and evangelists, pouring hatred and vitriol against Muslims and even supporting their views with false accusations and misinformation. They are spreading hatred, and not love as Jesus ordained.

I have no doubt that this problem is not confined to Christians. Amongst Muslims, Jews, and people of other religions, there are those who preach hatred, defying, first and foremost, the teaching of their own faiths. I have been taught by

the Qur'an: "They are not equal good and evil, therefore respond in a graceful way, so that he with whom you have enmity would be like a bosom brother."

How sad it is to see how, under the banner of faith, people inadvertently cross the boundaries of religion into the grip of pseudo-religion!





Ishmael and his brother, Isaac (who was eleven years younger), lived in separate lands due to the sour relation between their mothers (Hagar, the maid, and Sarah). But they came together again to tend to their father at his deathbed and, together, buried him in the city of Hebron in Palestine, known in Arabic as "Al-Khalil" i.e. the friend of God.

Jacob had his clash with his elder twin Esau over the blessing of their father, but later met and reconciled. Esau later took for a wife Mahalath, the daughter of his uncle, Ishmael. Jacob, later named Israel, had twelve sons from his two cousins, Leah and Rachel, and their two maids, Zelpah and Belhah. Eleven of his sons got rid of their brother, Joseph, by putting him in the bottom of a pit (a well), hoping he would die.

God willed that this would be the prelude to his good fortune and noble mission as he was found by a caravan (of Ishmaelites) and sold in Egypt to eventually attain authority and save Egypt and its neighbors, including his own family, from the oncoming famine. He invited his parents and brothers to Egypt and there was the remarkable reconciliation.

Generations later, things soured for the Israelites in Egypt and they were persecuted by a particularly heinous Pharaoh, who was equally bad to his Egyptian subjects (even modern history tells us of dictators who would poison-gas their foreign enemies as well as their own subjects). Eventually, God liberated Moses and the Israelites by parting the Red Sea and the Pharaoh was drowned.

This is the story of the Passover, as mentioned in Genesis and the Qur'an. What is not known to non-Muslims is that the occasion is an Islamic celebration observed and prescribed by Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims on the tenth day of the Islamic month of Muharram every year.

The real agony and persecution of the Jews was never at Muslim hands but in Europe, pre-Christian and Christian, including various pogroms, the Inquisition and the Holocaust. In his book, My People, Mr. Aba Eban of Israel states, "My people met justice only twice in their history, under the Muslims in Spain and currently in the United States of America."

Now we witness the great clash over Palestine. Looking back at history and trying to read the future and looking in depth into the three Abrahamic faiths, one would hope that the land of Peace becomes a land of peace, and that Jerusalem would be the converging lens of God's rays rather than the divergent lens some want it to be.





He is also named Hillel the Elder in Jewish history. Since Judaism is a common heritage of the three Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (we Muslims believe they are three links of the same chain), a quotation from him seems to me worthy of acceptance by all. A young man approached him and asked, "Can you explain the Torah to me while I stand on one foot?" The Rabbi answered, "Do unto others what you wish others would do unto you. This is the Torah. The rest is commentary. Go and study it."

If this dictum is observed by all, much suffering could have been avoided in all the world, East, West, Middle East, and Midwest.



Since Man knew life, he also knew death. Yet Man seems to be less accustomed to and less accepting of the end of his life. Death is the crowning of life, and no life can be complete until death takes it. Death is not an evil but the inevitable conclusion of life. Death is crossing your bridge and reaching the other bank, a journey that takes a different time for different people. It is out of mercy that we do not know when we will die, for this would make life unbearable. Death cannot be annihilation, as some people think, followed by nothingness. This would have meant that those who spend their lives enjoying evil and those who spend their lives fighting it would come to the same fate, a supposition that our innate human nature cannot accept.

It would be wise, therefore, to get ready for a day of reckoning where we will stand fully accountable for whatever we chose to do.



Frank Buchman is certainly one of the topmost people of the twentieth century. After scattered readings about him in the newspapers, I knew about him in detail from my teacher, the late Dr. Donald Robertson, of the medical school at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. So I decided to meet with him personally and went to Caux, Switzerland, coinciding with his eightieth birthday. It was a most remarkable experience and a very important milestone along the journey of my life.

Frank Buchman founded the Oxford Group after the First World War. He believed that peace between nations could only come as individuals committed their lives fully to God, and allowed themselves to be changed in the dimension of absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. This brought him large numbers of fellow workers in many countries, and also bitter attack from the materialist ideologies.

The clouds of impending war gathered in Europe with the rise of Adolf Hitler, and Buchman called for Moral Re-Armament (MRA, now called Initiatives of Change), which became the new name for his work. MRA workers joined the armed forces when the Second World War broke out, in defense of freedom and their country.

Buchman supported the war against fascism, but knew it would take a much greater spiritual struggle to deal with the international pride, hate, fear and greed that cause war. He planned urgently for reconciliation in the post-war period. With donations from like-minded people, poor and rich, an MRA conference center was established at Caux, Switzerland, in 1946 in a formerly magnificent hotel, Mountain House. People from France, Germany, and most of the warring nations, came there and found a new vision of what they could do together in peace.

Sixty years on, Caux still hosts a number of gatherings and conferences endorsing a key principle, summarized in one word: "Change". This is the motto of MRA and their prescription to heal the world.**

MRA has touched and changed more people than can be numbered. Like scattered seeds they are carried by the wind to all corners of the earth, bearing fruit beyond measure. It is an ongoing process. It sounds slow but this is the only way to change our world.

Buchman was a very quiet and soft-spoken person, with a contagious spirit. He remains influential more than forty years after his death.



The basic lesson I have learned from my lifelong study of religion is "Freedom".

Animals behave upon their instinct. Angels do good all the time because they do not know what evil is. We humans share with animals their instincts and biological needs but on top of that, we are imbued with a concept of good and evil and the inherent power to choose between them. We are therefore responsible for our free choices.

Without freedom to choose, there can be no responsibility. Sometimes, evil is tempting and righteousness is difficult but we have to decide which way to go.

Confiscation of freedom, therefore, whether by a dictator at home or an aggressor from outside, is an assault on humanity itself, even if it offers affluence and more pleasures of life.

A bird is still in prison even if it is kept in a golden cage.



During the journey of my life, I formulated certain rules to go by and to serve as my compass along the tricky course of life. Here are a few examples:

- *I prefer that life would be bad to me than bad because of me.*
- *I may be tired but never retired. As long as I am alive, I have some work to do or a message to deliver. This is the right of humanity for every human being. I will not die before I die. To die before one dies is suicide, whether physically or intellectually. When I am totally disabled, there is still a great thing to do. I call it Patience.*
- *No human being is inaccessible, if one can just find his psychological telephone number and dial it.*
- *It is not important just to offer sound advice. It is more important to decide when to offer it and how to do so.*

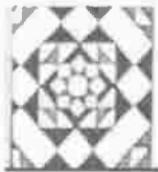


1 does not equal 1000

Yet $1/1=1000/1000$

It is not correct to compare nominators without considering their denominators. It is, therefore, a poor argument to say, "We have rights" without asking ourselves, "Do we deserve them?"

It is not compatible with divine justice to get a right that one does not deserve. Don't say "But my enemy is more evil than I" because Omar Ibn Al-Khattab said, "God might punish a devil by the hands of a worse devil!"





I went to the circus. I saw monkeys playing football, tigers jumping through circles of fire, elephants walking on rolling balls, and animals driving a motorcycle, to mention but a few examples.

Thinking of this, the question just glared in my thinking. If animals can be made to do this, how can I ever despair of the human being?! Man is by nature changeable. It is in our nature to seek and implement the proper "initiatives of change".



Maimonides, the jewel and pride of Jewish philosophy, was the student of the Muslim philosopher (Cum jurist and physician), Bin Rushd of Muslim Spain (known in the West as Averroes).

When the Jews were expelled from Spain as collateral damage with the Muslims, Maimonides later settled in Egypt as personal physician to Salahuddin (Saladin), who fought the Crusader alliance of European kings headed by Richard the Lion Heart of England and recaptured Jerusalem after decades of Crusader occupation.

At one juncture, Richard the Lion Heart became gravely ill due to an attempt on his life by poisoning conspired by his fellow Christian kings. As soon as Salahuddin knew of it, he secretly sent Maimonides, who treated and cured Richard.

Richard was so grateful that he invited Maimonides to stay with him as his personal physician, an offer which Maimonides declined and went back to stay with Salahuddin.

When Ferdinand and Isabella conquered Muslim Spain, resulting in the exodus of many Jews to Muslim lands, the Muslim Caliph commented, "They impoverished their country and enriched mine!"

This is past history. One wonders what the future holds after the gloomy present we witness today.



We are from Earth and to Earth we return!

Atoms form molecules and molecules form compounds up to that wonderful self-replicating molecule, DNA, which begins what we call life. Vegetable life feeds from Earth. Vegetarians feed upon plants. Carnivores feed upon vegetarians. Man is vegetarian and carnivore at the same time. If living beings do not die, then the earth will be consumed in making them until they find no earth to live on or to be made from.

The raging battle of evolution versus creationism concerning the human being never really engaged my concern. To me, Man is not defined by his body. Anatomically, physiologically, and psychologically, I hardly see a tangible difference between the members of what we call higher life, including man. They are all members of the animal kingdom.

But if someone calls me an animal, I will certainly be offended. I am a member of humanity: Noble Humanity. I am more than my biology. Those of us whose ceiling is their biology are indeed animals. Man is the only creature who has gone beyond the realm of biology to the realm of Values while maintaining his biology. It is something above and beyond our bodily matter and material. When and where and how we acquired this essential spiritual component is still unknown to us but certainly earth is not its source. Its source is our Maker and when we die, it is only our earthly part that we refund to Earth but not our spirit.





A constant ingredient of my daily life is a period of talking to God and raising to Him my needs and feelings and asking for His help. Naturally, this supplication comprises constants and variables. Amongst the constants for the past forty or more years is the request, "Please give me a loving heart and deny me not the blessing of the smile."

This smile, a great thing and a precious gift, creates a happy environment inside and around oneself. Even in a hot argument between spouses, friends, or even enemies, a smile can defuse the situation and widely open the gates of reconciliation and the advent of the needed solutions to problems. A smiling face is contagious and is certainly a potent factor in cleaning the psychological environment.

When I taught in the University, I used to tell my ever-pious Muslim female

students who believed that a criterion of piety is to look stern and serious to the point of frowning, "In Islam, the teeth are not an awraah (a part of the body that religion mandates to be covered)".

I am offering here my suggestion to everyone to acquire and cultivate a constant smile.





There is so much that we long to provide for our children including good health, good clothing, good schooling, good careers, and a hefty and abundant wealth to inherit after we die. We spend our lives doing this and during the process, we miss the central and basic fact: The most important thing to give your children is your TIME!

We are keen that our children receive their vaccine shots against such diseases as measles, rubella, diphtheria, tetanus, polio, and so many others. The whole idea is to build up their immunity before infection strikes so that when it hits later on, they are ready to repel it. You prepare the soldier for battle before he faces it.

Unfortunately, some parents do not have the vision or even the concept of moral vaccination. As they grow up and they are immersed in the vagaries of immorality pervading in our modern society, our children have no immunity and just succumb to them.

The best thing to endow one's child with is a purpose in life to live for and strive to achieve, a purpose higher and wider than personal ambitions. There is a window of time during early childhood when children totally and unreservedly accept and keep forever parental guidance. At a later age, one is exposed to competition by one's own desires and inclinations through peer pressure unless the message had been imprinted at an earlier opportune stage of the child's life.

Keep in mind that no amount of advice or admonition will influence your child unless you yourself are the good example. You can teach your children the greatest lessons even without uttering one word. Remember that children by nature are very clever and very observant. So help you God.



When I was a child, my first attempt to learn to swim was very disappointing. In my frantic attempt to swim, my head plunged into the water. As I frantically worked my arms, water went into my nostrils and I just could not do it. It was then that my trainer (may God rest his soul) gave me the advice, "Keep your head above water."

When I grew up and navigated the sea of life, I realized that my swimming instructor's advice was not limited to the swimming pool but to life as a whole.

Time and again, this piece of advice was my anchor in so many storms and my deliverance from so many crises. My life entailed so many taxing circumstances, to use a mild word, but I never allowed them to break me. I put my difficulties between brackets and never allowed them to put me between their brackets. "No storm blows forever," I used to say to myself. I acquired immunity to situations

that would make many people succumb to fear, pain, anger, grief, hopelessness, or irrational behavior.

I'll always feel grateful to my instructor for his beautiful five words: Keep your head above water!





May God rest her soul!

I first saw her many years ago at the M.R.A. Mountain House in Caux, Switzerland. During the meals, she sat by herself at a table beside the window, beautiful, dignified, and as if glowing with light.

During the German occupation of France in World War II, she was a member of the French Resistance, to her people a hero, and to the Germans of course a terrorist.

After the war, she was one of the most beloved and appreciated citizens of her country. But more important than her Resistance career was her decision to go on a tour in Germany and speak to the German people, who were, at the time, the most hateful creatures to the French. And what did she tell the Germans?

She apologized for the sense of hatred she had harbored towards them. She realized that hatred is destructive to both hater and hated. She realized that a happy future to the world hinges around ridding it of rancor and ill feelings. As an outcome of her tour, some leading French and German figures were brought together and soberly considered the future of their respective countries and the world at large. This was the prelude to further developments that led to the reconciliation and alliance between France and Germany.

How dire the need in today's world of people like Madame Laure!



My knowledge and interest in financial matters are really meager. One evening, as I was watching television, the financial bulletin was exhibited and a long line of names of companies rolled, beside which a downward pointing arrow was shown indicating a drop in the prices of their shares. At long last, I noted a row of upward-pointing arrows meaning a rise in price. To my surprise, all those profit-makers were related to the military industry. Somehow, it was a kind of rude awakening to me and I hope to all viewers.

At the peak of human civilization, the most profitable of all is the industry of death. That immediately brought to my memory a poem I had written many years ago, of which I excerpt the following lines:

*As the deer see the lions they fly away,
For lions feed upon deer,*

*Each one has a foe from which it runs,
But is safe in his own clan,
Only we make the bombs,
And we stock the guns,
For the enemy of Man is Man!*



Sometime ago, I was watching television and chanced on an interview between a program host and two beautiful women. I found out that they were prostitutes and he was interrogating them about various aspects of their career. The discussion was revealing and-if I may use the word-educative. At one juncture, he asked one of them, "What if the customer is a very ugly and repulsive man, would you still accept him?" To which she answered, "This has nothing to do with it; the important thing is the money."

This was almost shocking to a person with my cultural background and belief system. I grew up in a society that heeds something called chastity and one of our famous epigrams says: An honorable woman would prefer hunger to riches gained by immorality.

Unfortunately, there is a new trend that questions the worth of such things as honor, purity, and chastity. These words seem to be on their way to deletion from the dictionary of modern times.

Prices are measured in dollar currency. Values are beyond measure.





It is the tradition to teach our children to be honest, to say the truth, to be unselfish and responsive to the needs and sensitivities of others... basically, to stick to moral standards and the dictates of their conscience.

Time passes and one is appalled that their world as grown-ups has discarded these values. It is regrettable that this is especially exhibited by those of them who attain influential positions and become the leaders, politicians, and tycoons of industry, commerce, media, and business. Modern times have witnessed flagrant examples of such behavior even in the highest circles. Selfishness has become rampant, whether personal or national, under the guise of patriotism. Denial or distortion of the truth or its concealment has become a recognized way of public life, nationally and internationally.

I wish adults, especially those in positions of leadership, would maintain their childhood teachings and innocence. The whole world would certainly be happier.

In my opinion, this is the only way to save the world from falling into the gaping abyss.



Sometimes, in my wild and curious imagination, I see myself resurrected after my death and brought to judgment in the court of the Almighty. A full account of my deeds during my earthly life will be spread before me, omitting no detail.

It will show plenty of sins, errors, and irregularities (after all, the human being is not a perfect being). I will be very embarrassed and worried. I will be asked, "Do you confess to all this you have committed in your life?" "Yes, I do," I will say. Then I will be asked, "What do you want then?" "Forgiveness!" I would say. "Let us review your bank account then and see if you have sufficient deposit to pay for your debts." I would then hope to have enough to pay for my debts. What you can do to be forgiven is for you yourself to be a forgiver.

And so your best insurance for your inevitable future life is to lead a life of forgiveness. Whether with your spouse, your family, your friends, your enemies, or those who transgressed against you, forgiveness should be your ultimate response so that forgiveness will be your ultimate reward.



In my poetic imagination, I can go on travels, visit places, attend meetings, and strike up conversations. Once there was a large social function, and amongst the attendees, my attention was attracted to two ladies. One was quite old with a wrinkled face, white hair, obviously limited in health and strength, and dragging herself around, assisted by two canes. When she spoke, she oozed with wisdom and imparted a feeling of peace and content. The other was young, extremely beautiful, jubilant, and certainly aware and proud of her beauty as betrayed by her walk, talk, and mannerisms.

A conversation brought them together during which the young beauty did most of the talking and the old one most of the listening. At the conclusion, the young one asked, "But who are you?" To which the old lady answered, "I am none other than you... only after the passage of a number of years!"

I never believed in communism. I always believed that if people discard God, they inevitably succumb to tyrants. Subduing the individual for the sake of society will eventually subdue the society, because society is the sum total of individuals. The eclipse of communism, therefore, took me by no surprise.

The fall of communism was never, in my thinking, an assertion of the fitness of unbridled capitalism. The motto of the latter is for capital to continually grow and obviously there cannot be such a thing as unlimited growth in a limited world. Sooner or later, the system will crumble and cracks in its structure are showing day by day.

The only hope is to strike the proper balance between individual and society, and for capital to be equally conscious of its rights as of its duties.

The human mind is the greatest gift to man, making him master over God's creation around him. It is the human mind that has been working and will ever be working to decipher the creation we are part of and harness the forces of nature to hopefully-good use. The clash between science and religion that was in vogue for centuries, to me, has no grounds. To me, as Muslim, the Qur'an is the very word of God and nothing can be more religious, yet in it, I read, "Say, go about on earth and find out how He (God) started out the creation!" (29:20). This is indeed the essence and mission of science.

It is our mind that tells us what is right and what is wrong, what we should or should not do, and, on the whole, it is a compass as well as the navigator of human life. Harmful substances that curtail or abolish the human mind from free action are an infringement and assault on humanity itself.

Hence, it will be also correct to say that alcohol and drugs that numb or stupefy the human mind are, in fact, reducing humanity, noble humanity, to mere "animalhood".





Incontinence is a known medical symptom. In urinary incontinence, the bladder sphincter is not functioning normally and urine dribbles or flows out and cannot be controlled. Fecal incontinence affects the anal sphincter and stools, inadvertently, come out, soiling the patient's clothing. Both conditions cause much distress.

Another kind of incontinence I would like to mention here is often of more serious consequences than the afore-mentioned two. I am referring to incontinence of speech. Words inadvertently uttered in the wrong situation, the wrong time, or the wrong circumstance can lead to sequels ranging from hurtful to disastrous. Examples are replete in everyday life.

Through personal experience, I found out that the urge to speak is probably the strongest of human desires, even including food and sex. When I was a student, we used to gather in front of the lecture room, exchanging jokes and puns and chatting until our teacher arrived. Pondering on that irresistible temptation to

talk, I decided to have one weekly day of silence except in the bare minimum of words in answer to those addressing me.

That was when I discovered the awesomeness of the desire to speak but also the greatness of the ability to curb it. This was one of the greatest lessons my life has ever taught me. Reading the holy Qur'an, my attention was drawn to the fact that abstinence from speech used to be a kind of worship, even referred to as fasting in the Abrahamic faiths. According to the Qur'an, when Prophet Zachary [usually spelt Zechariah in the Bible] was given the glad tiding of begetting John the Baptist after infertility well into old age, he asked God for a sign and was told to observe a three-day fast from speech. When Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus and felt too embarrassed to take the baby to her family, she was advised to go to them, maintaining that she was observing a fasting from speech. She was, of course, heinously accused by her family until baby Jesus spoke to them, according to the Qur'anic version.

The ability to control one's tongue is one of the most precious endowments God bestows.

It is common knowledge that the original sin was committed by Adam and Eve when they ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, disobeying God's instructions not to do so.

In my view, there was a more original sin than that. When God created Adam from dust and ordered the angels to prostrate themselves before him, they all did except Satan, who refused, telling God, "You created him from dust but created me from fire." Whereas Adam and Eve apologized, repented, and were forgiven, Satan did not and has not until today.

It is this satanic element of the human nature that leads some human beings to cling obstinately to their arrogance and pride, rather than saying "I am sorry" and correcting their course. They think it is weakness, whereas in reality it is the essence of strength. Eventually, they suffer and the world suffers because of that.

Examples are aplenty at all personal, national, and international levels with dire consequences. A truly strong person is the one stronger than himself.



Over history, having dreams while sleeping has been a known phenomenon. Although attracting human attention and provoking intensive study, dreaming continues to be an elusive subject and remains largely beyond the sphere of human knowledge. Some dreams, however, seem to acquire a permanent position in one's memory and never succumb to oblivion or even lose their vividness. Here is one I saw decades ago, but which remains so vivid in my memory.

I was watching the dark night sky studded with thousands of little stars. One of them attracted my attention because it grew brighter and brighter and started a descent towards planet Earth. As it approached nearer to me, I realized that the star was none other than the Virgin Mary, carrying baby Jesus on her left arm. She was dressed in a flowing white dress, her face was shining, and there was a halo around her head. I was in awe as she approached and stopped when she was about twenty yards from me. I bowed my head in respect and she reciprocated by a smile

and a nod of her head. She then started ascending again, retracing her previous course, and her image became smaller and smaller and when she reached the sky, she became a bright star once more.

One of the few very impressive dreams I've had in my life! I do love Jesus and the Virgin Mary, as all Muslims do. The Qur'an describes him as: "The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, is the emissary of God and His Word that He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him." About Mary, the Qur'an says: "The angels said 'O Mary, God has chosen you and purified you and chosen you over the women of all the worlds.'"



Many years ago, I received a memorable telephone call. My caller gave his name and asked me if I knew him, to which I answered to the negative. He told me if I would please accept his invitation to dinner at a very prestigious hotel, hoping he would have the opportunity then to tell me what it was all about and that the matter was very important to him.

As he received me, he asked me if I recognized him at all and I answered that I didn't. He told me he was the boy occupying the seat behind me in the third grade classroom at our elementary school, some forty years previously. I greeted him cordially but had to admit that, regrettably, my memory failed me. He then asked me, "Don't you even remember the day the school took us on a bus trip to the Pyramids and when you opened your lunchbox at lunchtime, you were surprised and dismayed to find it empty?" Then I remembered and he told me that it was he who deliberately removed my lunch as a practical joke to enjoy watching my

reaction to the unpleasant surprise. In spite of the passage of many years, I regained my memory of the incident with a broad smile on my face. He told me that something strange happened, viz. that as he was reciting the Quran, he read a verse saying: "And those who, as they commit an abominable act or a behavior tantamount to wronging their own selves, remember God so that they repent for their errors and do not insist on their mistakes, and who else to forgive sins but God?!"

Although I read this verse several times before, something suddenly clicked in my mind that actually opened a new vista to me. Why don't I try to remember all my mistakes and, whenever I can, try to make amends for them?! This invitation to you is an example of the advent of this new policy in my life and it is one of many. You cannot imagine the tremendous happiness that has brightened my life since. Those who commit errors in their personal or public life and deny themselves and others the blessings of apologizing for them are indeed missing quite a lot.



Two persons walked along a corridor until they met a door of a room they both intended to enter. Obviously, there were two possibilities to choose from.

The first, they will both stop, each with a smile on the face, gesturing to the other to go in first, politely uttering the words: After you... Eventually, one of them will go in, followed by the other and everybody will be happy.

As for the other scenario, each insists on being the first to go in. They will collide and try to push the other in order to go in first. Given enough selfishness and obstinacy, a sense of fighting of some sort will develop until one can make it, entering the room first, followed by the other. The result seems to be the same in both cases but the consequences are not. Instead of the happy feeling of giving and yielding and creating a loving atmosphere, there will be a feeling of anger, competitiveness, and a lingering background of hatred. If these two persons are

attending a meeting, their psychological attitude might actually taint the discussions and influence their course.

This seems to be a naïve example, but a scrutinizing look at the goings on in the broad world and at much higher and more serious levels denotes that much suffering and conflict in the world is ultimately a manifestation of what Man feels towards Man!

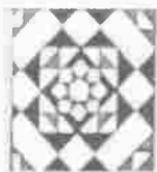


I first met her at a conference in New Orleans many years ago. She was a middle-aged nurse, whose face was shining with a beautiful peace, happiness, and content. She was never married, but was the adoptive mother of three boys. To my surprise, all three children had Down syndrome (a genetic disorder due to an extra chromosome number 21). This was strange to me for, in the United States, the antenatal discovery of Down syndrome fetuses is almost a universal antenatal test and beyond the age of forty is usually funded by the government. It is usually a "Search and Kill" mission, since with few exceptions such fetuses are disposed of by abortion. I was therefore very keen on hearing more from this lady.

It was her firm belief that every human being has the right to live, a right that overrides the wishes of the parents or the economic references of the society, unless, of course, the fetus is diagnosed to harbor a fatal abnormality or one that makes life miserably unbearable, or if the continuation of the pregnancy was a threat to

the mother's life. In her belief, children with Down syndrome were entitled to live. Cities that can fund a zoo ought to be able to fund institutions to care for humans with abnormalities.

In her experience, children with Down syndrome came at the top of the list. "They can live to a reasonable age, they are educable to a certain degree, and can be trained for earning a living and supporting themselves. They are, on the whole, good mannered. Everyone knows this and my three children are proof of it. They have been a source of joy and happiness to me and to all those whom they have encountered. Above all, I feel they have been a strong knot that ties me to the grace of God". It is painful to witness this God factor so ignored by our modern times.

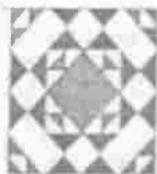


This brother and sister were my cousins, he a year older than me, and she a year younger than me. In early childhood, they were my closest friends (my only sibling is a brother eleven years younger). Their father was an irrigation engineer whose career dealt with the Nile flow in Egypt and its harnessing to adjust to the requirements of the country's use of its water under conditions of relative drought or threatening inundation.

One day, the brother and sister were playing by the bank of the Nile when they slipped and fell into it. Fortunately, Aisha could hold on to a shooting with one hand while her other hand grasped a lock of hair on her brother's head, keeping him in place and barely having access to air to breathe. Help soon came and both were luckily saved.

One year later, Aisha died of child meningitis at the age of five. Zaky remained as my lifelong brother until he died of a heart attack at the age of seventy-three. He became a mining engineering professor at the university, a top scientist in his branch and to him, both as a researcher and advisor, his country owes a lot, to his knowledge and practical participation. He was widely mourned and accredited with the valuable services he rendered his country.

Now I often wonder to whom the credit is due. To Zaky for all his achievements or to Aisha, who in the first instance, saved his life and without whose child efforts at the critical moment, Zaky's achievements would have never come to materialize?!





She got married at the age of twenty-three, but her hopes to become a mother were frustrated as her six pregnancies all ended in spontaneous miscarriage. She became so disappointed that at last she made the decision of "No More!" She had permanent sterilization through laparoscopy. This is an operation where the abdomen is not opened by incision but merely by piercing its wall by a scope fitted with a light to look in and through another hole, introduce a cauterizing forceps to coagulate each fallopian tube by cautery, thus barring the ascending sperm from meeting the descending ovum. This was actually the major use of the laparoscope when first invented.

Five years went by when she missed her period and the diagnosis of pregnancy was established. It was a tremendously joyful and happy event to her. As a matter of fact, she had been undergoing remorse and regret over her decision to be sterilized. Almost every surgical procedure has some failure rate, however small,

and hers turned out to be one such failure. The pregnancy proceeded successfully, overriding her previous history of repeated miscarriage. At term, she gave birth to a lovely healthy boy, and felt she was the happiest woman on earth.

But alas! The human being is such an amazing and complex creature. An idea came to her, out of her own or instigated by some friend. She sued the gynecologist who had performed the sterilization that failed, under a charge that was given the name "Wrongful Life", since the sterilization operation he had performed failed to achieve its purpose. For the happiest thing that ever occurred to her, she was now complaining and seeking compensation. I was amazed to know that the ruling was in her favor. The doctor was to pay a hefty amount of money as well as a monthly allowance to support and educate the child until the age of eighteen years.

A couple of years later, the child was playing with his ball in front of their house when the ball rolled into the street and the boy reflexively dashed after it. The driver of a car passing by could not possibly avoid him and the boy was run over and died.

All was lost in a second!



It was at a party at a friend's house that I met her for the first time. As she came in, she strongly attracted my eyes, and I guess everybody else's, because she was extremely beautiful. Never before had I seen such beauty in my life. Her face was like a miracle in its beauty and it prompted me to whisper time and again, "Blessed be God for creating such beauty!"

At one juncture, I happened to move to a place she was sitting in, chatting with some friends. At that instant, I wished I hadn't. I heard her talking and reflexively felt extremely disappointed. Her voice was loaded with arrogance, bitterness, and scorn. She went on backbiting this, badmouthing that, and bitterly criticizing people for having views that did not concur with hers. The way she spoke made the beauty of her face fade away and her face, to me, came to represent the ugly side of human nature. Instead of representing the epitome of beauty, the same face dwindled into representing the epitome of ugliness!!

In Arab countries, a medical doctor is called-in colloquial language-“the wise man” (hakeem). It is common expectation that he offers not only therapy but also wisdom.

One day, I received a request from the Genetics department at the institution I worked in to see a patient they described as having suicidal tendencies. The patient was a young pediatrician in the same hospital, who was the mother of a grossly malformed daughter two years old. With her gross malformations and disfigurement, everybody had expected her death within hours or days of her birth. But she didn't and kept on thriving. Food had to be led into her stomach through a nasal catheter every few hours. This went on and on with no end in sight and her mother seemed to crack down under the stress, to the point of entertaining the idea of putting an end to her own life as an outlet from the ordeal.

I usually tailor my words to the particular ears I am addressing. "I would like to know whether you are a believer or a non-believer because I have different words for each," I told her. She said she was and was an observing Muslim who believed in the tenets of Islam, observed the articles of worship, and upheld the articles of faith.

"So you believe that after this life, there is a hereafter including heaven and hell and accountability." She did. "Let us now resort to our imagination and imagine that we died and then were resurrected in the hereafter. There is hell on one side and heaven on the other and huge numbers of people in between, some destined to this and some destined to that. Of course, you are keen on going to heaven and you started pushing your way through the crowd inch by inch until, at long last, you reached the gate of heaven. The gatekeeper will then look at you and ask, 'What do you want?' You would naturally say, 'I want to go in!' But then, he will confront you with the question, 'Do you have the key?' What will your answer be?"

She was an intelligent person and, after a little pause, she said, "I'll answer him, 'Yes, I have the key.'"

"He will ask you, 'Show me they key.' What will you say?" She confidently said, "My patience over my daughter. This is the key."

She nodded her head. For the first time in two years, a smile flickered on her face. She thanked me and showed all signs of relief as she left the clinic.

Her life after that became one of peaceful acceptance. She had been contracepting but she stopped and soon became pregnant. Along her pregnancy, some doctor suspected the fetus was not growing as it should but her decision was consistently to gratefully accept whatever God gave her. She told me that she felt that perhaps a more important mission of her life than doing pediatrics was to furnish a good example for similarly afflicted parents in patience and acceptance.

She later gave birth to a beautiful, normal girl and loved both immensely. She would often tell me that if the part played by her deformed baby was to assure her of the key to heaven, then she is no doubt the best thing she was ever given in her life.

Many, many years ago, there was a gathering of friends at the home of one of them, as far as I remember, to celebrate his birthday. For a refreshment item of the program, one of them suggested we each tell the group about two days in our personal lives considered to be the luckiest and unluckiest of our lives. As the game went on, a friend sought our permission to reverse the order and start with the unlucky day. He told us that he had been on his way to the airport to travel to the United States on a scientific mission. He had looked forward and worked hard for it for a long time until his D-Day came and he was on his way to the airport with a full load of hopes and aspirations. Unfortunately, the car he was taking to the airport made a collision accident with another car and he was afflicted with several fractures and other injuries. Instead of the airport, he was taken to the hospital and was to undergo treatment and disability for several months. The chance of America was gone and his circumstances never brought it back afterwards.

There was a sad silence for a moment until someone, wanting to change the mood, asked him to tell them then about his luckiest day. My friend smiled and looked into the eyes of every one of us and very deliberately said, "You'll be surprised to know that my luckiest day turned out to be none other than the very unlucky day I just told you about! It was a long time after that I came to know- and by chance- that the connection I was to take from Europe to America crashed during the journey with no survivors! Had I not known that, I would have still been mourning my luck and reminiscing on the unluckiest day of my life."

Many such events occur in life, ours and other people's. One cannot guarantee the fortune or the satisfaction of knowing the unseen part of the story which would make the apparently sad event only the prelude to a very happy conclusion. We are not in a position to demand from God to give us an explanation for events in life that we feel are painful, for it is God that is putting us to the test of faith in Him, and not the other way around. As Prophet Muhammad said: "Had you been in a position to know the unseen, you would have been content with the seen." This is the real translation of having faith in God and the proper attitude to pass our test of faith.

My dear little one:

You looked like a shining star on your birthday. You were the focus of attention and your face shined with happiness as each one congratulated you. You received lots of gifts as well as prayers and good wishes.

That was your day.

Or was it?

On your birthday, who really did the birth?

Was it you or your mother?

Who bore the burdens and went through the hurdles before that day materialized? And who bore responsibilities of caring and catering for you since?

I wish you many happy birthdays but never forget that your birthday is in reality your mother's birthday!

God (English)

Allah (Arabic)

Yahweh (Hebrew)

Dieu (French)

Dios (Spanish)

Gott (German)

Dio (Italian)

Khoda (Farsi)

Theos (Greek)

... ..

etc., etc.,

These are the names of God in different languages. It is surprising, therefore, to repeatedly watch on television some supposedly knowledgeable (!) persons accusing Muslims of not worshipping God but worshipping Allah.

Human beings speak different languages and each has a name for God. Perhaps the English language is the one that has no such a name and instead we use the capital G instead of merely god. So many times after giving a talk, I am addressed with the question, "If you really worship God, then who is Allah?" I even once heard a person in high office deriving comparisons between "our" God and that of the Muslims.

God is One! There cannot be two of Him because, in that case, neither of them can be infinite and God is infinite! But someone might ask, "What do you mean by infinity?" My confident answer would be, "I do not know." Because I am finite, I cannot comprehend infinity. And yet, infinity is a scientific term taught in our schools in the math curriculum, and not in the religious curriculum.

God is. And He is the One. Whether you are Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Sikhi, godless, agnostic, or an outright non-believer, God is...

And God is the One.