

Importance of Focussed Thinking

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Sunday, March 07, 2010

Introduction

Psychologists suggest that focussed thinking is the prerequisite for *super* achievement. A focused man devotes himself entirely to the cause he pursues and detaches himself from every other enticement. If the price for worldly achievement requires such focus, then the supreme achievement of realization God will require man to forsake all other pursuits. In other words to find God, man must abandon every other concern.

The discovery of the biggest secrets of nature was a result of the efforts of highly focussed individuals. Newton was called a *wool-gatherer* in his early days. It was this special quality that allowed him to observe with utmost concentration. He is known to have said, *"I have no special sagacity, only the power of patient thought."*

The Quran provides guidance to a sincere seeker. Such a person finds fundamental principles of life in it. For example a verse in the Quran states,

"Do not incline towards those who do wrong, lest the fire touch you." (11:113)

Here the Arabic word '*rukoon*' (incline) means to lean or to deviate from the straight path. In other words, the verse observes that one who gets distracted is the one who shall be led astray from the right path.

Life is a super opportunity

Man fails to discover life as a super opportunity; one that will never be regained and it is his unawareness that does not allow man to avail this opportunity. Therefore discovering life as an opportunity must become the starting point for each individual.

I spent my lifetime trying to understand the life of the Prophet Muhammad. I drew motivation for my recent book '*The Prophet of Peace*' (Penguin Publications) from the present-day misrepresentation of the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Instead of adopting the Prophetic model, the present-day Muslims choose to retort through futile,

violent protests. While in conversation with an acquaintance, I told him that the title of my upcoming book would be '*Prophet of Peace*'. Dismayed, he said that this was an unappealing title and would not garner attention of the readers. Instead he suggested that my book should be titled, '*Why Bin Laden was wrong?*' I could not reconcile myself to this suggestion as Laden is a negative personality and I could not give the reference of a negative personality while writing about Prophet Muhammad who was a positive personality in the complete sense of the word. I could not relate myself with the idea of writing about the life of Prophet of Islam in reference of a negative personality. I kept thinking about this matter and thus the book stayed under wraps for almost a year.

If I would have focused on gaining media popularity and titled the Book on a negative personality like *bin Laden*, it would have become a *rukoon* for me. But I chose not to do so and while man seldom realizes this but only when he leaves men that he finds God. One year later, I got a call from Penguin Publications and the official expressed a desire to pay a courtesy visit to me. During our conversation, a mention of the Book took place and the official grew keen on reading it. After a few days, the official rung up to say that Penguin Publications wished to publish the Book! This was how it finally got published.

It is absolutely baffling to realize that this is the first time that an international publisher has published the book of an *alim*, which presents pure Islam and cites extensive references from the Quran and Hadith. Had I focused on what may or may not appeal the media, I would have deviated from the pivot of my Book. Because I did not do so, God made provision for that book to be published by such reputed publishers.

God is the focus

The above example brings to fore an important consideration, that, God must be the focal point of our life. If we immerse ourselves in the work of God, rest of our tasks will be taken care of by the angels. According to a Hadith,

Everyday, God says to men on Earth: "Is there someone who seeks something from me, whom I should give what he asks for?"

However, in order to make God the pivotal point of one's existence, one must do *dua* and disengage oneself from every distraction. Dua or prayer is effectuated only when man's behaviour and his life becomes a reflection of his dua.

Developing focused thinking

Focused thinking has to be strived for; it does not develop on its own. Prophet Muhammad migrated to Medina after spending 13 years amidst the hostilities that were meted out to him and his companions at Mecca. The mother of one such companion sent a message to him at Medina saying that she vowed to neither comb her hair nor go in shade, till her son returned to Mecca. The son grew very anxious upon receiving this message. Caliph *Omar* tried to dissuade him from going and said that when the heat of Mecca will trouble her, she will go to the shade and comb her hair as well. But the son did not take *Omar's* advice and returned to Mecca. He never got back to Islam.

(Ibn Hisham)

Caliph *Omar* could say this because he had a focused mind which allowed him to objectively weigh the words spoken by the mother vis-à-vis the capacity endowed in her by nature. Though she claimed to not move to shade but the constitution of human body per se cannot tolerate heat. Whatever her claim, she could not have changed her nature. And as per the tradition she did move to shade despite avowing not to do so.

I am reminded here of an incident which clearly distinguishes between the outcomes of objective and emotional thinking. When *Omar* became Caliph, *Mauwiya* was the

Governor of Syria and *Khalid* was a general in the army. *Mauwiya's* lavish lifestyle was not appreciated by Arabs some of whom complained about it to *Omar*. At the same time, some had even complained to *Omar* about *Khalid*. As a result, *Omar* demoted *Khalid* from the rank of General to an ordinary soldier. But he did not demote *Mauwiya*. The judgment of *Omar* was full of practical wisdom and he could do it because he thought about the problem objectively. Demoting *Mauwiya* could have created problems because he belonged to the rich clan of *Banu Umaiyya* unlike *Khalid* who was not of the same position as *Mauwiya* and could not have propagated unrest in the society.

Unlike *Omar*, Ali upon becoming the Caliph, demoted *Mauwiya*. It was this event that kick-started several bloody wars and battles. This was the difference between an action done after deliberating with a focussed mindset and one that is done at an emotional level. Focussed thinking leads to greater analysis and develops power of deep thinking.

At another juncture, Caliph *Omar* was asked to pay a visit to Palestine by the besieged rulers of the land so that they could work out a bilateral agreement. Caliph *Omar* agreed. The talks were taking place at the Church of Resurrection. As the *Asr* time approached, Caliph *Omar* expressed the desire to pray. The Priest asked him to offer the prayer in the Church itself but Caliph *Omar* declined his offer saying that he would not pray in the premises but at a stone's throw distance from the Church. He later explained that he did so to avoid any potential conflict between Christians and Muslims. Had he prayed inside the precincts of the Church, Muslims would have insisted on building a mosque there giving way to unnecessary confrontation. And history tells us that this is exactly what happened. Later, Muslims built a mosque (*Mosque of Omar*) at the same location where he had offered his prayer.

Contrary to this example of *Omar* was the response that Muslims gave to the *Babri Mosque* event. Let us look at the history of this mosque. Four hundred years ago, *Mir*

Baqi built a mosque adjacent to the place of worship of Hindus. He acted upon the advice of a Sufi who thought that the proximity of places of worship would foster cordial relations between Hindus and Muslims. The mosque that was built surrounded the *Ram Chabutra*, a Hindu place of worship. Initially, both Hindus and Muslims accepted it, as is apparent from a poem of Tulsidas, in which he says that he used to sleep in the mosque (referring to the Babri Mosque). However, this did not continue for long and confrontation between Muslims and Hindus took place at the issue of constructing a temple at the site.

Had Muslims acted wisely and adopted the policy of Caliph Omar, such a dispute would never have arisen. Caliph Omar was not a mysterious person. He inculcated thinking power in him. Everyone has the potential for this but it has to be actualized. If therefore the focus is not singular, nothing great can be achieved.

Conclusion

Torch for instance exemplifies focus. If the focus of the torch is low, the vision is blurred but if the focus is high, the vision is much clear. People today have a wide focus; they work on community initiatives that encompass the entire crowd. This prevents them from concentrating on the individual. Crowd-based thinking leaves no room for the development of an individual. Several conferences and seminars keep taking place but to no avail. The focus of these seminars is so wide that it does not end with a concrete take-away.

Focussed thinking provide room for planning and wise action but all this happens only when man consciously concentrates and invests his energy towards the cause of his intellectual development.