

Building a Creative Personality

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Sunday, November 20, 2011

Excerpt:

In his talk, the Maulana explains that “creative thinking” refers to thinking in a different way. He explains that man always encounters new challenges and situations in life, and as such, he needs to think and re-think.

Taking the example of Japan (in a community scenario) the Maulana explains that life encourages man to inculcate the ability to think differently and to re-look at the present set of circumstances with a different lens. Not doing so, leads to stagnation of thinking process.

Citing examples from the life of the Prophet Muhammad, he elaborates the significance of Ijtihad. Despite the fact that Ijtihad was related with every aspect of life – religious or secular, its scope of application was gradually limited and then closed. After a lot of study, he could understand that Ijtihad is not only related to Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence) but man’s entire life; it pertains not only to non-basics but also covers the basics.

Introduction

What does creative personality mean? It means thinking in a different way. In life, we always encounter new challenges and newer situations, which lead to emergence of newer problems. The journey of life is not smooth so there is need to think and re-think. This is called creative thinking. Those who think such can attain great heights. Those who think on routine lines do not accomplish great feats. Such thinking is required in both secular and religious fields.

Examples of creative thinking

From the community point of view, Japan is an illustrative example. Before the Second World War, Japan was considered a ferocious country and they unleashed a lot of violence in WWII. During the War, Japan was associated with the Axis Powers (led by Germany) and they suffered defeat. After this, they re-assessed the situation and took a u-turn and converted themselves into a peaceful nation. Instead of casting their abilities in violence, they put their energies into education and industry. And, within the next thirty years after the War, Japan created history and became an economic superpower. If it would not have re-assessed and kept on fighting, it would not have progressed.

Life encourages man to inculcate the ability to think differently and to re-look at the present set of circumstances with a different lens. Not doing so, leads to stagnation of thinking process.

Few days ago, Dr. Saniyasnain Khan visited Turkey, where he met the Imam of a large mosque. Dr. Khan presented the latest translation of the Quran to him and encouraged him to present it to the visitors at the mosque. Imbued with the dawah spirit, the *Imam* put the Quran into a small gift bag, converting the Quran into a “tourist gift”! This is a small example of creative thinking.

Islamic point of view

Islam lays great importance on creative thinking. The word used to describe creative thinking in Islam is “*Ijtihad*”. *Ijtihad* refers to “thinking in a different way” that is, when confronted with a problem how one can think differently and charter a way forward. This term became popular during the Abbasid period, when Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) was being compiled. *Fiqh* was the last to be compiled after the Quran and Hadith. And when *Ijtihad* was used more in *Fiqh* instead of being used in the context of the Quran and Hadith, its scope was confined. This was because *Fiqh* had only limited scope of creative thinking. Let me elaborate this with an example. Worship for instance, has two broad aspects - *basics* and *non basics*.

Basics (*Kul-liyaat*) for example, pertain to the 3 units of prayers during *Maghrib*, and 4 units during *Zuhr* etc, which are fixed. In these, no *Ijtihad* could be done. Hence *Ijtihad* was confined to non basics (*Juziyaat*) since there was not much scope in basics (*Kul-liyaat*). Three units of prayer in *Maghrib* could neither be made four or two. The exercise of *Ijtihad* in *Fiqh* was a big loss because it led to a reduced form of *Ijtihad*. The clerics who are held to be *Mujtahid-e-Mutlaq* (those who can do all *Ijtihad*) are actually *Mujtahid-e Juziyaat* (those who do *Ijtihad* on non-basics).

Ijtihad in Islam

Ijtihad is related with every aspect of life. Neither is it limited to ibadaat (prayers), and nor was the door of exercising *Ijtihad*, open only during the lifetime of the prophet. *Ijtihad* is part and parcel of life; however the scope of its application was first restricted and then shut. I will cite an example to prove the importance and scope of *Ijtihad*. According to a Hadith, Prophet Muhammad sent a delegation of Companions to a Jewish tribe Banu Quryza. The delegation left after the *Zuhr* prayer and Prophet said to them

Banu Qurayza ki basti mein pohunch kar hi Asr ki namaaz padhna (Al Bukhari)

*[Read your Asr prayer (the prayer offered just before the sun sets),
when you have reached the Banu Qurayza settlement]*

Prophet had given strict instructions in this regard but a time came when though the Companions were still some distance away from their destination, the time for *Asr* prayer was about to end. Some said that they would pray only upon reaching. Some others re-considered the option of not praying and realised that if they do not pray, the prayer time would pass. These companions offered their prayers and said that Prophet's advice meant that the contingent should travel fast. But now a new situation had emerged, which required a different way of thinking. The companions who prayed exercised creative thinking in changed times.

It is important to bear in mind that there always exist such situations in this world when man is required to think differently. Failing to do so, leads man to intellectual stagnation. Unfortunately amongst Muslims, *Ijtihad* began on a limited note and was later completely refrained from. This was contrary to the lessons drawn from the life of Prophet Muhammad.

According to a tradition of *Ibn Hisham*, Prophet Muhammad was once travelling with a delegation of 10,000 companions to Taif. Traversing in horizontal formations, the delegation reached a narrow valley, where it seemed the delegation will have a difficult time to pass.

When Prophet asked the name of the valley, he was told it is called, *Az Zaita (narrow way)*. Prophet said, “No. It is *Al Yusra (easy way)*.” Prophet then advised the delegation to form a vertical queue. Upon doing so, they easily passed through the valley. This was a case of *Ijtihad*, that is, to re-evaluate the situation to find a solution.

I would like to cite another example where *Ijtihad* was mandatory. It was a case of *kul-liyaat* and so *Ijtihad* was not done by Muslims because of which they have still not emerged out of the issue. This was the case of *Musalla Jihad* (armed struggle).

At the time of Prophet Muhammad, *Musalla Jihad* took place. According to the Quran

Fight them until there is no more (religious) persecution (8:39)

The literal meaning of the term “*Fitna*” is religious persecution. In ancient world, there was no religious tolerance and followers of one religion did not tolerate the followers of another religion. Followers of a religion were neither free to worship nor to propagate their religion. This was a big issue because it was against the Creation Plan of God. According to this Plan, man was required to spend a period of trial in this present, imperfect world and subsequent to this, according to his deeds, he will earn the right to inhabit the perfect and eternal world of paradise. In order for man’s trial to materialise, freedom was required because the restriction of following only one religion was against the freedom to practice whatever one wants. Such compulsion would have jeopardised the Creation Plan of God. Hence, God desired that this religious persecution be brought to an end so that freedom flourishes. The fights undertaken by Prophet and his Companions were for this purpose and they ended religious persecution in entirety.

Religious persecution ended during the caliphate of Umar but *qital* (fighting) continued. My study made me understand that after the Prophet and his companions, only two people could understand that *qital* has ended forever now – *Abdullah ibn Umar* and *Umar Abdul Aziz*. They realised that now was the time for worshipping and doing dawah work, unhindered. During the time of *Abdullah ibn Umar*, people started fighting against their rulers on account of oppression and injustice. This was not the issue of Jihad but was an issue of peaceful struggle only. Work should have been done on individuals so that eventually, the results percolate through the society. People could not understand that *Jihad* was allowed only for religious persecution. Referring to the above verse, people asked *Abdullah ibn Umar* why he did not participate in the war.

He said,

Woh to humne kar diya (Al Bukhari)

[We finished it (religious persecution)]

He meant that they (the Companions) had undertaken wars to end the religious persecution and there was no need to fight now. Allowance for *qital* in Islam is only to end religious persecution. If man finds out new reasons to fight, it does not have any relation with the Quranic teachings; it is a self-styled approach.

During his caliphate, Umar Abdul Aziz said to a Governor,

Muhammad bheje gaye the hidayat ke liye, na ki idne aur tax wasool karne ke liye.

[Muhammad was sent to pass on guidance, not to fight and collect taxes]

But people continued to fight on issues like land, justice, oppression etc, which demanded peaceful struggle and not warfare. These issues required thinking in a way different from the traditional approach. The need is to do peaceful dawah work but because the thinking of majority did not change, so the fighting continues in the Muslims. And now the situation of religious persecution does not exist anywhere for which the command of war was given in the above verse. Through these violent acts, Muslims pursued self styled agendas, which had no relation with Islam. This happened because the spirit of *Ijtihad* was no longer there. In the later times, people exercised *Ijtihad* only in *Juzziat-e-Fiqh*.

Western Civilisation

Western Civilisation had certain issues like, nudity; political expansion etc and Muslims started fighting on these issues. Every Muslim hates the West without realising that it is the Western civilisation, which opened significant opportunities to do dawah work, globally. Doing a dawah work on a large scale required developed means of communication. Modern civilisation brought printing press and such advanced means of communication and media, as we see today. But due to the lack of creative thinking, Muslims could not see the boon associated with the Western civilisation. Some write books against the West, others speak and some others commit violent acts. The entire Muslim community is against the West – either passively or actively. How enormous is the loss due to not engaging in *Ijtihad*. This is lack of *Ijtihad* because they cannot see that the bad aspect of West is only 1%, while its boon is 99%.

Because of this lacking, in the world of opportunity explosion, Muslims continue to harbour hatred and engage in protests. This world is so different from the world that was earlier!

Some days back, a programme was organised at a Christian Centre. Delegates from various places in India and Europe were present. There was a discussion of different faiths and the organisers gave me one and a half hours to talk to the audience about Islam. They organised the seminar, incurred costs, provided infrastructure and only asked me to come and talk about Islam. Our companions distributed free literature there. When the programme ended and we started returning, the organiser gave us an envelope saying that it was the payment for the literature. What kind of a world is this! That non-Muslims or Christians whom Muslims hate, call us and even pay back the money. This is a result of openness and religious freedom which never existed in the world before. Because Muslims have not inculcated *Ijtihadi* thinking, they have not been able to realise the opportunities that exist in the world.

An *alim* was doing a research on a *Fiqh* issue. His topic was whether during *Ramzaan*, eating breaks the fast but if something is injected in the body will it break the fast or not? He was researching on a non basic (*juzi mamla*). No research is done on basics (*kulliyat*), that is, on topics that govern thinking. For example, a topic of research is that while the cultural aspect of Western world has some malpractices, but its technological and scientific aspect is a gift for humanity. Unfortunately, wherever Muslims live, they harbour hate, even the ones in the West, they are there only to earn money. This is only due to lack of creative thinking.

Significance of creative thinking

Creative thinking is imperative for intellectual development. Prophet Muhammad received Prophethood in first quarter of seventh century and he had to propagate the *Tawheed* (monotheism) mission amidst the polytheists in Mecca. A great issue was the presence of hundreds of idols in the House of One God, *Kaaba*. One way could be to fight it out, the other was to ignore. Prophet opted for the latter, as he could think creatively. By doing so, he was able to use the audience of pilgrims to propagate the message of God.

Likewise, when Prophet migrated to Medina, he no longer remained in the oppression psyche. Had he thought on similar lines, he could not have achieved anything there. Instead of adopting a confrontational mode, Prophet Muhammad adopted the Jewish *qibla* (direction of prayer); he started fasting on their fasting days.

He released a Charter, which said

For Jews, their religion. For Muslims, theirs. (Ibn Hisham)

So, he left behind the experience of Mecca in Mecca and started the dawah mission afresh in Medina.

Lack of creativity in Muslims had led to absence of positive thinking in them. This is because in life, man never finds conducive environment, it throws up a challenge every time. When man is negative, he loses positivity, which is a huge price to pay. Positive thinking leads to God-realisation and enables you to perform dawah work and understand Quran and Hadith. The source of positive thinking is creative thinking. It was most unfortunate that *Ijtihad* was initially restricted and then obliterated completely.

Mission

We must know this fact and first inculcate creative thinking within ourselves and then help others hone their creative thinking. If you lack creative thinking, you cannot do good dawah work because you will not be able to leverage and explain experiences. Lack of creative thinking is the only reason of failure of present-day Muslims.

I will share my own experience. I was very negative about Turkey since the days of my education because it was popularised that *Kemal Atatürk*, who got power in twentieth century in Turkey introduced some significant changes. *Atatürk* was a secular man and wanted to modernise the life of his country. He, for example, adapted the Latin alphabets to Turkish as a part of the language reforms. He attempted to break the power of Muslim clerics and formally abolished caliphate in 1924 and replaced *Shari'ah* (Islamic law) with a revised version of the Swiss law code. I had read those books, which portrayed *Kemal Atatürk* as the enemy of Islam. I was under the same impression until my companions visited and told me that *Atatürk* was not the enemy of Islam but a proponent of new development and progress in Turkey. He modernised Turkey and today it is a very developed country, in the secular sense. I have made halts at the Turkish Airport but never went in the country. I used to think that Turkey as a nation must be underdeveloped. But, this visit of my companions changed my mind set. Now, I separated two aspects of *Atatürk's* revolution. One aspect of his reform was putting an end to traditional culture and the other aspect pertained to developing Turkey as a nation. I too, succumbed to this propaganda against Turkey.

The gist is that if you have to do global dawah work and establish well-wishing and positive relations with people, it is important that you possess creative thinking. It is often popularised that *Ijtihad* must not be done. This is a wrong belief because according to a tradition in Bukhari, Prophet Muhammad encouraged *Ijtihad* - if *Ijtihad* is incorrect, man will get one reward and if it is correct, he will get double reward. Therefore, the option of *Ijtihad* must never be restricted because Islam fosters open discussion. If someone errs, you must rectify his error, not close the door to *Ijtihad*.

Conclusion

Another example is that of patriotism. It is often thought that Muslims are not loyal to their homeland. This is because in today's world, nation hood is based on homeland and not on religion, as was earlier the case. This was a new idea, which the Muslims clerics failed to understand.

Amongst the clerics, *Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madni* had once said, "*Fi zamana qaumein, aotaan se banti hain*," that is in today's world, communities are formed on basis the concept of homeland. Upon his demise, his disciples said that the Maulana said this to highlight the mistake of the community and that was not his intention. No one could distinguish that nationhood is not a matter of belief, but a matter of practical life. This is such a big issue that Muslims world over are thought to never be loyal to their nations. According to a Hadith

Watan ki mohabbat iman hai (Al Durarulmuntatharah, Lil suyuti)

[Love for your nation is tantamount to having faith]

Scholars say that this Hadith is *Mauzu* (fabricated), therefore not applicable. According to my understanding, even if this is *Mauzu*, it is still telling us a law of nature. It is logical to love the homeland in which you have been born. Muslims should be as patriotic as anyone else. This is not a religious issue.

Another example is that of democracy. Many scholars opposed the democratic model and held it against the Islamic ideals. They called it "*ladeniyat*" because democracy was considered to be the rule of people, which is wrong because rule can only be of God. If they were creative, Muslims could have realised that democracy is a model of *power-sharing* and has led to decentralisation of power. What is unislamic in this? Democracy is an Islamic way of governance. All the complaints of conspiracy against Muslims are actually a result of our lack of understanding. Because we are unable to understand, we become negative.

Inculcating positive thinking is also a part of our mission. In order to propagate the dawah mission, it is required that people have a positive mindset. I was educated in a madrasa and due to my traditional upbringing I could not extract myself out of my mindset. After a lot of study, my mind understood that *Ijtihad* was not only related to Fiqh but man's entire life; it pertains not only to non-basics but also covers the basics.

According to a tradition of *Ibn Razeen*, a believer is one who knows about his contemporary world. But present-day Muslims are unaware about the fact that there is so much openness in the world today that if you go and talk about your religion, others will appreciate it.

On my visit to the US, I was invited to deliver a lecture at a Church. My companions had 'B taken literature with them and the Christians started distributing the Islamic literature to others. Unfortunately, the present-day Muslims do not understand this primarily because of their lack of creative thinking. Time has come for Muslims to put an end to all violent activities and do dawah work.

May God grant us wisdom to think creatively!

Question - Answers

Question 1: Refer Quran 56:79. Does it mean that only the clean can touch the Quran and not the unbelievers or women in their state of uncleanness?

Answer: This verse does not refer to "cleanliness" as we know it, and it does not pertain to man. This verse indicates an instance and not that before touching the Quran one should go and do *wuzu* (ablution). This is a self-styled interpretation. It means that angels are clean already (and do not make themselves clean). In other words, it means that the angels who transmit the message of God from Him to the messenger are "clean" in the sense of being free of negative thinking, hubris, pride etc. Therefore, this verse is giving a news and not ordaining the believers to do *wazu* before touching the Quran!

Question 2: Who will enter paradise?

Answers: Paradise is not associated with community. Those who believe in God, purify themselves and attain God-realisation will enter paradise. There is no doubt that faith, piety, purification of soul is criteria of paradise but these virtues are brought about as a result of God-realisation.

Question 3: During a conversation, you said that ordainment of the severing the ties with Jews and Christians was contextual to war-like state and not always. Please explain.

Answer: The academic basis is to know the context and background of the Quranic verses. Such verses were not revealed in Mecca but in Medina when an established rule had come into being and Muslims and other community was at war.

Question 4: These days, dawah work in non-believers is only being done by CPS team and no other organisation. Why?

Answer: Since last two hundred years, Muslims have become filled with hatred for all other communities. This happened due to a variety of reasons when the Western powers emerged to a superior position. Muslims began living in the psyche of reaction hence they think that the other communities are conspiring. Muslims should be told that these communities are *madu* (addressee) and not enemies. All literature prepared during this time, has been prepared with negative mindset because of which Muslims developed such a mentality. First, Muslim thinking should be changed and then dawah work will follow.

Question 5: Am a shopkeeper and stay tensed due to problems. What is the reason?

Answer: Tension is not due to business; it is due to the psyche of *more and more*. If man controls the expenditure, he will have no problem. So, the real reason for tension is greed; you must manage your business and stay within the realms of your need. Save yourself from greed and you will be tension-free.

Question 6: What is the difference between Ijtihaad and Ijma? Is the latter necessary for former?

Answer: The concept of *Ijma* has not been rightly understood by people. Jurists think that there are 4 sources of *Shari'ah* – Quran, Sunnah, *Ijma* and *Qayas*. I don't think this is correct. There are only two sources – Quran and Hadith. *Ijma* is the mechanism of solving a problem at hand. It refers to a state of consensus of opinion. Otherwise, vote of majority is considered. As the situation changes, so does the approach of problem solving. *Ijtihaad* precedes *Ijma*, that is, if something is not being directly inferred from the Quran or Hadith, one must think differently.

Question 7: in an Islamic society, what rules should be observed between man and woman?

Answer: Man and women can interact under one condition only, that is, marriage. At work however, interaction is allowed, within the limits of civility.

Question 8: Why God needs to test us? Can't he create pure souls and inhabit them in paradise?

Answer: This is self styled argument. Even the jobs in this world are earned by the deserving then, how will paradise be for those who do not deserve it? When you don't do this in your world, how do you expect God to do it? This is an unnatural argument.

Question 9: Refer Quran (5:82)

Answer: The verse and Hadith about Christians is because they are cooperative, modest, open, and helpful.

Question 10: You said that only through positive thinking can man become creative. Please explain.

Answer: For creative thinking, your mind should be free of unimportant issues. He who wants to be a positive thinker, will have to pay the price of saving himself from – *distraction, unnecessary questions and negative sentiments*.

Question 11: It is said that the likelihood of mistake in Ijtihad is greater and that is why the door to Ijtihad has been closed. Is it ok?

Answer. No, not at all. Who is there who can undo something which has been ordained in the Hadith? When the Hadith clearly says that even if you have done a wrong *Ijtihad*, you would get a reward for it, then who else has the right to close the door of *Ijtihad*. Instead, of closing the door, you should rectify the mistake.

Question 12: On what basis was the door to Ijtihad closed by the ulema (scholars)? How can Muslims be made to understand its importance now?

Answer: This was done on the basis of a self styled assumption that no mistake should be committed in *Ijtihad*. The scholars could not understand that the door which was left open by the Prophet himself cannot be closed by men. According to the Hadith tradition, a believer should do *Ijtihad* at all times and should simultaneously be ready to admit his mistake so that he can say, "*I was wrong,*" and course correct. He who is ready to admit his mistake has only reward in doing *Ijtihad*. If a person does *Ijtihad* and when corrected does not agree, he is then committing a crime and for him everything is a sin. But if a believer admits and accepts his mistake, it is good for him.

Question 13: Does Ijtihad require understanding of Quran and Hadith?

Answer: *Ijtihad* is in everything and must continue at all times! People consider it to be a mysterious thing! *Ijtihad* is applicable in both religious and secular fields. God has created the world such that man keeps experiencing new things and therefore the door to *Ijtihad* cannot be shut.

Question 14: How can we make Afghans and other tribal understand the peaceful message of the Quran?

Answer: Revenge is foremost for tribal. The violence seen in tribal lands is a result of this culture and has nothing to do with Islam. I visited Afghanistan and met a young boy. I asked him what he does and he told me that his mother sends him to study but he does not want to do that. His goal is to avenge the death of his father! Arabs too were similar because of their tribal culture. Even if they take the name of Jihad, their acts of violence have nothing to do with Islam. The problem is that they were not educated. Education is the only solution to this problem.

Question 15: People who do self discovery have actually learnt the truth, he who learns it from others has not. Please explain.

Answer: This is an elite criteria but every person cannot cast him for attaining self-discovery. One is the *imaan* that stands on self-discovery but this is elite; for those who cannot spend such time, must follow an *alim*. The real thing to know is the creation plan of God. People are born and die each day. Till they are in this world, they want to earn, and be happy but they do not know what will come to pass when they die. People neither discuss death, nor God. Those amongst Muslims who you think have faith are also following form-based religion. But religion is not the name of a form; it is the name of establishing connection with God and must be seen in the light of how man spends his life.

Question 16: Ulema have closed the door of Istihsaad. Is it required that their thinking should be changed or can Muslims do Istihsaad even without changing their thinking?

Answer: *Ulema* are highly ineffective in society; they give fatwas but there is not a single person who consults *ulema* on issues like job, business, marriage etc. Every person should study himself and make his own opinion after studying Quran and Hadith.

Question 17: What is “wala” and “bara”?

Answer: These days, some books written in Arabic world use the term “wala” for Muslims (means deep connection) and “bara” for non-Muslims (means being distant). But according to my study, these are wrong references and these terms are not used in the right context. The Quranic verses cited hold

true for a particular situation, which they generalise. For instance, if Muslims are at war with a group, they will be “*bara*” because leak outs may happen during war time. But this cannot be generalised. All Arabs have derived their Islam from Palestine – Israel. Because they hate Jews, they explain Islam only on those lines. They are deeply dug into hatred. To understand Islam, Quran/ Hadith and not Arabic titles should be referred to.

Question 18: People confuse between Ijtihad and Taqwa and say that just like we should refrain from doubtful thinking we should refrain from Ijtihad as well?

Answer: This is a self-styled argument. *Taqwa* refers to open acts of evil – like drinking wine, eating pork etc. But the issue of *Ijtihad* is different and applies to practical living; neither should it be confused nor refrained from.

Question 19: What is Istikhara and what is the way of doing it?

Answer: According to traditions of Companions, Prophet used to teach us *Istikhara* like Quran. This cites the importance of *Istikhara*; literally, it means “*wishing well*”. When you pray for well wishing, that is also *Istikhara*. The formal way of doing *Istikhara* is that after ishaah prayer, two units of prayer must be offered with – aZ Zuha and Al Nashra – you can also do dua in your words and then seleep. There will be either of these two conditions at night - either an idea will strike or dream will appear – this can be continued for 7 days if on the first night, you don’t get the exact answer.

Question 20: If everyone should be a creative thinker, what is the need of taking guidance?

Answer: There are two levels of everything. First level is *Ijtihad* that is, if you have time, study yourself. Deep study requires that you know Arabic well and are able to study Quran, Hadith and associated literature. Irrespective of the time that elapses, you must continue your study so that you decipher the real purpose of Prophet Muhammad’s mission. But this is not possible for all. So, the other level is of *Taqleed* (following), where a believer can follow an *alim*.

Question 21: What does deep thinking mean?

Answer: There is no limit to deep thinking; it pervades one’s lifetime. Search for knowledge and reality is a lifelong process and can be done commensurate to the time at hand.

Question 22: You said that ulema (scholars) are ineffective in society but you say that ulema can understand my mission better when the reality is that secular people understand it better.

Answer: Quran is not a book of *madrasa* but a book of nature. Every man is endowed with nature and therefore can understand. I only say that ulema have the technical understanding in comparison to someone who has not been educated in a madrasa. By this, I refer to language gap since I too was educated in a madrasa. Earlier I used to speak a very different and difficult language. If you read Al Islam, it is in a very difficult language. Therefore, this is a matter of language gap and not related to understanding of the Quran.