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# The problems facing Muslim nations

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I recognize well this is very sensitive subject because human nature prefers not to hear the truth and simply wants to receive good news even at the expense of reality. However, let's be frank: Most Islamic countries are being left behind in social progress as compared with other nations. There are essentially five reasons for this situation.

First, we must consider the educational curriculums adopted in Islamic countries, knowing that education is the first step toward refining the talent and minds of scientists, inventors and innovators. Yet, our curriculums and our teachers, being the products of cultural norms in most Muslim countries, remain wedded to the past and unable to produce persons of creative minds and innovative ways of thinking. Why is this so? Because these curriculums and the attitudes of teachers fail to value or embrace the disciplines that are vital for today, such as subjects like mathematics, chemistry, physics, philosophy and logic, which have been disregarded and replaced, with all due respect, by mostly religious subjects and teachers who seek to impose religious dogma upon their students.

While there is nothing wrong with religious classes at educational institutions devoted exclusively to religious instruction and training, such classes may impair scientific study if they are taught intensively in non-religious educational institutions. It has been proven throughout history (and beyond any doubt) that no nation can progress if it uses an educational system that focuses on purely religious curriculums that are based on memorization and blind obedience. Instead, the curriculums that have produced brilliant thinkers throughout history are based on understanding, comprehension, experimentation and invention. Indeed the Holy Qur'an repeatedly asks: Do they not reflect? Do they not ponder? Do they not understand? This certainly encourages thinking and contemplation, rather than blind unquestioning obedience to religious dogma. But how can we change this paradigm?

Secondly, Islamic nations generally tend to dwell in the past at the expense of the present and the future and thus become prisoners of an outmoded way of thinking. Although great progress has been achieved in the past, now such countries seem frozen in time and beholden to certain school of thoughts that have been established by those who died decades or centuries ago, unwilling or unable to foster the kind of visionary thinking and innovations epitomized even by great Muslims themselves such as Ibn Sina Avicenna, Ibn Al-

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Haytham Alhazen and many others. Thus, we have watched as other countries have planned for the future by emphasizing the very things that have created technologies that are compelling and popular. Times change, challenges arise, and innovators respond and adapt. So must nations.

Thirdly, Islamic nations praise the abstract at the expense of the concrete, that is, they believe in the unknown and disregard reality by permitting this mysterious situation to dominate all aspects of scientific inquiry. Although the Prophet (peace be upon him) said to the people of Madinah, You know best about the matters of your world, so we must emphasize the physical over the metaphysical in encouraging new ways of thinking. Yet, we remain obsessed with the taboos, heresies and errors of every useful science and do all we can to suppress legitimate questions. When all sorts of freedoms, sciences, inventors and innovators are suppressed and restrained, we are left with those scientists who specialize in the fields of halal and haram, etc.

Fourthly, Islamic countries are obsessed with angels and demons, God and Satan. In other words, if something fails on the job or in school (let's say an employee is fired from his job for poor performance or a student is expelled because of excessive absences or disciplinary problems), then the failure is due to the fact that God has decided that it is not meant to be, or Satan and his devilish schemes have caused it to fail. Conversely, if it succeeds, then this is God's plan and the result of prayer to keep Satan away. Why are we unable to face reality and acknowledge the fact that we rely too much on intangible things, remaining confused? Why do we embrace a culture that promotes an escape from reality? How strange is that?

Finally, we can see that Islamic nations have used lame and illogical excuses to push art aside and intentionally hide it from their people. All kinds of art such as music, theater, painting, and sculpture have been de-emphasized or completely disregarded and buried alive. This has led to creating shaken and disturbed personalities and spirits, stifling talents that could add to the enjoyment of life. Art is a means to satisfy our soul and feed our emotions, producing a more confident, balanced and spiritual humanity and motivating people to live and work, and even more, to create, innovate and give of themselves to others. Art protects humanity from all that can bring it down and allows spirits and hearts to soar high into a sky filled with optimism and hope and to move steadily down the road of innovation, creation and discovery. The Prophet Mohammed taught us to cheer up our hearts from time to time, because grieved hearts live in darkness.

How can Islamic nations achieve such progress if there is little appreciation for thinking and questioning all aspects of our lives? We must turn the page on extolling religious dogma that breeds ignorance and fear of the future, especially when we have the great religion of Islam which is valid and applicable in every time and place. There is no question that Islam, as revealed to believers in the Qur'an, is a true miracle but only for those who are open to change their mindset and embrace critical thinking. Let us hope future generations, if we cannot, will emerge to lead us toward a brighter future!

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