

Importance of Positive Thinking

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Introduction

Positive thinking is the practice of maintaining positivity despite negative situations. The fact is that everyone enjoys freedom. But at the same time, everyone is free to misuse his freedom. It is this misuse of freedom that creates problems. As we cannot abolish people's freedom, we have no option but to learn to stay positive in every situation.

Man finds himself in a world where everyone rushes to fulfill his desires. In such a scenario, there exist only two options - to demonstrate resentment or to stay calm and maintain positivity in negative situations. The freedom that man possesses appears so limitless that he does not shy away from stooping to the extent of ridiculing even the Prophets and calling them "mad". Yet, God neither ordains retribution nor abolishes the freedom. This is to let the Plan for settling man on Earth progress unhindered. It is for man to realize that complaint against man is actually directed against God Himself because He is the Giver of freedom to man.

Unfortunately, the entire Muslim world is unaware of the Creation Plan of God. A recent case will prove my point. A well-known scholar published an article in an Arab magazine entitled, "*Will there be no end to this hatred?*" This author writes on the assumption that the West continues to be antagonistic to the Muslims and in conspiring against them, wants the Muslims to be doomed. This has been the Muslim way of thinking for the last hundred years and surprisingly no leader or ulama questioned that why despite being the "*Khair-e-Umma*", Muslims continue to be suppressed by the world and even then God remains indifferent to it? Has God forsaken those who claim to be His emissaries, the "chosen" ones?

Principle of Replacement

The answer to the above question lies in understanding the "Principle of Replacement." This Principle is illustrative of the law of nature and indicates the replacement of old blood with new blood. This is imperative because after sometime the old is rendered useless. It is for this reason that no community in this world has had eternal political monopoly. Let me explain this with a few examples.

Romans

Ancient Rome was a civilization that grew out of a small agricultural community founded on the Italian Peninsula as early as the 10th century BC. The Roman Empire was characterised by an autocratic form of government and large territorial holdings in Europe and around the Mediterranean. Romans saw a long period of relative peace and minimal expansion by military force, through the introduction of *Pax Romana* (Latin for "Roman peace"). Their ruler Augustus faced a problem making peace an acceptable mode of life for the Romans, who had been at war with one power or another continuously for 200 years. Romans regarded peace not as an absence of war, but the rare situation that existed when all opponents had been beaten down beyond the ability to resist. Augustus' challenge was to persuade Romans that the prosperity they could achieve in the absence of warfare was better for the Empire than the potential wealth and honor acquired when fighting a risky war. Augustus succeeded by means of skillful propaganda. During the Pax Romana, the area of Roman rule expanded to about five million square kilometers (two million square miles). Because of the Empire's vast extent and long endurance, Roman influence upon the language, religion, architecture, philosophy, law, and government of nations was immense. Thus, the Romans taught the world to unite and strive for betterment of civilization.

Muslim Empire

The decline of the Roman Empire followed the societal collapse encompassing both the gradual disintegration of the political, economic, military, and other social institutions of Rome. Romans used to offer cult to innumerable deities who were considered to influence every aspect of both the natural world and human affairs. The era of Christian hegemony even witnessed religious persecution on a large scale. In replacing the Roman Empire, God opened the gates for ushering in the age of exploration. Islam eradicated nature worship and put an end to religious persecution thereby unseating nature from the throne of divinity. These developments paved way for the scientific exploration of nature. The coming of Islam affected such varied areas as art, architecture, medicine, agriculture, language, education, law and technology. The contributions from the Islamic world were to have a considerable effect on the development of Western civilization and later to the achievements of the Renaissance.

Europeans

The British Empire took science to the next level. The Renaissance enabled a scientific revolution which let scholars look at the world in a different light. Religion, superstition, and fear were replaced by reason and knowledge. This period saw a fundamental transformation in scientific ideas across physics, astronomy, biology and in institutions supporting scientific investigation. Advances in exploration led to the scientific revolution, which in turn formed the foundations of all modern sciences. While the Muslims had only reached animal power (horsepower), the Europeans discovered the power in steam and converted it into mechanical energy. Their contributions led to the development of mechanization of power. Steam ships, railways, machinery etc - came into existence because of their relentless efforts. However, like in case of all other powers, the British Empire degenerated following the decline of colonialism and was replaced by the Americans.

Americans

The American Revolution was the political upheaval during the last half of the 18th century in which thirteen colonies in North America joined together to break free from the British Empire, combining to become the United States of America. The American Revolution initiated a series of social, political, and intellectual transformations in early American society and government. The rights of the people were incorporated into state constitutions. Thus came the widespread assertion of liberty, individual rights, equality and hostility toward corruption which would prove core values of republicanism to Americans. The research and contribution of Americans made the world a global village. Globalization integrated regional economies, societies, and cultures through a global network of communication, transportation, and trade. They introduced outsourcing which is a boon to nations and in accordance with the teachings of Islam. Let me explain this with an example. According to a tradition,

God will strengthen Islam even through secular forces (al-Bukhari)

Hence, the scientific discoveries made by the West converted the potential evidence of God's existence into actual. Although West made these discoveries, they could be used by Muslims to support the Islamic ideology. This was outsourcing. But Muslims could not understand this and remained opposed to the idea of outsourcing. They could not recognise the contribution of Europeans, Americans and failed to realise that while all the development and research took place in these countries, the truths of Islam were brought to fore.

Disadvantages of Complaining

Complaint indicates the negativity that an individual harbours within himself. Being bereft of positive thinking does not allow him to recognise the Creation Plan of God, which is why when there is a shift of power and a different community comes to fore, they start protesting. Such protests are directed against the following verse of the Quran, which clearly ordains,

We bring these days to men by turns (3:140)

Remaining uncognisant of God's Plan prevents man from planning effectively. According to a tradition,

God presents Himself on Earth and asks, Is there anyone who seeketh (Mishkat)

The above tradition presents good tiding before man. It indicates that God sends down spiritual inspiration everyday for believers to imbibe. Unfortunately, because of remaining immersed in negativity, the Muslims stay deprived of divine guidance.

An instance from the life of Gautam Buddha aptly illustrates that in order to receive wisdom man must spring clean his mind of negative thoughts. A milkman, deeply influenced by Gautam Buddha insisted that Buddha visit him and share his nuggets of wisdom. In lieu of this, the milkman offered to present milk to Buddha. He agreed. In the evening when Buddha set out to visit the milkman he took with him a container in which he intentionally put some mud. The milkman took the container but just as he was about to pour milk into it, the milkman realized that the container had some impurity. The milkman cleansed the container and removed all the impurities. He then poured the milk into it and gave it to Buddha. Upon getting the container, Buddha got up to leave. Surprised, the milkman asked Buddha why was he leaving before imparting any wisdom. Buddha replied that he just had. Unable to comprehend it, the milkman urged Buddha to explain the learning to him. Buddha told the milkman that our mind is similar to the container and the thoughts that preoccupy us are like the impurities in the container. In order to attain wisdom, we must purify our mind and make it free of all impure thoughts. Buddha asked the milkman to cleanse himself of his thoughts for only then will he be able to imbibe any further learning. This illustration depicts the case of every individual.

Divine inspiration is the source of positive thinking. While negative thinking is the source of all kinds of evils, positive thinking is the source of all goodness. An obstacle to man's development, negative thinking makes him unworthy of God's blessings.

The Quran says

True believers are those whose hearts tremble with awe at the mention of God (8:2)

The greatest weakness of present-day Muslims is their negative psychology. They feel that all the nations of the world are inimical to them, and so many of their activities are seen as acts of hostility against the Muslims. This negative psychology has resulted in all their thinking becoming unrealistic. It is situations such as these that are the tests for man. Giving negative responses to negative situations leads to failing the test. On the contrary, giving positive responses to such situations leads to passing the test. In short, a soul of paradise is one who has opted for the way of forgiveness in moments of anger; who has converted sentiments of jealousy into those of well-wishing, who has converted negativity into positivity, who has converted hatred into love, who has diffused the tensions, instead of causing them to mount: above all, who has converted material loss into non-material gains, by opting for the course of introspection, when beset by complaints and grievances. Patience is undoubtedly the highest form of worship and the superior solution to all problems.

Positive Planning

It is crucial for man to realize that positive and effective planning can materialize only if it is done keeping in mind the Creation Plan of God. The present world is designed in such a way that here one has repeatedly to face unpleasant experiences, inside as well as outside the home. Now if people were to fall to wrangling on all such occasions, they would fail to advance along the path of human progress. The following verse of the Quran provides the formula for undertaking positive planning. It says,

So, surely with every hardship there is ease (94:5-6)

This is the way nature works. We should therefore be prepared for a period of hard struggle before we can expect to reap the results we desire. This is a law established by the Maker of the universe, and it is only by complying with it that we can advance towards our goal in life. Unfortunately, the present-day Muslims are lagging behind in every field except militancy and suicide bombing because they have failed to plan their activities in keeping with the Creation Plan of God. This is a grave loss.

Globalisation

A Book authored by a Muslim showers vitriolic criticism on the phenomena of globalisation. This is a clear case of unawareness of the Creation Plan of God. The phenomena of globalization was the precursor to the coming true of the following Hadith,

The word of God shall enter every household – big or small (Musnad Ahmad)

For the construction of a better society, it is necessary that its members should never foster discontent. A feeling of contentment enables a person to rise above trivialities and live in the higher realities. Lamentably, reaction has become immanent in the psyche of present-day Muslims. Unlike the Prophet and his companions, the present-day Muslims react at the slightest provocation. They do not understand that freedom of speech and expression is given paramount importance in today's times. And because media is not monopolized by a community or sect, it will continue to publish books and articles that would voice the opinion of people from all walks of life. As much as the opportunities exist for others, they do for the Muslims. The latter only need to avail it. Instead of harbouring the impractical notions of establishing hegemony over the world, the present-day Muslims must re-assess themselves and re-plan their life in accordance with the will of the Creator of the world. They must understand that God tests communities by giving them freedom and opportunities; their rightful usage would decide the fate of man in the life to come.

Towards the end

Our mission seeks to inculcate positive thinking in man because it is the stepping stone to all forms of progress both in this world and the world hereafter. Positive thinking in other words, marks submission to the Creation Plan of God. For those who are able to abide by it, the Quran says

God is well pleased with them and they are well-pleased with God. (98:8)

Present-day Muslims have failed to understand the importance of aligning man's plan with the Creation Plan of God. They have been unable to assimilate positivity in their way of thinking leading to loss of divine guidance. This is despite nature itself being a clear manifestation of the positive values that man must imbibe. One may not like the thorns which essentially accompany roses, but it is not possible for anyone to pluck out all the thorns and destroy them completely. For, if you pluck out one, another will grow in its place. Even if you run a bulldozer over all rosebushes, new plants will grow in their place

which will bear roses ineluctably accompanied by thorns. In the present scheme of things, roses can be had only by tolerating the existence of thorns. Therefore, positive thinking ought to be retained despite all odds. This way of living is illustrated in the following tradition of Caliph Umar. Umar Farooq, the second Caliph once asked a companion of the Prophet what *taqwa* was? He replied, "O leader of the believers, have you ever crossed a path which has thorny shrubs, on both sides?" But the companion instead of replying asked another question, "What did you do on such an occasion?" Umar Farooq replied, "I gathered my clothes close to me and moved ahead cautiously." The companion said, "This is the stuff of *taqwa*."

The present world is a testing ground. Here, various kinds of thorns have been scattered for the purpose of testing man, such as negativity, false issues raised by non-serious people, the lure of worldly things. Besides these, there are many unpleasant occurrences, which disturb people's minds and lead them away from the path of virtue. All these things are like thorny shrubs lining both sides of the path of life. At any moment it is feared that man may embroil himself in these thorns and then instead of going forward, remain entrapped in these snares of life.

In such a state of affairs the wise man is one who travels the paths of life by gathering up his clothes to avoid becoming, entangled in these unpleasant snares. In this way, he is able to continue his journey unhampered. Yet at all times he must remain conscious of the fact that he must protect himself. He has to adopt the path of avoidance, not of entanglement.

Islam attaches great importance to patience. Most of the verses of the Qur'an have a bearing, directly or indirectly, upon this virtue. A verse in the Quran says

For the sake of your Lord, be patient (74:7)

Those who are attempting to provoke or disturb your scheme of things, do not act against them. Practice avoidance so that you may continue unhindered, your onward journey towards the higher goal – God realization. Another verse in the Quran cites

Truly, those who persevere patiently will be requited without measure (39:10)

There is no other action which will have unlimited reward and that is why The Qur'an repeatedly stresses the need for patience. Patience, as well as being a practical solution to the problems faced in the outside world, is also a means of positive character building.

One who fails to exercise patience, gives free rein to negative thoughts and feelings, develops a personality which is likewise negative while one who remains patient is so morally bolstered by his own positive thoughts and feelings that he develops a positive personality.

Living with people, and observing their principles are acts which would deserve a reward in normal circumstances, but when one continues to be well-behaved in spite of differences and grudges, by curbing negative sentiments, then the reward is increased manifold. God will count those who sedulously avoid friction among the possessors of a superior character. For the human character to retain its superiority, therefore, there must be staunch and unceasing adherence to the principle of avoidance.