

In 1631 the foundation of a building was laid. In 1636, the foundation of another building was laid. Today both buildings exist. The first one has two occupants. Both dead. The second one has seen thousands enter it and leave, educated, empowered and moulded to lead the world in practically every single aspect of life and endeavor. I speak of the Taj Mahal and Harvard. What if Shah Jahan had sought to immortalize the memory of his wife by establishing a university instead of building a tomb? Both she and he would have benefited from Thawaab ul Jaariya and her name would have been more than a footnote in history.

I want to say four things to you which I want you to remember.

1. We invest in what we consider to be important.
2. Attitude is the root of all action.
3. Our priorities reflect our vision.
4. Ideas and institutions outlast their founders.

Allahﷻ said about us and our purpose on the earth:

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ

A'al Imraan 3: 110. You [Muslims] are the best of peoples ever raised up for mankind; you enjoin Al-Ma'ruf (all good) and forbid Al-Munkar (all evil), and you believe in Allah.

If you read the history of civilizations you will see that Allahﷻ preserved and permitted to prosper all those who benefited others and removed those who were harmful, even when they may have appeared to be successful for a time. Take the case of the Greeks for example and compare them to the Mongols. The Iliad and its sequel, the Odyssey, both attributed to Homer were written in the 8th century BC. Historians argue whether the war described between Greece and Troy really happened, but the fact remains that Greek thought, its philosophy, science and political ideas, the names and history of their kings and states, survives to this day though modern-day Greece is a country beset with all kinds of problems and is economically one of the weakest in the EU. On the other hand, the Mongols of Genghis Khan (12th century CE) who came 2000 years later and ruled the largest land empire of all time, more than 13 times the size of the

empire of Alexander, simply vanished. John Man, who wrote a biography of Genghis Khan says that during his research for his book, "Genghis Khan: Life, Death, and Resurrection", he searched for artefacts related to Genghis's time but found only a single turtle-shaped pillar base from the city of Karakoram. Just imagine that. The remains of the largest land empire the world has ever known; the remains of the most powerful absolute monarch whose wealth was uncouncted, the man who destroyed the Muslim Khwarazm dynasty and laid waste to Samarkand and Bukhara and countless cities of the Muslims, Chinese and Russians, and whose grandson Hulegu destroyed Baghdad and broke the back of the Abbasi Empire and by inference, Muslim civilization; is one pillar base.

https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/93427.Genghis_Khan

Interestingly, his opponent, the Abbasi Khalifa was Al-Musta'sim Billah, a direct descendent of Rasoolullah ﷺ. Baghdad was sacked on February 10, 1258 and the Khalifa was killed by Hulagu Khan soon afterward. The Mongols did not want to shed "royal blood", so they wrapped him in a rug and trampled him to death with their horses. His wives, concubines and children were either murdered or enslaved. Neither Musta'asim Billah's religion nor his lineage saved him or his family or kingdom from annihilation. Neither did the fact, that it was these very Abbasis who presided over the peak of the intellectual and scientific development in the Muslim Khilafa.

Similarly, neither did Hulegu's army nor treasure save the mighty kingdom that his grandfather created or its memory from being wiped out, except as a warning marker in history for those who have the ability to see. Today, in a world where people are desperately searching for meaning, the Mongols have sought to elevate Genghis into a demigod and have built a shrine to him where they go to worship and ask for favors. The fact is that his place of burial is not known as it was hidden at the time because his people were afraid that others would desecrate it and so it is lost today. But facts never come in the way of creation of myths.

History shows us that when you cease to be useful, Allah ﷻ replaces you. The question to ask ourselves is, "Am I being useful?" Allah ﷻ told us that He created us for the benefit of all people. And He defined that benefit being the promotion and propagation

of all that is good and the prohibition and opposition of all that is evil. Are we doing this? Or are we accepting and in many cases, even participating in the evil, without a shred of shame or awareness of accountability to Allahﷻ from whom nothing is hidden?

Muslims must understand that we can only prosper as individuals and as a nation when you make it a mission to make things happen and put every ounce of effort into it. Not simply because you hold a certain belief or exercise a particular ritual. That is why it is important to understand the relationship between ideology and material effort. Let me illustrate. People succeed or fail to fly if they fail to apply the principles of flight, irrespective of whether they ascribe those principles to their Creator or not. Following the principles will enable them to fly. Not following them will prevent them from taking off or will enable them to crash. This would be fine, if there was no Aakhira. But since there is an Aakhira, it is essential while flying, to recognize who makes it happen and thank Him. Then not only will you fly in the Dunya but also in the Aakhira. Otherwise, you may fly in the Dunya. But in the Aakhira, you will crash.

What improves our current worldly life are not our intellectual and physical efforts alone. Ideology underlines, enables, empowers and drives action. Action that is rooted in strong ideology is always more powerful and longer lasting, especially through hardship and opposition, than action which has only human desire behind it. It is ideology that enables you to work through the dark and cold nights where there is no support, no light on the horizon and no sign of impending success. Success comes from consistent effort which is made possible only by faith. In the words of Barbara Winters who I love to quote: *"When you come to the end of all that you know and are about to step off into the darkness of the unknown, faith is knowing that one of two things will happen; there will be something firm to stand on, or you will be taught how to fly."*

The Japanese are perhaps the best example of this. Be it the people who rebuilt the entire nation after World War 2 and made it one of the most dynamic, prosperous and respected nations in the world. Or those who volunteered to enter the nuclear reactor to seal the leaks, knowing full well that it was certain death. Or those who cleaned the stands and changing room after losing the match to Belgium in the on-going World

Cup. It is not money, or any material gain that drives them. It is their sense of dignity, their pride in their national identity, their sense of who they are and what they represent. That is what Bushido is all about. Inazo Nitobe, in his book, "Bushido, the Way of the Warrior", identified the eight virtues most admired by his people. Rectitude, courage, benevolence, politeness, sincerity, honor, loyalty and selfcontrol. Making money is not even mentioned though Japan is one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Money is the natural result of intelligent effort. It is not a worthy goal in itself but is the result of many worthy goals. That is why, as survey after survey on personal satisfaction shows us, money is the least powerful motivator. In my view, working to please Allah ﷻ alone, supercedes in power, every other ideological basis while having a real positive effect on the Aakhira.

Muslims went wrong when they substituted passion, for political understanding and informed action. They also went wrong who discarded politics and retreated into their cocoons behind Madrassa and Khankha walls. Islam is about politics, as it is about economics, social engineering, ethics, morals and values. Islam is about enterprise. It is about government. It is about running this world in ways that are beneficial to all those who live in it. It is not about rejecting this world but about embracing it in positive ways. Being ultra or infra political, is not the issue. It is the understanding of politics and of applying it in ways that are beneficial to all and based on the principles of Islam, the first and foremost of which is pleasing Allah ﷻ.

We went wrong when Ulama started indoctrinating the young ones with their personal favorite interpretations of Islam instead of introducing them to Islam the way it is. They began teaching Madhab instead of teaching Islam. They inculcated chauvinism (Asabiyyat) based on Madhab instead of brotherhood (Ukhuwwat) based on Islam. They created their own small support groups who they relied on to fund their private schemes, organizations and themselves. Their strategy was based on actively generating contempt and hatred for others different from themselves, while claiming to respect everyone. That is why the poet said: ***Waaizon ka yeh takabbur ki Ilaahee Tawbah + Apnee har Baat ko Aawaaz-I-Khuda Kahtey Hain.*** Ask yourself how and why it is that while we claim to respect all the four Imams of Fiqh and hold everyone to be correct; we are so rabidly rigid about allowing those who

follow the Imam we follow, from acting on the Fatwa of another Imam of another Madhab? If this is not a sign of Nifaq (hypocrisy) then tell me what is! It would be more honest to declare that only one Imam is right, and all others are wrong, than to play this hypocritical game that we do. We went wrong when we went against the direct order of Allah ﷻ to hold fast to the rope of Islam and not to create divisions. We actively created and continue to create divisions every day.

We went wrong when we reinforced the belief that being a Muslim is inherently superior. We silently or actively supported discrimination, bigotry and narrowmindedness all in the name of the excuse, "but **'they'** also do it." We forgot that 'they' are not our teachers. But our teacher is Muhammad ﷺ and he didn't discriminate, wasn't bigoted and didn't condemn people. We forgot the Sunnah and the Baraka of Sunnah left our lives.

We went wrong when we stopped pursuing scientific and technological progress. A lot of this happened because of the destruction of the Abbasi Khilafa and the later destruction of the Khilafa in Al-Andalus. Nothing to do with religion. Everything to do with politics. The mistake Muslims made was to imagine that others didn't matter. Amazingly, we still seem to be in this intoxicated state. This is a common mistake that all empires make. Arrogance is the common terminal illness of Umara (Rulers) and Ulama (Scholars). Those who don't fall into that trap are rare indeed. This is what destroyed the Roman Empire, the Mongols, the Mughals in India and the British on whose empire they said, the sun never sets. It happened with the Soviets and is happening to the Americans as we speak. Arrogance is the root cause of all decline.

History is proof that Muslims didn't give up scientific endeavor voluntarily. They and their civilization were destroyed. But they never really picked up the pieces because their back was broken. But then the back of Japanese civilization was also broken in World War 2. However, the Japanese rose from the ashes to what we see today. Muslims chose to remain broken and complain about their fate. What did happen, is that in the vacuum, Ulama became the leaders in the post-destruction phase because both the Umara and the scientists had been wiped off. They responded from two bases, fear and ignorance. They feared the destruction of Islam and its ideology and they didn't have any understanding of science. Their primary goal was to protect Islam

(no quarrel with that) but they saw science as the enemy, especially when it came out of the portals of Western thought. This is where the old sin of scientists, not involving and teaching Ulama came home to roost. Ulama rejected science because they didn't understand science and saw scientists as the enemies of Islam. They rejected the English language which severely restricted both their learning and influence. This remains the state to this day. They rejected everything Western including an inquisitive mind, free thinking, even Ijtihad. They did all this thinking that they were helping Islam, whereas they were actually harming it.

They forgot what Allahﷻ told us:

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لآيَاتٍ لِأُولِي الْأَبْصَارِ
الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ
وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ

A'al Imraan 3: 190. *Verily! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for people of understanding.*
191. *Those who remember Allah standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and think deeply about the creation of the heavens and the earth, (saying): "Our Rabb! You have not created (all) this without purpose, Glory to You! Give us salvation from the torment of the Fire.*

There is no dichotomy or discord between science and theology in Islam. Indeed, Allahﷻ tells us to search for His signs in His creation. The biggest mistake that Muslims made was to separate science from religion. The reason, as I mentioned earlier, is because those who taught religion didn't know science. The solution was to collaborate with those who did and introduce them to the Creator, if they didn't know Him. This didn't happen, and the fracture became a gulf and has led to the highly undesirable situation we find today where the Word of Allahﷻ is taught as if there is no creation and the study of creation is done as if there is no Creator. Our youth have difficulty in connecting the two because we have passed on our own confusion to them. And so, they can't find meaning in religion and don't understand why they need it to succeed

in this world of cause and effect. How can you understand a cause until you understand the Creator of the cause? That is a question which neither the teacher nor the student understands. Our so-called Ulama are not only content to teach their students to simply recite the Qur'an without teaching its meaning, but the more ignorant ones insist that this is the only way. Ignorant and lazy parents continue to send their children to learn from such people, not concerned about the result on their child's heart and future. Let me give you one final example from history. If only to prove that the only thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing.

In 1439, Johannes Gutenberg, a German blacksmith, goldsmith, printer and publisher, invented the moveable printing press. This was promptly banned in the Ottoman Empire. The result was that Islam (and the Ottoman Empire) was widely attacked and maligned but Muslims had no means of responding to it because they had decided to reject the only tool with which they could have responded. Sadly, and strangely this remains the case centuries later, where almost the first reaction of Ulama to every technological invention is to reject it and pronounce it Haraam. They did it with the microphone, the radio, the television and so on. What seems to have escaped, which really should have been pronounced Haraam in no uncertain terms is Facebook. Maybe that is because all Ulama have FB pages. To this day we still see Fatawa prohibiting university education, especially for women. The list of laments is much longer but this will suffice to illustrate the regressive attitude that I believe we must change urgently.

We failed to admit that we have failed on many fronts. We still refuse to admit this and until we do, we can't hope to change. After all, how can you fix something until you accept that it is broken? Instead of developing a sense of responsibility, we pointed fingers in the direction of other countries and played the victim card. As my dear friend Mir Faheem put it, "We want people to treat us on an equal footing though we are takers and not givers. Who honors beggars in this world? We forgot to beg from our Rabb and are content with asking favors from people who are desperately in need of guidance - guidance that we think belongs to us only!"

The problem with Muslims is that they want someone else to bleed for them. History shows us that it is only and only when people are willing to stand up for their rights and fight for them, sacrifice their time, resources, energy and lives, that change

happens. Take the great slave emancipation movement, or the civil rights movement in America, or the Zionist struggle in Europe that finally resulted in the creation of Israel or the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Two things are clear: Change doesn't happen either quickly or painlessly. It takes years of effort and a lot of pain for things to change. But in the end, success is assured, though you may not see it yourself. In some cases, you do; as in South Africa where those who fought, saw the victory. In some cases, you don't; as in the case of Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X and others. But success comes if and only if the price is paid in advance.

Another sobering thought is that all these struggles happened at the end of very excruciatingly painful and bloody history. It appears that things must get very, very bad first, before they get better. Or to put it more accurately, before people are convinced that they need to start making an effort to make things better. That is sad, thinking of our people, because it appears to me that by this logic, things are not painful enough. If they were, we would have started to act to change them. History and logic tell us that it is the one who feels the pain who must take the medicine. So, if we need to change our situation, we need to sweat and bleed. Not expect others to do it for us. Take all major change movements and you will see that it was the very people who were persecuted, who decided to stand up against the persecution; not someone else on their behalf. They worked hard, with fortitude and courage, consistently, not looking for quick results, learning as they went along and changing their strategy but not their goal; which yielded results. So, where do you think we are on this?

In my view the solution is to do the following:

1. We need to inculcate piety in ourselves before we open our mouth to anyone. We need to recognize that this world and all who live here, including ourselves, belong to Allahﷻ and to Him is our return.
2. We must accept that people listen with their eyes. They don't care what you say, until they see what you do. If we want the world to take Islam seriously and positively, we must start behaving and living like Muslims. Not simply talking about Islam, but practicing it ourselves. The question the world is asking us is, 'If it is so good, how come you don't practice it yourself?' What is the answer?

3. We must learn to make Allahﷻ No. 1 in our lives, and to live our lives according to the Sunnah of Rasoolullahﷺ and to do it with confidence and love.
4. We must change our method of education: both what we teach and how we teach it. We need to teach in an integrated way (please see my lectures on this).
5. We must teach values, ethics and morals before we teach anything else. We must understand that these can only be taught by demonstration, not by lecturing.
6. We need to encourage curiosity, creativity, dissent and teach with respect.
7. We need to not only accept but to embrace technology and science and pursue excellence in it.
8. We need to teach citizenship (ownership) and entrepreneurship (creating assets).
9. We need to invest significant time, money, energy and resources behind this and treat it as our legacy. We must understand that tokenism which we are so good at, is counterproductive and harms rather than being helpful because it gives the illusion of having done 'something'. We need total commitment to succeed, not 'something'. That is a law of Allahﷻ and doesn't change for us. That is the lesson that the Seerah teaches us. It didn't change for Rasoolullahﷺ and his Sahaba and it will not change for us. Laws of Allahﷻ (AKA 'Nature') change for nobody.
10. Finally, we must put quality first. Quality is the differentiator, it is the hallmark of excellence. Quality creates brand. Brand inspires loyalty. Loyalty enables influence. Sadly, almost everything we do today is differentiated by lack of quality, thanks to our 'chalta hai' attitude when it comes to Islam.

We must do this because this is our legacy to the world and Thawaab ul Jaariya for ourselves. The time to change is long overdue. We must act with courage and faith.

As another dear friend, Mudassir Masihuddin put it, "I just know that when there are 1.6 billion of us, we can't be victims. At least, not all of us."