

# Ideas for Life

Mohamed Rabie, PhD

# Ideas for Life

Copyright © 2021 by Mohamed Rabie

All rights are reserved

First edition, 2021

Publisher

Prof. Rabie's Library

# Contents

1. A life, like no other
2. Tools to use if you choose
3. Things we do in life
4. Ambitions and contentment
5. Addictions and the addict
6. Changing people
7. Friends and associates
8. Knowledge and life
9. Knowledge and faith
10. Language and life
11. Love and happiness
12. The meaning of happiness
13. Contentment and happiness
14. Rules of fair competition
15. The comedian and the preacher
16. The spoken and the written word
17. Smartness and arrogance
18. The meaning of hope
19. Tips for success
20. When sharing is advisable
21. How to avoid losing an argument
22. Dear students

23. Facing life challenges
24. Helping others
25. Individualism and society
26. The power of ideas
27. Who are you?
28. Who are we?
29. Words to remember
30. The negative and positive
31. Memoirs and life
32. The individual and power
33. Viewing life challenges
34. Religion and society
35. Togetherness as Empowerment
36. Mind and change
37. Society and change
38. Spending and living
39. The politics of power
40. Constructing a new future
41. The past and the future
42. Planning the future
43. Reading and writing
44. On the train
45. Materialism and ethics
46. The truth

47. Viewing the past
48. Advice for aspiring leaders
49. Fear and courage
50. Words that matter

# Introduction

This book is a collection of many ideas, reflections, and facts that were conceived and composed over the last 15 years. I am sure that many of the ideas and reflections in this collection were inspired by the writings of other intellectuals and philosophers and economists, but the responsibility for them is mine alone. When memory was helpful, I mentioned the names of people who were the source that inspired an idea or a thought, but oftentimes, the memory did not help, so they came without a reference.

Nevertheless, I wish to thank people whose names are mentioned and apologize to others who inspired an idea, but their names are not mentioned. Since I started writing back in 1970, I insisted on making whatever I produce in books and ideas and articles and poems and information available to all readers and seekers of knowledge worldwide for free. My motto is: “**knowledge not shared is knowledge wasted**”.

I hope that every reader will find an idea or a thought or a little story or a word of wisdom that helps him and her to face a life challenge or deal with a certain issue, or just make life a little more interesting. I also hope that some of these ideas and unconventional perceptions inspire many people to do the same thing, so we all can contribute to enriching human life and creating a new just, and peaceful world for all. Our need for a new beginning is dire and our tools are inadequate, and

our values are deteriorating fast, and our leaders are losing their sight. So we have to rise and fill the vacuum and offer whatever knowledge and experience we have to help our children and grandchildren have a better, safer, and sustainable future.

Every comment and every inquiry and every suggestion to make these ideas reach a wider audience is warmly welcomed; everyone can reach me at:

[professorrabie@yahoo.com](mailto:professorrabie@yahoo.com)

Mohamed Rabie

Washington, DC, February 2021

## A Life, Like no other

I have been fortunate to experience first-hand the development of civilization over time, and witness the evolution of human societies from the hunter-gatherer age to the tribal age, and from the tribal to the agricultural age, and from the agricultural to the industrial age, and finally from the industrial to the knowledge age and participate in some of their important events as a contributor or spectator. And because stages of human development or civilizations go through difficult transitional periods before the transformation is completed, living the life I have lived has given me a unique opportunity to feel the pain and hopes of people in all such circumstances.

I was born in Yazour, an enchanting agricultural town, three miles from the Mediterranean Sea, on the road from Jaffa to Jerusalem. However, Yazour had neither electricity nor running water, only one paved road. People and animals were used to plow the land, plant the seeds, harvest the crops, and transport them to the local and regional markets. The community where I spent most of my childhood was probably quite like a typical agricultural community in Italy or Germany during the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with few exceptions; the existence of trains and cars and radios were the major ones. Every family in Yazour owned a house and some land and had thousands of orange and other citrus trees; no family in the town was landless or poor; the town had also

no landlords to exploit people or enslave anyone.

However, as I was growing up and becoming aware of the social, cultural, economic, and political environments that surrounded my life, war erupted and caused my family and most of my generation to become refugees. The refugee camp in which I spent about five years of my youth was outside Jericho at the edge of a vast, desolate desert. For almost two years, my older sister and I performed the traditional work of the hunter-gatherer; my father assigned us the task of spending three days a week roaming the neighboring desert searching for dry and dying bushes and shrubs to make a fire for cooking food. During late winter and early spring, the task was expanded to include collecting wild vegetables to feed the family. Two of these vegetables are now domesticated, and every time I taste them, I remember the days and events of a childhood lived in abject poverty in the hunter-gatherer age. Other circumstances surrounded my life at the time led me to share with nomads their food, listen to their songs and folk stories, spend time in their tents and observe their daily life, and even go with shepherds about their daily tasks to the Jordan River. It was a life that represented the first stage of the development of human society on its way to civilization. Having been uprooted from an affluent and secure existence to living in abject poverty and insecurity led me to become aware of most aspects of life, evaluating every change with a critical mind that has never stopped thinking and wandering beyond the known and the familiar.

By the time I entered high school, my family had moved to the peaceful city of Jericho, which is considered the oldest city in the world.

Nevertheless, all nine of us (four boys and three girls, and the parents) lived in a one-bedroom apartment that had none of the basic modern amenities. The family, moreover, had neither the money nor the space to buy a desk, a table, or any piece of furniture. My father rented and cultivated a small piece of land on which we lived and whose produce provided most of the food the family needed to survive and support a mostly subsistence living; children who were old enough to help were required to do so. Domesticated turkey, chicken, pigeon, and rabbits provided the meat the family needed to supplement its mostly vegetarian diet.

Upon graduation from high school, I received a scholarship from the United Nations to study in Cairo, one of the largest and most vibrant cities of the Third World at the time. The trip from Jerusalem to Cairo gave me the first opportunity to fly on a plane via Beirut and spend a night at a fancy hotel in the Lebanese capital. Living and studying in Cairo gave me a valuable chance to observe affluence and abject poverty coexisting side by side, and watch modern and primitive cultures living their separate, estranged lives in one place. Third World nationalism and socialism were thriving along with anti-imperialism in an atmosphere that inspired the young and gave hope to the deprived. It was only there that I was able to live in a house with electricity, running water, modern sanitation, and even a phone and a refrigerator. Life in Cairo represented what I call the transitional period between two civilizations, the agricultural and industrial ones.

Five years later, I traveled to Germany, where I witnessed the

“German Economic Miracle” and lived in a mature industrial society for almost two years. In Germany, I pursued my graduate studies and worked a few months in a publishing house. Most of my free time was spent visiting as many German cities and towns and villages and historical sites as possible and immersing myself in the culture of the land. In 1965 I moved to the United States where I completed my higher education, received a Ph.D. in economics, and taught at two American universities before moving on. While living in the United States, I witnessed two of the most important social and political movements in US history, the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement that opposed the American war on Vietnam.

In 1970, I left the United States for Kuwait to teach at its newly established university. And while at Kuwait University, I managed to change the education system and the curriculum and participate in the cultural life of the Kuwaiti society; I also got to know how the non-Kuwaiti immigrant workers lived and viewed life conditions in that part of the world. For six years, I witnessed a tribal society losing the major characteristics of its traditional culture and way of life as money was transforming it into what I call “petroleum society.” It is a society whose roots were deep in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and whose aspirations were touching the 21<sup>st</sup> century; a society that thought it could buy anything and employ anyone with money.

In 1976, I returned to the United States to teach first at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, and then at other universities. And while living in Washington, I witnessed the transformational impact of the

Reagan and Clinton years on the American economy, society, and culture, which allowed me to live through the transitional period that leads a mature industrial society into the age of knowledge. And in addition to teaching at a few American universities, I got involved in business, research, and the writing of books and articles. In 2002, I returned to the Middle East to spend two years teaching at a university in Morocco and two more years living in Jordan. So, for the second time in forty years, I had the opportunity to witness life during a transitional period separating the agricultural from the industrial age, where globalization has caused traditional cultures to lose most of their traits and be deformed beyond recognition.

Since boyhood, my life has been an ever-evolving, most fascinating journey that took me to visit and live in many interesting places in the Middle East, Europe, Asia, North Africa, and America, enabling me to look back at the primitive roots from where I started and explore the unknown future in my thoughts and ways of living. And throughout the period since graduation from college, I have continued to travel, give lectures, and teach seminars, write articles, and publish books. I wrote and published so far 52 books in 9 different disciplines; published books include 2 novels, one story, and 4 books of poetry. My perspective thus goes beyond the ups and downs of ordinary life in one society or one civilization, and my connections to all the places and historical phases I have experienced first-hand have continued to fascinate me and challenge my intellectual capacities. Consequently, I can say with confidence that I have experienced, within my lifetime, starting with the hunter-gatherer age and into the knowledge age, the life of more than

600 generations, going back to the pre-agricultural times.

## 2

### Tools to Use if You Choose

1. One of the major lessons that each boy, girl, woman, man, and student should learn and follow throughout her and his life is:

**“The more you read, the more you succeed.”**

2. During the deadly Tsunami that hit Indonesia and other Asian countries in 2004, a former Indonesian student whom I had in one of my classes at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco, send me an email to thank me for a remark I once said during one of my regular classroom lectures; the remark says;

**“We do not teach you at the university to make you change your minds but to train you how to use your brains.”**

The student, who has become a professor, informed me that this little statement had a profound liberating impact on his life; it helped him to face new challenges with confidence, using logic and reason and science, rather than old traditions and ideological convictions and past wisdom, to judge things and evaluate situations, and act accordingly. This professor is now teaching this lesson to his students and the audiences wherever he goes. Since no one can avoid making mistakes,

and because no one can live without taking decisions; thoughtful thinking that reviews all options available is the safest way to minimizing the chances of making mistakes and maximizing the chances of making good decisions.

3. As the marital problems of a professor colleague compounded, during my tenure at Kuwait University, I made a simple remark that he liked and made into a poster that hanged in his office for years, it said:

“If you are not married, no matter how happy you are, you always feel something is missing; and if you are married, no matter how happy you are, you always feel something is wrong.”

Finding the missing thing is hard, and is likely to get harder as time passes; dealing with the wrong thing, however, is complicated; it demands decisive action to correct what is wrong in time; otherwise, it gets more complicated, causing a loss of mutual trust; it could even transform life into hell characterized by deep distress and unmitigated sadness.

**No one should ignore a serious problem or avoid facing a life-threatening challenge.**

4. Some people speak softly, others speak loudly. However, most people who speak softly tend to have self-confidence and care much about what they say and to whom they say it. And because of such a pleasant attitude, they tend to have credibility and find

themselves surrounded by friends and others interested in what they have to say. In contrast, people who speak loudly tend to do so to draw attention and be overheard by others; they behave in such a way to impress whoever is within reach. Such people tend to lack self-confidence and to care less about what they say and to whom they say it; and because of such an unpleasant attitude, they are more likely to lose credibility, and, as time passes, have difficulty finding people interested in listening to them and hearing what they have to say.

##### **5. Always remember:**

Winners in life do not abuse friends or things they can use and benefit from.

While good times make good friends, bad times test the sincerity and strength of friendship.

Finding an excuse for a friend who commits a mistake against you is a virtue; allowing the same friend to repeat the same mistake is an insult. There is an Irish proverb related to this advice that says, “if my friend fools me once, shame on him; if he fools me again, shame on me”. So, be a good friend but do not allow friends to abuse your friendship.

# 3

## Things we do in Life

**The Things we do and should do in life can be divided into four categories:**

**Things we must do; things we need to do; things we love to do; and things we must avoid doing.**

Working for other people or a corporation or the government, or the self, are among the things that we must do, regardless of how we feel about them. We may like or dislike doing these things; nevertheless, we must do them to earn a living and survive and probably thrive; no person can live a normal life without working, particularly in this age where the pursuit of money has become the goal most sought by the rich and the poor alike.

Things important to our health, like going to see a doctor regularly, or taking medicine, and things that are important to our relationships with other people, like caring for a friend or a neighbor in need, are among the things that we need to do, regardless of how much enjoyment or pain we may derive from doing them.

Things that we do out of love or in pursuit of pure pleasure and self-satisfaction and social recognition are the things that we enjoy doing most and live to do and experience. Things that most of us love

doing include traveling, spending time with friends and children, reading, writing, singing, painting, participating in group discussions, practicing hobbies, and being kind to people who need our help.

However, as we do or try to do all these things, we need to recognize that there are other things that many people in the world do but should not be done because of one reason or another. Such things include hurting the feelings of others, smoking, heavy drinking of alcohol, and getting addicted to drugs that make you lose who you are and what you stand for, and thus become a liability to your family, friends, and society.

Since we can control our lives to a great extent, we should try to reduce the number of things we have to do; be selective when it comes to the things that we need to do, and do as much as we can of the things that we love to do. Nevertheless, we need to recognize that most options open to us tend to be limited and conditional; and because of that, we are often forced to make choices that could be the least desired. People who save while working and producing can have more time to enjoy life when they retire; they will also have an easier time deciding to quit a job they do not like and wait for a more enjoyable, or less demanding one. People who take care of their health and stay away from fast and fatty food and bad habits like smoking can reduce the number of things they need to do and the cost of doing them. Consequently, they will have more time to do what they love to do, and experience what they enjoy most in life.

But as people do what they must do, need to do, and love to do,

they discover that there are things they must try their best to avoid doing. Every person must be careful not to lose his dignity and freedom or honor by pursuing something illegal or harmful to others. Losing one's dignity or freedom is a terrible thing that causes people to lose their sense of direction, which usually leads to confusion and loss of happiness and satisfaction. A person suffering from a loss of direction cannot live a normal or productive life that meets his living needs and satisfies his expectations. Besides, everyone should be careful not to lose his independence or sacrifice any portion of it for the sake of money or traditions, or ideological zeal. Accepting dependence on the family is the first step toward losing freedom. Sacrificing your independence to please others limits your mind's capacity to think rationally; it also transforms you from a free person with a free spirit to a slave who takes orders from others and performs acts that could harm him, and harm people close to him. **Without a thinking mind and a set of core values, man loses his humanity.**

If you stay long enough in one place enchantment by its atmosphere, the place could easily become an entrapment or a prison that robs you of probably all options to leave and seek a new, more interesting place or a new rewarding work. Therefore, enchantment with a house, a place, or a job must be viewed as a choice you make; otherwise, the enchantment will lead you to feel being trapped and often unhappy as well. Therefore, you should always try to keep your options open and be careful not to lose sight of new opportunities and different places. To live a rich, enjoyable life experience, you should keep thinking of new things to do, new places to visit, and new ventures to

take that enrich your life and make it more interesting and exciting.

Affection could easily become an addiction, especially if affection is to a person or a state of living or a way of thinking and behaving. Types of affection that are treated as addiction limit the options of everyone involved in such a relationship. If love causes affection to become an addiction, it might turn the addiction into a moral and social hazard, causing the love relationship to become a costly sin no party can afford. Preventing affection from becoming an addiction is always the way to keeping every lover happy while keeping life interesting and enjoyable, in addition to keeping love more exciting and lovers more joyful. When affection is combined with addiction it is likely to reduce life from being an exciting journey into the unknown to being a destination in a colorless, tasteless place that has nothing of value to offer. Destinations, unlike ventures in the unknown, usually deprive most lovers of the motive to seek happiness and excitement and new opportunities outside their closed world of addiction.

Respect for older people is the right thing to do; at times it may be a cultural obligation you need to keep in mind. However, respect must be mutual; if other people fail to reciprocate and treat you with respect, you could easily lose your dignity and the right to be free. As you respect others, you need to make sure that they respect you as well; older people, particularly in Eastern cultures, are more likely to demand respect from younger people without showing the same degree of respect towards them; such attitudes should be considered unacceptable and therefore, everyone should try to change them.



# 4

## Ambition and Contentment

If you were born in a sociocultural environment where people believe in faith and fate, you are more likely to be content; and to accept whatever you may get in life. People who are content tend to lack the motivation to do more and improve the quality of their lives, regardless of how little they may have; as a result, they miss the tingling feelings of success. If contentment comes first, it does matter how much you have, because you will always feel that you have enough.

In contrast, people born in a sociocultural environment dominated by greed, envy, and unrestrained competition are more likely to be ambitious and often aggressive as well; they tend to work very hard and let themselves be transformed through work into money-making machines that never stop running. Therefore, if greed and envy, and unrestrained ambition come first, it does not matter how much you may have, because you will never have enough; you will keep working and worrying until the end of your productive life. You are more likely to miss the enjoyment that comes with success and making more money and accumulating more wealth.

People who live a life of contentment are more likely to lead simple, quiet lives, and to have little or no regard for hard work and money. Ambitious people, in contrast, are more likely to lead busy,

stressful lives and be obsessed with work and money. The first type of people is less likely to face the challenges of life with courage and determination to succeed; the second is more likely to welcome the challenges of life and work hard to succeed. The first is more likely to place morality at the top of their values; the second is more likely to ignore morality for the sake of making more money and owning more wealth.

Therefore, for everyone to feel happy and satisfied and lead a productive life, he must strike a rather difficult balance between ambitions that have no limits, and contentment that lacks motivation. He needs to work and feel the enjoyment of work, be focused on what he wants to do and be in life, set achievable goals for himself, know when to stop working, and seek satisfaction in getting as much knowledge as possible and giving as much assistance to the poor and the weak as affordable, especially to those who need help most.

## Addiction and the Addict

Every person who is addicted to something that has been proven to harm his physical or mental state is weak. People may be addicted to cigarette smoking, taking harmful drugs, excessive drinking of alcohol, or other things that waste their time and money and harm their health. Every addiction of this sort diverts the attention of addicts from doing good things to doing bad ones instead. These are things that undermine their chances of having healthy and productive lives. Though all addicts know or ought to know that what they are addicted to is bad and often invites trouble into their lives, they are usually unable to say, "No" to the habit, because they tend to feel rather helpless.

The harm of addiction does not stop at hurting the body and mind of the addict only; it almost always extends its negative consequences to his social status, relationships, productive capacity, mental stability, and self-confidence. Children of addicts tend often to learn from their parents the bad habits, particularly when schools and society fail to give enough attention to addiction. In the meantime, as the addict chooses to indulge in his habit, he often ignores his friends and family members who love him and need him most; and that comes to haunt him later in life. All these consequences undermine the relationship of addicts with people they love most and care for. Since no addict cares for himself,

he should not be expected to care for others.

Addiction denies every addicted person the opportunity to be a good, caring husband, wife, or friend because he does not have the time to be such a person. Addiction also prevents every addict from becoming a compassionate father, a kind mother, a responsible wife, a committed worker, a team player, or even a rational person who recognizes bad habits and embraces good ones instead. As a result, every addict becomes a liability to his friends, family, and society. Though every society should try to help addicts recover, no one and no society can help an addict that does not want to be helped. The dilemma is how to teach addicts to acknowledge the need for help and ask people they trust to help them.

An addict is a sick person suffering from a mental problem that makes his judgment doubtful, his character flawed, and his behavior unacceptable in a normal environment. And that makes his friendship and companionship more of a liability than an asset to whoever accepts to be associated with him. Although an addict needs help and almost always knows that he needs help badly, he seldom appreciates help offered by others, even the closest people to him. No matter what an addict says about his situation; and no matter how he lives his life and what he does, he lives, first and foremost, for his habit, not for the people he claims to love and others he knows they love him and care for him.

**An addict lives for his habit, not for the people he claims to love or others he knows to love him.**

Everything and every habit that is known to be bad must be avoided and never be tried, no matter how attractive the incentives may be. As a student in high school, some of my close friends tried repeatedly to entice me to smoke cigarettes, but I always said no. Avoiding bad habits and harmful things need no explanation and no excuses whatsoever.

**Bad habits are not exotic food to try or inspiring games to play; they are dangerous roads that lead to disastrous consequences.**

However, when trying to advise other people, you should be careful not to hurt their feelings; if you fail to use the right words and the appropriate time and approach, people are more likely to react negatively, regardless of what they hear. Therefore, how to say what you wish to say and when to say it is often more important than what you say. Knowing that no one can change other people unless they are amenable to change, you should be careful whenever you offer a piece of advice. You should start by asking them questions about how they feel and how they are living their lives. Most people usually open their hearts to people they trust and know that their intentions are noble, which leads them to start considering their situation and think seriously about change. Helping people to think about their lives and view their situations differently is a good starting point to a serious change in attitudes and behavior.

# 6

## Changing People

We must understand that we cannot change other people according to our wishes; everyone has a mind on his own, and a special way of thinking that is difficult to change. To help change anyone, the person in question must be convinced first that he needs to change; any person who sees a need to change is always ready to consult others and listen to their advice. People who wish to change others must show sympathy and love for the people they believe should be changed. Some people try to change others not because they care about them, but because they want them to believe in certain ideas and transform them into people dependent on them.

However, the people who can be easily led are usually the weak who have no core moral values and no particular ideals or deeply-held convictions. Nevertheless, most people tend to be suspicious of others who offer their advice without being asked and thus seldom listen to them. People who feel that they need to change usually feel uncomfortable asking others for advice except for the people they respect and trust. So, to be listened to, you need first to win the trust and respect and oftentimes the hearts of those you care about and wish to see them succeed.

A professor can influence his students' attitudes and behavior, but

he does not have the power to change their ways of thinking or lead them to adopt ideas that contradict their religious beliefs and ideological convictions, not even their traditions. Therefore, a professor who feels that his students need to change must concentrate on helping them to change the way they think by training their brains how to think rationally, and how to lead productive lives. When people abandon old ways of thinking and start thinking differently, they would be in a good position to plan their lives and face the challenges of everyday life; changing ways of thinking is the right path to changing old values, attitudes, habits, lifestyles, behavior, and the way people manage their private and public lives.

Parents should not try to change their grown-up children, because they are most likely to fail. This means that trying to change grown-up children is likely to strain the relationship between children and parents. Seeing children abandoning the old ways of thinking and living causes traditional parents to feel that their children need to change. But the change in such a case means going back to old ways of living whose time had come and gone and can never come back again. Therefore trying to make children go back to their cultural or religious roots is an act that wastes time and emotions and undermines the parent-child relationship. Roots represent the past that must be overcome in thoughts and ways of thinking and deeds to make the management of the present possible, and the building of a promising future an opportunity that cannot and should not be missed.

On the other hand, planning for a better, more promising, and

exciting future needs a clear vision. Yet vision needs an effective plan of action to take you to where you want to be, which means translating the vision into reality. A vision without a plan of action is a daydream; while you may enjoy living it, it is a waste of time. Having a plan of action without a vision is like being lost in a thick forest; walking scared in twisted alleys hoping for good luck. Life without a clear vision defined in achievable goals is an aimless process leading to nowhere. Therefore, a vision needs to be clear and have a plan of action to realize it; and a plan of action needs a vision to define the goals sought, and guide everyone involved in the plan to the desired destination.

In society, neither a clear vision nor an excellent plan of action is likely to succeed without being led by an enlightened, educated, and committed leadership; no plan can succeed without leadership that understands the vision and is committed to achieving it. Visions that intend to cause comprehensive sociocultural and socioeconomic and sociopolitical transformations in society require also the formation of mass popular movements to organize people and motivate them to act to protect the vision and its leadership and participate in the implementation phase of all plans and steps for change.

Therefore, no matter what you intend to do in life; there is a need to know three basic things; first, where you are at the time of planning change in terms of development and relations to friends and foes and nature; second, where you want to be at the end of your journey, also in terms of development and relations to friends and foes and nature. And third and most important; how to get from where you are to where you want to be. And when the goal is intended to cause comprehensive societal change;

that is economic, social, cultural, and political change, you need also to know the local, national, regional, and international environments that surround your life, and how to navigate the complexity of change in such environments.

## Friends and Associates

No one can avoid dealing with other people because we live in societies that have many groups and often millions of people. Some people are a pleasure to know and interact with and have as friends. However, some people are a pain in the neck, and therefore must be avoided because we are supposed to enjoy life, and not suffer agonies of our making. Other people do not concern you, and association with them could represent liabilities you do not need to add to whatever you already have; life is often difficult to manage even when you have no problems.

Since life is never complete or truly enjoyable without other people, everyone must decide how to allocate his time between people he knows and needs to interact with for one reason or another. There is only one rule to follow; you must have something in common with everyone you are associated with; people with whom you have nothing in common should be avoided; not because they are bad, but because they waste your time. Any person with whom you have nothing in common is a potential liability.

Every person likes some people and loves to have them as friends; he also has other people that he cannot avoid being associated

with due to several reasons. All such people can be divided into three major categories:

1. Relatives who, according to blood relationships and traditional obligations, cannot and should not be avoided. If you have nothing in common with blood relatives more than casual family relationships, association with them should be limited to traditional obligations; nothing more, nothing less. Any more involvement could create added obligations that you might not have the time or the energy or the money to meet; some obligations might drag you to lose some of your principles which you should never sacrifice to please others.
2. Work associates who, according to normal work rules and teamwork requirements demand that you work and meet with them regularly; oftentimes in the workplace; but sometimes outside of it as well. Association with such people should be limited to meeting the demands of doing your job as best as you can; nothing more, nothing less. Anything more might cause personal and business relationships to be mixed and possibly cause each relationship to affect the other negatively.
3. Friends who make life enjoyable while making living an exciting journey to beautiful destinations that never stop surprising you and pleasing your heart. True friends are a genuine spring of love and happiness that must be sought and enjoyed and cherished.

People who do not fit in any of these three categories must be avoided,

not because they are bad, but because association with them wastes valuable time and creates added obligations at the expense of devoting whatever time and energy you may have to fulfill family obligations, meet with work associates, and enjoy life with friends. If you are lucky, you could have a blood relative or a work associate who is good enough to have as a friend.

Since life is too short no matter how many years one lives, everyone must be selective in choosing his associates and much more so in choosing his friends. And to avoid unwarranted social liabilities, everyone should be polite but direct in rejecting relationships with people who do not fit in any of the above-mentioned categories.

Though friends, in general, are a source of pleasure, no one can avoid making mistakes that might hurt the feelings of others. So if a friend does something that causes you pain, you should never blame yourself for what he has done, nor should you react by trying to hurt him in return. Instead, you should see him and deal with him for what he proved himself to be, a bad person who deserves neither your friendship nor your respect. Bad people have been doing bad things to good people throughout history, oftentimes choosing the closest friends to them as victims to cheat and sometimes hurt, because good people trust their close friends. That does not mean that every good person should be suspicious of his close friends; it means that everyone should trust but be careful not to reveal his secrets and create opportunities for others to take advantage of him.

A person, whom I considered at one point in my life to be a close

and trustworthy friend, did something terrible to me; he forced me to evacuate a flat I contracted with him to buy, and thus denied me the quiet, secure life I enjoyed in that beautiful flat for three years; he also cheated me of the opportunity to increase my assets because the value of the flat had doubled during that period. This friend did the cheating out of greed and because the law was on his side. The law was written by the rich to enable them to cheat and exploit the poor and the weak. The law of the land does not recognize written or oral agreements related to property ownership unless title for the concerned property is transferred from the owner to the buyer, which was not done in our case; my friend, the owner had refused to go through the legal procedures and pay the required registration fees; he was waiting for an official to bribe and get the registration done for little money.

I could have decided to fight the owner in court and deny him access to the flat for several years, but I knew that he would win at the end of the day unless the law is changed in the meantime to be fair and equitable. So, instead of choosing to engage him in a long, exhausting, and ultimately losing battle, I decided to avoid a bitter fight and turn my attention to doing the things I do best; things that make me happy and give me most satisfaction; to reading and writing, travel and participation in seminars and conferences around the world, giving lectures and helping students who ask for help and advice, and help others who need guidance and can use my knowledge and benefit from my experience.

Choosing to fight would have tied me down for years and led me to think negatively rather than positively. Whoever thinks negatively

cannot think positively, and whoever cannot think positively cannot produce much of anything in life. Negative people cheat themselves of valuable time and opportunities; they often hurt themselves much more than hurting the people who hurt them and proved to be unworthy of their friendship and trust.

Some of my friends and relatives blamed me for what had happened because I trusted my old friend and believed that he would honor his signature and the agreement he wrote with his hand. I could also have blamed myself for the very same reasons. But I did not. Trusting others, especially close friends, is a virtue, not a sin; cheating friends is a sin, not a virtue.

## Knowledge and Life

Satisfaction is the essence of life, without which life would be boring, largely unproductive, if not unbearable. Satisfaction, which could be gained by individuals as well as by groups and societies, and nations, has many sources. Getting the right education, getting more money, getting things you wish to have, doing a good job at work or home, getting a good position; social recognition by society and friends are other sources of satisfaction. However, the most rewarding source of satisfaction for me personally is to make people feel good being around me and to help them get smarter and more knowledgeable, and caring. Trying to demonstrate to others how smart you are is more likely to make them feel jealous or insulted or even inferior, which could lead them to stay away from you.

Association with smart, knowledgeable people is inspiring; and there is nothing that motivates people to learn more and do better than inspiration. Experience seems to indicate that inspiration is a magical feeling that helps people to become interested in acquiring more knowledge and having the self-confidence needed to do more. And that makes them feel good about themselves and recognize what they need to learn to get to where they wish to be in life. To make my students and others around me feel good and motivated to learn more, I have never tried to keep any scientific knowledge or facts from students or friends,

or even strangers. Since I began teaching and writing over five decades ago, my motto has always been: *Knowledge not shared is knowledge wasted*. There is nothing more painful and harmful to society and humanity than withholding knowledge that could benefit them.

**The more we give the more we gain as individuals and societies.**

On the other hand, wealth and knowledge are largely interchangeable; each one is a source of self-satisfaction and a path to social recognition. Wealth and knowledge tend also to reinforce one another, while knowledge is a means to gain more wealth, wealth facilitates the acquiring of more knowledge because it enables the wealthy to send their children to the best schools and universities to study and gain first-class knowledge; knowledge, in turn, opens new opportunities for the well-educated to engage in activities that enable them to make more money and accumulate more wealth and, in the process, acquire more prestige and power.

In most countries, particularly the industrially advanced ones like the United States, wealth has become the primary source for gaining and maintaining social status, and thus more important than knowledge. In contrast, due to the relative poverty and lack of much wealth in most developing countries, knowledge has become the shortest and surest way to gain and maintain social recognition. Nevertheless, the ever-widening wealth and income gaps between the rich and the poor at the national and global levels have given the wealthy individuals and corporations the power to manipulate the poor and weak, dominate

society, and claim the highest social statuses.

In the less developed societies in general, wealth tends to overshadow knowledge and undermine its importance, giving the wealthy no pressing reasons to spend the time and money needed to acquire the right education and knowledge. But without knowledge, wealth cannot grow easily and accumulate, particularly in the knowledge age which we live in today. Wealth without knowledge may even be unable to maintain itself over the long run and survive bad times. And that is likely to cause the hard-earned or easily inherited social recognition associated with money to lose its glamor and influence.

In contrast, knowledge cannot fail regardless of the times and living conditions; it is both a form of personal, though intangible, wealth and a means to earn enough income to have a good living. And for a person having wealth and knowledge, social recognition becomes an entitlement, not just a right to be earned. Therefore, while wealth is a path to knowledge, knowledge is a means to wealth and wealth is a tool to acquire power. However, regardless of how wealth and knowledge are viewed by society, without the right knowledge, no societal progress can be made, and no personal or national wealth can last for long, and no social recognition associated with wealth can endure. For example, Spain which stole most of the gold and silver that South America had before it was invaded by the European colonialists, could not maintain its power or position on the global stage because it lacked the knowledge to build a modern economy, industrialize and compete with

Britain, France, and the United States. Therefore, Spain had to wait some 150 years for the European Community to save it and help it to industrialize and join the western world of affluence.

Education is the best and shortest way to gaining knowledge, but after you leave college, books become your most trusted source of knowledge regardless of the nature of the knowledge they hide inside them. Books are also the safest and most convenient way to entertain yourself, relax, forget your daily worries and be ready for the next challenge. The transformation of human societies was augmented with the development of the written word that gave birth to books and book writing and the spread of knowledge. Therefore, books enabled knowledge to find a place to protect it and give it the chance to travel from one place to another and from one time to another.

People who read books regularly tend to acquire a treasurer of information about nature, health, and other aspects of life that concerns them. And as the reading of books becomes a habit, most readers discover that reading is an enjoyable way to spend their free time away from activities that sometimes get them into trouble. Since books are a store for knowledge and pleasant, as well as sad memories, they cause readers to become more knowledgeable and sensitive to the feelings of others. Therefore, almost all books tend to humanize us and lead us to appreciate knowing what we do not know and love history and storytelling. Book readers tend also to build within themselves incentives to learn more and do more and try to perfect whatever they do. And this, in turn, helps them to reach their potential and achieve

most of their goals in life.

Reading books regularly helps you to know who you are, why you feel the way you do, whom do you want to be, and how to get from here to there; books enable everyone to define himself and identify what he stands for and why. Though you may be able to identify and define what you stand against without reading books, you would have difficulty identifying what you stand for without the knowledge that books provide. And without defining what you stand for and against, you would have a hard time deciding where you stand regarding some of the most important issues of life and the future. Rejectionist forces, throughout history, on the Left as well as on the Right, have been able to identify what they stood against, but unable to identify what they stood for, which lead them to play a negative role in society, undermining change and hindering progress.

Moreover, reading books helps all readers to understand how the world functions, what are the major forces that drive it and cause it to move in one direction or the other, how to influence the direction of change to meet their expectations, and what is expected to happen in the future, and how to prepare themselves for the inevitable change that is expected to come. To realize the true importance of books in shaping our history and lives, we only need to imagine life without new ideas and information and science and philosophy, and records of the past.

People without the right education are unlikely to find financially rewarding jobs, and thus have good incomes; people without good sources of income are less likely to get a good education because

quality education has become too expensive for most people. The communications and information revolutions have made knowledge an essential raw material for employment in many industries. Therefore, these revolutions have partially freed companies from dependence on human resources, because the largest companies today are service-oriented and therefore no longer depend on the manufacturing of industrial products. And this has reduced the need for labor, especially the less educated workers, making good-paying jobs out of reach for most workers.

Due to these developments, most western societies have witnessed drastic social, cultural, and economic changes that caused ideological polarization among the general public and the ruling class; they also caused economic marginalization of the poor and the disadvantaged who have little or no education. As a result, cultural ghettos began to form and spread, particularly among minorities that feel excluded and discriminated against. This simply means that poverty nurtures ignorance, and ignorance feeds poverty, while wealth and knowledge reinforce one another, enabling people with knowledge to increase their wealth, and the wealthy to gain more knowledge and power. On the other hand, ideological polarization provokes conflict, economic marginalization provokes radicalism that often invites crime and lawlessness, and discrimination creates mutual hatred and mistrust; all of which cause the sociocultural fabric of society to slowly disintegrate.

The positive role of knowledge as far as societies are concerned

often translates into socioeconomic disparity and less social and cultural cohesion. People with knowledge are empowered financially, socially, and politically; people with little or no knowledge are weakened, marginalized, and largely neglected. And minorities are forced to build a black-market economy that functions outside the supervision of the state and form cultural ghettos to live in and feel comfortable. So, to stop this trend and strengthen social cohesion, while undermining radicalism and discrimination, society must intervene to narrow the knowledge and wealth gaps and create incentives for people with little knowledge to earn more and enact new laws to fight discrimination.

However, if the income and wealth gaps continue to grow as they have done over the last four decades, no meaningful change should be expected. Money today is in control of all centers of power in almost every rich and poor country; and in the process of making more money, the rich is corrupting politics and buying politicians, causing poverty, marginalization, and radicalism to become important aspects of life in almost every society. On the other hand, the richest 1% of the world's population owns more than 50% of the world's wealth, and get about 27% of the income, while the 50% of the world's population representing the lower bracket, whose number exceeds 3.8 billion, get 9% of the income only, and own less wealth than the 26 richest individuals in the world. According to Oxfam, the world's 2,200 billionaires saw their wealth grows by 12% in 2018, while the poorest 50% of the world's population saw their wealth decline by 11%. Since these trends are unhealthy, they cannot continue without inviting social unrest and possibly revolution.



## Knowledge and Faith

An educated person, who thinks rationally is unlikely to believe a claim without logical or scientific proof. In contrast, an uneducated person who does not think rationally is more likely to believe most claims without demanding a logical explanation or scientific proof if he trusts the storyteller. The first is likely to see every mystery a claim to be proven; the second is likely to see every strange incident as a mysterious message that needs no proof to be accepted and believed. So, to convince simple, largely uneducated people to believe any claim, you only need to make every claim sound like a miracle or a mysterious message that only God can send or make happen.

Since we all live in a world where all kinds of claims and counterclaims are being made by the media and the countless demagogues without proof, ignorance has spread and belief in miracles has become pervasive and hard to refute. But since most miracles are claimed incidents that happened in the distant past, their times had come and gone long before humanity knew science and philosophy and logic. In societies where belief in magic and miracles is rooted in popular culture, the brain is ignored and largely neglected, and science is a fugitive searching desperately for a little home in which to live and play its role in life.

In contrast, where science and knowledge are widespread in society, the brain can play its role in life, causing magic and miracles to largely disappear as components of belief systems. And since miracles are important components of every religion, faith in religion has declined, causing religious activities and rituals to become more social events than sacred rites. So, as science and knowledge replace miracles and magic, reliance on religious men and institutions wanes, and the mind and science flourish and become the captains that guide the ship of life. Today, the social and economic and knowledge gaps separating societies have widened and deepened, especially between those believing more in religious truth and others believing more in scientific facts. Indeed, such gaps have become largely unbridgeable, causing social conflict to spread everywhere and impact human relations in every rich and poor society.

What we should know is that no religion holds the keys to the ultimate truth, and no science can answer all questions. However, only the mind and science can face the challenges of life and shape the future of humanity. Therefore, we need to accept the fact that agreement on issues of faith is beyond our reach, at least for the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, our humanity demands that we respect each other's beliefs and rights, while our globalized world dictates that we work together to face the increasing challenges of our times.

In our search for tools to face the increasing complexity and challenges of our times, we need trusted references to guide us, so we

do not get lost in the wilderness of claims and counterclaims. There is three trusted references that we should consult before passing judgment on any claim we hear. First comes science, second comes mind and logic, and third, comes the human experience. For example, some acts of magic are unbelievably miraculous, they look like miracles, but if you ask a magician, he will most likely tell you that what you saw were tricks that many people can learn, but few people have the talent to learn and practice. When claims are made regarding belief in the existence of certain creatures like ghosts, angels, and the devil, the first thing to do is to ask why we cannot see them, and why only some people in the distant past claimed to have seen them. The only reason for not being able to see them is that they do not exist. Therefore, every claim that neither our mind nor science nor our human experience can confirm is a shaky claim that must be considered hallucination.

Understanding the origins of religion and how it evolved can help us to see the human need for it as a system of belief and a way to view life transformations. First, when life was primitive and people were vulnerable to the ups and downs of life and nature, fear of the unknown pushed some people to imagine a creator that holds the keys to the past, present, and future. Second, as the rich and powerful began to enslave the weak and the poor during the agricultural times, religious men and institution found that it was their duty to advise the rich and powerful against enslavement and exploitation and for sympathy and compassion, claiming that the creator will ask everyone in the afterlife about his deeds and holds him responsible for the good and bad that he had done in his life. Third, religious men and institutions were able

to come up with explanations for the mysteries of life and the afterlife. Although no religion could prove its claims, having no scientific facts to refute those claims made it rather easy for religious men to convince people to believe their claims.

The development of many different religions in every part of the ancient world is proof that no religion owns the truth. Nevertheless, religion has become an accident of birth that almost everyone inherits from his parents. The simplicity of life in older times and lack of science throughout the prescience age gave people no reason or tools to examine their beliefs. By the time science was developed and could be proved, it was too late to question the message of a sacred institution that had become an integral part of most peoples' daily lives and relations to others. This is why a lot of people who do not believe in religious claims continue to attend religious ceremonies. For most people in West, religion has become more of a social club than a sacred place to seek advice or salvation or explanation of the ups and downs of life and nature.

We must also realize that it is easier to fool simple people than convince them that they were fooled; trying to convince such people that they were fooled is usually considered an insult to them and their beliefs. This is why simple, largely uneducated people are easy to indoctrinate and radicalize and lead without having to explain to them where you are taking them and why. Most such people tend to fight hard to defend their faith and attack their opponents viciously. And if you ask them to prove the truthfulness of their beliefs, you will get almost nothing besides the

same lies and superstitions that they were fooled to believe in. Knowledge and science stand often helpless in front of indoctrinated people because their convictions are their major source of satisfaction and capital in life.

## Language and Life

Languages are needed for people to communicate with each other, understand the cultures of others and work with them to make deals, solve problems and enjoy life. Learning a major foreign language is an investment in the future that cannot fail; this makes language education for states and societies a long-term commitment to building their human capital. No nation can do without language education in this age of globalization and cutthroat competition. A foreign language is a valuable skill that enables who knows it to do more, learn more about others and enrich his life. Every language is an effective means to communicate with others, understand their feelings and fears, and deal with them in a culturally sensitive way. As a skill, language gives its owners access to knowledge that they cannot get otherwise while inducing them to have an open mind and a more tolerant attitude toward others.

Teaching languages is an indispensable societal investment; no society functioning in an economically and culturally globalized world can afford to leave its children and public officials and politicians and diplomats handicapped by lack of an international language. While the French, Chinese, Spanish, Arabic, and Russian languages are wildly spoken in many parts of the world, the only language that can be considered an international language is English. And because the

British were able to colonize about half of the world and the Americans own the largest and most advanced economy and the best universities, English has become the language of science, technology, trade, finance, space, and learning the new facts regarding most aspects of life. No researcher today can research most areas of the social and natural sciences without the English language because the bulk of all references he has to rely on are in English.

Knowing the language of others is the best way to understand their living conditions, what matters most to them, and their cultural traditions and customs and sensibilities, and sometimes their dreams as well. Without being armed with such knowledge, it will be difficult for you to overcome the cultural barriers that separate nations, do business with other people with ease, minimize misunderstandings, and be able to solve conflicts that may arise peacefully. So everyone should know two languages at least; one is regional where he lives and functions; the other is English, the only international language. Learning a third language is a luxury, it can help you enjoy travel in the land where that language is the spoken word, enjoy its culture more, particularly its food and traditions and the arts.

For example, Spanish is the regional language spoken by all Latin Americans, except for the Brazilians; and Arabic is the regional language spoken by all Arabs. While Spanish enables most Latin Americans to communicate with each other across political borders and cultures with ease, Arabic enables Arabs to communicate with each other across political borders, express their thoughts eloquently and do

business with ease in the region where they live. However, neither Latin American nor Arab researchers can make notable contributions to human knowledge without knowing English. Though China makes about 20% of the world's population and has the second-largest economy in the world, reports indicate that the number of Chinese who have learned to speak the English language exceeds the total population of the United States of America. This is due to the Chinese appreciation of the importance of English in the world of science, technology, space, finance, trade, and investment.

The German philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once said, "The borders of my language are the borders of my world." One might add to this, "The borders of my language are also the borders of my knowledge." Since the spoken and the written word influence people's cultures, attitudes, ambitions, and even ways of thinking, language becomes the borders of man's opportunity in life. Language and the way of thinking tend to govern man's interest in learning and therefore condition his fame and social status in his society, if not in the world. Moreover, language is one of the major factors that influence a person's self-satisfaction, self-realization, worldview, outlook, and standard of living. Some languages cause their speakers to lean more toward being happy and optimistic, while others lead their speakers to lean more toward being unhappy and pessimistic.

If a person knows only one local language, the borders of his world would be limited to the borders of his community; and that also defines the borders of his knowledge, opportunity, life experience, and often

achievements. But if one knows a national or regional language in addition to his local language, his world would be expanded to include many communities and possibly several states near and far. And that causes his knowledge, opportunity, life experience and culture to be vastly enlarged, leading to enriching his life and the lives of others around him.

However, if one knows an international language besides a national or regional language, his world will become borderless and his access to knowledge limitless. And that would expand his opportunity immensely and make his future as far as the eye could see and as large as his ambitions. Since English is the only international language, whoever gains command of this language would be in a great position to shape his future through learning and getting access to almost all sources of knowledge available in the world and pursue the career he prefers. Knowing the English language can help most people to work for an organization they are often able to choose, do the things that give them the most satisfaction, and attain the standards of living they aspire for. And when a man sees that his growing needs are being met and his rising expectations are being satisfied, he is more likely to feel happy, appreciate life, and be a good citizen. Therefore, learning English in addition to a national language should be considered an investment in human capital that no person and no society, and no nation can do without.

## The Journey of Life

Most people live and die or get old and reach a dead-end in their lives without achieving much; they usually move from one situation to another without paying attention to what happens around them; even without asking about the reasons for the change in their living conditions. Such people cannot set lofty goals for themselves and pursue them with diligence; they lack the will and foresight to live meaningful and rich lives, where they can fall in love and enjoy being loved by others. Having a pleasant personality, being honest and ethical, or wealthy and generous, and having achieved notable achievements are the main characteristics that invite love into your life, where you enjoy being in love and loved by others.

In contrast, some people mature at an early age due to unusual circumstances beyond their control, or because of achieving high levels of education. Such people usually make fast progress and accumulate experience and often wealth along the way. Each person that goes through a rich and colorful life experience gains a unique perspective on life that enriches his life; he is also likely to leave behind a legacy of achievements that enrich the lives of generations to come.

For people to live rich lives and enjoy living their cherished dreams, they must make sure that life is lived as a journey, not as a

destination. A life lived as a journey makes the living experience full of surprises, adventures, fun, and interesting encounters with nature and people and varied cultures. In contrast, a life lived as a destination tends to be poor and boring; it lacks excitement and achievements, and seldom experiences fun and adventure. And that makes such a life devoid of much love and subject to changing circumstances beyond anyone's control. People who chose to live life in such a manner usually confine themselves to living in small spaces shared with like-minded people who wait patiently, yet unconsciously, the arrival of the train of no return to take them beyond life.

Learning in schools and universities and gaining experience by being involved and taking initiatives and calculated risks make life interesting and rewarding. People traveling along the rough terrain of life are the only ones able to experience success and failure, feel the joy of the first and the pain of the second, and learn the good and bad lessons of life. Such people are most likely to live a life worth living, and experience a journey worth telling, and write memoirs worth reading by every student of life and every lover of people and nature.

If you miss an opportunity in life, you should not feel bad or lose hope, or blame yourself for what had happened to you, even if the responsibility is yours; life is always kind; it gives everyone, especially its lovers, more than one opportunity during their lifetimes. Nevertheless, the second opportunity that life may give you could be your second and last one; therefore, you should be alert, always looking for that second opportunity in order not to miss it. And the faster you

move to take advantage of the new opportunity, the better your chances of succeeding and getting some of what you love to have in life.

Life is too short for anyone to experience full love; therefore, it is rare that one love can satisfy and enrich the full life of anyone. Because of this, no opportunity to live and enjoy life should be wasted; and no invitation to sail in a love boat should be missed, because no life can be truly enjoyable without love, and no love can touch all the senses of either man or woman and satisfy all desires. Each life has its special conditions to be lived, and each love has its taste and charm that makes it special; thus, no love can satisfy every taste and enrich every life; and no life is long enough to meet the demands of full love.

Since almost every man and woman functions fully or partially in the public sphere, no one can avoid all invitations of love; some love invitations are limited to admiration and spirituality; others go beyond admiration and spirituality to experience the sexual lust of love. Nevertheless, the only fact about love is that no love lasts forever; especially loves born at an early age before lovers get exposed to the ups and downs of life and appreciate close friendship and enjoyable companionship.

On the other hand, every old picture that you have at home or saved on your phone is a mirror, when you look at it, you do not see the images and colors it contains only; you see also the moment when the picture was taken. Old pictures bring back old memories of love, pain, success, and failure; and because of that, they lead you to relive the past and feel its taste, at least for a few moments. Therefore, every

picture should be good; it should express more happy feelings than sad ones and evoke joyful memories when viewed again and again.

## The Meaning of Happiness

Happiness is an emotional feeling that all people occasionally experience; however, some people look and act as happy as anyone could be at most times and occasions. These kinds of people make it easy for others to talk to them and feel comfortable around them. In contrast, most people rarely feel happy because they tend to deal with their daily lives without much thinking about life or how they should live it, or what they have of the things that matter most to them; some of those people look and act like machines devoid of human feelings. Thus, happiness is a state of mind related to what you have accomplished in life compared to what you are seeking to accomplish; how you perceive the value of what you have, and how much satisfaction you get from these things; happiness is also a social activity like love; it cannot be enjoyed fully expect when shared with other people. So, how you think and what you seek to accomplish in life, and how you manage your life affairs and relationships with others, and how you treat people around you are the major factors that determine your feeling of happiness and lack thereof.

A feeling of being a free person, living in a free society is a state of mind that helps most people get the satisfaction they aspire for. Also a general feeling that the states of political, economic, social, and

cultural affairs are comfortable gives most people pleasure, which is the other face of satisfaction. Nevertheless, all these things are not enough by themselves to make people feel happy, because they tend to change from time to time, causing the states of mind of people to change as well; they also cause the value of the things people cherish to increase or decrease, often unexpectedly.

To feel happy, you need to derive pleasure and satisfaction from the things you do daily, like performing regular work, doing voluntary work serving good causes, spending quality time with close friends and family members, and practicing your favorite hobby. Pleasure derived from daily work, and the satisfaction derived from being at peace with yourself and the people around you, are the major paths leading to happiness; they represent a stable state of mind of being satisfied with who you are, what you have, and how you live life, besides feeling lucky and glad to be doing what you do in your life.

No one can feel happy, no matter how many material things he owns and how much wealth he may have if he does not like what he does in life or does not feel secure where he works or lives. Doing what you do with passion and integrity and gaining the love and appreciation of people around you are invaluable sources of happiness. However, for some people like me, the most enjoyable moment of happiness is seeing a big smile in the eyes of someone I helped to feel good about himself, regardless of what he does or what his goals are.

Nonetheless, most people in this age tend to associate happiness or the feeling of being satisfied with money and wealth. How much

money people have compared to how much their neighbors or friends have has become the major yardstick by which happiness is measured. No doubt that having more money gives people more opportunities to do things they cannot otherwise do, such as traveling, buying new cars and houses, getting a good education, helping friends or relatives or poor people in need, or providing financial support to organizations serving good causes.

Because of the role that money plays in individual and societal life, it has become a major target that everyone tends to pursue with diligence. While most people pursue money and wealth through legal and ethical means; some resort to cheating and manipulation and even stealing to get more money and accumulate more wealth. What makes money particularly attractive is its close association with social prestige and political power. Therefore, money is desired because of the things it can buy, the power it can generate, the people it can manipulate, and the social status it can make available to the wealthy to attain. However, most of the power and prestige that money brings depends on how it is used and how its owners adapt to changing circumstances and living conditions.

However, money does not always bring happiness to its owners; money can sometimes bring misery to those who have a lot of it, particularly the greedy and stingy ones. The history of wealth seems to suggest that most wealthy people tend to be greedy and stingy; they also tend to have no friends they can trust and feel comfortable having around. The very rich tend also to work harder than most people to

accumulate more wealth and satisfy their egos; however, as most wealthy peoples get wealthier, they begin to give less as a percentage of their wealth to the poor, the needy, and society in general; as the rich get more money, they become less concerned about the needy.

More wealth often brings fear that leads to misery rather than happiness. Most neighbors and relatives of wealthy people, realizing how much less money they have compared to their wealthy neighbors and relatives, tend to feel less happy, or poorer than before, even as their incomes increase and their living standards improve. People who keep an eye on what others have, and not on what they miss having are losers. Associating money with happiness deepens dissatisfaction, spreads jealousy and envy in society, and make neighbors, relatives, and friends less able to enjoy their relationships. Sadly, most of the money in our globalized, very competitive world comes at the expense of the weak and the poor, and committed intellectuals that humanity needs most.

How one feels at home and at work and in his daily life is more important than how one performs in life and how many material things he has or can have; satisfaction is the major criteria by which happiness should be measured. Since circumstances and regulations change constantly, how one performs in daily life should not be a criterion to measure happiness and self-satisfaction.

To live a good, productive life, you need to know first who you are, and know second what kind of world you live in, and know third where you are at every major turn in history, and know forth what are your

objectives at that point. Otherwise, you are likely to get lost in a place that you do not know enough about to manage. And this makes you subject to the whims of luck and chance and the good and bad deeds of others. Smart people do not wait for things to happen to them; rather, they study their options carefully, identify the opportunities available to them, and then take the initiative and make things happen for them.

The good life is achieved when you feel comfortable and secure, living under conditions that enable you to love what you do and do what you love doing. Though no one of us can fully shape the living conditions to suit his desires and meet his ambitions and realize his dreams, everyone can influence such conditions; the tools and means that enable people to influence their living conditions could be classified as positive and negative.

You could influence your living conditions negatively by either accepting them the way they are and be content with your lot in life or by adapting to the existing conditions but making the best use of whatever options available to you. Accepting living conditions the way they are, and being content is easy, but no one under such conditions can fulfill his desires and achieve his goals. If you accept the living conditions the way they are, you abandon your ambitions and dreams, and, consequently, you are more likely to live your entire life without achieving something meaningful.

However, acts to influence the living conditions positively involve more than becoming an active player in life; they require awareness of what happens around you and getting the education that enables you

to influence the trends of change to suit your desires and help you to fulfill your dreams. Acts also require that you do whatever you like to do ethically, not only for money but also for pleasure and self-satisfaction; your intentions should be to participate in creating a better world for all. Resorting to unethical behavior and adopting bad attitudes towards others is more likely to cause you sooner or later to feel bad about yourself and regret what you had done.

Regret is the worst feeling that any person will ever have because it makes achievements come with a bitter taste that is hard to swallow. Regret robs most people of the joy they generate from success and even helping others. Religious believers in general are less able to feel the pleasure of living productive and enjoyable lives because they tend to see enjoyment and fun more as sins than rights of life. And therefore, it is too hard for any religious community to feel free and achieve progress as measured by the age standards and contribute positively to making life better and freer for all.

## Contentment and Happiness

Most simple people seem to think that contentment is happiness or the major source of happiness. But there is a big difference between being content and being happy; while contentment reflects acceptance of life conditions as they are, happiness reflects enjoyment of life and what man does in life. What man does in life can lead to satisfaction which is an aspect of happiness; it can also lead to frustration that leads to dissatisfaction and thus to misery. This means that happiness is an acquired state of both body and mind, while contentment is a state of mind only that borders on the abdication of personal rights. Contentment often emerges as a result of belief in faith and fate, or due to unfavorable life conditions that cause people to lose hope and the incentive to work hard and do more to improve the quality of their lives.

Contentment could also be due to the simplicity of life conditions that prevail in traditional agricultural societies and closed communities of faith where people lack information about life and standards of living in other places. The lack of opportunities that usually drive people to explore different careers and living conditions causes contentment to be an appealing and less stressful option to accept. Education and the upbringing of children play an important role in leading some people to be modest and seek peace of mind through contentment while

encouraging others to seek satisfaction and thus happiness through hard work and adventure. But neither contentment nor peace of mind is an aspect of happiness.

However, in the turbulent age of knowledge in which we live today contentment reflects more ignorance of the reality of life in other societies. People feeling the pressure of life tend to fear change and try to protect what they have and be content. In contrast, happiness reflects knowledge of the reality of life that motivates people to do more and take calculated risks to improve their lot in life. Therefore, contentment almost always reflects a lack of understanding of the value of knowledge, particularly science and technology in making people more productive and life more rewarding. Due to this ignorance, the poor and the largely uneducated usually lack the incentive to transform their habits and traditions and lifestyles, and be more economically productive, more culturally engaged, more politically active, and more culturally open-minded and adventurous.

Since no one can escape the traumas of the times we live in, happiness cannot be found in contentment because it provides the largely less educated people with limited opportunities that do not pay enough money to enable them to obtain many of the comforts of life. Happiness can only be sought in getting access to good education, helping people in need to get the attention they need and opportunities they deserve, commitment to freedom and liberty, and equality for all. Opposition to war and promotion of peace are sources of satisfaction because they involve people in activities that serve humanity. People

can also seek happiness in acquiring material things and knowledge that enrich life and make living more enjoyable while making work satisfying.

Optimism is another aspect of happiness, and for both optimism and happiness to be realized, people must do their best to forget the past, have an eye on the future, and try to shape it through formal and informal education; social and cultural transformation, thoughtful planning, and hard work are means to help people achieve their objectives in life and be happy. And to be an optimist, you must believe in the future and its promise; and be an active participant in the economic and cultural, and political life of the society in which you live and consider your home; you should also participate in shaping the future because it is a project we work together to shape, not a fate that we patiently wait to arrive.

People who live as strangers in society often feel that they live in a foreign land, which makes it difficult for them to plan for a future where they live as strangers or as a minority subject to racial or religious discrimination. For anyone to build a future or even to think about building a future in a certain place, he must plant roots in the land of the future where he lives; he should also raise his children to believe in their dreams and consider that land their homeland.

Life under traditional agriculture is timeless, peaceful, and serene; people usually feel content with whatever they have and earn, instead of thinking about what others have. In such a social environment, how one feels becomes more important than how one is doing in life. This

kind of feeling and way of thinking enables belief in faith to prevail without challenge while enabling fate to be accepted without questioning. Consequently, contentment strengthens the forces of stability and continuity in society, making change hard to conceive and harder to initiate. Since such a life reflects tranquility and peace of mind, it limits people's expectations, ambitions, and imagination; it also breeds acceptance, resignation, and stagnation.

Agricultural societies, in general, prefer feeling to knowing; people want to feel good and be at peace, and not to know things that cause them to worry. They usually lack the desire to know more than needed to run their daily lives; they tend to have little or no interest in knowing what disturbs those lives, particularly the inner lives of faith and fate. Because of the prevalence of such feelings, it took agricultural society about ten thousand years, many ideas, and technological developments, and scientific discoveries, and countless wars before the way of life began to experience systematic and systemic change and witness deep social, cultural, and economic transformations that ultimately led many societies to enter the industrial age.

Since Third World societies in general still live in the pre-industrial times and adhere to the traditional culture and way of life of the agricultural age, they prefer feeling over knowing. What some people might try to know in this environment is largely related to how others feel and what they do, but not what they know or can learn from them to change their living conditions and make progress. Since progress comes after a profound sociocultural transformation, agricultural society

could not make much progress because its culture resists change. Lack of freedom and adherence to traditions contribute substantially to limiting people's desire to change and be creative. Therefore, they appear unwilling to do the hard work needed to succeed in life. Yet, most agricultural people feel happy and content.

Van Doren says that "the rich are never rich enough; to have enough is simply to be content with what you have rather than have what you want. When wanting comes first, you can never have enough. If contentment is placed first, it does not matter how much you have," because you always feel that you have enough. (Charles Van Doren: A History of Knowledge, 1991, 242) This means that culture or people's way of life, sets the priorities and leaves achieving them to economics and science and learning new skills; and that makes goals subject to human desires and ambitions and knowledge, not chance or fate. So, when people, like the agricultural people, feel good and content, they usually entertain no big goals but little ones, because big goals require social and cultural change which they detest.

Since traditional cultures have their ways to make people feel good, enjoy life, and be content, agricultural people do not have the incentive to work hard and change. In contrast, the industrial and post-industrial cultures have distorted the traditional meaning of happiness by making money and wealth the ultimate goals in life and the means to gain satisfaction and feel happy. Though money can and does make life easier to manage, money alone cannot make people feel happy, because it invokes more envy and jealousy, and competition than

satisfaction, contentment, and happiness.

## Rules of Fair Competition

When you play a fair game, you might win and you might lose; no game can guarantee you to win all the time, because guarantees make games contracts, abolishing the meaning and rules of competition. Sometimes your chances of winning are better than your chances of losing; at other times, your chances of losing could be better than those of winning. However, to enhance your chances of winning the game of life, you have to have some of the right tools such as good education and good ethics; you must be also willing to endure hard work and be patient and resilient. Moreover, your timing and management of time, and ability to recognize opportunities as they arrive and exploit them must also be good. Without gaining such tools, you are more likely to strengthen your chances of losing the game of life. Every person needs to know that playing the game of life starts at birth and ends when life ends, which means that playing this game is not an option that you can ignore; it is an obligation that you must fulfill.

Some people, to improve their chances of winning without having the right tools to win, resort to ways that are unethical and unjust, such as cheating, lying, manipulation, deception, stealing, and exploitation of others. But by so doing, they make it difficult for honest people and hard-working individuals to succeed and get a fair share of the social,

economic, and educational pie. Societies that deny their best and brightest young men and women, and their poor and powerless groups a chance to succeed are doomed to failure; even if such societies manage to succeed in the short run, they will fail in the long run. They are like a runner who does not stop running until his leg is broken or his heart is hit by a stroke that disables him. Therefore, societies that ignore a minority or a social class in the short run, guarantee that everyone loses in the end.

In a competitive world where winning has become everything, and money has become the only criteria by which success and failure are measured, ethics have become a victim of unfair competition and sheer greed, causing society to lose the basic principles of a fair game. But when societies ignore such principles or fail to protect and apply them, people lose their sense of unity and cohesion. As a result, envy, hatred, discrimination, and greed replace ethics, equality, honesty, generosity, and hard work; manipulation meanwhile replaces good management of time and people and opportunities, causing competition to be unfair and unproductive; consequently, honesty and ethics become old ways of doing business, unworthy of consideration.

In societies where opportunities are limited and economic freedom is restricted and corruption is widespread and accepted as normal, winners cannot win unless the poor and the powerless and the honest lose. The game in such places is a zero-sum game, where almost no one wins unless another one loses, so as the numbers of the rich and powerful increase, the numbers of the poor and the powerless increase

more. Consequently, destructive competition rather than constructive cooperation prevails in society, guaranteeing the ultimate failure of everyone; this also guarantees the demise of any environment hospitable to freedom and equality, which allows no one of the poor and the weak to get a real chance to have a decent life.

## The Comedian and the Preacher

A good comedian is a gifted actor who makes you laugh until you sometimes cry as you listen to him telling silly jokes and watch him make fun of himself and others. And in the process, the comedian helps you relax, be in a good mood, and often forget what was on your mind bothering you. Soon after you leave the theatre, you resume regular life with renewed energy and often enthusiasm. From time to time, however, the comedian's image and some of his words and theatrics come back to remind you of his funny acts and silly jokes and make you smile. Yes, you smile for seconds and then resume normal life, because you know that nothing comedians say or do on the stage are supposed to be taken seriously.

A good preacher is also a gifted actor and an able communicator; he speaks with passion and makes you sometimes cry as you listen to him talking about a power that is beyond the capacity of humans to see or communicate with; he also tries to manipulate you and lead you to believe in whatever he says. Preachers usually try to convince their audiences to do good things and be kind to others; however, they sometimes ask the audiences to do odd things that are supposed to help them get rid of what is bothering them and stop worrying. So, going to see a preacher is an acknowledgment of having psychological problems you are unable to deal with without outside help. However,

soon after you leave the preacher you are more likely to feel sorry for yourself for having sought the help of someone who knows little about your work and almost nothing about your life. A rational person usually forgets what he had done wrong and resumes normal life with a touch of sadness. Nevertheless, as you grow up and become mature, you discover how naïve you were to believe in slogans and things that can help no one; and as a result, you are likely to laugh at yourself with some regret.

Therefore, a good comedian makes you laugh at him and his characters, as you enjoy his jokes and funny acts, and thus helps you feel good for a few hours, and often for many moments in the future. A good preacher, in contrast, makes you sometimes cry and feel sorry for yourself; he often makes you feel guilty as well. However, some people spend several years trying to forget the words of their preachers; and more people waste most of their lives believing in words and mysteries that can never help anyone improve his chances in life. The promise of the afterlife is a claim that no one in the past was able to prove and no one in the future is expected to prove.

## The Spoken VS the Written Word

The Romans, known for their emphasis on the law, left us a meaningful proverb that says: “The tongue is free, but the pen is restricted.” This means that while we can say whatever is on our minds often freely without worrying about how our words would be interpreted later, we should not do the same thing when it comes to worlds we put on paper and publish in books. Spoken words fly easily in the air and get lost in the dark alleys of life; most words die when their owners die, and people forget them. However, words written in books live long lives; many books have lived thousands of years after the death of those who wrote them; some books have continued to influence people’s thinking about the past and the future for countless generations, particularly religious books and words attributed to the prophets. Books written by the famous philosophers of the distant past like Aristotle, Socrates, the Greek philosophers, and Ibn Rushd or Averroes and Al Farabi, the Islamic thinkers have lived over a thousand years; some of these books, I believe, will outlive many of the religious books.

People can always deny what is attributed to them as expressed in spoken words; they can claim to have forgotten what they had said or that their words were either distorted, misunderstood, or taken out of context. But when it comes to the written word, people can neither deny

nor pretend to have forgotten what they had written; the written word will always be there for everyone to read and judge. But since these days the written world is often replaced by a recorded one, the recorded word has become as binding as the written one; and with the digital media, almost no spoken or written world can be forgotten or erased, particularly when said by rulers or famous people.

While most people can escape responsibility for their spoken words, no one can escape responsibility for his written or recorded word. Therefore, everyone who thinks that his words count should be careful to avoid being misunderstood; he, therefore, should choose his words carefully, express them in ways that reflect the message they carry, write or record them, and make sure they are less likely to be misinterpreted or taken out of context.

And when famous and wise men die, only their written words endure. The spoken ones are likely to live for a few months or years but cannot endure unless they get written or recorded by admirers. Nevertheless, no spoken word can escape distortion or misunderstanding. In contrast, the written and recorded words are certain to live for a long time, especially if they are of interest to a large audience while avoiding distortion, misinterpretation, and misunderstanding. Therefore, what we care about should be either recorded digitally, written in books, or shared on the internet.

## Smartness and Arrogance

If you behave as if you are the smartest or the best-educated person around, you are more likely to generate envy and often resistance that undermines your capacity to function normally and succeed in life. Such an attitude is certain to encourage competitors and even some colleagues to oppose you and stand in your way, often causing you to fail to achieve some of your goals. Having to struggle to succeed or perform a job properly causes life to be stressful, less productive, less satisfying, and largely frustrating. But when you behave like a humble person who loves other people and respects their opinions, you invite others to treat you with respect; and that encourages them to help you succeed and get the satisfaction you aspire for.

When you recognize that you are not the smartest or the best-educated person among your peers, you will realize that you cannot do everything by yourself, or get all things to go according to your wishes. However, by recognizing your limitations and behaving accordingly, you will be able to learn more and generate enough sympathy and support from others to help you do some of the tasks that are difficult for you to do alone: and that enables you to carry out meaningful tasks that make you feel good about yourself and, in the process make new, trustworthy friends. Consequently, you learn the art of teamwork, and how to cooperate with others to make life easier and more rewarding for you

and everyone involved in the teamwork process.

On the other hand, people we tend to unfairly call stupid are persons with little minds and little ambitions; these people tend to be peaceful and seldom make grave mistakes because they are unable to think big and plan to do things they cannot imagine or comprehend. Therefore, whatever mistakes such people may commit, are usually small ones that often provoke pity or cause laughter, but little harm to others or society. Of course, there are exceptions to every rule, which means that the possibility of such people committing serious mistakes and even crimes still exists. However, when such people make big mistakes or commit crimes, the culprit is likely to be a smart person who convinced a stupid one to commit the mistake or the crime in question.

But unlike stupid people, smart people, driven by big ambitions or lust for money, fame, and power tend to make grave mistakes, because they can think big and plan to do big things. They usually feel smarter than most other people around them, and that makes them believe that they can beat the system and get away with whatever they decide to do. However, after making their grave mistakes, they often spend the rest of their lives regretting what they had done by default or design. Big mistakes usually cause smart people to start doubting their intelligence and lose the self-confidence and courage to think big and make big decisions, and this makes them look and feel less smart, less creative, and less ambitious than they could be.

Goethe, the German philosopher who believed strongly in man's capacity and intellect to do the right things, once said, "mistakes are

decisions taken in a hurry". Though this is not always true, it is a valuable piece of advice that every one of us should take seriously; no one, whether he is smart or not so smart, should abide by Goethe's advice and the law of the land where he lives. Everyone should also respect the rules and take his time to make important decisions; he should never consider beating the system because systems are made to protect people's rights and beating the system violates such rights. Most thieves and criminals are smart people, and because of that, they violate the rights of others and beat the system every day; however, most criminals are rarely able to live their entire lives without getting caught and punished.

If we consider the number of successful businessmen, famous politicians, and powerful lawyers who ended up in prison, we realize that crime does not pay. Most inmates in prisons are people who thought they were smarter than others and thus capable of beating the system and doing whatever they wished without being caught. But when someone disregards the law, he disregards the rights of other people, and consequently his rights. Most inmates seem to have been blinded by their egos and lust for money, and consequently, could not stop committing one crime after the other and violating ethical rules of conduct. Yes, crime does not pay, and even if a criminal can live his entire life without being caught, his conscience would not allow him to live in peace, and the ghosts of his victims will follow him wherever he goes, even in his sleep.

Therefore, every person should avoid behaving arrogantly no

matter how much money and power and education he may have. Normally, people tend to respect themselves and others, and expect others to respect them in return. Because of this understanding, people, no matter how simple and humble they maybe, hate arrogance and avoid whoever acts arrogantly. Arrogance forces normal people to resent arrogant persons and try their best to prevent them from succeeding.

On the other hand, when ignorance and arrogance are combined in one person, they cause the mind of the person in question to be largely closed, and his heart to lose compassion, and his conscience to go into a deep coma. Arrogant people and states, no matter how much they win, will ultimately lose; and in the process, cause great suffering to the innocent, the poor, and the weak; and that makes the destruction of life and the undermining of humanity the only accomplishments of arrogant states and individuals.

## The Meaning of Hope

Hope is a feeling that expresses itself in several forms and influences people's mental states in varied ways; all of which however tend to be positive. Hope is a psychological tool to inspire people to imagine what they wish to see happen in the future or to visualize the kind of world they would like to live in. Hope could be just a feeling that something good or exciting is about to happen, which makes people optimistic but without knowing why. Therefore, optimism either motivates people to act with confidence and enthusiasm to change things they do not like or convince them to wait for things to be better and thus weaken their capacity to act.

Nevertheless, hope could be an attempt to escape a reality people do not like for an imagined one they like but have little or no chance to realize. While attempts to escape reality are often helpful to stabilize a rather confused mental state; they are likely to lead people to do nothing to change their lives, and thus feel helpless and accept being subjects rather than objects of change. In contrast, hope that leads people to act and pursue things they wish to have is more likely to strengthen their self-confidence and cause positive change to happen to them and around them; giving people more reasons to live, be optimistic, and enjoy life.

However, change invoked by hope is a personal experience and a complex social process that no person can accomplish without the active participation of other social actors like friends, family, schools, and often communities as well. Societal change is a comprehensive process that requires the involvement of many actors and coordination by many systems in society, including the state, the economic and political forces, and the media. Even a simple attempt to escape a bad reality to an imagined one needs other people's cooperation; it requires that people close to the one who wishes to escape reality accept him the way he is and tolerate seeing him live in a world of imagination that does not exist except in his head, while gently helping him to return to reality and face the challenges of life that no one can escape.

Every life experience we go through as human beings is a shared experience no matter how big or small it may be, because we share our experiences with other people and sometimes animals we like, and even with our ancestors via our memories. No life experience can be fully lived without interacting positively and otherwise with many components of the natural, social, cultural, and technological environments in which we live and function. This interaction is actually what makes us humans who love and be loved and can share with others their feelings and dreams.

People who wish to help friends and relatives feel optimistic should hide their fears and apprehensions from them; they should keep such feelings to themselves and share their courage, dreams, and certain accomplishments with those who need to feel optimistic. By so

doing, they show others that they care about them, and they are willing to help them face the adversities of life with confidence; and that gives all persons involved in this process a good reason to be hopeful and optimistic, and work hard to achieve their objectives.

Hope therefore is a deep feeling that rejects life conditions perceived as bad because they lead to despair and often make bad situations worse. Hope is a motivating force that makes people look forward to better times to come but do little or nothing to change bad situations; it is also an act to escape a perceived bad reality that postpones action and sometimes resists calls for action to create a new, more promising reality.

## Tips for Success

There are no recipes for success in life, yet there are many things that everyone can do to improve his chances of success. Such things include the following:

1. Knowing what you would like to have from life or what you would like to be in terms of wealth, power, social position, and career. Choices are many; you could choose to be a politician, a schoolteacher, a university professor, a businessman, a computer scientist, a physician, an astronomer, a carpenter, or just a person living a comfortable life and doing good deeds.
2. Identifying the things you would like to achieve or have, and the steps to be taken to reach your goals while trying to live and enjoy everyday life.
3. Prioritizing your goals, deciding what comes first and what comes next, and what the requirements to reach each goal are, and how to fulfill such requirements without violating the laws of the land and the ethical codes. Again, while trying to live and enjoy everyday life.
4. Pursuing desired goals without hesitation, making sure that actions you take are focused on the targeted goals which require

perseverance and hard work while recognizing that some actions cannot be reversed. So, identifying the goals, hard work and perseverance should be articles of faith. In the meantime, you should pursue your goals, knowing that no one can succeed if he loses hope, or allows trivial matters to distract him and undermine his ability to focus on what he is trying to accomplish.

5. Realizing that life is a learning process from start to finish; every decision, accomplishment, move, and failure has a lesson that teaches us something new. Therefore, life should be viewed as a unique experience that cannot be repeated and will never be repeated after it ends. Nevertheless, human life continues, and history never stops changing, which makes our legacy lives for a few or thousands of years after our death.
6. Realizing that life is a challenging journey into the unknown with its ups and downs, no one should discount life as boring or meaningless, or hopeless. Life is interesting, sometimes fascinating, sometimes difficult and burdensome, but never dead. Since life is mainly a personal journey, it is up to each man and woman to make it more interesting and rewarding and less boring, and never meaningless. Each one of us can do this, being a simple farmer, a successful businessman, a professor, a scientist, a politician, or a salesperson.
7. Traveling on the high road of life, the landscape that lies behind becomes, with every turn we make on the road, less visible and less relevant, and therefore less important, while the landscape that lies ahead becomes more visible and more relevant, and

therefore more important. Consequently, more attention should be given to what lies ahead because it represents the future that holds the keys to the promised land; and therefore, less attention should be given to what lies behind because it represents the past that had lived its full life and became a memory. And as the past becomes a memory, its life experience and wisdom become outdated and largely irrelevant. Since every past is a foregone life experience that will never be repeated, it should be viewed as less relevant to the present and the future.

8. Recognizing that life is a journey implies acceptance that life is neither destiny nor a destination. Therefore, nothing of the past and the future should be viewed as a fate to be accepted without serious challenge. Challenging the past and its experience and wisdom is the first step toward building a different, more promising future.
9. As people navigate the terrains of life, they compete with others, function under the influence of good and bad conditions and changing circumstances, while taken decisions that affect their lives and the lives of others. Therefore, they need to keep in mind; first, that they should adhere to ethical behavior and moral responsibilities to make the journey safe for all, and the fruits of work clean and healthy; second, they should recognize and praise the virtues and intelligence of allies and competitors alike. Competition, when viewed correctly and played according to fair rules, enriches the personal and communal, and national life, and builds bridges between competitors, estranged

communities, and different cultures.

10. All people need to think positively to free their creative capacities from bad memories and painful experiences and direct them to do the right things that serve all people. Everyone should avoid considering revenge because it is a tool to destroy the self before destroying the perceived enemy. Thinking of revenge, like hatred, destroys the self without hurting the enemy. Whoever thinks in negative terms undermines his capacity to think in positive ones, and that leads him to be engaged in a process of self-destruction and time-wasting that brings more misery and invites more enmity and hatred. Thus, hatred and revenge deepen bitterness, waste rare opportunities, and the good part of life itself.

## When Sharing is Advisable

You should hide your fears but share your courage; fears can only be shared with people you love and trust and feel comfortable talking to them about your private life and inner feelings. You must feel that the people with whom you share your fears love you and care for you and can understand your fears and sympathize with you. Even if all fears are facts; you still need to make sure that the people you share your fears with are willing and able to lend you a helping hand to overcome your fears and resume life as usual. Sharing your courage with others is a virtue that strengthens self-confidence while causing others to respect you and appreciate your generosity.

All things private are supposed to remain private, especially things that touch the lives of others; otherwise private feelings become public and could hurt you and hurt others whose private life is exposed. When private feelings lose their privacy and become public, they cause you to lose control over them; consequently, you will not be able to hide them, ignore them, or deny their existence. Therefore, no one should volunteer information about his private life unless it is necessary to protect his health or family or wealth or life. Sharing of feelings must be limited and have a purpose; otherwise sharing becomes a way to invent ghosts that could haunt you wherever you go and maybe others as well;

unwise action to be often regretted later.

To understand the meaning of something that bothers you, or to find an explanation for strange behavior or an attitude that you find offensive, you need to seek the advice of those you trust most. However, trusting a person while seeking his help to understand something odd is a risky endeavor; it could expose you as lacking knowledge you should have; it could also cause you to lose a valuable idea that could be good for a new profitable business venture. Therefore, seeking advice is not always advisable because it could be counterproductive. Therefore, advice should be sought when needed from a trusted source that has the knowledge and experience, and capacity to provide the advice requested and keeps it confidential.

You should make sure that the person you are seeking his advice has three qualities: first, he must be trustworthy as a person; second; he must have enough experience and knowledge to be considered an expert, and third, he must have good judgment regarding the issue in question. How much trust you should have in people you seek their help also depends on the nature of the problem to which you are seeking advice. If you are seeking advice regarding a personal matter, trusting the integrity and character of the person in question should be enough, but if you are seeking advice concerning a business venture, you must trust the person's business judgment in addition to trusting his integrity. You cannot and should not choose a person as a business partner unless you make sure that he is knowledgeable and has good business judgment; personal trust, in this case, is not enough; it could cost you a

lot of money and emotions. Therefore, if you are seeking personal advice, you should make sure that the person you seek his advice is wise and can keep a secret. Seeking an explanation for a problem requires that the person you ask has the expertise in the matter in question. Seeking advice regarding a business venture, you should seek the advice of a trusted person who has good business judgment.

## How to avoid Losing an Argument

Arguments, unlike dialogues and negotiations, are often unpleasant and generally hard to win and harder to feel comfortable being part of them. Nevertheless, arguments can be divided into two major categories: one that you cannot win; and one that you cannot lose. However, you will discover at the end that both arguments are frustrating and largely useless; they tend to waste time and often make bad situations worse. Dialogues, in contrast, are usually conducted in a hospitable environment intended to reach compromises to resolve differences peacefully and find reasonable solutions to complicated issues of public concern.

Arguments you cannot win are usually traps designed not to reason with you or work with you to solve problems, but to embarrass you and destroy your reputation and raise questions about your credibility or mental state; such arguments are like ditches full of muddy dirt, the minute you get into them, you start sinking without finding a bottom to stand on. The first action you should take whenever you realize that you are about to get engaged in an argument you are most likely to lose is to get out immediately. Since it is difficult to escape a trap designed to put you in a difficult position, you need to have a strategy to convert an argument you cannot win to an argument you

cannot lose no matter what your opponent does or says.

Therefore, you should try to avoid all arguments you cannot win. However, if you find yourself obligated to engage another person in an argument you cannot win, particularly if the argument is public, you should try to shape the argument in a way that helps you avoid losing and embarrass your opponent. Most arguments can be converted with little effort and knowledge from ones that you cannot win to others that you cannot lose. The way to accomplish this goal is to look at the issue in question from the outside in rather than from the inside out. This means to avoid answering any of the points that your opponent raises and move instead to raise doubt about the method he uses and the sources of his information and his knowledge of the issue in question. This puts him in an awkward position, where he finds himself obligated to defend his method and information and knowledge of the issue.

If you picture yourself looking at the issue from the inside out, you are most likely to lose all arguments, allowing your opponents to win with ease. Losing is almost certain if you start your argument sitting among others listening, while your opponent is standing on a podium speaking. In contrast, if you picture yourself in a position looking from the outside in, you are more likely to win most arguments and avoid losing any. Looking from the outside helps you to see the entire issue, not only one angles of it that the speaker favors. And all that you need to do to win or at least to avoid losing is to create as much doubt as possible regarding the selectivity of your opponent's sources and information and the objectives he is seeking by being selective.

Emphasizing the issue of selectivity amounts to proving the dishonesty of your opponent, which often translates into an embarrassing loss of credibility.

Demagogues who believe in religious or Marxist or national or racist ideologies are the most difficult people to argue with; they are unlikely to give you a chance to win standing next to them looking from the inside out. These are people who shape their basic arguments over long periods and practice reciting them hundreds of times before facing others, and that makes them capable of repeating their arguments with ease and confidence. However, no ideologue can prove his claims as facts beyond doubt or as scientifically sound information; all ideological ‘facts’ are mere claims that can be refuted without difficulty; however, trying to refute them is a mistake that can lead you to lose; and therefore, you should stick to your strategy of creating the largest cloud of doubt possible and placing it on the head of your opponent’s argument; you should also avoid questioning the integrity of your opponent because making an argument personal makes you look small in the eyes of the audience.

Therefore, to win an argument standing next to an ideologue on the same podium or even sitting in the audience listening to him, you need to picture yourself on high grounds looking from the outside in. This allows you to refute the essence of the ideology, not the point of argument, and expose the fallacy of the ideology’s premise as well as its promises and slogans. And this is all that you need to do to avoid losing an argument while denying your opponent the opportunity to win.



## Dear Students

Feeling overwhelmed by information and references after having read many volumes and countless articles can make life feels miserable, especially when you must take all of this into consideration to write your MA thesis or Ph.D. dissertation. My advice assumes that you pass all exams and getting ready to write the final research paper required for graduation. The way to overcome fear and worries is easy and rather fast; a discovery I made after many sleepless nights and writing more than 50 books.

Here are the steps:

1. Put all books and references on the side.
2. Open a document and write on it “new ideas”.
3. Write a general outline for the thesis or dissertation if you have not done so yet.
4. Write the main points you believe must be included in each chapter.
5. Start writing each chapter without consulting any reference; just use the information stored in your head; continue writing until you finish all chapters.

6. Any new idea that jumps up as you write should be written in the “Ideas” file; otherwise; it will be lost; do not say I will come back to it later because you are unlikely to find it; these ideas are good to include in other chapters.
7. Bring the papers and books relevant to the first chapter you finished writing, and seek the quotations and information you need to complete this chapter; it is better to have each book and paper in a document form to use Ctrl & F; you also can use the index of books to find the words that lead you to the information you seek. As you start working on the first chapter, you will discover information and quotations that good to include in one of the other chapters.
8. Open a new document and write on it “quotations and information.”
9. You should copy every quotation and piece of information you feel that you might need to use in another chapter, and put it in the “quotations” file to be considered later; do not forget the page number and the source of every quote and piece of information.
10. Before moving to the second chapter, spend a day or more moving things around until you feel satisfied that the chapter is complete and well-structured.
11. After completing the first chapter, move to the second chapter and bring the relevant books and papers and proceed as before.

12. Writing each chapter should take 4-5 days and finding the right information and quotations you need to complete it should take 2-3 days, assuming that you devote about 8 hours a day to this project.
13. Always remember to copy and keep the ideas and quotations you might need to complete other chapters and strengthen your arguments and enhance your work.
14. The entire process should take between 15 to 18 weeks, depending on the topic as well as the size of the thesis or the dissertation.

I helped so far, some 25 graduate and undergraduate students from 7 different countries. Using my method is easy and fast and cannot fail; it also guarantees completion of the work required in a short time. Many students continue to contact me for help, asking for ideas for papers, and how to conduct research and write papers. I welcome everyone; I love all students, males, and females, young and old, and enjoy working with them because my motto is "Knowledge not shared is knowledge wasted". And whoever loves knowledge hates to waste any part of it and loves to share his knowledge with others, especially the potential leaders of the future.

## Facing Life Challenges

If you encounter a serious problem that challenges you or contradicts the way you view life, you need to get over it as fast as you can; otherwise, you are likely to lose control of your life and feel frustrated and often helpless. And then you should consider the changed situation that follows overcoming the serious challenge as a new phase in your life that must be accepted as is, for what it is. Blaming yourself or others for what had happened will not help; it may even lead you to feel depressed and lose time, energy, sleep needlessly, and become sometimes bitter for no reason. Bitterness causes people to lose their compassion and friends and feel lonely, less able to make friends and sound decisions, and enjoy life.

One way to overcome serious life challenges and incidents is to think of what you can still do and enjoy doing. The minute you try to do new things, you will discover that there are many things you can do well to enrich your life and the lives of people around you. As you discover the potential to do many enjoyable and sometimes fascinating things, you will be reminded of the creativity, excitement, and love for life that you have, but have been too busy to think about, discover, and experience. Internalizing this discovery makes life an enjoyable journey that has no end.

Another way to overcome the memory of a bad or sad incident that changed your life is to program your brain to replace that incident with a happy, exciting one. Every time the bad incident tries to remind you that it is still alive, you need to switch your mind quickly to focus on the happy one that replaced it. After a few attempts, the brain will get used to switching to the happy incident every time the bad one tries to force itself on your consciousness. Memories are selective, and brains naturally prefer to remember happy incidents and forget the bad and sad ones.

Meanwhile, you should never think about things you cannot do, because it is fruitless and may make you feel smaller than what you really are; you should realize that no one can do everything well enough to get the recognition he aspires for; in fact, whoever tries to do everything will not succeed in perfecting anything. You also need to remember that every one of us can probably do certain things better and faster than most others. Every person has a special thing about him that makes him unique; he is endowed with a special talent that makes him creative. We need only to discover what makes us unique and creative to feel good about ourselves and be able to contribute to making life more enjoyable and better for all.

## Helping Others

Helping others is a sacred duty that obligates each one of us to help people in need. But to be able to help others and feel appreciated, you need to have the expertise and the resources to provide the help needed; otherwise, a well-intentioned offer for help could complicate a bad situation and add a new problem to the existing one. If this were to happen, the offer of help would have negative rather than positive consequences, leading you to regret what you have tried to do and probably stop trying.

For example, if someone is fat and needs to lose weight badly; you should not tell him or her that they are overweight and need to eat less or exercise more. You cannot change people unless they feel the need to change a habit and ask for help. Therefore, you should not try to offer help to people, especially strangers, unless they ask you for help. Telling people, they need to change may cause them to feel that they look ugly, and start, as a result, hating themselves and the people around them. And that is more likely to lead some of them to ignore whatever advice they may receive from friends and continue to do what they have been doing before.

What we should try to do is to help people to think differently and lead them gradually to where they should be. If they do not look healthy

to you, you can ask them about their health situation and how they feel. Asking such a question is more likely to make them think about their health, which, in turn, leads them to ask the right questions and try to get the right answers. Consequently, they will most likely be convinced that they should start doing what it takes to lose weight and feel healthier and look better. Programs to lose weight seldom work because the objective of such programs is to make people look pretty, not to be healthy and make money in the process. Most people who smoke and take drugs are either going through a bad situation or trying to look cool or find an odd clan to which they can belong.

Students need to learn how to learn and how to keep learning, which is possible only if they learn how to evaluate what they have accomplished and how much progress they have made in light of the time they spend learning. Training students how to think and put things in perspective is the right way to helping them to recognize what they do not know but ought to know. Getting students to this point is certain to make them feel good about themselves and satisfied with the pace of progress they are making toward reaching their goals.

Satisfaction has many sources; the most rewarding feeling for me as a professor is not to demonstrate to others how smart I am, but to make them feel good being around me and getting motivated to learn more, think more, and do more. Association with smart people who care is more inspiring than anything else. Inspiration can motivate people to learn more and do better and feel that they still can do more to help themselves and others. To facilitate planting the seeds of this kind of

feeling and motivation, I never kept any piece of information from my students and friends and people who ask. Knowledge not shared is knowledge wasted, and therefore there is nothing more painful and harmful to society than withholding knowledge, especially from students who come to college in search of knowledge and motivation.

Most people today live and die or reach a dead-end in their lives without achieving their objectives because they never had a source of inspiration to motivate them to work hard and focus on their goals. So, to live your cherished dreams, you must make sure that the journey of life is fun and interesting. And that can only be achieved by learning and going through the ups and downs of life and experiencing success and failure and disappointment and taking chances. Taking calculated risks makes life feel like an adventure in the wilderness where singing birds and wild animals and rivers and nature live happy and serene lives. Living a life full of adventures and surprises is probably the best way to make life fun and worth living.

## Individualism and Society

Going back to the tribal age, we notice that each tribe had lived an independent life, forming a society of its own. Even after the state came into existence about 5000 years ago, the tribe did not recognize the state, or abide by state rules and laws, or change its nomadic lifestyle. However, in the agricultural age, the tribe could not live an agricultural life without transforming its society, culture, social structure, and way of life. Therefore, the agricultural society replaced the tribe with the extended family or the clan, which formed the unit of each agricultural community and society; each farming community or village is usually made up of few extended families, and each extended family put its interests ahead of the interests of the village and the state to which it belonged.

In the industrial age that followed, neither the tribe nor the extended family could exist or have a role to play in the new society; the extended family, consequently, was replaced by the nucleus family, which formed the basic unit of the industrial community and the larger industrial society. Consequently, each family placed its interests and the welfare of its members ahead of the interests of the industrial community and society to which it belonged. The individual throughout these times had little or no particular role to play; he was a member of

the major unit of society, and his will and wishes, as a result, were subordinated to the will and wishes of the social unit to which he belonged.

As human societies began a difficult transition from the industrial age to the knowledge age, the nucleus family was replaced by the individual who is slowly becoming the basic unit of the emerging new society. As a consequence of this transformation, the will, wishes, and interests of the society and the state are being subordinated to the will, wishes, and interests of the individual. In pursuing their interests, individuals have become nomads moving from one place to another and from one organization to another trying to subordinate everything in life to money and pleasure. Money-making and wealth accumulating have become in the knowledge age the focal point of life and the major sources of satisfaction and social recognition and power. As a result, individuals, and members of the elites in control of the economic, political, military, financial, and media affairs are slowly confiscating all material and non-material things they can reach, causing great damage to the interests of their societies. Individual gain today translates into collective pain for other members of society, especially the poor and the weak and the discriminated against racial, religious, and cultural minorities.

But since no action could shield individuals from harming themselves as they harm their societies, the elites will ultimately become victims of their greed and selfishness. Of course, they can carry their wealth and run away to faraway places and leave their societies in ruins. However, they are unlikely to succeed because greed and lust for

money are more likely to lead them to repeat the same mistakes wherever they may go. This means that individualism and wealth cannot escape the fate of their victims. They are also likely to feel haunted by their conscience if they manage to keep their consciences alive after ruining the lives of millions of people in their pursuit of money and power.

Since the collectivities of elites in all rich and poor societies form one global elite, they are partners in the game of greed and selfishness, and lust for money and power. Therefore, it is expected that the actions of this global elite will gradually transform all societies into victims, of course, unless states intervene sooner rather than later to place restrictions on the free actions of the rich and powerful. But since the state is run by members of the same elite, the state is unlikely to act forcefully to protect the interests of the poor and powerless members of society. Ultimately, however, everyone will suffer, and no one will be saved from the consequences of individualism. Nevertheless, no logical argument seems able to convince the greedy that their fate is tied to the fate of everyone else. Individualism makes people with wealth and power feel that they are exempt from the laws of nature and therefore can do whatever pleases them regardless of the impact of their actions on the lives and fortunes of others. Only mass social movements led by intellectuals committed to the welfare of humanity can change the world to be fair to the poor and the weak and the needy, and transform our cultures and economic systems and systems of government to create a new world that cares for everyone and leave no one behind.

## The Power of Ideas

Oswald Spengler is one of the famous philosophers of history who had been given credit for developing the cyclical theory of history which simply says, “History tends to repeat itself.” Spengler viewed history as the story of cultures; however, he saw outside intervention in the normal lives of cultures as having a negative rather than positive impact on the course of cultures’ development. “Cultures never learn from one another, they never really understand each other, [and] what one cannot understand one cannot learn, and what one cannot learn, one cannot be influenced by,” said Spengler. He also argued that cultures are like wildflowers; they come and go without leaving much behind them.

Spengler made two basic mistakes on the way to reaching these conclusions; first, he did not place each culture in its proper historical context and therefore could not see cultures as products of civilizations, not wildflowers coming from nowhere and disappearing in thin air. As products of civilizations, the fate of each culture and the pattern of its development are very much dependent on the fate of the civilization that produced it and its fate. And second, he failed to see the impact of religion on people’s consciousness and way of thinking; he said that “what one cannot learn, one cannot be influenced by”. But looking at how religious believers react during times of religious revival, or how

they behave in reaction to injury to religious symbols one must conclude that the more mysterious an idea is, the more influence it has on people who believe in it.

Since every person's religion is an accident of birth, followers of most religions believe in the sanctity of their faith without understanding the message or the core teachings of it. Nevertheless, most believers act like wild animals in defending their religions against critics. However, all religions are claims that cannot be proven or disproven. But having lasted many centuries and deepened their roots in each society and the conscience of billions of people, religions cannot be erased or neglected. And no matter what happens to life on this planet and civilization, most people are not expected to abandon religion because it provides them with solace and hope, which the poor and the weak in particular need to survive the ups and downs of the current turbulent world.

In 2013, I published a book under the title; "*Global Economic and Cultural Transformation: The Making of History*". The book articulates a new conception of history that explains how human societies developed over time; it identifies four stages of societal development or civilizations. The first civilization was the primitive tribal stage which started about 13 thousand years ago and ended with the emergence of the agricultural civilization about ten thousand years ago. The traditional agricultural civilization was followed by the mechanical industrial civilization in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which was followed by the dynamic knowledge civilization that started in the mid-1990s.

Moving from one stage of development to another, all societies had to pass through transitional periods. The transition for the tribal to the agricultural age lasted about 3,000 years; the transition from the agricultural to the industrial age lasted about 300 years. Based on this sequence, I expected the transition from the industrial to the knowledge age to last 30 years only and end around 2025. This means that the next transitional period will last about 3 years only because every subsequent transitional period needed one-tenth of the time of the preceding one. This means that the new world that we are entering is going to languish in a state of continuous change and transformation for as long as our mother earth maintains its ability to sustain human life.

So, while learning is the way to understand life's complexity and deal with its daily challenges, believing is the way to make commitments that go beyond knowledge and logic. Therefore, one needs to be aware of these matters to experience life and understand others and their convictions; he also needs to be sensitive not to hurt the feelings of friends and believers in general. This is important to appreciate the motives behind mass movements based on feelings rather than on scientific facts, and how they might develop and be transformed in the process. We also need to understand that cultures are living creatures that grow, develop, change, and often lose relevancy due to the passing of time and the coming of new civilizations. Every stage of human development or civilization brings with it its different society, culture, and economy; and thus its own social, political, and economic structures that differ fundamentally from those of previous civilizations.

However, no religion can transform any society and equip it with the means to lead the world or catch up with advanced societies because no religion is capable of producing new ideas to transform the world. Religion, like freedom and democracy, are ideas that transformed most human societies and gave people hope. But since every idea is a product of its times, it has a life of its own that could be long or short, but never perpetual. No idea, system, or roadmap can live a perpetual productive life. Only ideas and systems based on scientific facts can change the living conditions of people and transform the world.

## Who are You?

Most of us live and die without knowing who we are because what we are is not how we look, or to which family or nation we belong, but what we do and represent and accomplish in life. So you are what you say and what you do, what you read and for what purpose, how you live your life, and how you treat others; these are acts that reflect how you think, and what your core values are, what you believe in and what you seek to accomplish in life, what you stand for, and what you leave behind for other generations when the journey of life ends.

If you have nothing to say that is worth repeating by others in your absence, or cannot do something worth imitating by friends and foes alike, you would have lived a life not worth living or mentioning; you would have failed the test of both life and time. And whoever fails the test of life and time is a liability to be avoided, not an asset to be embraced. So after you die, it would be hard for anyone to remember you in either a good or bad way.

If you find yourself often on people's minds, and a force affecting the way they think and live or behave, you would have lived a good life worth imitating; a life that deserves to be repeated and celebrated by others. Your admirers are more likely to write about you, repeat your words, even establish a public institution in your name to encourage

others to imitate you.

But if you can say something worth repeating by others, and do things that are worth imitating by friends and foes alike, and leave behind a wealth of ideas for others to read and benefit from, you would have lived a beautifully productive and admirable life; for which you will be rewarded by living in the memory of history and the actions of people for generations to come.

Though Alexander the Great was probably the smartest army commander in history, he is remembered mainly for his conquests, the killing of his perceived enemies, and killing probably a million people in his quest for power. Yet Aristotle, Socrates, and Averroes are known for their philosophy and wisdom, which made them pillars of rational thinking throughout the ages. On the other hand, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela are known for their defense of human rights, and rejection of colonialism and racial discrimination. And what distinguishes these three great men is their call for peaceful action to change reality, forgiving their oppressors, and building new societies and cultures on the ruins of the past. While no rational person today wishes to be like Alexander the Great, millions of young men and women wish and strive to be like the other six great men.

Considering what those great people have done to be remembered by many generations and find a place for themselves on Wikipedia and every book of philosophy should motivate you to plan a career for yourself to be remembered by the history of ideas, science, peaceful action to change the world and set an example for others to

follow. Yes, there are many more great people today that deserve to be listened to and imitated, like Bill Gates, and Jeff Bezos, but all of these people are in a race to make more money and accumulate more wealth and deepen the socioeconomic gaps in our societies and global village and thus divide rather than unite us. So the choice is yours, to join the movement that works hard to humanize and unite us or the few who are working harder to enrich themselves and raise the barriers that divide us.

## 28

### Who are We?

To start thinking about who we are and where we came from, we need first to understand four things and accept them as indisputable facts:

1. We exist in a complex universe that has tens of billions of stars that no one knows where they came from or how many they are, or what will happen to them.
2. That all the truth that exists is objective, but not absolute,
3. Logic and rationality are above mysteries and myths and miracles; and
4. Belief in science is the key to discovering the truth.

Our existence is not predetermined as most religions claim, and our will emanates from us, and not from an obscured force that controls us. When our will is free, it becomes a tool that we can use to make and remake our living conditions, and how to live our lives and choose what we like to believe in, as well as the religion we prefer to have.

No matter what the rules of every game are, and no matter how we accept and obey them, they do not determine by themselves the outcome of any game we play in life. We, the people, are the ones who determine the outcome of each game because we are the players who

have a stake in every game, the winning and the losing ones. But to do so, we must learn the rules of the games we like to play, and how to use those rules to our advantage.

Things we do not know should not scare us and cause us to refer them to God; there are a lot of things that our ancestors did not know that we know today. Our ancestors' fear of the unknown is what led them to create religion and imagine the existence of a creator or God who manages the universe of which we are only a tiny part. God, assuming there is a creator, gave us a brain that seems to have unlimited capacity to think and create things that help us manage our lives and discover many of the elements of the truth that exists inside and outside us. This is the only truth that should matter to us; everything else is illusions.

The role of the human genes is very important in influencing our feelings and vulnerability to certain diseases and mishaps; however, genes do not make us or form our consciousness. Self-awareness and consciousness have evolved gradually through trial and error and learning and gaining more knowledge over many thousands of years. And this has come as a result of the human experience in facing life challenges and living together in one place and getting to know one another. Since our interaction with one another in good and bad times and our collective experience is what forms our consciousness and self-awareness, we should consider our experience as a major tool to understand the past and guide us to build a better future for all.

If all the diseases and natural catastrophes and wars and pain and

agony and poverty and oppression and brutality is not enough punishment in this life, and that more punishment still awaits us in the afterlife, then God has nothing to do except punish his children that he is supposedly created in his image. So what God is that? And how could such a God be loving or merciful as almost all religions claim?

**No one can get real satisfaction in life unless he realizes the essence of life and learns the rules of how to play the game of life.**

## Words to Remember

You must remember that you can go fast by yourself, but you cannot go far in life without the help of others. People can be hands to help you carry something heavy; they can be words to inspire you to think and reflect and plan better; they can be new ideas and experiences to learn from and enhance the stock of your knowledge. And no matter what you do and how you live and where you go, you are a part of a large society of people. People around you are the sea in which you dive to swim and refresh on a hot summer day, knowing beforehand that you are safe to go far without worrying about getting driven away by a raging sea and drown.

You must also remember that you cannot keep beautiful relationships in your life unless you continuously inject new life into those relationships. Relationships are like a flower garden; it needs to be watered now and then and cared for so that the flowers continue to bloom and give you the opportunity to enjoy them. If you neglect your favorite relationships for a while, they fade away and slowly die leaving behind memories that often make you feel bad because you missed the chance to nurture them and help them grow and bloom.

No one fails in life, but everyone misses opportunities; therefore, you should not feel bad if you miss an opportunity because it is life's

nature to give everyone a second and often a third chance. But to be able to recognize the opportunity and take advantage of it, you need to stay alert, keep your eyes open, and your mind focused on what you want to be in life. Knowing what you want to be is an invaluable compass that helps you to navigate the sea of life, and finds the shores of hope where opportunities live, grow, multiply and please the hearts of those who recognize them.

Everyone has the right to make mistakes, but smart people know that they have no right to repeat their own mistakes. People who think, work hard, and try to do substantive things in life are destined to make mistakes; a mistake, however, must be viewed as an experience to learn from, not a sin to regret making. Whoever fails to learn from his mistakes is destined to repeat them and expose himself to loss of confidence and sometimes loss of direction as well, and this undermines his chances to succeed and reach his desired goals in life.

Learning in college is not meant to make you change your mind; rather, it is meant to train you how to use your brain; and once you learn how to use your brain, everything changes in your life; you become more able to face challenges with confidence and without fear. So, no one should fear change because life does not stop changing and surprising us. Whoever does not change does not live a life worth living, because life is a love story in the making that never stops evolving and challenging its lovers to learn and adapt.

College is not a place to indoctrinate you to believe in lofty ideals or adopt a certain ideology; rather, it is a place to expose you to many

ideas and competing ideologies and help you use your eyes and ears and critical mind to evaluate what you see and hear and read and feel without outside pressure. And based on that, you decide what you like and dislike doing; and consequently, choose for yourself what is lofty and realistic and desired to adopt, what is exciting and moral to follow, and what is profitable but unethical to avoid; and thus what is good for you to learn and pursue as a lifetime goal or career.

Going to college is not meant to help you get a diploma only, it is meant, first and for most, to help you learn something new, acquire as much knowledge as you can, and train your brain to think rationally and critically and chose among the many competing ideas and careers open to you. And contrary to traditional wisdom, there are no good careers and bad ones; your career is what you like to do and enjoy doing most because your career is your life story.

If you look around, you are likely to find unsuccessful physicians who attended first-class universities, and successful hairdressers who did not complete high school. The secret behind this puzzle is not hard to discover, the unsuccessful physician never liked to be a doctor, he chose that career for its prestige and the money it generates or under pressure from his parents or friends; while the successful hairdresser chose his career because he loves to help people look and feel beautiful, and enjoys talking to his customers who represent all careers and human shades and different cultures in society.

## The Negative and Positive

Some people behave as if there were born and raised and taught to be negative; just like the many who are taught and raised to discriminate against others and hate them for no apparent reason. But this is not a natural human attribute; otherwise, no progress would have been made throughout history. Nevertheless, every one of us can be sometimes negative due to a bad experience with someone or something; he also can be positive and have a great attitude and contribute positively to every situation and serve himself and others. Here is how you can be positive and not negative:

The positive: When faced with a problem, he thinks about a solution.

The negative: When faced with a problem, he thinks of people to blame.

The positive: When faced with a challenge, he thinks of endless options.

The negative: When faced with a challenge, he thinks of endless excuses.

The positive: He shows courage and readiness to help others in need.

The negative: He tends to complain and wait for others to help

him.

The positive: He sees an opportunity in every challenge in life.

The negative: He sees every challenge as a serious problem.

The positive: he sees a solution for each problem.

The negative: he sees a problem in each solution.

The positive: He tends to acknowledge that solutions are hard but possible.

The negative: He tends to see possible solutions as hard to implement.

The positive: He is often busy thinking of dreams to realize.

The negative: He is often busy thinking of rumors to spread around.

The positive: He treats others as he wants them to treat him.

The negative: He thinks of how to fool others before they fool him.

The positive: He focuses on the rewards of work.

The negative: He focuses on the pain of work.

The positive: He sees promising possibilities in the future

The negative: He sees no hope of change in the future.

The positive: He chooses his words carefully.

The negative: He criticizes what he hears without stating his position.

The positive: In heated discussions, he speaks with a soft voice.

The negative: In soft discussions, he speaks with a loud voice.

The positive: He sticks to values and principles and ignores trivial issues.

The negative: He sticks to trivial issues and ignores values and principles.

The positive: He tries to make things happen for him.

The negative: He waits for things to happen to him.

## Memoirs and Life

Memoirs are stories and views of life that are based on people's own experiences. In such stories and experiences, memoirs writers try to depict the spirit of the times they lived over the years since they were born; they also try to identify the trends of change that governed the making of the history they experienced and the cultures that colored that history. And in the light of their observations, memoirs writers try to predict what is likely to happen in the future. Memoirs, therefore, are road maps that the dying generation leaves for the younger ones to learn from and use as lights to help them navigate the dark alleys of life, not as examples to follow. Thus, memoirs reflect experiences of personal change and growth, success and failure, hope and despair, as well as the sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and sociocultural transformations they witnessed and participated in making, often unconsciously.

People usually try to write their memoirs before they start losing their memories while waiting to die; any serious mistake in memoirs discredit the entire story it tells because the writer exposes himself to accusations of being senile. So, anyone who wants to write his or her memoirs must be aware of this fact; he must try to write as soon as he feels that his life journey is about to end. Writers who live longer and

richer and more diversified life experiences than the norm tend to write more details and thus leave for future generations more lessons to learn from and more examples to follow and identify more pitfalls to avoid.

Any person with a unique life experience must write his memoirs; everyone who values his humanity must understand that what he lived is not his property alone; it is a shared property and therefore he bears a great responsibility to share it with others and let them benefit from it. Futurists, in contrast, try to imagine the future they expect their children and grandchildren to witness and thus help them prepare for what is expected to come. Some people, especially strong believers in the existence of an afterlife try to create the kind of life they would like to have in the afterlife, causing readers to be divided between believers and deniers.

The best memoirs, in my opinion, are those that tell the story of the past and its major social, cultural, political, and economic transformations as the writer witnessed them; as well as how he would live that life if he were to have another chance. And by so doing, the writer would be drawing a moral and principled road map for future generations. So, memoirs are valuable tools capable of helping generations eager to learn and manage their lives and avoid many of the mistakes that the previous generation had committed. Memoirs, therefore, are tools to bridge the gap between the nostalgic past, the often-unsettling present, and the ideals of the future as imagined by those who lived a full life in the past and the present.

My memoirs, for example, tell the story of my life journey from

comfortable and happy childhood to living in a refugee camp inhabited by snakes, killer scorpions, misery, abject poverty, cruelty, insecurity, and need. And the steady rise from there to become a distinguished professor and author of dozens of books and hundreds of scientific papers. And on road to this stage, I lived the life of more than 600 generations with wide-opened eyes and an unmatched awareness of the major transformations that the world has witnessed in several developed and developing countries. And as a consequence, I was able to write one of the first books on conflict resolution in which I developed the theory of conflict resolution; in addition to writing a new conception of history and the first theory of sustainable development; all of which could not have happened without the difficult but colorful life journey I lived and the awareness that the diaspora awakened in my heart and mind.

## The Individual and Power

During the tribal times, culture was shaped by tribal customs and traditions and norms and feuds with other tribes; and because of that, culture regulated relationships within each tribe and between tribes; in the meanwhile, the tribe represented the basic unit of the tribal society. As for the agricultural society, the clan or the extended family replaced the tribe as the basic unit of society. Traditions and customs and norms represented the law that governed the relationships within each clan and between the clans in agricultural times, especially in the absence of state authority and superstructure and institutions. However, the social structures of both the tribe and the clan were hierarchical; and because of that, they gave no freedom to the individual, and therefore, no meaning role to play in societal life.

Consequently, all tribes and clans gave the interests and security of the tribe and the clan priority over the interests and security of both the individual and society. The traditions and customs of those social units asked the individual and expected him to sacrifice his interests and security for the sake of the group to which he belonged. In exchange, the tribe and the clan assumed responsibility for protecting the property and honor of its members. But this kind of relationship caused personal initiatives to be vastly restricted, leading both tribe and clan to fail in

making meaningful change in their social or economic, or cultural lives, causing those societies to freeze in time while maintaining a circular movement in place. Therefore, both tribal and agricultural societies failed to make scientific or economic, or philosophical progress worth mentioning.

In the industrial society, the nucleus family replaced the clan of the agricultural society, but it created religious and ethnic communities that played the roles of the tribe and the extended family in the early stages of industrialization. However, the ties between members of these communities were weaker and less restrictive than the older ones, because the older ties came with birth, while the new ties came with awareness and therefore they were products of choice. Consequently, the family interests and security gained priority over the interests and security of the community. And this, in turn, freed the individual from the oppressive tribal and clannish ties, causing personal initiatives to become possible and much welcomed, particularly in the fields of finance, economics, and innovations. Consequently, the individual, the state, the public, and most private institutions became major players shaping the life and future of industrial society.

Today, as the knowledge society and its culture spread and become prominent in many parts of the world, the interests and security of the individual have gained priority over those of community and nation and even family, making older ties within religious and ethnic communities largely dysfunctional. The knowledge man of the new age does not seem to give much credence to any community or abide by its

rules of conduct and association. Therefore, the interests of the individual are increasingly being realized at the expense of all groupings in the knowledge society. However, this unusual development could not have happened without the freedom that most people enjoy in this society and the laws that regulate individual and communal life. While some individuals are taking advantage of this environment to work hard and excel; others have continued to be attached to old rules that tie them to faith and ethnic and cultural communities and cause them to lose time and opportunities and status.

In almost all developing and largely undemocratic states, corruption has made it possible for the individual to seize most opportunities and enrich himself at the expense of all groups, society, and nation; all of this has become possible due to the absence of the rule of law, freedom, and fair competition. Individuals having the right political and social connections can get what they want even in the absence of good education. Therefore, neither freedom nor justice nor democracy nor equal opportunity can be achieved unless corruption and nepotism are eliminated, and the interests of the individual are subordinated to the interests of society and humanity. Genuine progress is the change that protects everyone's rights and achieves social justice for all. However, we need to recognize that corruption is not the cause of backwardness and lack of social justice, it is rather an aspect of the hierarchical social formations that continue to overshadow the law in all tribal and agricultural societies.

What is needed is a new vision to balance the interests and

freedoms of the individual and those of the community and society and nation and humanity; and transform centers of political and economic and financial and media power into social entities that compete on the bases of conduct, ethics, and the quality of their production. Such entities need to be regulated so that serving their interests be a byproduct of serving those of community, society, nation, and humanity. Education, equal opportunity, freedom, and the transformation of older cultures are the tools that can achieve these goals and help us navigate the chaos of the present and avoid the catastrophes that loom on the horizon of our future.

## 33

### Viewing Life Challenges

Emerging issues and unexpected problems, to be understood and appreciated, must be placed in their proper societal and historical, and often global contexts. Contexts represent a little candle that lights the dark tunnels of every crisis and takes us through the seas of pain and despair to the shores of change and hope. Contexts are needed to help us navigate the uncharted terrain we must cross to face every challenge and resume normal life without fear. As contexts light the dark angles of every challenge, they open our eyes and minds and collective consciousness and help us become aware of the magnitude of the difficulties we face and must overcome. By the time we complete the journey through the dark tunnels and see the light again, the candle dies slowly, signaling the end of the era we left behind dying of neglect and old age, and the arrival at the shores of a promising future that lies ahead.

This point in our collective journey represents an obscured line that disconnects us from the past and links us to a future we know almost nothing about. So, after crossing the uncharted terrain, we discover that we can no longer go back because we have no candles to light our way into the past. And this forces us to adjust to a new life that has little or nothing to do with the past we just left behind. Therefore,

the past becomes a legacy to speak about with passion or disdain, and a space to imagine and dream; but not a place to live in or even to visit. The train of time tells us that there is no way for anyone to go back in time; you may be able to imitate the past in your dreams or appearance, but you cannot live the past as a way of life or even use its language to understand the new life and communicate with its peoples, even with your children.

Groups, societies, and cultures that view challenges as threats to their cherished values and traditional ways of living tend to retreat in thought and behavior to the past every time they face a serious challenge; and that makes them more conservative, more resistant to change, and more protective of what they have, though most of what they have no longer counts. Consequently, they make their situation more complex, not less, and cause overcoming the challenges they face more costly and time-consuming. Therefore, preserving old ways of life and traditional cultures in the face of new challenges is a recipe for closing the minds and living in isolation. However, closing the minds and living in isolation causes conservative groups and societies to trail competitors who choose to adjust as circumstances change and modify their ways of living to suit the new times.

Therefore, the first step that must be taken by a society facing a serious crisis emanating from a fundamental change in the regional or global balance of power, or due to transitioning from one civilization to a new one is to develop new sets of values, traditions, laws, and ways of thinking about the past and the future; they also need to accept

adjustments to change as inevitable, while preserving the spirit of honesty, equality, respect for human rights and caring for the weak and the poor. And the second step that must be taken is to build new strategies and institutions and instruments to manage change and deal positively with the life complexity that is expected to follow. And the third and last step is to change the educational system and upgrade its curricula to train the new generations how to deal with the new age and excel under its umbrella while trying to influence the trends of change to suit their desires and help them achieve their individual and collective dreams and aspirations.

History tells us that change is inevitable and will continue to evolve and complicate our lives; therefore, history advises us to adapt to change and be ready to deal with its many consequences that cover all aspects of life. Since change is a societal process that cannot be stopped, we must deal with it as a challenge that has no end in sight. All challenges represent difficult problems and great opportunities at the same time. Societies that viewed challenges as problems to be avoided rather than as opportunities to harness were losers; in contrast, societies that saw challenges as opportunities rather than problems only were winners. Nations that dealt with internal and external challenges as threats to be avoided, became easy targets for the forces of colonization that killed many of them, stole their natural resources, and perpetuated their backwardness. In contrast, Nations that dealt with internal and external challenges as opportunities were able to face the forces of colonization and escape being subjected to exploitation and backwardness. Nations that chose to retreat into their cultural cocoons,

of which faith is a major component, were unable to free themselves from a self-inflicted wound that gets worse as time passes.

## Religion and Society

In the age of agriculture, and among all traditionally underdeveloped societies, social life was one of religion, meaning that religion was everything in life, and life was almost totally devoted to religion. For committed believers, religion was and still is an ideal to live for and, if necessary, die for as well. In the age of industry, interests, mainly material interests triumphed over old values, and realism triumphed over idealism, causing religion to be reduced to a mere social system whose primary goal is to create and sustain communities of faith. In other words, the industrial age transformed the ideas and ideals of religion into sociocultural institutions meant to meet the spiritual needs of their members and encourage them to behave morally and support its message. And while people still pay homage to religious ideals and give money to churches, temples, synagogues, and mosques, sometimes generously, they seldom live or die for their religions or what religion represents anymore.

In the knowledge age, religion is rapidly becoming personal and familial, rather than societal or even communal. Therefore, places of worship have become meeting places for people who lack spirituality and others who need moral support to find spiritual comfort, as well as for individuals marginalized by the breathtaking pace of socioeconomic

and sociocultural change and scientific developments in society. And while diehard believers are still willing to give money to churches and temples and synagogues, they expect their personal needs to be fulfilled in return, forcing religious institutions to tailor their services to the needs of their clientele. And in so doing, churches compete, branch out, provide drive-in services, and act as theaters where music is played, and shows are performed. As a consequence, the new age has caused the old religious ideals to be subdued, often subordinated to personal interests, elevating man to a position where he can observe religion perform, rather than being observed by religion and judged by it.

Since most Islamic societies still live in pre-industrial times, religion continues to play a leading role in individual and communal life. Nevertheless, the fast pace of global change and sociocultural and socioeconomic transformations have affected Muslim societies in contradictory ways, causing some people to become less religious and more socially and intellectually open, while pushing others to be more religious and socially conservative, and largely closed-minded. As a result, Muslim societies are witnessing a religious revival, religious decline, and religious extremism at the same time. While religious revival is about the past and its ideals and way of living, the religious decline is about the future and its scientific facts and way of life; religious extremism, meanwhile is about maintaining religious control of most aspects of life, which makes religious extremism a force of repression and suppression that suffocates free speech and limits change and restricts personal freedoms and initiatives.

Therefore, the trends of change that Islamic societies are witnessing today must not be mistaken or confused. Any victory the conservative religious forces make in the short run will be at the expense of progress and the freedom of almost every member of society and the future of future generations. Nevertheless, regression, regardless of its magnitude and duration, will be erased in the long run, because no society can live in the past forever or create a future in the image of a long gone past. However, diehard religious believers are likely to cause a lot of social and cultural damage and make the eventual victory of the progressive forces more costly but less than desired and probably needed to free society from the many religious chains and allow it to move forward and catch up with the developed nations of the world. Since the ability of ideologies to close the minds of their followers is tremendous, they cause the recovery of individual and communal sanity a difficult and painful task indeed.

## Togetherness as Empowerment

International non-governmental organizations working in the developing countries and among peoples lagging in income and education always talk about empowering the poor and the weak, particularly poor women. And to accomplish this objective, they usually design training programs and establish funds to provide financial assistance to help those in need and encourage them to start cooperatives to participate in the social and economic life of society. There is no doubt that such programs help the targeted people and make them often feel empowered, but after the programs run their course, their impact disappears or diminishes substantially, leaving the poor and weak largely without help or protection. Since this kind of empowerment has a short life, it cannot continue to perform its role unless the state protects and support it, especially where the male dominates the female in traditional societies.

In rural areas, women usually help each other by forming small groups, where each woman contributes the same amount of money each month; and the sum of all contributions is loaned to a member of the group, starting with the woman who needs the loan most. This is repeated every month, so each member gets the same amount of money once every cycle to meet a family's health or educational needs or to start a productive or trading enterprise. Assuming a group of 12

women, each contributing \$20 a month; each woman gets the chance to get a \$240 loan interest-free once every year. This simply means that each woman loans \$20 a month to a friend and all friends pay her back her money at one point during the year. If this arrangement continues the empowerment of women would continue as well. Such empowerment could be strengthened and made very attractive if the state were to contribute \$30 monthly to each group of 10 to 12 members, and \$50 to each group of over 12 members. The contribution of the state signals to participating women that the state supports them financially and morally and encourages them to become productive members of society and more reliant on themselves. Self-reliance makes such women independent and free to use their income as they wish; it thus liberates those women from the chains of religions and traditionalism, as it creates and sustains a shared spirit of togetherness.

This is the only way to empower women and the poor without help from the outside and without having to pay interest on loans; this arrangement also strengthens their belief that they share one destiny. This is empowerment through togetherness; women getting together to empower each other and feel better about themselves. The empowerment that comes from the outside causes women and the poor to feel the indignation of dependence on people they do not know and can hardly trust, because they know they will leave and go to their countries sooner rather than later. So, empowerment from the inside is more humane, long-lasting, and guaranteed to work without exposing the poor and largely uneducated women to any form of exploitation or intimidation by outsiders or men or crippling traditions.

To understand the power of getting together, just consider the Tunisian, Egyptian, and Yemeni uprisings of 2011; all started and accomplished their initial objectives of deposing the rulers who oppressed them without help from any foreign organization, political party, state, ideology, or even encouragement from the outside. There is no doubt that Facebook and other social media outlets helped activists to launch their movements and empower millions of individuals to overcome the barrier of fear and participate in the uprisings.

To picture empowerment from within and without outside help or encouragement just consider how would you feel if you were to find yourself standing in front of a demonstration that you sympathize with because you share its goals but without prior experience in such activities. In the beginning, you are more likely to feel that this is not what you usually do; hesitate for a few minutes, and then join the crowd of demonstrators without enthusiasm or intention to shout like others. But minutes later, you start shouting with others and forget yourself, because you become a member of an empowered crowd and not yourself anymore.

To empower any group to defend a cause they share or claim a right they are entitled to but denied, all that you need to do is to create a network of people and organizations and announce the nature of the cause that the group intends to support or defend. Every noble cause has millions of supporters who love to adopt and defend and try peacefully to accomplish its goals. Young and old, women and men, employed and unemployed, rich and poor, strong and weak getting

together to empower each other to achieve a human goal they all share. Today, because of the change our world is going through, the need to form such groups is ripe and social media is open to facilitate collective action; and the need to free each other from political, financial, economic, and traditional oppression and discrimination and enslavement is urgent.

**So, together, we empower each other, create a global power,  
and change our world for the better.**

## Mind and Change

Changing attitudes and lifestyles depend on people's ability to change their minds, which are often chained by cultural traditions and value systems and religious teachings that usually resist change. Therefore, changing attitudes and lifestyles and ways of thinking become a function of transforming education systems and cultures that value stability and encourage contentment. This means that the way to genuine change and enlightenment passes through the building of new education systems and transforming traditional cultures. So, the upbringing of children at home and educating them at schools and universities are where the change in attitudes and ways of thinking should start and end. Exposing children and students to varied and contradictory ideas and different facts lead them to view themselves and the other and the world differently and thus change the way they think, the way they view life challenges, and the way they deal with most issues.

The European Enlightenment was a process of fundamental change that covered all aspects of individual and communal and national life that took about two centuries to complete. During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the ideas concerning God, reason, nature, freedom, the separation of state and church, and humanity were synthesized into a worldview that gained wide acceptance in the West. Consequently,

this view instigated fundamental change in the cultural values and traditions and the education and political and economic systems. Being a societal process, change covered attitudes toward economic activities, political philosophies, religious thought, and forms of freedom. Therefore, the Enlightenment liberated most Europeans from the authoritarian rule that the state and the church imposed on them for generations to keep them ignorant and submissive. The adoption of reason and critical thinking and the application of the scientific method to study and evaluate ideas and examine claims were instrumental in helping the transformation process succeed and be sustained ever since.

The Enlightenment established the ideals of individual freedoms, economic growth, scientific inquiry, and technological innovation that had barely existed at the time in any society of the West or East. The concepts of democracy, economic freedom, social liberty, freedom of expression, and the separation of powers gave ordinary people the power to influence change and participate in making decisions that affect their lives through participation in the political process. Consequently, people were able to change their lives and shape their future through planning, learning, and hard work, while democracy gave equal opportunity to education and work. And though the rights to participate in the political process were limited to men at the beginning, women were able to gain the same rights in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both in Europe and America.

And that gave traders, financiers, entrepreneurs, innovators, and

owners of industrial plants the ability to form a new aristocracy rooted in trade, industry, financial services, and foreign investment, rather than land ownership. The expansion and diversification of economic and financial activity, especially during the colonization era, made the emergence of this aristocracy not only possible but inevitable. And unlike the old aristocracy that came from royalty or through wealth inheritance, the new aristocracy came from hard work, creativity, and imagination, making the utilization of body and mind the tools to achieve success and social status in a society dominated by industrialization.

Nevertheless, the new aristocracy is as vicious as the old one in exploiting the poor, the weak, women, and children, while building very wealthy and powerful dynasties at their expense. The European aristocracy established business and financial dynasties, most of which have survived the upheavals of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and flourished, despite its inefficiency and corruption. On the other hand, the contributions of the enlightenment to all types of freedom and democracy and liberal values, though tremendous, were less transformative than the scientific, economic, and industrial activates it created and sustained since then. Nevertheless, viewed from a wider historical and societal perspective, it would be easy to conclude that the world we live in today has become more advanced and sophisticated and rich, but less caring than before and more materialistic than ever. Moreover, materialism and lust for money have made the economic and financial and political and military and media elites of the world as vicious as the barbarians of the distant past, if not more. It also made religion an outdated social system with limited capacity to influence

individual and communal lives and cause a change in its image; any change that religion causes today is more negative than positive.

## Society and Change

Due to the influence of a fast-changing world, societies are losing what held them together for many generations; they are being exposed to a process of sociocultural fragmentation that threatens their unity and security and probably survival over the long run. Therefore, all societies need to reinvent the intangibles that helped them to stay together in the past; otherwise, many societies will be subjected to political fragmentation, and possibly civil wars as the experiences of Yugoslavia and Sudan demonstrate. Since cultures cannot change fast enough to accommodate themselves to the changes in the economic, political, scientific, and technological fields, societies, to survive and flourish, need to transform their cultures and restructure production relations and create a balance between interests that motivate people to work hard and values that invoke them to be honest and compassionate. As they try to reinvent what holds them together, societies need to promote the culture of tolerance and respect for the rights of others, and undermine the culture of political polarization and racial discrimination that weaken the unity and resolve of all societies; they also need to develop the law to protect these rights and values.

We must recognize that no one can reshape the past, not even touch it. However, we all can shape the future and influence its course;

therefore, we need to envision the future we desire and work together to shape it. Otherwise, most societies are likely to lose both the present and the future and what makes them one society living in peace. The past can always be interpreted in ways that enable us to reinvent what holds us together and facilitate peaceful social and cultural change; the reinterpretation of history can help every nation to transform the attitudes of its people and value systems to be more positive and tolerant, and create a new environment more conducive to cultural transformation and political democratization and social harmonization. Reading history properly can also help societies develop a collective consciousness that promotes unity, social justice, peace, and keep the nation united around shared values and socioeconomic interests.

Individualism and the new scientific developments that enabled the internet companies and social media to collect all kinds of information regarding our behavior and habits and desires have transformed our secrets and private lives into commercial commodities for sale, even the lives of innocent children. Therefore, they have reduced our humanity and undermined our ability to live as free people with minds to think and values to cherish and legitimate interest to pursue. Manipulating our fears and needs and desires and emotions to make money has become very dangerous, it threatens our ability to function normally and feel secure in our homes where we live and the streets where we walk, and the shopping malls where we meet, socialize, and buy the necessities of life.

This is an important cause that people can rally around to defend

their rights and force all such companies to stop using any private information as commodities to sell to the highest bidder. Just changing your phone number has become in America an opportunity to sell to thousands of advertisers who disrupt your normal life by calling you tens of times every day, and in the process, waste your time and make you feel haunted by voices that use schemes and intimidation and sometimes threats to exploit you and denigrate what you represent as a human being.

## Spending and Living

When you spend your money on things you do not need, you often do so to imitate people who have more money, or to live a life as if there is no tomorrow to worry about, or because you were enticed by a commercial to buy an attractive thing you never had before. Anyone who acts this way is not thinking rationally, because he is spending the money he must have to take care of himself and his family in case he is faced with a difficult situation like losing his job or getting sick. Everyone must remember that all people get old, sometimes get sick and need help, and often see their major sources of income decline or dry out due to circumstances beyond their control. Today, job security and the abundance of jobs are slowly disappearing as the age of knowledge advances. Automation and sophisticated robots and computers are taking over many of the jobs that were available a few decades ago. As you plan for the future you should consider financial security a challenge you have to prepare for now, not later. There are two ways to face this serious challenge; each one of us needs either to save enough money for a lengthy retirement or work together to transform the systems that have managed our individual and communal lives over the last century and caused financial and job insecurity to become the norm rather than the exception.

Therefore, everyone should be spending his money on things he needs only and saving the money he does not need to spend now; a good life should be affordable, not wasteful. No one can control or even anticipate future surprises and emergencies that require more money than usual. While savers are likely to be prepared to meet unexpected developments with confidence, spenders are less likely to handle such situations without pain and sometimes the indignation of having to ask others for financial help. People who think and behave rationally are more likely to live decent lives while working and guaranteeing a dignified life while earning little or no money.

Everyone can save some money no matter how little he or she may earn. If the saving process starts early in life and becomes a habit, the twenty or thirty dollars a month saved would grow fast to become hundreds and thousands without much effort. The way to do this is to program your mind to think that your weekly or monthly income is the residual after depositing the amount allotted to saving in your bank saving account. What is left after that should be the money available to pay your regular bills and spend on buying the things you need to survive and enjoy life.

This means that your income should be devoted to doing three major things: first, paying all bills on time so you avoid paying interest and penalties, second, saving to meet unexpected future circumstances and retirement requirements, and third, spending on activities and things that make you happy and enjoy life. This way you would not feel being deprived of spending your money, because the portion devoted

to savings becomes not your money to spend now; instead, it becomes money that belongs to your future or the education of your children or to taking care of yourself when the need arises or to compensate for the loss of income when the usual sources dwindle or seize to exist.

## The Politics of Power

In democratic societies in general, politics determine the extent and limits of the powers that rulers and states have; it also defines the ways to use power and when to use it, and the reasons for using it. In contrast, power in undemocratic societies determines the extent of political legitimacy rulers enjoy; therefore, rulers in such societies tend to have unlimited political and economic power and use their power to confiscate the rights of most citizens with impunity. In undemocratic societies power controls everything and determines the fate of everyone, including people; citizenship has no rights to be respected, only obligations to be fulfilled.

Rulers in democratic societies are only able to rule within the limits defined by the constitution and according to the laws of the land. People in the meantime choose their leaders through regular and free elections in which all eligible citizens enjoy the right to participate. In contrast, in most undemocratic societies, rulers conduct elections not to reflect the will of the people, but the desire of the rulers; political power in such societies knows no limits; it determines the identity of the rulers and the extent of their privileges to control all major aspects of life, including the space that every citizen needs to have to live and be productive.

Since political and economic objectives are intertwined and largely

inseparable, political power in democratic societies is usually used to facilitate economic and financial activities and regulate their many aspects and roles in society. Regulations are enacted to prevent monopoly and encourage free and fair competition among producers; they also safeguard the rights of both workers and consumers and protect the environment. However, economic power and money are often used to manipulate politicians and corrupt politics, and thus influence legislative changes in favor of the rich and at the expense of workers, consumers, and the environment.

In undemocratic societies, political power is used to control economic activity and gain more economic power and wealth, without regard to the rights and needs of the poor, the weak, and the disadvantaged. And to perpetuate its rule, the ruling class tends to employ corruption as a tool to appease influential people, undermine sociocultural transformation, and prevent political change. And this usually causes societies to suffer oppression and often poverty and lack of adequate healthcare and good education and opportunity. Most African and Arab and Latin American states are controlled by leaders who monopolize power, leaving citizens in distress with little hope.

The connections that tie politics to economics cause the political and economic elites in both democratic and undemocratic societies to form a socioeconomic class that is hard to challenge and harder to tame, particularly in the age of information and communications that allowed the media elite to become an integral component of the ruling socioeconomic class. In fact, by not regulating the media, the ruling elite

opened the door for the media elite to become part of it, where mutual interests tie both parties together. As a consequence, the new ruling class was able to tighten its control of society by employing money and coercion and the media to complete its domination of most aspects of life. The ruling class in the West and East, North and South is able today to own or control the major means of production, the power of politics, and the influence of the media and money, and use them to perpetuate its rule and enhance its powers at the expense of everyone else. The only difference between democratic and undemocratic states in this regard is the degree of control maintained by the ruling class and its size and the extent of its abuse of power.

In most African, Asian, and Latin American countries power determines the limits of political legitimacy and the rights of people including the freedom they enjoy; the ruling class controls political decisions and economic and financial activities and defines the prerogatives of the courts. In the meantime, politics, economics, the courts, and the media are used as tools to perpetuate a vastly unjust system that enriches the rich and impoverishes the poor. And by so doing, the ruling class denies people the right to be free, have equal access to healthcare and social and education services, and even justice. And while these policies undermine the ability of the masses to live worthy lives, they cause backwardness to become a state of mind and an oppressive state of social, cultural, economic, and political affairs on the ground. Consequently, change becomes hard to contemplate and harder to plan and implement. This is why most of these states have remained poor and lack a developed culture and

enough knowledge to change and move to a higher state of societal development.

According to Joseph Nye of Harvard University, power is the ability to get others to do what is needed to be done so you get what you desire without having to do much. Nye says that there are two sources of power; hard power and soft power; however, each power has its special sources from which it emanates. While hard power derives its ability to influence the actions of others from tangible things like military and economic power and money; soft power derives its ability to influence the actions and behavior of others from intangible things like ideas and ideals and values. Such intangibles, as Nye seems to suggest, entice others to follow the advice of the power holder or imitate him and adopt the ideas and ideals and systems he promotes.

This means that the tools that powerful states, organizations, institutions, and individuals use to influence the actions and attitudes of others are coercion, seduction, bribes, and brainwashing. Coercion is the tool that military power usually uses to scare others and threaten them to influence their actions and get what it desires. Seduction is an effective tool to expose others to some of the notable cultural products like movies, music, books, and maybe sex that people of the powerful state usually enjoy. Financial bribes are often used to buy the loyalty or the acquiescence of others and turn them into agents ready to do whatever the financially powerful individual or state wants them to do. And brainwashing is a tool to falsify the consciousness of others, especially the masses, and convince them to follow specific instructions

to meet the demands of the power holder, which charitable organizations, foreign aid programs, and religious institutions excel in doing.

Nevertheless, I believe that there is a third source of power that might be more effective than the hard and soft powers combined; it is the power of ideology. People born in certain religious and national and racial ideologies are usually easy to brainwash, manipulate and lead to do whatever you want them to do; such people are often unable to think for themselves. Diehard believers in religious and secular ideologies alike are trained to believe, not to think. However, the fact that they are easy to manipulate and lead makes them unstable and therefore untrustworthy. They cannot be trusted because they can switch their loyalty from one master to another, and from being a friend to being an arch enemy. So, anyone with the ability to lead and convince and sympathize and bribe can cause ideologues to change allegiance and follow his orders.

## Constructing a new Future

Constructing a new future is a right that everyone should have, and rights should never be forgotten and left to rotten due to negligence. However, before considering how to construct a more suitable future to live and enjoy, you need to look at the past and its experience. People usually choose different ways to construct futures that respond to their needs and help them to achieve their goals and meet their expectations, depending on several considerations.

Since people live in different places and have different cultures, they face different challenges and therefore have to deal with varied situations. People also live under different political systems and environmental settings and have varied cultural traditions and values and desires and ambitions and expectations. Because of these issues and more, people choose different future models that suit their situations and meet their needs. However, some people have the financial resources to construct fancy models capable of meeting their lofty expectations, while others do not have the financial resources to construct costly futures, and therefore are forced to settle for models that allow them to live decent lives and be content.

People who consider constructing a new future must keep in mind that there are many reasons for success as well as for failure. So, to

improve your chances of success and minimize chances of failure, you need to study cases like yours, where failure was avoided, and success was achieved. By so doing you realize how different and often remote the past was from the present you live in, and therefore how remote the future you are trying to construct from both the past and the present. Every society has its state of life and way of life and reasons to live and goals to achieve, depending on the times in which it lives and the resources available to it to use.

Comparing the past with the present should help you to realize that the logic and wisdom of the past are not relevant to the present, let alone to the future. People who consider the glory of a certain period in the past as a point of reference to build a better future have never succeeded; all attempts to construct a more promising future in the image of a glorious past have failed and left people in despair and confusion unable to decide what to do next. When people back a plan for change with confidence and enthusiasm that has no chance of succeeding, they feel devastated when the results come to contradict their expectations. And that often leads them to lose hope and accept failure as a fate no one can change, which makes them feel helpless, and act as if they were brainless walking aimlessly in the dark. And this makes future attempts to change society and overcome underdevelopment very difficult to launch, let alone succeed.

Nevertheless, starting from a point of optimism based on rational thinking and studying the experience of other peoples who faced similar situations like yours can maximize your chances of success and

minimize the chances of failure. However, you need to realize that change does not stop, which means that whatever plan you make must be considered a project in the making that requires modifications and adjustments along the way to completion. The depth and width of the required adjustments and modifications usually depend on the place where you live and the time you live in and the goals you seek to accomplish and the point of departure. Life is the largest and most complicated laboratory in the world, where billions of people cooperate and compete to find new and better ways to live their lives and new, more efficient tools to deal with the unintended social, cultural, economic, political, scientific, and technological transformations that never stop working to change life settings and even goals. And by so doing, science and technology and will change the social, political, cultural, and natural environments surrounding our lives, forcing us to deal with a new set of challenges that make change an integral part of everyday life.

## The Past and the Future

When change and progress is a priority for individuals, the questions that must be asked are:

Who were you yesterday? Who are you today? Who you want to be tomorrow? And has the road you traveled been satisfactory?

When change and progress is a priority for nations, the questions that must be asked are:

Where were you yesterday? Where are you today? Where you want to be tomorrow? And has the road you traveled been satisfactory? And how to get from here to there?

If the past, present, and future life of the individual is the main concern, the major factors that should be considered when we speak about the past are the cultural traditions and values; the belief system to which he belonged; and the kind of education he had. As for the present, the major factors should be the kind of work he does, the level of education he has; the standard of living he enjoys; and the security challenges he faces regarding work and life. And as for the future, the major factors should be the degree of preparedness he has to live in a world that does not stop changing; the level of knowledge he has regarding the

development of science and technology and their impact on life in general; and what kind of plans he has to construct a future that meets his needs and suits him most, in the light of his goals and ambitions and resources.

If the past, present, and future of nations is the main concern, the major factors that should be considered when we speak about the past are the legacy of the past; the collective memory of the people; and their cultural heritage. As for the present, the major factors to be considered are the state of the economy; the standard of living people enjoy, their scientific and technological achievements; and the social and cultural transformations witnessed by society over its way from the past to the present. In contrast, when the future is a major concern, the first factor to be considered is the knowledge factor, followed by the economic factor and then the cultural factor. The most important issues for the past are the cultural and historical legacy; while the most important issues for the present are the state of the economy and the standards of living most people enjoy; and for the future, the most important issues are the kind of knowledge and amount of knowledge it has developed, and how much of that knowledge is being put to good use.

If the present is acknowledged as satisfactory and perceived as good, it means that the road traveled to reach the present was the right one, which implies that all that is needed to get to where you want to be tomorrow is to follow the same path, with probably little change. However, if the present is not satisfactory and perceived as bad, it means that the road traveled so far has been ruff or hazardous, or not

the right one, which implies that there is a need to change the current path. However, no road leading to the future can be like the one that got you from the past to the present. The fundamental changes in the social and economic structures and production relations in society, and the changes in the global environment that humanity witnessed during the last three decades require fundamental changes in the path leading to the future.

Since science and technology are the major factors responsible for causing change and making progress in the economic, social, and cultural areas, the production and accumulation of scientific knowledge and technological innovations claim priority over other factors; and their economic and educational applications become more important than culture itself and the legacy of the past. To make further progress and build a better future, we need to understand that no economic progress or sociocultural transformation is possible without acquiring more knowledge and making more technological innovations, and sharing the fruits of both with others, without losing sight of social justice at both the national and global levels.

## Planning the Future

People planning for a new future and a more promising life need to pass through five stages: first, they need to articulate a clear vision of where they want to be at the end of the transformation process; second, they need to develop detailed, but flexible plans to translate the vision into a reality on the ground; third, they need to have a leadership aware of the need for change and committed to the promises articulated by the vision; forth, they need to create a popular mass movement to mobilize the general public in support of change and transforming life conditions on the ground; and fifth, they need to have the will and courage to act as necessary to cause change and implement the plans and realize the dream.

The vision is needed to paint a picture of the desired future and guide the process of change to its destination. The plans are needed to take society from where it is at the start of the process to where the vision wants society to be. A committed and capable leadership is needed to supervise the implementation of the plans and ensure that no program misses its targets. As for the mass movement, history seems to indicate that no societal transformational process can succeed without a well-organized mass movement that carries the flag of change and protect it; however, mass movements do not always succeed, as

the Arab Spring of 2011 proved; Arabs failed because the mass movement had neither leadership nor strategy, nor a vision.

Yes, some movements fail to achieve their objectives and cause public disappointment; nevertheless, failed movements often cause enough change to make the social environment ready for fundamental change to follow. The Cultural Revolution led by Mao Zedong in China between 1966 and 1976 failed to transform China, but it did transform the Chinese culture, making China's revival not only possible but inevitable. While China had failed for centuries to develop, it was able to transform its society and economy and build the second-largest economy in the world in a matter of four decades.

Sometimes, the state itself launches a comprehensive plan for change and appeals to the general public to support change and participate in its implementation. This is what the state in Japan did in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with great success; and what the American government did following the Great Recession of 1929 with some success, and what President Nasser of Egypt tried to do between 1956 and 1967; and though Nasser achieved some success, internal and external factors intervened and caused his plans to be delayed and die with his death in 1970. The will to act is needed because obstacles often arise and cause processes of change and transformation to be interrupted and undermine people's enthusiasm for change.

A vision without a plan of action is a daydream; while it may be enjoyable, it is futile; it wastes valuable time and effort, and sometimes resources as well. On the other hand, action without vision is an

adventure without a purpose in an inhabited place; it is like walking scared in a dark alley and hoping for good luck. Therefore, the Arab Spring and the Occupy Wall Street movements failed without achieving anything meaningful. Life without vision defined in clear and achievable goals is an aimless process leading to nowhere. Therefore, a vision needs a plan of action to realize it, and a plan of action needs a clear vision to define its goals and guide its movement on the way towards the desired objectives. No matter what you intend to do in life; there is a need to know three basic things; Where you are at the time of planning; where you want to be at the end of your journey; and how to get from where you are to where you want to be.

People who view time as a liability, which most people living in traditional agricultural societies do, tend to emphasize the past and deemphasize the future. In contrast, people who view time as an asset, which almost all people living in industrial and post-industrial societies do, tend to emphasize the future, or deemphasize the past. Since the past represents the collective memories of people belonging to one nation and country, giving priority to memories enables them to find excuses to avoid facing the challenges of the present and ignoring the future. Therefore, they waste a good portion of their time thinking about how to revive a long-lost “golden age” of the past. But since no past leaves behind a relevant experience for future generations to emulate, living its fantasy makes the future a fate to be accepted rather than a project to be consciously constructed.

The experience of tribal and traditional agricultural societies

proves that time is an important factor influencing people's achievements in the present and their future prospects. The tribal society lived thousands of years without managing to change its way of life, due primarily to its inability to develop a realistic conception of time. As for the agricultural society, it was able to change slightly and make some progress, due primarily to its ability to develop a conception of time; however, it viewed time as a liability to be wasted, and not an asset to be utilized. As a result, the agricultural society lived about ten thousand years moving in place rather than in time. A movement in place enables individuals and societies to do what is needed to maintain life as is, but not to create new things that change their living conditions and make them more productive. In contrast, a movement in time enables individuals and societies to do what is needed to change their living conditions and ways of life and climb the civilizational ladder.

On the other hand, the industrial society, unlike the tribal and agricultural societies, was able to develop a revolutionary conception of time; it viewed time as an asset to be harnessed. As a consequence, industrial man and society designed new strategies to utilize every minute of the time available to them; and because of this attitude toward time, industrial man and society were able to achieve great things and produce many products that we enjoy using today. In the new age of knowledge, the knowledge man and society are developing a new conception of time that views it as the most precious asset; consequently, the knowledge man and society are making great advancements in all fields of science and economics and communications and services that were inconceivable a few decades

ago.

These examples prove that no progress could be made by focusing on the past; only by keeping an eye on the future and viewing time as an asset can help people and societies move forward and build a better, more enjoyable life for them, and shape a more promising future for their children and grandchildren. Therefore, without recognizing the value of time and the imperatives of the times we live in, we cannot visualize what is needed to make further progress and conceptualize a promising future for all.

## Reading and Writing

Reading and writing are indispensable tools to learning and acquiring knowledge, and knowledge is the most reliable means to success in life. Therefore, they say: "in elementary schools, we learn how to read and write; and in high school and beyond, we read and write to learn." However, without providing good and interesting books for people to read, learning the art of reading and writing becomes hard and rather boring. The absence of good books to help kids become more curious and love reading and enjoy writing makes attempts to teach them the arts of reading and writing a difficult task; in fact, the absence of good books and good teachers is more likely to discourage kids and turn them away from both books and reading. This means that good books and good teachers and growing interest in reading go hand in hand.

While writing books is an important tool to create new ideas and spread knowledge about all aspects of life, reading is the most accessible tool to acquire knowledge found in books and magazines and newspapers, and other sources like the Internet and social media. However, good books must be made available to people to read and benefit from, which means they need to be within reach for students and the poor to buy or borrow; otherwise, most people will not be able to master the art of either reading or writing. Even in rich countries like the

United States and Britain, good books are too expensive for most students and ordinary people to buy. In fact, without the availability of good books at reasonable prices, books will have little value to most people, and book writing becomes less rewarding for thinkers and honest writers. In this era of our lives, where fake news dominates the screens of televisions, the availability of good books at reasonable prices has become a matter of survival for rationality and the truth.

While reading encourages book writing and publishing; book writing and publishing do not necessarily encourage reading. Most people seeking knowledge can get a lot of information from listening to the radio and watching TV shows and programs and navigating the Internet. However, most of the information that people get from the radio, TV, and social media are either meant to lead them to support a certain point of view that might be contrary to their interest or compel them to buy things that they often do not need and might be bad for their health. Therefore, people must be made aware of the fact that the spoken word is vulnerable to misinterpretation and falsification, and the picture is subject to manipulation. And this leaves good books as the most reliable sources of knowledge. Most books provide accurate information and new knowledge people need to know and are likely to use and benefit from.

We need also to acknowledge that there are several reasons for turning people away from reading books in general. These reasons include the absence of good books to read; restricted freedom of speech to write books about controversial issues that expose what the

ruling political and economic elite are doing; the widespread of ideological books, especially the religious ones that claim to contain the entire truth about life and the afterlife; and the availability of radios and TVs that do not stop entertaining the masses and working hard to falsify their consciousness, waste their time and steal their money. Such forces have created a new phenomenon that I call “cultural illiteracy,” where people have access to information but lack the cultural sensitivity and the political, economic, and scientific knowledge to understand the meaning and importance of the information they consume regularly. This phenomenon has caused book publishing and reading books that deal with scientific and cultural and social issues to be undermined. Most countries, where the Catholic and Islamic religions are entrenched, trail all secular states, not just in book publishing and reading, but also in science and technology and economic growth, and political freedom.

What people read is important because reading affects their lives and outlooks, and often how they view themselves and life and the other. But where people live and what kind of cultural and educational and socioeconomic environments they come from are as important as what they read. These intangibles affect the way people interpret what they read as well as how they use the ideas and information gained from reading. Culture and class and education are very important in understanding the meaning and value of knowledge in human life. A computer, for example, can be used by a student to do research and gain more knowledge, by a police officer to spy on people and search for criminals, by a military commander to plan for war, and by a

businessperson to increase labor and machine productivity. Computers are also used by many people to play games, navigate the Internet, and manage investment and banking, and credit card accounts.

Due to the vast differences in cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and educational levels, nations of the world have repeatedly failed to find ways to cooperate and face their destinies together. Such a failure has caused most nations to struggle, largely alone, to solve problems, set national priorities, and make progress, with some nations having more success than others. But if we were to examine the state of reading books in each nation, it is almost certain to discover that nations, where people read books, are more successful in solving problems and making progress than nations where people get most of their information from listening to the radio and watching television. Though television programs are often entertaining and sometimes informative, their main objective is not to inform or teach the public, but to make money by promoting and selling products that their sponsors offer for sale.

Nations, where illiteracy rates were high when the transistor radio and the television were introduced, are the least active nations in the fields of book publishing and rearing.

When the last book reading generation died in the 1950s and 60s, its impact on society and book reading died with it. When the transistor radio and the television came, people that could not read and others that looked for an easy source of news and entertainment found in both gadgets what they were looking for and needed most. And since public

schools in those countries do not oblige students to read or even encourage them to read, at least two generations grew up without acquiring the habit of reading. And because the parents tend to watch television and listen to the radio at home, most kids have no one around to motivate them to read books. Most students in Third World countries go through all stages of education, from kindergarten to elementary school, to high school and university without reading a single book besides the required books for passing exams. For such students and even most of their teachers and professors, book reading is neither a hobby worth adopting nor a source of knowledge worth considering.

In most houses in such societies, the television set has become the master of the house whose authority is unchallenged. People gather around it speechless, focusing on whatever it says and displays, which causes everyone to become less social and more selfish. Even when they have visitors, everyone does the same thing, making the visits and the conversations meaningless. So, the spoken word and the moving picture in most homes have become the major, if not the only source of knowledge and entertainment, causing book publishing and reading to be neglected. Consequently, ordinary people have become less informed of the facts of life and more inclined to believe the message of the companies and organizations that sponsor television programs. And while it was hoped that the Internet would correct this awkward situation, it made things worse. The lust for money and wealth and power made the manipulation of people's fears and needs and even instincts the major source of income for Internet companies; such companies use most of what they display as tools to collect information about the people

who visit their sites or use their services. Information collected by the internet companies and social media about people and their private lives is sold to advertisers, who in turn use it to harass people and lead some of them to buy things they often do not need and sometimes cannot afford.

## On the Train

On the way back from New York to Washington in May 2015, I met on the train a retired army general who was traveling to Richmond, Virginia. Before joining the army, John attended West Point Military Academy, one of the most prestigious colleges in America that train its students to lead the American army. John at the time of meeting him was engaged in a business that has nothing to do with the army; however, his religious upbringing in the American South and his indoctrination in the army led him to be a diehard Christian and American nationalist.

John and I talked about several things related to history and society and the economic situation in America; we also discussed other issues that concern people like him and me; issues that cause some people to lose sleep and worry about the future of our world. John got interested in what I had to say after discovering that I am the author of “The New World Order” book, which he had read and liked. The book was published in 1992 following the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. In that book, I looked at the past with an eye on the future and made some predictions that proved to be correct.

Months later, John sent me an email raising a few questions and asking me to comment on ISIS in general and the American presidential

election campaign. He concluded his email by saying: "Does that mean in your estimation, that the end is a foregone conclusion, or is there any other circumstances whereby humanity gets another chance? I can't believe that God would not provide a way out; another course to choose for those who believed and were loyal".

After giving John's worries and concerns some thought; I wrote the following:

Dear John.

Humanity has more than one choice, it has many choices indeed, but we must create those choices ourselves; no power can create choices for us. It is us, the people of America and the world who built the past, messed up and corrupted the present, and will build the future, and will determine our destiny by what we do and fail to do in time. Therefore, I never lose hope; my strong belief in the capacity of the human mind to do the right things and correct its mistakes drives me to be an optimist, yet my knowledge of the human spirit makes me skeptical; many of us are so evil and greedy, they cannot be trusted. And God, my friend, has nothing to do with how we manage our lives and shape our destiny.

If there is a mighty God who created us, I do not believe he intervened in the past or will intervene in the future to help us deal with such matters; these are left to us to manage. God created us, gave each man and woman a powerful brain and a soft heart, and put the responsibility of managing our individual and collective affairs squarely

on our shoulders; so we can claim credit for the good we do and blame ourselves for all the bad and evil things we cause to ourselves, our environment, and our future.

Anyone who believes in God and sees all the misery around him, and feels the suffering of millions of innocent children in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and other places have to conclude that God is either does not exist or is standing there watching and judging; or he is not as fair and merciful and loving as holy books claim. Therefore, the only way to keep your faith in God and respect his will and accept his judgment is to believe that he has empowered each one of us with a magical mind that can do so many good and bad things; but we seem to betray God's trust in us; and therefore do more bad things than good ones. Man's lust for money and power has undermined his commitment to ethics and the sanctity of human life, and this has led us to engage in destructive wars that seem to have no end in sight. Wars destroy lives, kill children, dampen hope, spread poverty, and transform what we build into ruins.

## Materialism and Ethics

The financial crisis that hit the United States of America and other nations in 2008 proved that public trust in the economic and political and financial systems is essential to maintaining their functioning. However, trust by itself cannot guarantee that these systems will keep functioning properly, efficiently, or ethically, only the law can ensure that. The crisis also proved that public trust in the financial system since the early 1980s was misplaced; the relaxation of regulations and the financial products invented by some financial institutions were instrumental in causing the crisis and bankrupting many American economic and financial entities. As the crisis brought thousands of financial institutions worldwide to near collapse, it caused great damage to the world economy on the one hand and rubbed hundreds of millions of people of their life savings and livelihood. The minds that shaped the economic philosophy in America and glorified the "free market" system should have been held accountable for causing the financial crisis and the near-collapse of the global financial system. But in America, holding a person responsible for a mistake or an evil act does not mean holding him accountable for either the mistake or the evil act he committed. President Trump was held responsible for inciting the attack on the Capitol on January 6, 2021, but the Senate failed to hold him accountable for the destruction

and loss of life he caused.

The free market is a mechanism that is supposed to guarantee the proper functioning of the economy, allocating available resources and products among producers and consumers in ways that maximize economic benefits to all participating individuals and corporations; it is also supposed to guarantee that large financial institutions and large economic entities will play by the rules of a fair game, and do not take unwarranted risks, and pay for whatever mistakes and excesses they may commit. But as the 2008 crisis began to unfold, the system proved to be inefficient, unjust, corrupt, and thus unable to correct its mistakes; it required the intervention of the US government to bailout many large banks and corporations, the price of which the common man had to pay. The experience of the last four decades indicates that the system has continued to sacrifice human and social values and business ethics for the sake of making and accumulating private wealth motivated by selfishness and greed. The free market economy or market capitalism is a system designed to privatize wealth and power and socialize poverty and need, not just in America, but in all countries of the world.

Therefore, the system and its institutions and captains lost public trust; and instead of moving to regain lost creditability by transforming their attitudes and changing the old ways of doing business, they claimed innocence and let the US government rescue them from disaster. And this allowed big banks and insurance and mortgage companies to resume outrageous habits and discredited financial practices of the past. And instead of forcing them to correct their

mistakes, the regulators closed their eyes, denying the people the opportunity to restructure the system and regain lost credibility. In the meantime, the unethical practices were reinvented with the support of the American and European central banks and the blessing of western governments; meanwhile, public acquiescence to not holding banks accountable for their crimes made it easy for the corrupted individuals and institutions to cheat millions of people every year and destroy the lives of many people in need.

So, instead of abandoning greed and corruption, and committing themselves to give priority to serving the common interest, financial institutions intensified their efforts to manipulate the system and cheat their customers and try to steal the last penny in the peoples' pockets. Manipulating every aspect of human life has caused people's distrust of private and public institutions to deepen and transform the relationship between business organizations and the public from distrust to antagonism. Greed and selfishness and lust for money and power on the one hand, and human values and ethics people cherish on the other cannot coexist in one place peacefully; human values and business ethics must overshadow greed and selfishness if we are to avoid another financial crisis and ultimately social unrest.

Today, all societies are experiencing or have experienced a dramatic decline in the status and influence of traditional values, social and business ethics, and the spirit of community that regulated the lives of previous generations and held them together. Although several forces could be blamed for instigating this negative development, four

major factors stand accused of causing the gradual dehumanization and degradation of the living conditions; a persistent movement toward individualism and materialism; the slow abandonment of spiritualism and collectivism for the sake of materialism; the subordination of politics to economics; and the spread of apathy in society. While rich individuals and societies compete hard to acquire as many material things and knowledge and power as possible, poor individuals and societies try harder to imitate the rich but do little to acquire more knowledge and reclaim their lost rights. As a result, more emphasis is being placed on consumption and the appearance of wealth than on education and the essence of living meaningful, productive lives.

The last few decades have shown that as the numbers of the super-rich increase, the numbers of the poor people increase as well, while the numbers of the middle classes decline. Meanwhile, greed, jealousy, and envy have intensified, leading the rich to ignore the ethics of fairness and justice, while forcing the poor to ignore the ethics of honesty and, at times, dignity as well. Consequently, the rich, driven by greed and lust for money and power on the one hand, and the poor, driven by need and jealousy on the other have caused greed, jealousy, envy, and need to emerge as major forces motivating people to work hard, invest, learn, compete, cheat, lie, and sometimes steal to get ahead. By the time the knowledge age announced its impending arrival in the mid-1990s, interests rather than values had become the organizing principles of individual and community life, causing materialism to overshadow spiritualism and ethics and most cherished human values and concerns.



## The Truth

The truth is a thing we often accept without much thinking as a fact, though it might contradict reality and even rationality and science. Many of us take most “truths” for granted as if they were inevitabilities that cannot be changed and must be accepted as they are presented without questioning; religions are just one example of unproven claims that believers accept as facts. However, everything that cannot be scientifically or practically proven must be considered a claim, and not a fact, which makes it subject to doubt, debate, and criticism. And since every claim is subject to doubt, believing in the validity of a claim becomes a personal matter, and therefore, no one should have a legal or political, or moral power to impose his convictions on others.

The truth is a thing perceived by some people to exist, or a story that at least one person believes to be true; however, this “truth” binds the people who believe it, and no one else. Based on this logic, no one has the right to impose his “truths” on others, especially since he cannot prove the validity of his claims. All convictions regarding religions and the past are claims made by people who could be telling the truth or lying or repeating what they heard from others. Even the existence of God, which billions of people believe to be true, is a claim that no one and no science can prove or disprove. And since millions of people do

not believe in the existence of God, everyone should have the right to stick to what he believes to be true or abandon it. And since all faiths and most stories related to faith are claims; everyone should respect the convictions of others and keep his convictions and opinions to himself.

But if two people were to look at a mountain from two opposite directions, each one would see an angle of the mountain that the other would not be able to see. If one side of the mountain is covered with trees where birds sing and dance freely, and the other is covered with large homes overlooking a quiet lake, the views, and the feelings of the two people looking at the same mountain would be different, if not contradictory. The first could describe it as a beautiful natural sanctuary for birds and wildflowers, the other could describe it as a vicious act by the rich to destroy nature and enjoy life at its expense. So here is a mountain that represents one truth that has different meanings as seen by two different people.

For believers in God, God represents the ultimate truth, even though no one has an idea of how he looks because no one has seen him, talked to him, or heard his voice. In this case, God becomes a powerful character that lives in our imagination without knowing where he lives or what he does, or how he looks like. However, for nonbelievers, God is a shadow that has no existence at all, people create it, and wrote his commandments, which means that he is a fictional character that has no role in shaping our lives. He influences our lives through the orders we relegate to him and believe that we must

obey.

The truth, regardless of its nature and role in human life, has three major characteristics:

1. Being relative.
2. Being partial; and
3. Being tentative.

The truth is always relative because each one of us views it differently, depending on each one's personal beliefs and convictions, cultural background, level of education, where he lives, how he lives, and how he thinks, and what he seeks to achieve in life.

At the same time, the truth is always partial, because no one can see all its angles or details at once; two persons looking at a glass of water that is not full usually see it differently; an optimist is likely to see it as "half full"; while a pessimist is likely to see it as "half empty". Nevertheless, no one knows exactly if the glass is half full or half empty by looking at it only; you need an accurate instrument to measure how much water the glass has compared to how much it can take to support your claim.

The truth is often tentative, meaning that it is subject to change because science and hidden historical records could prove that some of the things we believed to be true at one point in the past were inaccurate claims or even lies. Centuries ago, for example, it was believed that our earth was flat and the center of the universe and that

the sun revolves around it; now we know for sure that the earth is oval, not flat, and it revolves around the sun, not the other way around, and though the sun appears much smaller than the earth, the sun is about 1.3 million times the size of the earth. We also know that earth is not the center of the universe and represents only a tiny portion of it.

What goes for the “truth” goes for “facts”. When people speak about facts, they often do so without being aware that we share little facts among us; almost every group of people has its own set of facts that differ from other people’s facts. Therefore, we seldom agree on what we call facts, which causes us to often fail to find common grounds to unite us. Even the followers of religions tend to agree on a few claims they call facts but differ on many more, particularly the interpretations of the shared claims and facts. As a result, most religions are divided into sects and factions that tend to be united by hate and enmity, rather than by love and devotion to their religion. Even in the United States which is recognized as being the world’s most scientifically advanced country, American scientists still disagree regarding certain facts related to the environment and the impact of certain pesticides on human health.

People with strong convictions who brag about their knowledge complicate communications between people, causing attempts to bridge the gaps that separate people from one another to often fail. Therefore, we need to respect others and their opinions and beliefs but continue to exchange views with them honestly to reach common understandings, knowing in advance that we will continue to be separated by convictions and perceptions of what facts represent and

what they mean. Otherwise, miscommunication leads to misunderstandings that create new problems and make our lives more difficult, and reaching common grounds that unite us rather impossible.

People in traditional societies often try to protect their children from being exposed to new ideas, because new ideas tend to influence the attitudes and behavior of young people. Most traditional people believe that new ideas threaten their traditional belief system and cultural values and loyalties they usually cherish and want their children to adhere to. Religious and traditionally conservative communities tend to think that their beliefs and values represent the ultimate truth. This makes all claimed facts related to religion part of the universal truths. But the only universal facts that exist today are scientific facts that can be tested and proven beyond doubt. Anything else is mere claims that cannot be tested and therefore cannot be proven. Yes, everyone has the right to believe in whichever faith or ideology he likes, but since we disagree on many things, no one has the right to impose his belief or viewpoint on others. So, we need to agree that we could be friends and neighbors and partners but disagree on other things.

There is no traditional or modern society that all its members agree on all issues of importance; every society is divided along socioeconomic and sociocultural and sociopolitical lines, making its many groups and factions unable to agree on many issues, though they belong to one society and share one land and express allegiance to one state. Sharing and loving are the social glue that holds society together and enables it to function as one entity, solve common problems and

achieve shared goals. And this means that accepting disagreements as an unshakable fact of communal life causes agreement on many issues to be possible.

## Viewing the Past

Most people, particularly older people, love to talk about the past and its great old days; but when you hear their description of that glorious past, you realize that it was not that great. Life conditions, for example, have never been as good as they are today, regardless of the injustice and poverty that prevail in our world, and exploitation that persists at the present. Man's experience in the past was very limited compared to today's experience and therefore, his accomplishments were limited as well. The theoretical and practical knowledge that man has gained during the last century from education, trade, work, travel, TV news and programs, and the Internet has enabled him to make much progress, causing the old life to look primitive and unattractive. If you ask an industrial worker or a government employee if he would like to go back to farming the land it is almost certain that he would say no. Science says that our memory is selective; and as we grow older, our brains get more focused on remembering the good things and forgetting the bad ones, which causes images of the past to be distorted and lack credibility.

However, looking back at history is very beneficial, especially before considering the future, because history sometimes has lessons to teach and valued experience to give. Yes, we need to learn from

history and should never ignore its lessons, but no one should not follow its path. History helps planners and thinkers and visionaries in several ways; it enables everyone to look at past incidents and accomplishments from more than one angle, which helps them gain a better understanding of the causes of successes and failures and evaluate their past implications and probable future consequences.

History often enables people to understand the nature of the forces that lead to success and others that often cause failure; it also helps planners to identify the socioeconomic, sociocultural, and sociopolitical conditions that make success possible and sometimes cause failure to be inevitable. And by so doing, history helps us improve our chances of success and reduce the chances of failure. Moreover, history highlights the differences between the past and the present, and the envisioned future. And in so doing, it helps us to have a realistic perspective of the past and the present and the future alike, and how they relate to each other. Consequently, studying history and its experience with an open, non-ideological mind reduces the chances of failure, enhances the chances of success, and helps us to identify the right path to follow.

Since history does not discriminate, it helps individuals, groups, corporations, and nations to see how different the past from the present is, and how remote it is from the future they aspire for. History reveals that the past has many valued experiences to learn from but little wisdom to give, and no laws to follow. So, whoever thinks of the past as a golden age that must be recreated will be badly disappointed,

because history does not go back, not even for a second. Since we all know that no one can be revived after dying, we must understand that no dead person can do anything for a living person. Yes, dead bodies can tell us something about the causes of their death but cannot give us anything material to use or ideas to construct new systems or write new laws to help us manage the present or conceive a better, more humane future.

The present and the past are two different places that existed at two different times and functioned in two different environments. And though they are tied to each other by certain memories and some experiences, the present cannot change the past, and the past cannot change the present. However, the past, through its claims, can influence the thinking of the traditional forces in society who, in turn, try to change the present and the direction of societal development. Though such efforts can slow down the pace of change, they cannot hinder change or arrest its movement. But by slowing down the pace of change, traditional forces cause the transformation process to lose its focus and sometimes the sense of direction and thus fail to develop a roadmap to guide its movement. Nevertheless, no roadmap designed in the image of a long-gone past can gain enough popular backing to lead societal change, not even in the strictest religious communities, because no one can function properly in this age without using its scientific tools and abiding by its laws.

Everyone and every nation need to acknowledge that no one of us can return to the past; and no human power can recreate the cultural

essence of the past, because every past is a dead body that has nothing to give. While most people can realize this fact and acknowledge its implications, others tend to be obsessed with a largely fictional past they wish to see and live in. Individuals and nations that acknowledge that the past cannot be brought back to life are moving on to live in the present and imagine a more promising future; individuals and nations that are obsessed with the past live in mental prisons that deny them the opportunity to live in the present, imagine the future, or even see the world as it really is.

A person, who fails to acknowledge that every past is a time long gone and no power can bring back, wastes his time living a worthless life; a strange life that is largely devoid of hope and imagination. Therefore, such a person cannot recognize the opportunities that the present offers or deal with the challenges he may face with confidence or imagine the possibilities that the future promises. And what is true of individuals is also true of groups and nations. The great nations of the past such as the Arabs and the Persians have paid and continue to pay a tremendous price in lost opportunities and natural resources and human lives because they failed to acknowledge the fact that no past can come back to rescue them from the crises that engulf their lives. People who think in the past are condemned to live the dreams and aspirations of the dead; people who think in the present are destined to live in the future, dream its dreams, and enjoy the wonders it has to give.

## Advice for Aspiring Leaders

No one can teach without learning; therefore, whoever assumes a teaching or leadership role needs to be a person of knowledge who has an interest in learning and teaching others; he also needs to learn how to teach, and how to guide his students and followers to where they need to be. Teachers should know what is interesting to the children and students under their supervision, and what those children and students need to know most at every stage of their lives. However, to know what your students, friends, children, employees, subjects, or followers need to learn, you need first to know what they have; what kind of information and ideas and stories and complaints and aspirations and life experiences they have and would like to share; sharing stories is one of the greatest and easiest ways of acquiring knowledge that lasts.

Knowing what others have helps you to determine what they are missing and need to know, as well as how you can help them to acquire the knowledge they must have to face the challenges of life and succeed. And by telling you their stories and dreams and how they feel, you learn how to stimulate them to be more alert and more willing to listen to you and learn from you and books and others. Therefore, parents and teachers and managers and professors and political and

social leaders who want to lead but are unwilling to listen to their children and students and employees and subjects and learn from them will ultimately fail in their mission. Failure of most leaders to listen to the people is causing them to create more problems than they solve.

No teacher or leader should underestimate the intelligence of others, regardless of their age, cultural background, and level of education. People live different lives, under varied socioeconomic, sociopolitical, and sociocultural settings; they also tend to place different values on most things in life. While a person living in poverty might spend most of his day trying to get enough food to feed his children, a wealthy person might be spending his time thinking about how to make his millions multiply fast. A student living in a house without electricity should not be reprimanded if he fails to do his homework on time, every time. An employee who walks an hour to reach his workplace should not be treated like someone who drives a car to work. Time, work, money, life, age, poverty, friendship, kinship, prestige, and power have different values and meanings to different people.

Successful parents, teachers, managers, professors, political leaders, and even preachers need to understand that the people they try to teach and lead, are their closest friends and most valuable teachers at the same time. Teachers and leaders who listen to their students and subjects learn from them a lot. If they pay enough attention, they will be able to enhance their understanding of other peoples' feelings and aspirations and thus succeed in leading them. Teaching and leading should not be viewed as professions; they are

hobbies that sensitive and knowledgeable people love doing and derive from them much joy and inspiration. Therefore, leaders who ignore their subjects and followers, and make their relationships with them a one-way street, are more likely to lose them and fail in carrying out their missions. Failure, in this case, means failing the people who depend on them; and failing to be caring friends and compassionate leaders.

Teachers and leaders should view themselves as lifetime students learning from their peers, students, subjects, nature, their experience, and the experiences of others. Teachers and leaders who do not listen to the people they supervise cannot learn from them and therefore are not fit to teach or lead.

## Fear and Courage

Irish philosopher and statesman Edmund Burke once said, “No passion so effectually robs the mind of its power of acting and reasoning as fear.” Though fear is a natural feeling that everyone experiences from time to time, the fear that most of us feel today and some of us are living constantly with is created by the very people we are supposed to trust most. In most countries of the West, the major source of fear is the individuals and groups that people elect to lead them, manage the taxes they pay on their behalf and ensure their safety, security, and wellbeing. In almost all countries of the East, the leaders are religious men or traditional notables or ideologues who are supposed to guide the people to be ethical and honest and do the right things. Today, both democratic and undemocratic leaders have become experts in creating foreign enemies and using them as straw men to spread fear in society and rule without challenge. But as those leaders do what it takes to ensure that their subjects live in constant states of fear, their accomplices go around robbing the nations they rule of their natural resources, impoverish as many of them as possible, and keep them submissive.

Making people fearful of real and imagined enemies has been the most frequently used tool to keep the masses wandering in the dark alleys of the mysterious, which keeps them dependent on the state and

feeling in constant need of protection. Leaders of the West, in general, and America in particular, are using Islam and Russia and China as a mortal threat to frighten the masses and secure their support of whatever policies they may adopt. In the meantime, Third World dictators use the West as a mortal threat to secure the submissiveness of the masses and their support of the harsh measures they use to suppress dissent and silence all voices calling for freedom. Sadly, the more ignorant, racist, and poor the masses are, the easier to frighten, manipulate, dominate, and exploit. President Trump proved to be a great manipulator; he was able to recruit most of the ignorant and racists in America and come close to destroying the state he ruled; however, he managed to accentuate ideological polarization in society and cause the disintegration of the social and cultural fabrics of the American nation.

Fear is a windowless prison, where no one has freedom, and no one can live a normal life; it is a place where no one knows what lies behind the prison walls in which he lives. Therefore, no prisoner can think rationally about how to plan a future for himself and his family, or how to manage his life affairs with confidence and feel at ease. Keeping people in constant fear makes them feel helpless and hopeless, unable to do anything meaningful or enjoyable. A person living in fear is a person being imprisoned for no reason, and for committing no crime, but for being innocent and largely uninformed. And though the prison guards confiscate his freedom, he is convinced that he must support his jailers because they are protecting him from the ghosts that they created to frighten him and keep him submissive. In America, while the political

elite and the press spread rumors and keep most citizens in a state of constant fear, the army, the police, and the secret services play the role of the jailers.

When the jailers are ideologues committed to a religious or a secular ideology, they often resort to using their revered, but outdated books to convince prisoners that they are standing at the doors of heaven, which keeps them waiting patiently for heaven's gate to open, unable to think of anything else. Therefore, most prisoners feel thankful for their jailors for keeping them safe until they are welcomed by God in heaven; prisoners of fear cannot realize that they are being kept in a state of helplessness behind formidable walls that deny them their human rights, including the right to think freely and live normal lives.

Prisoners of fear see only their jailors and hear nothing except the echo of fear in their heads, and desire nothing more than supporting their jailors to make the prison walls higher to keep them safe. Almost all rulers and their accomplices in the West and East are using the magical cane of fear, supported by a largely corrupt and immoral press whose job is to falsify the consciousness of the masses and lead them to support policies meant to enrich the rich and impoverish the poor. These are policies that claim to protect the national interest and the nation's way of life from their mortal enemies. Therefore, fear transforms people from being free humans with thinking minds to herds of cattle easy to lead and manipulate; mindless creatures ready to give their lives at the request of their heartless, largely crock leaders.

In such an atmosphere that leaves little room for rational thinking,

people of conscience and knowledge show their courage by exposing the tactics of the ruling elites and the means they use to scare the masses and keep them submissive and guessing. However, people of courage and knowledge are almost always live in a different state of fear; fear of losing their jobs that often represent their only source of income. Intellectuals who are honest and courageous enough to speak out are often jailed behind brick walls in the East and behind censorship screens operated by the media in the West. As a result, those courageous men and women are often denied the opportunity to reach the masses, which causes the masses to be denied the right to know the truth.

## Words that Matter

### Chinese proverbs about money

With money, you can buy a house, but not a home.

With money, you can buy a clock, but not extra time.

With money, you can buy a bed, but not sleep.

With money, you can buy a book, but not knowledge.

With money, you can buy a doctor, but not health.

With money, you can buy a position, but not respect.

With money, you can buy blood, but not life.

With money, you can buy sex, but not love.

### Perception Matters

You think it looks like a frog and I think it looks like a cat. Yes, we disagree, and we have the right to disagree, but disagreement does not mean that we must fight with each other or hate one another. Disagreement means that we have to respect the opinions of each other and deal with one another as equals. By acknowledging our disagreement over certain issues, we make our relationship healthy and fruitful, which allows us to set together and consider all options available

to us.

I remember a friend businessman saying to another businessman who was seeking to partner with him; you are not going to give me a penny of the money in your pocket, and I will not give you a penny of the money in my pocket; we go to the market and share all the money we can get.

## Personal Advice

You should think more about what you want to do in your life and less about who you want to be in life; because what you do in life and people's reactions to your actions shape your personality and determine what you will be in life, which could be what you desire to be. The way you behave and act in life is your ticket to shaping what you want to be in life.

You need to be clear regarding what you believe in, but careful in expressing your beliefs in public to avoid hurting the feelings of people that have different beliefs.

People tend to care less about how much you know until they see how much you care; caring reflects who you are and determines how people feel about you.

If you do not get involved in life, you should not complain about life.

If you love life more, life will love you more and treat you kindly.

The more you read the more you succeed and the more you become open-minded and caring.

College is not meant to change your mind, it is meant to train you how to use your brain to think logically; therefore, your first objective in college should be to develop your mental capacity to think like a free man seeking knowledge and the truth.

If you train your brain to think rationally and resist accepting claims without logical explanation or scientific proof, it will help you deal with most life challenges and succeed.

Life is the first and last opportunity you will ever have, so you should try to enjoy it; however, most enjoyment does not come from accumulating wealth, but from using some of your time and wealth to help others and be kind to the poor and needy.

Even if there is an afterlife and there is heaven in that afterlife, heaven, as described in most religious books, is a boring place; it offers you everything you need and wish to have without effort, and that means living for eternity without using your mind; consequently, heaven reduces you from being a human actor driven by a thinking mind to a humanlike animal driven by instincts.

The most precious and happy smile that can appear on your face is the one that comes as a reaction to a smile on the face of a person you helped or a child you made feel happy.

Helping someone to feel happy, makes you feel happy as well, and that makes each one of you grateful to the other.

Smiles are a contagious feeling that spreads happiness around like an evening breeze after a hot summer day. So, you need to keep smiling and helping others smile.

Knowledge is facts that exist, wisdom is knowing when and how to use the knowledge and for what purpose; and virtue is using knowledge to enrich human life.