

Restoration of Quick-Wittedness and Averting the Harm of Western Mechanism

A defining characteristic of the Islamic Ummah is quick-wittedness (sur'at bad-eeha سرعة بديهة) in the matter of the Deen. Quick-wittedness is one of the styles of thinking and does not depart from the fundamentals of thinking. What distinguishes quick-thinking is its speed. It is quick observation of reality and a quick linkage of previous information that contextualizes that reality to produce a judgement upon it. In the time of the Companions (ra), quick-wittedness was found within the Companions (ra) and those around them.

Quick-Wittedness in the Era of the Companions (ra)

It is mentioned in the book, Al-Mabsoot (المبسوط) by the Hanifi jurist, Imam As-Sarkhasi (أن امرأة جاءت إلى عمر رضي الله تعالى عنه وقالت: إن زوجي يصوم النهار ويقوم الليل، فقال: نعم الرجل زوجك، (السرخسي) فأعادت كلامها مرارا، في كل ذلك يجيبها عمر رضي الله عنه بهذا، فقال كعب بن سور: يا أمير المؤمنين إنها تشكو من زوجها في أنه هجر من صحبتها فتعجب عمر رضي الله تعالى عنه من فطنته وقال اقض بينهما، فقضى كعب رضي الله عنه بما ذكر فولاه عمر رضي الله تعالى عنه قضاء البصرة) "A woman came to Umar (ra) and said, "My husband fasts during the day and spends the night in prayer." He replied, "Your husband is an excellent man." She repeated her statement several times, and each time Umar gave the same response. Then Ka'b ibn Suwar said, "O Ameer ul-Mu'mineen, she is complaining that her husband has forsaken her company." 'Umar (ra) marveled at his insight and said, "Judge between them." Ka'b issued a ruling based on what had been described, and 'Umar subsequently appointed him as the judge of Basra."

Undoubtedly, 'Umar bin al-Khattab (ra) was usually quick-witted. However, he lacked quick-wittedness in this specific incident. 'Umar bin al-Khattab (ra) did not have quick-wittedness when the woman complained about her husband, saying that he stood the night in prayer and fasted the day, making him negligent of her marital rights. 'Umar bin al-Khattab (ra) did not understand this complaint. Instead, he believed that she was praising her husband. However, Ka'b ibn Suwar was quick-witted, as he understood her complaint. He even understood that she persisted in the complaint. The fact that Ka'b ibn Suwar, in this incident, was more quick-witted than 'Umar bin al-Khattab (ra), means that quick-wittedness in a single matter, or in a specific incident, is separate from the general characteristic of quick-wittedness. It is a style of thinking that can be used or missed. It is a style of thinking that can be acquired or can be lost. It is not innate within some to the exclusion of others, and can be acquired.

Promotion of Quick-Wittedness

As for insight into promoting quick-wittedness, it is noted that Ka'b ibn Suwar concerned himself with what Shariah rulings link to the reality, which is the preference of the right of the wife to the right of Allah (swt). So, he was satisfied with that and with quick observance and linking this Shariah ruling emanating from the 'Aqeedah. With this linkage to the Shariah ruling alone, he had quick-wittedness. The prevalence of quick-thinking amongst the generation of the Companions (ra) was not an accident or coincidence. It was a product of the general approach of the society towards Deen. The Muslims understood that the Deen came to organize their collective affairs. Their atmosphere was dominated by attention to the Shariah rulings related to the realities of life, as well as their evidencing from the Noble Quran and the Prophetic Sunnah.

An atmosphere that encourages people to link Shariah rulings with the realities of life, certainly nurtures quick-wittedness. In his Tafseer (Quranic commentary), Ibn Kathir narrated, (ركب عمر بن الخطاب منبر رسول الله ثم قال: أيها الناس، ما إكثركم في صدق النساء وقد كان رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم وأصحابه وإنما الصدقات فيما بينهم أربعمئة درهم فما دون ذلك. ولو كان الإكثار في ذلك تقوى عند الله أو كرامة لم تسبقوهم إليها. فلا أعرفن ما Umar bin Al-Khattab stood up on the Minbar of the Messenger of Allah and said, "O people! Why do you exaggerate concerning the dowry given to women? The Messenger of Allah and his Companions used to pay up to four hundred Dirhams for a dowry, or less than that. Had paying more for a dowry been a part of Taqwa or an honor, you would not have led them in this practice. Therefore, I do not want to hear about a man who pays more than four hundred Dirhams for a dowry."

Thus, the Second Khaleefah Rasheed, one of the ten Companions (ra) who was given glad tidings of Jannah, and one of the prominent Companions (ra) in Fiqh, 'Umar Al-Farooq (ra) gave

his opinion, after noticing that dowry became a burden upon the men and a cause of resentment within marriage. So, what was the response of the people? Ibn Kathir narrates, (ثم نزل فاعترضته امرأة من قريش فقالت: يا أمير المؤمنين، نهيت الناس أن يزيدوا النساء صداقهم على أربعمئة درهم؟ قال: نعم. فقالت: أما سمعت ما أنزل الله من قرآن؟ قال: وأي ذلك؟ فقالت: أما سمعت الله يقول: ﴿وَأَتَيْتُمْ إِحْدَاهُنَّ قِطْرًا﴾) “Then he then came down from the Minbar, but a woman from Quraysh said to him, ‘O Ameer of the Believers! You prohibited people from paying more than four hundred Dirhams in a dowry for women’ He said, ‘Yes.’ She said, ‘Have you not heard what Allah revealed in the Quran’ He asked, ‘Which part of it?’ She replied, ‘Have you not heard Allah’s statement, **“And you give one of the women a vast amount”** [TMQ Surah An-Nisaa: 20].”

So, what was the response of the Second Khaleefah Rashid to the accounting by the people? Ibn Kathir narrates, (فقال اللهم غفر، كل الناس أقره من عمر. ثم رجع فركب المنبر فقال إني كنت نهيتكم أن تزيدوا النساء في صداقهن على أربعمئة درهم، فمن شاء أن يعطي من ماله ما أحب) “He said, ‘O Allah, forgive me; indeed the people are more knowledgeable in ‘fiqh than Umar.” Then he returned, ascended the pulpit, and said, ‘I had forbidden you to increase women’s dowries beyond four hundred dirhams; so whoever wishes to give from his own wealth whatever he pleases, let him do so.”

On the one hand, we see the quick-wittedness within the people, in linking the Shariah evidence to account the Khaleefah Rashid. On the other hand, we see the piety and humility of the Khaleefah Rashid ‘Umar Al-Farooq, who immediately accepted the truth and commended the people for their knowledge. There was no repression of the opposing opinion, nor was there intimidation of the one who expressed it. It was whilst this atmosphere was strong amongst the Muslims that quick-wittedness was prevalent amongst Muslims. It allowed the Muslims to be productive in all spheres of life, generating a dynamic civilization that led humanity for centuries. The Muslims were quick to link the known Shariah rulings regarding the realities they faced, whether in the domain of ruling, economy, education, foreign policy or social relations. The Islamic civilization made Allah (swt) the very center of attention of the people in their daily lives. Adhering to the revelation of Allah (swt), Whose knowledge encompasses everything, and from Whom nothing is hidden, the Ummah thrived, ensuring that Islam was the dominant civilization in the world. Its quick-thinking rooted in Deen repelled the conspiracies of the disbelievers, and turned their plots against them.

Loss of Quick-Wittedness and the Rise of Mechanism

What of us know? Enemies have established dominance over us, unleashing one conspiracy against us, after another. Our affairs are in ruin. Our lands are characterized by poverty and humiliation. Today, we do not find that quick-wittedness is prevalent. The awareness of the Shariah rulings related to practical realities is little, or at least, insufficient. This lack of awareness of the Islamic civilization is on the one hand. On the other hand, there is the dominance of Western secular thinking. It worsens the intellectual crisis within the Muslim World. In particular, it is the dominance of mechanism, mechanical philosophy, amongst the most capable sons and daughter of Muslims that is causing great harm.

Mechanism is an outcome of the secular way of thinking. Mechanical philosophy analogized the universe to a large-scale mechanism, a machine. After detaching religion from the affairs of life, revelation was substituted with human reason. The Creator was no longer the center of attention of people, human reason was. The Shariah rulings were no longer to determine the course of life, man-made laws were. Mechanism made the limited human as a rival to Allah (swt), Al-Aleem, the All-Knowing. It made the human mind as the center of human existence.

Mechanism Denies Allah (swt) As the Center of Human Existence

Mechanism rejected the Qadaa’ (divine fate) of Allah (swt) and His dominance over His affair. The French mechanist, Pierre Simon Laplace, in his book “A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities,” said, “We may regard the present state of the universe as the effect of the past and the cause of the future. An intellect which at any given moment knew all of the forces that animate nature and the mutual positions of the beings that compose it, if this intellect were vast enough to submit the data to analysis, could condense into a single formula the movement of the greatest bodies of the universe and that of the lightest atom; for such an intellect nothing could be uncertain and the future just like the past would be present before its eyes.”

The impact of mechanism on Muslims thus shook the constants of their Iman. Mechanism challenged ideas such as Rizq (sustenance) being in the Hand of Allah (swt), suggesting that if a man is clever enough, he can increase it, or if he is dim-witted, he is doomed to poverty. It challenged the idea of lifespan ('ajl) being in the Hand of Allah (swt), asserting that human ingenuity can extend the lifespan from decades to centuries. It even challenged the concepts of Qadaa' of Allah (swt), bearing hardship for His sake, testing and affliction, suggesting that a clever man can avert all manners of harm, including when facing an enemy on the battlefield, or accounting a tyrant, whilst a foolish person invites harm due to lack of intelligence.

The impact of mechanism upon the intellectual and political elite of the Muslim World is devastating. It paralyzed intellectual conflict with the dangerous concepts of Western civilization, as well as the political struggle against the evil plots of Western colonialism. All the Muslims were engrossed in procrastination, deliberation, analysis, pondering and stalling, until they failed in the course of life. They even failed to remove the authority of colonialism and its influence, despite the revolutions and wars they engaged against it. Each one of them, in every small or large problem, started to resort to procrastination, analysis, pondering and over-thinking, until the time passed and the available opportunity was lost. Opportunities were lost because the Shariah rulings were not linked immediately to the realities, preventing the Muslims from adopting a clear course of action. These Shariah rulings have been known within the body of Islamic jurisprudence for centuries, and they have been deduced after thorough evidencing from the Noble Quran and the Prophetic Sunnah by capable 'ulema. Yet, many Muslims did not refer to divine revelation in treating the realities that they faced. Instead, they resorted to human reasoning by philosophizing and analyzing, in search of a sound judgement from the limited human mind, which is full of differences, disparity and contradictions. They even over-complicated simple matters that became more ambiguous as a result. Mechanism even became a tendency and a taste amongst some of the Muslims. They began to take pride in their intellect, philosophizing and procrastinating, describing themselves as enlightened or deep. They began to enjoy debates without conclusion or outcome. They saw those who make sacrifices as reckless or of low intelligence. Instead of giving the capabilities that Allah (swt) had granted them their due right and leading the Ummah upon the basis of Divine Revelation, they became obstacles to revival.

The Retreat of Mechanism and the Restoration of Quick-Thinking Amongst the Muslims

It is upon the Muslims in general, and their ulema, thinkers, politicians, journalists and teachers in particular, to force the retreat of mechanism and nurture the rise of quick-thinking as found in the era of the Companions (ra). They must raise the subject of mechanism explicitly and alert people to its dangerous influence. By the permission of Allah (swt), they will find little resistance amongst Muslims to attacking mechanism, as the Islamic Ummah is now suspicious and distrustful of Western civilization. They must denounce the approach of cost-benefit analysis in matters of Shariah rulings. Shariah rulings are implemented as they are for the pleasure of Allah (swt), with any material losses to be compensated with reward in the Aakhira. They must denounce overthinking or debate in matters where there are clear Shariah rulings for implementation. They must strive to make the Shariah rulings known for every crisis, large or small, so that they become a general awareness amongst Muslims. They must take care to present the Shariah rulings with their Shariah evidencing from the Noble Quran and Prophetic Sunnah, so that the Muslims mobilize with convinced minds and settled hearts. They must commend and encourage any tendency within Muslims to link Shariah rulings to their affairs of life. Indeed, Allah (swt) is the center of our existence; from Him we came, and to Him we will return; we live according to His Revelation, and we plead for His Mercy during our accounting on the Day of Resurrection. Allah (swt) said, ﴿فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ﴾ **“But, no; by your Lord, they will not believe (in truth) until they make you judge of all that is in dispute between them”** [TMQ An-Nisa': 65].

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
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