

## **Accepting the Second Best**

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## Introduction

The Principle of *Accepting the Second Best* is in tandem with the law of nature, which governs the working of the universe. Man must accept the second best option because the *first best* does not exist. Unfortunately, throughout history man has remained plagued with the obsession of achieving the *imaginary* first best. An old adage alludes to how men rush after the *whole* measure, ignoring that which they could instead avail and in their vain struggle, end up losing both.

My recent experience with some residents of Kashmir is a case in point. They were of the view that it is not possible to lead a normal course of life in Kashmir because they live in an atmosphere of terror. As I pondered over their statement, I realized that the case of Kashmir was no different because they too had refused to accept the second best, in the hope of getting the best. It is widely known that after partition Kashmir was granted a special status under Article 370, but relying upon their false notions the people of Kashmir rejected it. Thereafter, they declined the proposal of an autonomous Kashmir, given to them during the Prime Ministership of Mr. P.V. Narsimha Rao. To the people of Kashmir, *first best* was either being independent or under the aegis of Pakistan; none of which was feasible.

## Case of every individual

The entire human history has been marred with this obsession; aiming for *first best*, man completely overlooks the *second best* failing to achieve which he falls into despair. This began with the first man, Adam. He was told to stay in paradise and keep away from the forbidden tree. This was ostensibly the *second best* option for him; *first* being that the entire paradise was provided for him. Since he overlooked the *second* option, it was taken away from him and he was ousted from paradise.

Every individual has an ideal in their mind, which is *first* according to his understanding. This does not let him recognize and appreciate the *second best* option. He fails to realize that the *first best* can only be attained in paradise. The following illustration serves to clarify my point. In conversation with a Palestinian speaker, I told him about my meeting with the President of Israel, Shimon Peres. It was a very hopeful meeting where President Peres acknowledged that Israel is open to the possibility of withdrawing to the limits assigned to them in 1967. As I narrated this incident to my acquaintance hoping to hear his positive response, I was rather dismayed at his contempt towards Israel's willingness to return 92% of the occupied land, which he considered inadequate. The retrieval of 92% of the occupied land was undoubtedly the second best option but it was blatantly overlooked. It is therefore entirely wrong to consider Palestine to be a case of *zulm* or victimization. Rather the mistake was on the part of Arabs who did not accept the second best and ran towards what they considered to be their wishful best.

Another example is of Pakistan. As Ayub Khan became the President of Pakistan, he offered the Islamists to establish the educational infrastructure of the country so that a new generation could be raised. But the clerics did not accept this. Instead, they started campaigns to dethrone him. The first best for them was that their own man should be on the political throne.

A similar event took place in Egypt. Al-Ikhwan-ul-Muslimun ousted King Farouk and paved way for Jamal Abd an Nasir thinking he was their man. This did not last for long and they alienated Nasir by

refusing to accept his offer of establishing educational edifice in the country. For these leaders, establishing an educational edifice was second best as their prime desire was to gauge political power. Such individuals and nations fail to remember that they have not created this world and therefore the secret of success cannot lie in discovering their whims but the Creation Plan of the Creator.

## Example of Prophet Muhammad

Several Muslims authors have written books glorifying the life of Prophet Muhammad but sadly none of them has explained that the Prophet was successful because he adopted the policy of accepting the *second* best. It is most unfortunate that people fail to familiarise themselves with the Prophetic policies because the books only serve the purpose of feeding the pride of the community. According to a tradition narrated by Hz. Ayesha,

**“When the Prophet had a choice he always opted for the easier option.” (Al-Bukhari)**

This means that the Prophet always focused on the easier option. He never strove for an unachievable endeavour. His choice was dependent upon the ease with which he could fulfill his commitment. Patience was fundamental to his approach and remained a consistent feature throughout his life.

In the first quarter of the seventh century, Kabah was under the domination of idol-worshippers and housed 360 idols. The Prophet Muhammad who propagated the message of Monotheism (*Tauheed*) should ideally have begun by striving to cleanse the Kabah of the idols. But nothing of this sort happened. He ignored the idols and availed the opportunity of addressing the gathering that would assemble to pay obeisance to their idols. Similarly, when the tribal parliament took the decision of killing the Prophet Muhammad, he did not opt for fighting against them. Instead he quietly migrated to Medina.

Muslims on the contrary talk only about establishing the political empire of Islam; they have wrongfully made it their priority. They consider dawah work as second best and while opportunities of accomplishing the second best galore, the rigid mindset of Muslims obstructs their understanding.

This is the case of the every man. Every person conceives ideal notions about – spouse, children, family, society etc. He imagines a *best* and strives towards it keeping aside all pragmatic concerns. Failure to achieve this, leads him into despair. Even the famous motivational author Dale Carnegie, (*How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*), spent his last days in despair and ended his life by committed suicide.

## What leads man into despair?

In today's times, everyone has developed an attitude of complaints. The primary reason for such behaviour is man's obsession to achieve the *first* best. Those who make this their sole concern give into frustration, despair and negative thinking upon meeting failure. On the contrary, if one settles for the *second* best, he can remain tension-free.

It is noteworthy that the rule has no exception. Even a superpower like America faces hard times. As Barack Obama assumed the Presidency of the United States of America he said, "*Change has come to America*". I had pointed out then that this change is not in America but just in American presidency. The President recently admitted that change has *not* come and it is not difficult to understand why. Before the Second World War, the motto of America was, '*The business of America is business*'. Driven by the desire of assuming world leadership, America could not settle for anything less and gradually deteriorated so much that it fell into worst economic recession of recent times.

Similar was the case of Muslims residing in Xinjiang, China who were peacefully earning their livelihood until some leaders arose among them who kicked off a revolution, seeking an independent state. Their act invited the wrath of the Chinese government, which took all possible steps to curb the separatists. The problem therefore developed because of the preposterous policies of the Muslim leaders of the region.

Another case in point is of Bosnia, which was a part of Yugoslavia. After being victorious in the general election, a Muslim leader became the head of state. Soon after, he declared Bosnia an independent state and what followed is widely known. Being a part of Yugoslavia, seemed second best to the Bosnian leader and following antagonizing policies, resulted in unprecedented suffering.

## Law of Nature and Dawah work

Effective dawah work can result from a keen understanding of the Creation Plan of God. While it may appear second to political power, in actual fact, dawah work is the real priority for a true believer. I once visited an Arab country where hundreds of youths were taken into custody as a result of their provocative activities aimed at ousting the reigning Sultan. They chose this 'apparently' best option ahead of the second option which sought the availing of opportunities in non-political fields.

It is most unfortunate that each person remains entrapped in this fascination of achieving the ideal and failing to do so falls prey to negative thinking. In his strife to achieve the very best, man completely overlooks the opportunities that are already present. It is therefore of paramount importance to acquaint man with God's scheme of things so that he does not live in despair but in hope and understands that adjustment as per God's plan is the only option for man.

## Conclusion

According to the Creation Plan of God, man shall receive the first best in the world hereafter whereas in the present world, he will have to stay content with the second best so that he saves himself from despair. Explaining how being in agreement with God's plan comforts heart, the Quran says,

**“Surely in the remembrance of God hearts find comfort.” (13:28)**

On the other hand, the price that man pays for neglecting the scheme of God is that he develops a negative personality. Non-achievement breeds feelings of hatred, anger, revenge within him and this puts him at a grave risk of being rendered unfit for receiving the best in the world hereafter. We must therefore accept the second best so that we retain our positivity and can be admitted to the perfect world of paradise. Indicating how men shall reap the result of their deeds in the hereafter, a verse in the Quran says,

**“This is the Day when the truthful will benefit from their truthfulness.” (5:119)**

It is worth noting that even the Prophet had to agree on the second best, which indicates that God's decision is the same for all. Indicating this, a verse in the Quran says,

**“You will never find any change in the ways of God; nor will you find God's decree averted.” (35:43)**

I would therefore reiterate the importance of such an approach while emphasizing that it requires objective and realistic thinking so that man understands that he will have no time at his disposal after he dies; then he shall face only the consequence of his deeds.

May God guide us to the right path!