

Wisdom of the Past

Past events and old ideas, to be fully understood and utilized, must be placed in their proper historical context. However, to make such things beneficial, they need to be examined using the present and future contexts. Failure to do so is more likely to make all wisdom of the past less helpful, if not an obstacle to understanding reality and appreciating trends of global change.

We study the wisdom of the past in order to understand things that happened, why they happened, how they happened, what change they produced or provoked; and how they relate to the times we live in. If past circumstances that precipitated major events and produced great ideas are similar to the ones we experience in the present, then the wisdom of the past may be of help to us; but if past circumstances are different from the ones that engulf our lives at the present, then the wisdom of the past is of no use to us. Deferring to such wisdom therefore is a grave mistake; it may even lead to disastrous consequences. In order to make use of the old and new knowledge available to us, we must place every piece of information in its proper past, present and future contexts; otherwise, we are more likely to misunderstand the past as well as the present and deny ourselves the opportunity to use knowledge to face the challenges of our times and plan for a better future..

Arabs are people obsessed with history; but obsession with the past is more likely to cause people to be blinded; making them unable to understand how the past relates to the present; how to identify what is relevant and what is irrelevant of the wisdom of the past to the challenges of the present. History must be employed to help understand the present and construct the future; otherwise, it could become a grave to bury the dreams of people who live on the hope of having a better future. People, who have an eye on the past but fail to have an eye on the future, are unable to influence the present or shape the future; they are doomed to stay behind their times and peers and rub their children of their dreams.

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