

## CHAPTER 12

# Clarion 7

November 19, 1860<sup>1</sup>

### *Moral Losses of the Homeland*

Countrymen,

The moral losses that befell the homeland as a result of the recent unrest are many and varied. They are even more criminal and evil than the material losses mentioned in the previous address. Among the moral losses is the loss of the concord that our fathers and grandfathers bequeathed us. This loss is tremendous in itself but, as the astute critic knows, the national concord was already shaky before the eruption of the recent civil war. Indeed, the current losses of the homeland only increased the estrangement and antagonism between different communities and among members of the same community.<sup>2</sup>

Those who observed carefully the country's state of affairs before the current crisis and noticed how the hearts were filled with malice and hatred predicted that these thick dark clouds were going to result in muddied and sullied living conditions. They also expected that the filth of hatred and extreme prejudice that was stored up in people's chests for many years would

at some point in time erupt in a violent outburst. The slightest trigger would lead to the destruction of everything and everyone in its wake because the deep wound inflicted by the treachery of earlier wars and unrests was sealed before it was cleansed from pernicious infections.

Hearts suppressed their hatred and anger while waiting for an opportune moment to shoot their sharp arrows at those standing in the way of these hearts' ascendant power and prestige. These wicked wars have in turn placed a father's killer in front of his son, turned the killer of a son into his father's neighbor, placed a thief of a robbed mother in front of her daughter, and positioned the defamer of a daughter next to her mother. Zayd's cap was placed on 'Ubayd's head and Hind's necklace on Da'ad's neck.<sup>3</sup> Memories of such injustices came to be stirred, at opportune moments, in order to arouse the malicious feelings that were—under the effect of songs and lullabies—dormant but not asleep. What is expected from a people and from neighbors in such miserable states when they have no religious, moral, or civil wisdom to restrain them? Rather, enmity, social divisions, and family factions were constantly mobilized for purposes we are neither too blind to see nor too foolish to see through.

Countrymen,

It is no secret how dangerous it is for a country or district to fail to punish murderers or to grant free rein to people who have become used to looting and shedding blood. Such men who have inherited these traits from their fathers and forefathers by nature and nurture have often experienced the pleasures of impunity—even rewards—associated with their deeds.

Is it possible for a country and a people that are in such a wretched state as we are to sustain peace, concord, and calm for

any length of time? The reality of the current situation proves that the honest answer is clearly “no”—that it seems absolutely impossible. If we remain silent, the rocks of Syria will speak out loud, as will the blood of its people. We should not resign ourselves to the claims that the peoples’ feelings are noble and strong enough to weather the sword and the bullets. For while those who are free from such violent aspirations exhibit some of the most pleasant and delicate traits, we see that the people with prejudice are still active and mobilized.

We hope that, this time around, matters do not fall under the old rule of “let bygones be bygones.” This was about to happen again were it not for the arrival of the great statesman, His Excellency Fu’ad Pasha. May the remedies be stronger and may the sanctions be more effective this time. Despite the constant delays we are witnessing, this hope is not without grounds. As the poet’s saying goes:

A people stand to lose from vacillation  
When decisiveness would have solved the situation

Countrymen,

The homeland needs concord for its survival, construction, and prosperity. We know from experience that the loss of concord is one of the most painful and pernicious losses. But someone may wonder: “Is the return to concord possible after what happened?” For as the poet says:

Hearts are like bottles of glass  
When broken cannot be recast

It is clear that this verse contains as much exaggeration as wisdom. Perhaps it was uttered by a pre-Islamic poet who did not live long enough to see it refuted by history or, occasionally,

by general experience. For concord, unlike discord, is a natural instinct of mankind that denotes companionship—as opposed to estrangement—and not forgetfulness, as some claim. Concord was indispensable for the rise of mankind and the promotion of the interests and well-being of human existence. This is why our hopes for a return to concord are high, in the long run at least. And we thought it befitting to alter the previous verse to read:

Glass bottles are broken forever  
But estranged hearts can be mended together

One should not understand our words to mean that we advocate a return to concord with blood shedders. No one who values the good of the public and the country over the good of the individual or groups of individuals would call for such a thing. And it is no secret that the return of concord and its very existence, persistence, and growth depend on certain conditions, most urgently on the following.

First: We need living and attentive religions to teach their children to view those who hold different beliefs neither with contempt nor with scorn, as is now often the case, but with care and affection, as among members of one family whose father is the homeland, its mother the Earth, and God the single creator, with all members created out of the same substance, sharing the same destiny. God does not favor one individual over another for their title or group association, but for their knowledge, piety, reason, virtue, neighborliness, and upholding of the rights of mankind and the common good. Human beings are valued by two attributes: what they feel and what they say. For us, laws are to be obeyed, the rights they bestow upheld, and the duties they entail fulfilled. Anyone who studies the histories of religious

communities and peoples knows the harm visited upon religion and people when religious and civil matters, despite the vast difference between them, are mixed. This mixing should not be allowed on religious or political grounds. But how often has it had a hand in the present destruction? God knows, and so do you. And since this patriot is not from the band of fools, he also knows.

Second: We need wakeful and firm local authorities capable of drawing the line against transgressors without exposing their inability to draw on support from outside their area of jurisdiction. They will treat all classes equally and provide law-abiding people with full religious, moral, and civil rights. These rights are not privileges dependent on affiliation to a person or to a group of people, but they are rights as such.

Third: We need agreed-upon legislation, just provisions and legal prosecution based on evidence rather than personal favoritism. These need to be in harmony with the times and independent from religious laws.

Fourth: We need to reject blind partisanship so that a family or a group cannot be condemned because of the actions of one of its members. Likewise, the homeland as a whole cannot be condemned because of the guilt of some of its sons; nor can we neglect the many charitable deeds of its helpful and humane sons. To maintain concord effectively we advise you to avoid this natural inclination to condemn an entire race and to attack it because of the failings of some of its members. In fact, it appears that, more than in other successful countries, the welfare and construction in this country, where divisions are so rife, depend heavily on these concerns; and their absence is one of the most important reasons for the destruction and the retardation that have befallen these lands.

Countrymen,

We are pleased to see how many of you are now returning home, and that some of you have begun to rebuild your houses. What makes us happier still is the hope that this time you do not build for destruction and do not gather fuel to rekindle the war, which, in the past, has only helped the barbarians lay their hands on the abodes of innocent families. Without such hope we would have suggested that you build in brick and wood rather than stone.

We know that the good progress of your affairs depends on intermixing and assimilation, which results in concord and unity. In spite of all objections and contradictions, we hope that something of this concord will sprout and grow after the abundant rains that are expected early this year. May this rain bring us a season of fertility and help us forget some of the past despair.

We bring good news to the afflicted among you. Humanity's gifts of compassion and sacrifice continue to be offered aplenty via steamships from all corners of the world. God has done to the homeland what a father does to his child. The father, who loves his child and does not seek vengeance, beats the child with one hand to discipline it and uses persuasion with the other to educate it. Similarly, after striking down this country with a heavy hand, God invoked pity toward it in the hearts of do-gooders. His deeds have rendered this city and its compassionate residents a haven for the hard-pressed and a refuge for the miserable. He has linked the old world with the new through issuing and receiving aid. Through His superb providence and high qualities He has warned people so they may turn away from their arrogance and move closer to His exalted and elevated being.

From a patriot