

## Idealism versus Practical Wisdom

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### Excerpt:

*In his talk, the Maulana explains that he has learnt from his experiences that human life is 1% idealism and 99% practical wisdom. This is because one can be an idealist as an individual but when he wants to create an ideal world or society, he fails because every man is Mr./Ms. Different; all of them harbour different desires. To bring into being an ideal society, all its inhabitants will have to be made like-minded. Considering the limited lifespan of man, how will the entire mankind be made ideal?*

*He further explains that practical wisdom is the ability to differentiate between achievable and non-achievable. The biggest loss of failing to differentiate between the two approaches is that it leads to stagnation of thinking process and does not allow peaceful thinking. The universe of realisation is vast and can be fathomed by reflection alone. Not following this formula, deprives one from attaining realisation. Universe of realisation is another name for paradise. After death, there will be physical entry into paradise but in this world, man can have spiritual (or intellectual) entry into paradise through God-realisation!*

## **Introduction**

It is strange that throughout history, man has always ran after ideal. Very few examples exist, where man understood the importance of practical wisdom; it was like this before and is so now. When I read the Quran in this context, it strikes that the incident of *Adam* has such diverse aspects that it gives guidance pertaining to almost all facets of man's living. The answer of this topic also lies in the incident of Adam.

God created Adam and inhabited him in paradise. He was told to live freely in paradise with the only one condition that he must refrain from eating the fruit of the Forbidden Tree. But Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the Forbidden Tree. Then, they were ousted from paradise and sent on planet Earth. There are two aspects of this incident – ideal and practical. As per the ideal point of view, if paradise was open in entirety, there should have been no restriction whatsoever and access to the Forbidden Tree should have also been permitted. Practical wisdom on the other hand was that only for two (*Adam* and *Eve*), entire paradise was made available, so even if one tree was not made available it should be acceptable. In other words, the situation was similar to getting a palace with 100 rooms and being asked to refrain from 1 room. Practical wisdom entailed staying away from the Tree and considering the remaining paradise as their abode. As a result of eating the fruit of the Tree, *Adam* and *Eve* were casted out of paradise. This example holds true for rest of human history. Very few such individuals exist who understood and applied the policy of following practical wisdom. In fact, I find no other example except in the life of Prophet Muhammad.

## **Examples from history**

Philosophy originated in Greece, where great philosophers were born. Aristotle (born in 4 century, B.C) was considered to be the Father of Western Philosophy. He got a great opportunity – he became the tutor of Alexander, the crown prince of Greece. He developed the philosophy that life should be ideal – ideal state, ideal society and ideal government. He thought that if the ruler is a philosopher, everything will fall in place. He considered philosophy as “*queen of arts*.” Now, he was getting the opportunity of preparing the crown prince. But when after the death of his father, Alexander became the king; expansion of his empire became his sole concern.

He grew his army and raising conquests from Greece reached Sind, Punjab. He made huge conquests but by the time they reached Punjab, his army was much tired and gave up. Alexander was very frustrated and he died at the age of 33 years.

Aristotle died at the age of 62 years. Neither could an ideal state come into being nor could an ideal ruler be raised. Had he (Alexander) worked on practical wisdom, he would have worked towards developing Greece but when he started running after expanding his empire, he could do nothing and died in despair and frustration.

I have learnt from my experiences that human life is 1% idealism and 99% practical wisdom. This is because you can be an idealist in your mind but when you want to make idealism work in the entire society/ world, it does not work because every man is Mr./ Ms. Different; all of them harbour different desires within them. To bring into being an ideal society, all its inhabitants will have to be made like-minded. Considering the limited lifespan of man, how will the entire mankind be made ideal? One of my teachers used to say

*Insaan mein sudhaar lana aisa hai jese mendakon ki panseri (5 kg weight) banana*  
*[To bring about a change in man is like stacking five kilos of frogs one above the other]*

In earlier times, weights used to be stacked and used for measurement. If frogs are used instead of weight, a stack up will never get created as they will keep jumping from one place to another! Because, everyone is unique, how will all mankind be brought on the same level of thinking? Therefore, the right formula is to be an idealist for self and to follow practical wisdom in society.

### **What is practical wisdom?**

To agree on what is practically possible is called practical wisdom. This has been explained in a Hadith thus

**Woh shaqs kamyab ho gaya jisne Islam qabool kiya (sachchai ka aetnaaf kiya) aur usko baqadr e zarurat rizq mila aur woh raazi ho gaya us par jo allah ne diya tha (Musnad Ahmad)**  
*[He is successful, who acknowledged the truth and became contented with need-based livelihood]*

To accept Islam is tantamount to accepting the reality of things. One can be an idealist as far as acceptance of reality is concerned. Agreeing to an ideology at the level of individual mind is possible. In such a situation, one does not have to compromise with anyone. But one cannot adopt an uncompromising attitude when in society, because a society caters to the needs of all its inhabitants and not just a single individual. You are one of the 7 billion and everybody wants his share. So it is important to become contented upon need and refrain from greed. Contentment here means that man gets only as much as will come his way according to the Creation plan of God.

Even though man has unlimited desires, this world has limited resources so it is not possible that everything will be achieved. Man will therefore have to agree on contentment. Therefore, man will get things only in limited quantity because they do not exist in unlimited quantities in this world; rest is in paradise. For instance, Greece fell in Alexander's part and paradise, except Forbidden tree, fell in Adam's part. He who does not adhere to this will not succeed in this world.

### **Prophet Muhammad's example**

The life of Prophet Muhammad is a succinct example of the approach of applying practical wisdom. He was an idealist as far as his own being was concerned with respect to *Iman* (Faith), *Ibadah* (prayers) and moral values. But when dealing with other men, he used to see what was possible and what was impossible.

When he started his mission in Mecca, 360 idols existed in Kaaba. This was against idealism as ideal was monotheism. But he did not fight or break them; instead he started doing dawah work with the worshippers of these idols. Had he raised protests or fought with them, it would not have helped. As an individual, Prophet Muhammad was an ideal proponent of monotheism but when he had to deal with others, he compromised.

Likewise, when the Quraysh tribesmen wanted to kill Prophet Muhammad, he silently left and migrated to Medina. Had he practised idealism, he would have said why should I leave the land of my ancestors? But he adopted what was practically possible and migrated.

Upon reaching Medina, he came into contact with many Jewish tribes, which resided in Medina. But he did not fight with them. Instead he got into a compromise and said,

**Jews on their religion, Muslims on theirs (Seerah ibn Hisham)**

Similarly, at the juncture of Hudaibiyyah, when Prophet Muhammad was going peacefully with his companions to do *Umrah*, the Quraysh stopped them mid-way. This was not an ideal situation because visiting Kaaba, was the right of every Arab for centuries but he was denied that right. But Prophet Muhammad silently returned. The justification of this return is not in ideal justice but in practical wisdom.

### **Price of living in ideal**

The price of not following the policy of practical wisdom is *tension*. Today, neither commoners nor men of power are devoid of tension because they harbour an ideal mind-frame and chase it. They do not develop contentment on what is practically possible. People understand the phenomena of tension as a state of being unwell that leads to diabetes and high blood pressure. But this is a small price! People only know the physical loss on account of being tensed. The bigger loss of not following the policy of practical wisdom is spiritual/ ideological loss. He who does not accept that idealism works only in mind and practical wisdom works in society, will continue to live in tension. For example, when at home, one can run wherever but on road, one will have to be careful. Similarly, in society, individuals are not alone and when they do not ascribe to this formula, it leads to tension.

The biggest loss is that it leads to stagnation of thinking process and does not allow peaceful thinking. The universe of realisation is vast and can be entered as a result of reflection alone. Not following this formula, deprives one from attaining *Marefat* (realisation). In other words, such a person is no longer capable of entering into the universe of *Marefat* (realisation). Universe of realisation is another name for paradise. According to the Quran

**... a house in nearness to You [God] in Paradise... (66:11)**

After death, there will be physical entry into paradise but in this world, man can have spiritual (or intellectual) entry into paradise through God-realisation.

*Marefat* (Realisation) is not a small thing – it amounts to finding spiritual entry into paradise. Realisation in this world and paradise in hereafter are the two facets of the same coin. The nearness to God in this world can be experienced in spiritual sense but in the life hereafter, believers will experience nearness to God in the physical sense. In this world, only 1% idealism works and 99% practical wisdom works.

### **My experiences**

With the grace of God I have adopted this formula in my life. At the level of my mind, I live in ideal but outside my mind, am always ready to compromise. The advantage of this is that I remain tension-free every second and capable of spending time in God-realisation (*tadabbur*, *tafakkur*).

Today, morning I recalled a verse in the Quran

**Glory be to God, the best of creators (23:14)**

Because I think all the time, am able to derive items of realisation from my surroundings. When it thought about God being the Best Giver, it struck me that man is then the best taker. Because whatever God has to give, man is the only creation in this universe who has the sense of these things. Sense of beauty, perfection, pleasure, enjoyment, taste – are possessed by man alone! Stars, planets, mountains, oceans, animals and trees – none of them has such sense. For example, howsoever good a feed you many give to the animal, he does not have the taste buds to relish it.

Only man can enjoy beauty, taste, fulfilment and good things! I felt that God has all good things to give but there is only one taker, that is, man who can derive the intended enjoyment from those blessings! So, I realised that the *Best Giver* wants the *best taker* and the best taker wants the Best Giver! This is like the fish needs water and vice versa; both want each other!

I prayed to God that He is undoubtedly the Only Giver but whom will you give because, I alone can enjoy your blessings! If you give it to a mountain, how will it sense its beauty! I was struck by a profound realisation! One of my companions from Aligarh used to say, *Aisa Khoda nahin milega!* [You will not find such a God!] This item of realisation led to a tempest within me.

I met a Palestinian businessman yesterday who came to visit me. He was very satisfied with his flourishing business. I thought that trillion times more satisfying than this would be the feeling of attaining paradise, but who can enjoy it? Only man can enjoy paradise – no mountain or tree can enjoy it! So, God seeks man (may God forgive me ) just as man needs God! I prayed,

*O God! Forgive me but without me, your paradise will be barren, who will enjoy it?*

Such realisation only happens when man remains tension-free. The biggest thing to attain in this world is higher realisation and discovery of God! But a price has to be paid for it. Yesterday I asked my maidservant to bring two cup of tea. She forgot. After some time again I rang the bell and when she appeared I didn't scold her or said any angry word to her. What I said was simply again to bring two cup of tea. That's how I keep myself tension free. To be tension-free, you must be ready to compromise with everything. This is the way to realisation and both the worldly and otherworldly success rests on it!

## **Conclusion**

The Hadith above succinctly states how success can be achieved in this world and the life hereafter. One who acknowledged truth and became contented with his share in this world. Having a destined share is not mysterious. Since the resources in this world are limited, so only a limited share can be had by each person. Even though man's desires are unlimited, planet Earth and its resources are limited. Therefore, man will have a limited share as per the Creation Plan of God because more than that he can only had in paradise. Following this approach leads to peace of mind.

Peace of mind starts a non-stop thinking process. Saving self from distraction allows the thinking faculty to work uninterrupted. In this world, thinking is the door to realisation. Realisation of God (*Marefat-e-Khuda*) has no other mysterious door – no rituals, practices, meditation - can lead to God-realisation. To attain this, one will have to save oneself from distraction and build contentment by agreeing on practical instead of ideal.

Man has a limited lifespan. No one lives for eternity and in that limited period man cannot afford to waste his time and energy. This must be understood properly.

What is wastage of time? One is an achievable target and the other is a non-achievable one. Wasting time is to chase that which is non-achievable. Because even after spending hundred years, nothing will materialise. To differentiate between what is achievable for your and what is non-achievable for you is another name of wisdom and intelligence.

The problem in this world is because people run after that which is not attainable. The real thing is to find what is attainable and what is not. The same rule applies to dawah work. Even in the field of dawah, a dayee must differentiate between what is achievable and what is not. This is the starting point of wisdom. All the corruption in this world is because people chase the unachievable and waste their lives in pursuit of that.

For example, if one aims to create a just society in this world, such a desire will never come to pass. Instead, individuals must be taught and prepared.

You should not do the mistake which Aristotle did. The so-called Islamists also make this mistake – they wish to create *just society* in the world – this is a highly unachievable goal, instead they should target how *just individual* came into being. These are serious items of thinking. If you don't think, you will waste your time, energy, resources and would live in tension.

I always read about the state of mind of people when they died. I realise that all people die a death of despair – unable to attain what they wanted to. This is because they could not differentiate between what is achievable and what is not and die with the feeling that they could not attain what they wanted to. This is a strange end to a precious life!

God created man as a special being and this is the biggest blessing of God on man! Wasting time on what is not achievable and dying in despair is tantamount to disregarding the blessings of God! Will you like standing with such ungrateful people on the day of judgement? Never! So, we must think a lot and follow the right path.

May God bless us!

### Question- Answers

*Question 1: What is the recipe for doing dawah work?*

Answer: We do not have to adopt any artificial way of working; we have the model of Prophet Muhammad to emulate. The model is that we must begin from what is possible. Keeping a world goal is not practical. We must plan according to what is do-able. The easiest beginning in today's world is distribution of literature. I once read about Christian missionaries that they sent an emissary in forests of South America to identify the potential of carrying out missionary activities. The emissary returned after spending days and began by giving an account of the flora and fauna of the place. Irrked by the description, a listener asked, "*Did you find men there?*" He said "*Yes!*" They said, "*That is it. If there are men, we have work!*" Establishing big targets is impractical and a dayee must refrain from it. A dayee is a very practical person and must make a humble beginning. Eventually it will increase.

*Question 2: Is global morality possible or practical?*

Answer: Global morality is an impractical target. The achievable target is only individual morality. When you try with individuals, you will achieve success.



*Question 3: When man has freedom as per the Creation Plan of God, then protesting against others is akin to protesting against God's plan. Why do people not understand this?*

Answers: The blame rests with their leaders who propagate negativity and notions like - conspiracy, siege and oppression. If you are positive, you should be grateful that in this jungle of negative thoughts, you are capable of thinking positively and should then spread it.

*Question 4: Islam has the strength to establish an ideal system. Why should we then agree on less than ideal?*

Answer: Neither Quran, nor Hadith make any reference to “*nizam or system*”. Such thinking is an outcome of communist ideology, which preached systems’ thinking. When I was young, everyone was a proponent of Communism. In those days, two of my friends also, who belonged to a progressive group preached systems’ thinking. Democratic/ socialist philosophers gave the philosophy of systems thinking and in imitation certain Muslim clerics started preaching “Islamic system.” The target of Islamic way of working is individual and not system.

*Question 5: Why does modern man die in frustration though his wealth abounds?*

Answer: The answer to this is in the Quran

**Al hatu mutakassur hatta zurtumul maqabir (5)**

*Takassur* sums up the attitude of non-contentment in man. He runs after greed and that is the reason that leads man to die in despair eventually.

*Question 6: What is the importance of a tension-free life for a dayee? How to save oneself from tension?*

Answer: If a dayee lives in tension, it means that he will harbour hatred in his heart because the tension would have arisen because of some doing of other men. For dawah work, immense well-wishing is desired.

*Question 7: I am tension free but do not have that creative a mind. What should I do?*

Answer: This report about you is not correct. You are overestimating yourself. If you are like this, the doors to creative thinking will open automatically. You must introspect again!

*Question 8: What does it mean, “God needs man”?*

Answer: I did not use the word “need”. I mean who else except man can be an eligible taker of divine blessings? If he gives it to mountains, planets, oceans, what will they do with it? Need is not in the sense of want or requirement. In this context, it means that God has unlimited things to give and man alone can appreciate them! Because no other creation in this world has a sense of enjoyment!

*Question 9: Please explain the meaning of remembering God so that He remembers man as is mentioned in Chapter 2, verse 148-152 of the Quran.*

Answer: It does not have a mysterious meaning; it only means that if you want divine succour, you will have to want it from God. It is not a one-sided process.

*Question 10: The Khilafat movement was on a wrong base and is every such movement is wrong?*

Answer: These movements were result-less and while living in a society, we must undertake a result-oriented action. These were only emotional speeches and had no other outcome.

*Question 11: I am a shopkeeper and because of not being able to manage, I remain in tension. How to deal with this?*

Answer: The real thing is that each shop owner wants to manage beyond their capacity. This is the reason for their tension. I know of many such people. Business cannot afford a hasty jump but every businessman jumps! You should therefore say that am not able to free myself from greed and adopt contentment.

*Question 12: You said that intellectual development and dawah require interaction. How should we remove the hesitation?*

Answer: One should inculcate learning attitude. People think we have to tell, if they change this mindset and go with a learning attitude, this hesitation will go away. Dawah work is a sharing process which entails giving and taking! If this is clear, there will be no obstacle.

*Question 13: A person said that women spend most of their time in kitchen so how should they increase their reading?*

Answer: Kitchen should be shut! A person who runs a seminary came to meet me with his wife. He told me that many guests visit him and his wife is engaged in catering to them all through! I told him that wife is a gift from God and he is disrespecting that gift!

He then took a drastic step and stopped entertaining guests. Not only this, he actually shut his kitchen and provisioned for food from the pantry of the seminary! Now, both of them do a lot of dawah work and study. All these acts of household indulgence are idle business and one will have to bring about a radical change in order to rise above them. There is no obstacle in life but in the way you think! If you become a revolutionary thinker, things will change!

*Question 14: How should people be told that Al Risala is not a periodical but a divine mission?*

Answer: Being a magazine, Al Risala follows the model of a periodical. But it is the only periodical, which is a mission in the complete sense of the word. What is a mission? When the one who writes lives in mission himself, then his writings become the voice of the mission. Because people are only familiar with periodical models, they do not discover it as a mission. He who reads Al Risala once, did not read it, he who reads it twice, read it and he who reads it many times, understands it! This is because Al-Risala's message is contrary to the conditioning of the present generations; they need to understand it in depth in order to appreciate it. Unless their mindset is broken, the readers will not be able to think and understand it.

*Question 16: What is the relevance of distributing literature and working on individual minds?*

Answer: Dawah work has two aspects – general dawah and individual centric dawah work. The latter is very important because change comes in individual mind only. You must meet such individuals, give them feedback and make them read books.

*Question 17: A dayee has tension for dawah work. Please comment.*

Answer: The tension of a dayee is positive because it is in the sense of well-wishing. The difference is that you lose something on the personal front and become tensed about it. The other is that you want the other person to understand but he is not understanding, this is positive tension as it emanates from well-wishing.

*Question 18: Please explain the meaning of “middle nation” as mentioned in Chapter 2, verses 142-143. Does it refer to dawah work?*

Answer: Middle nation or *ummat-e-wasat* does not mean “best or superior community”. Middle means being between two, that is, on one side of a believer is the Prophet Muhammad and on other side is rest of humanity. Believers have to take the message from the Prophet and pass it on to others.

*Question 19: How can I understand Quran in a better way?*

Answer: Read it again and again and pray to God. There is no other formal procedure.

*Question 20: Please explain the meaning of verse 6, chapter 48 in the Quran.*

Answer: A negative news item must be adequately scrutinised. It should not happen that one listens and starts propagating the negative word. This is a wrong practice because he who has told the news can do any kind of erroneous reporting. The bearer of the news must confirm its veracity before spreading the word. People spread negative news about me without even reading my writings. If you have to tell something negative about someone, it will be a crime if you say without scrutinising. A person came to me and said, I have been told that your writings have only material articles and not religious. I gave him the latest issue and told him where is materialism in this? According to a Hadith

**Us aadmi ke jhoota hone ke liye ye baat kaafi hai, ki jo woh sunne use bayan karne lage**

*Question 21: Problems are challenges as per Creation Plan of God. Please elaborate.*

Answer: In this world, man cannot lead life on his own terms. He must spend his life as per the Creation Plan of God or create another world for himself. As per the plan of God, you cannot abolish others' freedom whether they use or misuse it. Therefore, your planning should be in accordance with the fact that the other person is as free as you are, even to misuse his freedom. According to the Quran, *Ghazwa e Tabooq* was a war in which it was obligatory upon all believers to participate. But some did not go. Prophet accepted excuses of all upon his return except three persons, who were boycotted. This is not duplicity or injustice. All confrontations happen because every man wants to live on his whims without analysing the situation.

*Question 22: Can the state have a religion. Please comment.*

Answer: It is a bidat of our times, which has happened in Israel and in Pakistan. Islam does not have this notion. When Prophet made a city state in Medina, he did not announce that Medina is an Islamic state. He said, ruled would be like the ruler. State is only for administration; religion is for individual. The so-called Islamists in Pakistan said that "state" should read the kalimah - this is a ridiculous idea! State cannot read kalimah on behalf of individuals. An individual alone reads the kalimah!

*Question 23: According to Hadith, we must remember death but when we do so, no desire is left and you don't want to do anything. Please comment.*

Answer: I remember death every day and every moment. Yet, I lead an active life. A British thinker said, *I am large enough to contain all these contradictions*. This means that man has the capability of remembering death and leading an active life still. Thinking such things is akin to underestimating man.

*Question 24: An acquaintance said that only moral base is the right base for a successful business. Does it mean that people are re-discovering the truth of divine teachings? Please clarify.*

Answer: People do not understand the difference between contentment and lust. They fail to understand that we can get only as per our need because world cannot help achieve our greed. Need means that which is attainable within our realms of control.

*Question 25: How important is to be complex-free for those pursuing the Al-Risala mission?*

Answer: It is necessary for every one because if you are not complex-free you will not develop a realistic approach and will not understand the working of the world. In order to lead a successful life, you need to be complex-free.