

Perspectives on Life

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Introduction

This book is a collection of ideas, reflections, and facts collected, composed, and conceived over the last 18 years. This collection also includes a few poems that came as reflections on life and how we live and view it. Though many of these ideas came from reading the writings of other intellectuals and philosophers, the responsibility of formulating them is mine. When memory was helpful, I mentioned the people who inspired some of the ideas, but often, the memory did not help, so they came without a reference.

So, I wish to thank those whose names are mentioned and apologize to others who inspired an idea, but I could not mention their names. Since I started writing back in 1970, I insisted on making whatever I produced in books, images, articles, poems, and information available to all readers and seekers of knowledge for free. On my website, www.yazour.com, the first words visitors read: “knowledge not shared is knowledge wasted.”

I hope that every reader will find an idea or a thought or a little story of value that helps him to face a life challenge or deal with an issue or make him relax. I also hope that some of the new ideas and unconventional perceptions in this collection inspire many people to do the same thing and contribute to enriching human life and creating a new just, and peaceful world for all.

I welcome every comment and every inquiry, and every suggestion to make these ideas and thoughts reach a wider audience. I can be reached at professorrabie@yahoo.com

One Human Race: a Shared Destiny

This narrative tries to answer five basic questions concerning our existence and future on earth, our only home. First, how did we get to be what we are today? Second, how should we understand the concepts of nation and nationality? Third, how should we view religion and its role in our lives? Fourth, how should we understand the meaning of the word “truth”? Five; who are our adversaries, and how to deal with them? The arguments that follow are partially scientific, partially theological, and somewhat philosophical.

First, two principal theories try to explain how human beings became to be what they are today: the first is the creation theory, which claims that all humans were created by a mighty, mysterious power called God that no one can see; the other is the evolutionary theory, which claims that all creatures evolved from primitive species over billions of years, starting about 4 billion years ago, and continued to evolve reaching what they are today.

People who believe in creation also believe that all humans are the descendants of one man (Adam) and one woman (Eve). Since we have the same parents, we must belong to the same and only race, the human race. People who believe in evolution also believe that we all came from an animal that looks like an ape that appeared first in Africa hundreds of thousands of years ago, and from there, people moved in bands to populate our mother earth. Consequently, both theories say that we share a common ancestor, and therefore, we are one race. Whenever we define ourselves, we unconsciously say the human race, not the human races. And now science has come to say that we are all 99.9 percent the same, **DNA**-wise: and

about 99 percent the same as our closest relatives, the chimpanzees.

On our way to populate the earth, we were exposed to three powerful forces that shaped our life experiences and greatly influenced the way we look, live, think, and behave. These forces are: first, natural selection, or the law of the survival of the fittest, which caused some humans and animals and plants to survive and flourish, and many more to disappear and perish. Second, random mutations that gave us the many shades of black and white and yellow, and the diversified features we have today. Third, an unpredictable and often harsh environment that forced us to move from one place to another and adapt to nature's dictates and its changing mood, which led us to develop different cultures, many religions, countless languages, and forge varied associations with place and time and each other. Consequently, we gained cultural and religious diversity, but we encountered no other races to acquire racial diversity.

Embracing our cultural and religious diversity enriches our lives, opens our minds, and fills our hearts with joy. In contrast, believing in racial diversity poisons our hearts, closes our minds, and undermines our shared sense of brotherhood, and thus leads us to hate one another and fight with each other and damage our shared environment.

Second, nationality is a shared identity associated with a specific land and state; some nations have more in common than land and state, they have a shared language and culture and/or history. A German, for example, is a person who was most likely born in Germany and identifies with the German land and state; Germans also share a language and a historical experience. An American is a person who lives in the United States of America and is a citizen of the USA; however, most Americans have no shared history or culture. Indians, meanwhile, speak tens of languages and have

hundreds of religions, yet they are one nation inhabiting the same land and having allegiance to the same state. If the United States, with its 320 million people coming from every place on earth carrying their particular traditions and religions can form one nation, then any people sharing one land and belonging to one state must be considered a nation. Thus nationality is identification with a particular land and state only.

Third, Religion is an accident of birth; we all know that no one of us had the liberty to choose the religion he was born into. Today, as ever, no one can choose his parents or religion, place of birth or time of birth, his name, color, or social class at birth. Therefore, no one should be punished or rewarded because of things he inherited at birth: be it religion, identity, color, name, social class, or wealth; everyone should have the right to stay in his inherited religion, change it, or abandon it altogether; and it is the duty of society to respect everyone's religious choice, and the responsibility of the state to protect everyone's religious and non-religious rights.

People who believe in God also believe that religion and what comes with it at birth is an act of God. Since it is God who chooses for each one of us his parents and religion, the time, place, and living conditions at birth, no believer is in a position to reject God's will. Nevertheless, most believers tend to accept God's will when it comes to their inherited religion and reject God's will when it comes to other people's religions. Since God chooses for each one his religion, every religion must be considered legitimate and thus must be respected by every believer; anyone who refuses to accept other peoples' religions is rejecting the will of the God he claims to believe in and worship. No rational believer, therefore, can accept what God chooses for him and, at the same time, rejects what God chooses for his fellow human beings.

Fourth, how should we interpret the word "fact" or "truth"? Both words tend to refer to the same thing, and therefore the truth should

be understood as something that at least one person in the world believes to be true or a fact. This fact could be an imagined creature like the devil or an incident that happened in the past like miracles, or a claim that embodies information that tells the story of an extinct nation or religion, or facts that represent things and states of affairs proven by science to be true. Nevertheless, every fact or truth that falls in one of the first three categories has three basic characteristics; it is relative, partial, and tentative. It is relative because some people believe it to be a fact and others do not, and is partial because everyone looking at it can see only one side of it, and is tentative because science could prove it to be wrong.

For example, belief in miracles is relative because miracles defy our human experience and because only some people believe they happened in the past. A mountain that stands in front of our eyes is a partial fact because no one can see it in its entirety at one time. The truth is also tentative because it is subject to change due to many natural and cultural and scientific factors. For example, until the 17th century, most people believed that the earth was flat and it is the center of the universe and that the sun rotates around it. Then science came to prove that the earth was oval, not flat, and it represents a tiny portion of the universe, and it is not the center of it; and that it rotates around the sun and not the other way around.

Fifth, the most severe challenge that faces humanity today is the widening income and wealth gaps between the rich and the poor. Income and wealth reports indicate that the wealthiest 1% of the world's population owns over 50% of the world's wealth, which means that this 1% owns more than the rest 99% of the world's population, whose number is about 7.7 billion. The richest 42 men in the world own as much wealth as the poorest 50% of the world's population, whose number exceeds 3.8 billion. And due to the tremendous power that the rich have, they can manipulate every system and situation and take advantage of every opportunity to make more money and accumulate more wealth. Besides, reports

indicate that the wealthiest 10% of the world's population owns 85% of the world's wealth, leaving 15% to the other 90% of the people. Moreover, income reports indicate that about 95% of the annual increase in income goes to the richest 10% of the people, leaving 5% to the other 90%. This explains why the middle class is shrinking and losing power and self-confidence and why poverty is spreading and becoming structural, causing alienation, radicalism, and racism to inflict most parts of the world.

This means that the current global social order is unfair and needs to be reformed or changed to protect the rights of the poor and the weak. And though unfair social orders cannot be sustained in the long run, we should not wait for things to happen to us; we must make things happen for us because no social order or system will change by itself. Therefore, we, the people, should take the initiative, articulate new programs for change, and create social movements capable of effecting the desired change. This also means that our anger should not be directed at the rich but the social order and ourselves because we failed to do our job in exposing the excesses of the system and opposing the policies that got us to this point. Since the rich work hard to perpetuate the current social order, we need to work harder to change it and liberate ourselves from the existing socioeconomic and sociopolitical orders that keep many of us weak and poor, and undermine the future of future generations.

Other economic reports indicate that half of the world's largest 100 economies were corporations at the end of the 20th century. In 2017 corporations represented 69 of the world's largest 100 economies; all such corporations are either owned or controlled by the richest 1% of the world's people. At the same time, no two rich states or individuals are at war with each other, but many poor ones are fighting each other or involved in bloody and destructive civil wars. As we fight each other, we waste a good portion of our precious natural and human resources; besides, the money we spend buying weapons and ammunition goes to enrich the rich, and further

impoverish the poor. As a consequence, we remain poor and largely enslaved, killing each other instead of working with one another to liberate ourselves from poverty and need and oppression and restore our sanity and humanity.

To achieve our sociopolitical goals and reclaim a fair share of the world's wealth and income, we must realize that we, the 90% of the world's population, share the same grievances, hopes, and destiny. Therefore, any one of us who stands with a deprived minority somewhere is, unconsciously, standing against another deprived minority elsewhere. As we seek to change our living conditions, we need to further realize that neither the free market system nor the democratic system can by itself correct its mistakes and enable us to reclaim our rights and achieve our goals; both systems have become largely dysfunctional. Therefore, we need to create a mass movement covering all parts of the world and articulate a strategy for change that seeks to transform the existing economic and political systems and replace them with a new global social order that guarantees fairness. Reclaiming our rights can only be achieved by working together peacefully to deny our adversaries any excuse to label us as radicals trying to destroy this or that culture and undermine peoples' ways of life in the West or East, North or South.

Being the same race, having traveled the same road, and driving to reach similar goals should make us, poor and rich, strong and weak, view each other as brothers, sisters, friends, lovers, and colleagues; embrace our shared humanity, celebrate our cultural and religious diversity, and learn from each other the art of living together in peace and harmony. Again, embracing our cultural and religious diversity enriches our lives; believing in racial diversity undermines our shared humanity.

Our motto should be: together, we empower each other, create a global power, and change our world forever.

2

Age and Time

To a young man, the days of life usually seem limitless, causing the sense of urgency to do things on time to lose its meaning. As a consequence, man tends to waste a lot of time doing little to enrich his life and prepare himself for the future, leaving many jobs unfinished. Generally speaking, young people tend to think that time will come to finish all unfinished things.

In contrast, when the days of life seem limited or about to end, people stop wasting time and change their attitudes, sometimes drastically to utilize every minute of the time they still have; and that leads them to appreciate the imperatives of time and feel the sense of urgency to do the things that need to be done on time. Consequently, they begin to see the value of time spent enjoying the beauty in nature, the value of friendship, the pleasure in self accomplishments, and the sweet taste of love; all of which tend to bring a kind touch of happiness, sweet memories, and serenity to life.

Authors and thinkers, in particular, feel the urgency to deliver their perceptions and ideas to the public, because they feel that whatever they have is not their own, and therefore, must be shared with all other people. New and creative ideas and unusual perspectives on time and life are things that belong to all people of the world. Since thinkers and authors realize this, they tend to conceptualize their creative ideas and new perspectives and deliver them in time to the people who need them most. For thinkers and philosophers, the shorter the days left the keener they become

because time cannot wait too long before the lights of life are turned off for the last time.

As people get old, they also tend to accept most things the way they are, because they know that they no longer have the time to change everything to their liking. And this usually leads them to look at the bright side of things that matter most in life, and try to reflect on the dark side of life in the writings and stories they leave behind for future generations to learn from.

To accomplish such tasks, thinkers, philosophers, and authors must claim the higher moral grounds, be able to forgive but not forget, stick to their principles and rights, and make sure that other people have their own as well. Philosophers, thinkers, and authors must be willing to give more of themselves and their time to those who need and want to grow, learn and enrich their lives and the lives of their neighbors, community, and humanity.

3

Life and Time

The life we live is the time we spend enjoying what we love doing in life; the rest is a waste of valuable life and resources and precious time that cannot be recovered.

The past is the moment we just left behind dying of old age and loss of relevance while worrying about its legacy and how it will be viewed and judged by future generations; judged by people that can neither live the experience of times long gone nor understand how the life of those times unfolded.

The present is what we experience in everyday life, as we try to enjoy certain things, face some challenges, avoid many more, and create new opportunities for ourselves to exploit, boast our egos, fulfill our desires and realize our dreams, with full knowledge that no desire and no dream remains the same as times change.

The future is what we dream of having the next day in the morning by doing what we can do to make it happen now; delayed gratification, though is a virtue that only a few have, is no longer an option in a world that lives in a continuous state of transition and plagued with greed and consumerism.

History is what we make in our life as we build and destroy, imagine and realize, live and die, love and hate, laugh and cry, sing and dance, read and learn, think and become wise, work and retire, win and lose, fight and make peace, rebuild what we destroy, and dream again and again of a better future.

Knowledge is the ideas we crystallize, the scientific facts we discover, the social systems we develop, and the technological tools we invent to manage our lives and transform reality to make it more

enjoyable and responsive to our needs and desires. Knowledge is also the will and the tools we acquire as we work hard to realize our dreams, overcome the pain of sadness and loss, avoid the indignity of need, and replace failure with success.

Transformation is the continuous process of questioning traditions, convictions, old ideas, attitudes, belief systems, and the wisdom of the past in an honest, neutral way that does not consider any ideological bind. Transformation is also how to develop our capacity to see the other side of everything that matters in life and to learn the art of living with other people and animals and nature in peace.

Culture is the common traditions, customs, attitudes, convictions, views of the other, and the way of thinking that makes us feel and act like humans, able to live with one another and respect and love each other. Culture is also the way of life that reflects our approach in dealing with important challenges, as we struggle individually and collectively to transform our world, make and remake our history, and shape and reshape our future.

Destiny is what we manage, individually and collectively, to achieve and reach, using our minds and power and instincts and knowledge and will to make things happen for us, rather than wait for things to happen to us.

4

Life and Love

One life is too short for a true love

True and deep love engulfs the entire life and overwhelms lovers, causing love to become larger than life itself. While such love is destined to live for a long time, lovers are destined to die sooner or later, leaving behind a legacy of unforgettable love to inspire many generations to come. This makes life, no matter how long it may last, too short for true and deeply passionate love. Lives that cannot last long for such passionate love to enjoy often end before the love story is completed and exposed to the public to see and feel. Sometimes the love life of lovers ends prematurely because the nature of their love defies the culture of its times but fails to beat it. True love is usually too tender to wage battles against the cruelty of outdated traditions and customs and racial discrimination

One love is too little for a full life

When love is an enjoyable, yet passing experience, it becomes an emotional feeling that comes and goes in a short time, leaving no significant footprints behind it. Such love is usually of little importance to occupy a full life. While life continues and love may be repeated with more or less intensity and passion, it almost always disappears in the clouds of doubt, the sadness of disappointment, and the dark holes of emptiness and selfishness. A love story in such a case is only a part of a larger life experience that knows no limits; a life that lives one exciting experience after another until the end of life. The only thing that is sure about love is that it dies almost always a natural death due to neglect, boredom, pressure, and the intrusion of

another, more exciting love that keeps knocking on the doors of a tender heart.

So, having a love that is larger than life makes life a part of an experience that knows little about life complexity; a life too busy with a love that gives with passion all that it has without asking a question or expecting anything in return. In contrast, having a life that is larger than love makes love a component of a special life experience that goes beyond an ordinary life; a rare spring flower that loses its beauty and fragrance as the hot summer days arrive. The interaction of a full life with a truly passionate love makes love very special while making life a unique experience seldom repeated.

Love is a lesson that teaches us how to care and be kind to ourselves and our loved ones, how to be more loving and giving and compassionate. And that makes us more human caring not only about the people we love, but also about our work, our country, our world, and our collective social causes. But since the times of love that is larger than life have ended under the onslaught of greed, materialism, individualism, selfishness, and the worship of money, we need to reinvent our lives and train ourselves how to be in a love relationship with everything and everyone that matters in life; otherwise, our human instincts will be replaced by the wild animal instincts of our ancestors.

5

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 accept whatever you may get in life. People who are content tend to lack the motivation to work hard and do more; they are also more likely to feel satisfied, regardless of how little they may have. Therefore, if contentment comes first, it does not matter how much you have in life because you will always have enough to feel happy and satisfied.

In contrast, people born in sociocultural environments dominated by materialism and greed and characterized by envy and unrestrained competition are more likely to be ambitious and often aggressive. Such people tend to work hard and let themselves be transformed through hard work into money-making machines that never stop running. Therefore, if greed, or envy, or unrestrained ambitions come first, it does not matter how much wealth people may have because they will never have enough to feel happy and satisfied.

People feeling content are more likely to lead simple, quiet lives, and have little regard for work or money. Unrestrained ambitious people are more likely to lead busy, stressful lives and to be obsessed with work and money. Work for them does not end because the lust for money is limitless.

Thus for man to feel happy, and be satisfied and productive at the same time, he must strike a balance between unrestrained ambitions and unmotivated contentment. He needs to work hard, be focused, set achievable goals, know when to stop working, and seek

satisfaction in getting as much education and knowledge as possible, nurturing love friendships, and giving as much assistance to others as he could, especially to those who need his help most.

Borrowing and Living

No one can live his entire life on borrowed money or time to support a lavish lifestyle. Everyone that borrows to spend, and not to invest, will find himself sooner rather than later unable to service his debt, unable to borrow more, and unable to continue living as before. Besides, he is more likely to have a difficult time finding a job good enough to meet his financial needs and expectations. And to avoid being sued and probably going to jail, he finds himself forced to declare bankruptcy and start all over again with little hope of being able to restore normalcy to his life, and live long enough to enjoy whatever he may achieve in the future.

A nation living on its past glory and heritage is like a consumer that borrows to sustain a costly lifestyle he cannot afford. Such a nation will discover sooner rather than later that its past has nothing of value it can use to improve the quality of its life or make it more enjoyable; and that the legacy of the past is unable to make the present more productive. No past, regardless of its glory and legacy, and achievements, can help a struggling nation to construct a better future for its citizens. Since no one can remake or reclaim the past, everyone can and should try to make and claim the future. Whoever ignores the future, the future will ignore him as well; and whoever lives in the past, the past will laugh at him. A nation that continues to talk about the virtues of the past and lives on the legacy of the past is unable to live its present and therefore is less able to appreciate the future and meet its challenges.

When the future arrives, a nation living on borrowed time and the legacy of its glorious past will wake up trembling at the sound of strange currents of change knocking at its door without being prepared to face the challenges that change poses. It will look around

for some time to borrow or some money to restructure its shattered life, but there will be no one there to answer its call. This means that a nation living in the past for the past, will end up missing the present and most likely the future as well; and because it lacks what it takes to build a better future, it might be forced to live its entire life in poverty and conflict, or a virtual state of bankruptcy, dependent on charity and the mercy of others.

7

Choices We Can Make

We are born to live and die; and in the meantime, we are destined to experience the struggle that makes life worth living, and feel the joy of living, suffer the pain the ups and downs of life, and surrender to the agony of dying.

Homes usually prepare us to live and be healthy.

Schools usually prepare us to learn and live good, productive lives.

Most religions prepare us to live a life of peace and contentment and die with a promise to have a better life in the afterlife; a promise that no one and no religion can prove to be true.

Birth gives us no choice to be born or not to be born, when to be born, where to be born, in which religion to be born, in which social class to be born or die; birth does not even allow us to choose our parents or our names.

Death gives us no choice either; we cannot choose not to die or when to die or how to die or even where to die, and sometimes where to be buried.

Only schools and the knowledge we gain from learning and reading give us a choice; they teach us how to live, manage our daily life, plan for the future, and be productive; they also teach us how to be successful and happy. Schools and knowledge and learning from our life experience teach us how to use whatever we learn to enjoy

whatever we earn; they also teach us to give to the needy and get the satisfaction of knowing that we care and love to share.

We grow with learning, and mature with the wisdom of a rich life journey that experience trial and error, joy and pain, success, and failure. The accumulated knowledge and experience and wisdom we gain help us to find our way in life and guide us to where we decide to go. Watching others die teaches us how to ease the pain of dying with the comfort of knowing that all humans have the same fate.

So, to make the ship of life as safe and comfortable as it could be; and make living as enjoyable and rewarding as it could be, we need to learn as much as we can, for as long as we can, and get the most of the knowledge we gain until the day we die, and share our wealth with the needy, and make our knowledge available to whoever has an interest in knowing and learning as we did.

Always remember; you earn what you learn. And knowledge not shared is knowledge wasted.

8

Choosing How to Live

Life on earth never stops changing, causing circumstances surrounding us to change continuously and at times rapidly and profoundly. For everyone living in this world to enjoy life and face its many challenges, he must adapt to changing life conditions that affect and are affected by technological developments and new scientific facts. Life conditions are also affected by the socioeconomic, sociocultural, and sociopolitical changes and transformations we witness every day. Since the most change in living conditions is beyond man's control, people have to make their choices based on their views of life, the nature of change itself, and how they imagine the future. So, as we live, we are faced with two choices; to accept change and let it influence our lives, or build our capacity to face change and use our minds and other resources to influence its direction and speed to suit our views of life and future goals.

Most people usually choose to bend to changing life conditions and accept change as is; but by so doing, such people surrender to change they view negatively without a fight. As a consequence, they lose whatever capacity they have to influence the future and enjoy life as they wish. In contrast, people that try to bend changing circumstances to suit their purposes tend to have the courage to fight for what they seek in life. And in the process of fighting, they strengthen their capacities to live the lives they wish to live and face its many challenges and ups and downs without fear.

People who are poor and lack the proper education and knowledge are more likely to bend to changing life conditions rather

than challenge them. Since most such people tend to believe in faith and fate, acceptance and contentment become not only possible but the right thing to do. In contrast, people who have the right education and knowledge are more likely to try to manipulate change to suit their purposes; the first is likely to be poor and have little or no education; the second is likely to be rich or at least financially comfortable. Nevertheless, no one can surrender to changing life conditions and ignore his traditions and the objectives he seeks to accomplish; and no one can bend changing life conditions completely to meet his desires. Therefore, we all need to make compromises that we may dislike but have to accept to lead normal lives without much stress.

Time and change and knowledge are the train that carries every person to an undisclosed destination; we may be able to control the train's speed, modify its direction, and force it at times to make certain stops on the road to taste a different life for a while, but we cannot change the train's destination. Everyone is therefore forced to adapt to change. However, those who surrender to change and allow it to control their lives lose the most; and others who challenge change and influence its direction and speed gain the most.

9

A Birthday Reminder

A birthday is a kind reminder
Of the many years that are gone
And the more that are still to come
The need to forget the bad ones
And make the new real fun
To embrace the shining moon
And celebrate the rising sun

A birthday is a beautiful occasion
To be surrounded by loving friends
Laugh, dance, play, and hug everyone
Relax, and let the soul be rejuvenated
Forget past mistakes you've done
And commit to making good of days to come

A birthday is a gentle reminder
Of the many sleepless nights, you spent alone

Negotiating deals that could never be done
Missing the birds singing in the morning
And the setting of the evening sun
Worrying about life's ups and downs
That may never, ever come

A birthday is a wakeup call
That happiness is a shadow
A ghost that is always on the run
Riding on the shoulders of someone
Your love so dearly
And your heart says he is the one
In whose eyes you see the shining moon
In whose heart you feel the warmth of a rising sun
In whose arms you live many dreams
And believe that the end of joy
Will never, ever come

Ethics and Ethical Behavior

When a person loses everything, his prestige and dignity and ego and social status disappear quickly. And that is more likely to encourage him to become an honest person because he would have no reason to hide anything or tell a lie. But when someone develops an ego and seeks more wealth and prestige and power, he is likely to become a habitual liar; he often feels the need to lie to boost his ego, make more money, grab more power, and hide how he behaves to reach his goals. Nevertheless, such a person tends to do his best to appear as a nice, honest person who loves people and wants them to love him as well. Nevertheless, people with big egos and others driven by a lust for power and money are more likely to lie to hide their true intentions and ways of getting what they want.

People that lack self-confidence are more likely to lie to cover up the character deficiencies they suffer from because no one likes to be seen by others as weak. Most people who are weak lack self-confidence, and therefore tend to behave according to the values, customs, and traditions of society; however, a minority of them tends to behave in a largely unacceptable way and to do things that violate prevailing cultural values and traditions to prove that they are strong. But trying to hide who they are, often drives them to become dishonest and untrustworthy, and that puts them in a worse position than being seen as weak but honest.

For example, a prostitute who stands naked and acknowledges what she does for a living has nothing to hide; she has no reason to lie to others. Such a person is more likely to be better at telling the truth than a well-dressed businessman in pursuit of more wealth and

social status. The prostitute tends also to be more honest than a politician in pursuit of more power, as well as a self-styled intellectual promoting his ego. While a prostitute has no reason to lie, the others who have gotten addicted to money-making or power-grabbing or ego-inflating, have every reason to lie to get more of whatever they already have.

Self-styled Third World intellectuals are usually unable to boast their egos without lying and cheating and making claims they cannot prove; they often try to question the characters and credibility of others to make themselves look better; some of those intellectuals, tend to lie not just to others but also to themselves and get delusional in the process.

A businessman is usually driven by greed and envy; a politician is driven by a lust for power and money, and a self-styled intellectual is driven by a lust for prestige, recognition, and money. As a consequence, all of such people find themselves often working hard not to tell the truth or serve a common cause, but to advance their interests at the expense of both the truth and common causes. Therefore, such people should not be trusted blindly.

People that cannot compete with others openly and honestly often feel that they have to lie, steal, cheat and deceive to advance; as a consequence, they are likely to violate the ethical codes of conduct observed by society. Minorities in general, due to discrimination and lack of social and political connections, tend to lie and deceive to get what is theirs. Most Third World minorities living in the West tend to lack the language skills and education and knowledge of the law and culture of the land to compete in western societies. As a result, they tend to lie and cheat and deceive to move fast and compete with their peers; and in the process, they often violate the law and the ethical codes of conduct prevailing in the society. This kind of behavior usually continues until the second or third generation, depending on the quality of education each

generation gets and the kind of experience it gets exposed to in life. And that lead such minorities to form cultural ghettos, where they and their friends and countrymen reside, and live the same life they left behind in their original countries.

Faith and Progress

Life under traditional agriculture is usually timeless and serene, enabling faith and fate to prevail, penetrate deep in the culture of people, and therefore perpetuate the forces of stability and continuity in society. Such a life reflects tranquility and peace of mind, breeds acceptance that causes societal stagnation, and thus it limits individual imagination and curiosity. In such a society, faith claims to know the entire truth about life and the afterlife; it also claims that fate is predetermined. As a result, people are led to believe that they have little or no reason to worry about tomorrow or the day after because everything had already been determined by God.

Agricultural societies, in general, prefer feeling rather than knowing; people want to feel good and secure, even when they are relatively poor and vulnerable. Most such people usually lack the desire to know more than needed to run their daily lives. As a consequence, people living the agricultural way of life tend to have no interest in knowing what disturbs their beliefs and traditional life, particularly the inner life where faith, fate, and contentment reside together in peace. Because of these beliefs and living conditions, it took more than ten thousand years, numerous scientific discoveries and technological developments, and countless ideas and wars before life under agriculture began to experience systematic and systemic change.

The German philosopher Nietzsche argued that humankind would not be able to develop its potential in the presence of God, because a belief in fate restrains one's ability to grow and dampens one's ambitions. One can argue further that human beings living

under authoritarian rule, be it military or theocratic or traditional, are unable to discover, let alone exploit their hidden talents and mental capabilities. The authoritarian rule imposes on society a command system that suffocates freedom and vastly limits individual and collective initiative and human imagination.

People living under a theocratic or an authoritarian system are required to obey orders, stay away from questioning authority, avoid being engaged in thinking about science and philosophy and ideas that question faith and fate. Thus, challenging the basic principles of authoritarian rule and theocratic hegemony is the first step that society should take to move toward change and freedom and social and economic progress. Otherwise, no society living under dictatorship will be able to smell the aroma of freedom and join the advanced and free peoples of the world any time soon.

Social Awareness and Freedom

Whoever does not miss freedom is usually unaware of the meaning and value of freedom and the role it could play in his or her life; and because of that, he is unable to make others aware of its existence and meaning and importance. In traditional societies, where women are controlled and often oppressed by men, women cannot explain the meaning of freedom to their children and help them grow up as free men and women able to claim their rights, and pursue their dreams, and fulfill their obligations. As a consequence, children are brought up as members of a family led by an often dictatorial father, and members of a society led by strong men who represent a higher traditional or political or religious authority; and therefore are made to accept being dependent on others and having little voice in running their life affairs.

In such societies, the individual is denied the right to be free, and authority, regardless of its social or political, or religious source, confiscates all the freedom available in the society. As a consequence, people are treated as slaves responsible for whatever authority asks of them, while they have no right to hold authority accountable for whatever it does or fails to do. As a result, freedom becomes a privilege that rulers own and grant a small portion of it to people they trust to serve them well. And contrary to common wisdom, freedom in every society is limited, when some people get more freedom, many get little freedom, and that causes justice to become a victim of oppression and dictatorship and lack of awareness.

Freedom may change its face or form; nevertheless, it remains the most important agent of sociocultural, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical change, as well as societal transformation. Therefore, regardless of the form of freedom, it remains a human right, a moral value, and a requirement for causing change and making progress. Freedom is not the spirit of history only, as the German philosopher Hegel once claimed; it is the spirit of humanity; no human being is complete without freedom. However, man's longing for freedom and struggle to attain it does not happen except when he feels that his freedom is compromised or his will is confiscated; and that can happen only when people become aware of the role that freedom plays in sustaining their humanity and enriching their lives.

Cultures whose core is religious and others that are based on comprehensive ideological philosophies such as nationalism and communism do not teach freedom; as a result, they cause people to be unaware of the importance of freedom and the positive role it can play in their lives. Therefore, freedom and the longing for it remain a cultural issue, dictating that traditional cultures must be transformed to become more able to recognize that people have rights and obligations that are equal, which requires changing the education systems and curricula in schools and universities, as well as the message of the religious establishment, in addition to restructuring the relationships that tie the ruler to the ruled.

Freedom and Happiness

Happiness is a deep feeling of being at peace with the self and the world around you; it appears sometimes as a happy face, but often stays hidden in the heart. When people feel free they tend to enjoy life, have self-confidence, be optimistic, and strengthen relationships with others they love and respect. Free people also feel at ease to say whatever they like to say without fear; do whatever they feel like doing without being shy, and go to sleep every evening and wake up every morning without regret.

However, everyone needs to recognize that there is a big difference between saying what he wants to say and doing what he likes to do. To say what you want to say is important, yet it concerns listeners more than it concerns you. Therefore, you should be honest with yourself and say the truth as you see it without exaggeration. Honesty and courage reflect confidence and demonstrate responsibility to act as a free person who fears nothing but cares for others. In contrast, to do whatever you like to do concerns you more than others; therefore, you should do whatever you enjoy most and makes you feel good about yourself, provided it does not violate the rights of others or harms society.

On the other hand, regretting having said or done something is a curse; it makes you feel bad and often guilty and sometimes diminished in your own eyes; it may even lead you to lose self-confidence. Regret is a poison; it poisons the life of whoever regrets having said or done something he enjoyed saying or doing. In largely conservative societies where people have little or no freedom, traditions often force most people to do things they enjoy doing in the

dark; away from the public's eyes. However, when such people find themselves alone, they often feel guilty and thus regret having done what they did. Every tradition and belief system that denies people the right to be free insults their intelligence, diminish their humanity, reduces their creativity, and undermines their capacity to help make the world a better and safer place for all mankind.

One way to feeling happy is to be satisfied with what you have in terms of money and other material objects and to stay away from thinking of what other people have, regardless of being friends or neighbors, honest or dishonest, smart or dumb. Whoever worries about what others have will discover that many dishonest and disrespectful and ignorant people have more power and wealth and prestige and social recognition than he does. People seeking happiness and peace of mind should not enter a competition they cannot win; losing could cause them to feel bitter and lose self-confidence. Staying away from jealousy and greed and envy and all things that cause shame and guilt is a good recipe for feeling happy and satisfied and being at peace.

So, to feel happy and be at peace with yourself, you need to take care of your health first, live a life that generates self-satisfaction like doing things that make people smile when they see you; and have a purpose in life; a goal that is worth pursuing. However, when you help others you should help without putting yourself under stress, and do only what makes you feel good; and never regret anything you have done. You also need to think deeply and wonder more and meditate when you can.

Since we live countless hard days to enjoy a few happy moments, everyone should try to minimize the first and maximize the second. Therefore, happiness is essentially a feeling of self-satisfaction with life accomplishments and living conditions and relationships with others.

Contentment and Change

Social change and societal progress cannot be made by people who feel content. Contented people are usually the pillars of stability and continuity in society; they tend to detest uncertainty and oppose change, particularly change that threatens their cherished values and inherited traditions; contented people tend also to oppose change that has the potential of shaking their convictions and undermining their social statuses in society. As a consequence, such people are more likely to accept fate without questioning; and nurture a culture that fosters stability and opposes social change in general. However, contentment represents an obstacle that hinders social and cultural transformation, retards economic progress and scientific research, and often causes creative ideas and technological innovations to be ignored.

When people find themselves threatened by some social change they do not understand, they often abandon the present they live in for the sake of a past they cherish but know almost nothing about. Such people flee reality they know but do not like, and seek refuge in an oasis they like but do not know. And in the process, they create images, most of which are imagined of a past that may have never existed as imagined. However, in so doing contented people give themselves a sense of security and hope that enables them to accept reality, while feeling and believing they have escaped its traps. Escaping actual reality to an imagined one, nonetheless, does not lessen misery or pain; it only serves to transform the consciousness of people to be more tolerant of a bad reality and less willing to risk changing it.

People who choose to escape a reality they do not like rather than seek to change it are more likely to be strong believers in faith and fate. They are people who tend to accept their lot in life and waste their real lives waiting for a promised one that has not been proven by anyone. All ideologically committed people tend to live outside the bounds of history, moving either toward a false dream or toward an imagined past that promises more of what they are trying to escape but do not have the courage to face.

Goals and Means

People are always in search of ways to accomplish certain goals, yet no goals can be realized without effective plans of action. Plans of action are usually chosen to achieve well-defined goals, making each plan a means to reach a well-defined end, not to search for an alternative to a situation they do not like. Since situations change and evolve continuously, goals and the means to achieve them must change as well. Therefore, plans of action need to be flexible and dynamic, able to recognize change and deal with it constructively by adapting to it or facing it. The age we live in today has made change the only unchanging fact of life. Nonetheless, every plan of action has to have a set of principles and terms of reference to guide its movement toward its final destination. The absence of principles deprives all plans of their compass, causing them to lose their sense of direction. On the other hand, principles need to be valued by society and culture, and realistic enough to be viewed by the public as achievable.

Lack of dynamism and flexibility is more likely to transform plans into bureaucratic rules and regulations while transforming unrealistic principles into mere slogans that could easily become obstacles hindering progress. Persons, groups, and nations that refuse to interpret and reinterpret principles they believe in and adapt to changing life conditions are more likely to condemn themselves to backwardness and helplessness. And in so doing, they allow friends and foes alike to transform them into objects to be manipulated and exploited; and thus confiscate their will and control their destiny.

Throughout history, rejectionist forces both on the left and on the right have demonstrated a great ability to define and identify issues they stand against, but have failed to identify and define issues they stand for. As a consequence, they have failed to provide alternatives to the ideas and plans they do not like. Therefore, the best way to change whatever you do not like, and pursue goals you like and wish to accomplish is to think positively and try to articulate new ideas and build new institutions that can replace the dying ones and meet the requirements for transforming the existing living conditions.

The Good and Bad

In every society, there are good and bad people; good people tend always to do good things, while bad people tend often to do bad things. Good people could be harsh, but good to the poor and kind to the needy; and bad people could be good to their families and friends, but bad to people they do not know as well as to society.

Good people, by their nature, tend to be kind, helpful and tolerant, and more respectful of the views and rights of others. Bad people, in contrast, tend to be rude, unhelpful, and disrespectful of others' views and what they stand for; bad people also tend to lack tolerance and violate the rights of others, particularly the people who disagree with their opinions or attitudes.

Good people tend to be modest, regardless of how successful and smart and wealthy and knowledgeable they may be; bad people tend to be arrogant, regardless of how unsuccessful and ignorant and poor they may be. Modesty reflects self-confidence and humbled power; arrogance, in contrast, reflects a lack of self-confidence and determination to demonstrate and use sheer power.

By using the stick and carrot policy, it is possible to persuade bad people to stop doing bad things and do good things instead. However, it is almost impossible to convince good people to do bad things without brainwashing them first. So to persuade good people to do bad things, you need first to convince them to believe in an ideology that sees the world as black and white only. Every Ideology tends to transform its followers into mindless actors willing to do whatever is asked of them, even committing crimes against

themselves and the other, provided that the principles and slogans of the ideology justify the actions being contemplated.

The history of nations and civilizations indicates that extremist ideologies, regardless of their nature and objectives, have been responsible for almost all wars, massacres, and ethnic cleansings; history also indicates that all ideologies have failed to serve humanity in ways that count, such as helping establish freedom, promoting tolerance and social justice, accepting and practicing democracy, or leading societal development. Fully committed followers of extremist ideologies are mostly madmen and women who are criminals in the making. Ideological indoctrination, left unchecked, usually leads to dogmatism, which leads to extremism and eventually to criminality that has no respect for human life or the heritage of peoples and civilizations.

Ideologies that lead to extremism include not only religions and sociopolitical ideologies but materialism as well. When people become machines driven by greed and lust for money for the sake of gaining and accumulating wealth, they become mad individuals and groups willing to commit all kinds of evil deeds against the poor, the weak, the ignorant, and society to get what they want. Criminals do not only steal and kill; they also carry out their schemes through fraud, bribing officials, extortion, manipulation of public records, and exploiting the needy, the weak, and the ignorant. Corporations today commit their crimes through many ways that include misrepresentation of their products, unethical billing practices, manipulation of the uninformed, and discrimination against minorities that computers often perform automatically.

The social philosophies that are considered ideologies capable of transforming themselves and their followers into criminals include religion, Marxism, nationalism, and capitalism. The people and corporations and banks that manipulated the financial, insurance, investment, and real estate markets and caused the Great

Recession of 2008 cannot be considered anything but criminals; the same measures must apply to dictators and political systems that confiscate the rights of the public in the name of religion or Marxism of nationalism.

Greed and Human Values

The financial crisis that hit the United States of America and most other nations in 2008 proved that trusting any system, particularly the banking and financial systems, is essential to keeping such systems functioning properly. It also proved that the laws and regulations that were enacted in the 1980s to ensure the trustworthiness of the financial system were lacking; regulations failed to prevent the misuse of public trust and uncover the manipulation of the markets. As a consequence, the 2008 financial crisis brought the system and thousands of financial institutions worldwide to near collapse, causing great damage to the world economy. And that forced millions of people worldwide to lose their jobs, life savings, homes and cars, and sometimes their livelihood as well. The minds that shaped the economic philosophy in America and Britain in the 1980s were instrumental in promoting, even glorifying a god-like system called the “free market.” This system was promoted as embodying the perfect mechanism to manage markets and guarantee the proper functioning of the economy.

In addition, the free market system, now called ‘market capitalism’, was supposed to allocate available resources and products among producers and consumers in ways that maximize economic benefits to all participating individuals and entities; the system was also supposed to guarantee that large financial institutions and corporations will play by the rules of a fair game, take warranted risks, and pay for their mistakes and excesses. But as the crisis began to unravel in the last months of 2007, the system was exposed as inefficient, unjust, corrupt, and thus unable to correct its mistakes; it required government bailouts, the price of which the

common man had to pay. Moreover, the experience since the 1980s indicates that the system had sacrificed human and social values for the sake of making profits motivated by selfishness and greed.

As a consequence, the system and its captains lost the trust that people had placed in them; and instead of moving to regain lost credibility by transforming their attitudes and practices by changing the old ways of doing business, they claimed innocence and resisted change; they were quick to resume outrageous habits and discredited practices. Since greed is an acquired habit that characterizes people with an unlimited appetite for making money and accumulating wealth, regardless of morality and business ethics, the system is unlikely to regain lost public trust anytime soon. The captains of the financial system have failed to end their greed and commit themselves to give priority to serving the common good. Manipulating every aspect of human life has caused public distrust in market capitalism to deepen and transform the relationship between business organizations and the public from distrust to antagonism. Greed and the human values we cherish are not compatible; they cannot coexist peacefully in one society; the values we cherish must overshadow greed if we were to avoid facing another crisis and ultimately sociopolitical unrest.

The outrageously wide income and wealth gaps that separate the very rich of the world from the rest of the people indicate that greed has overwhelmed all human values, causing big corporations and financial institutions to lose whatever business ethics they may have had in the past. Misrepresentation, cheating, manipulation, outright stealing, and deteriorating services characterize the behavior of almost all big corporations, not in America only, but in almost all parts of the world. Today, the richest 1% of the world's population owns more than 50% of the world's wealth, leaving less than 50% to the other 99% of the people. Besides, an estimated 95% of all increase in income goes to the richest 10% of the population; and as wealth and income end up in the hands of the few, many end

up having inadequate incomes to support a decent living, especially as prices of commodities and housing and services rise. If the current trends were to continue, the world economy would slow down further and ultimately crash.

History and Sanity

Everyone should have the right to celebrate his history and honor his nation's legacy and achievements and great leaders; however, no one should be encouraged to believe that he or she can relive history or reenact a historical event. Since history has never repeated itself, it cannot be manipulated or forced to reenact a role it played in the distant past. Continuous social and cultural and economic change on the one hand and expansion of populations and cities and trade on the other make the past a fading memory that is hard to imagine, let alone reconstruct as a living reality. As a result, any attempt to recreate the past will fail, because it starts by discounting the complexity of the lives of the past generations while underestimating the extent of change the world has undergone over the centuries. Such attempts confuse the present, distort the past, and misrepresent its good and bad legacy. Promoters of the past cannot succeed in brainwashing most people without falsifying the average man's consciousness and undermining his capacity to plan for a better future. And that causes sanity to be replaced by insanity and rationality to be replaced by irrationality, making the present look like a sanctuary for largely insane people.

Traditional intellectuals of societies that have had great pasts tend to have the courage to challenge foreign powers and the reality of the present in which they live. They are also able to challenge and sometimes discredit their colleagues who think in the future for the sake of a past no one has witnessed or lived. Yet most of them do not seem to have the same courage to challenge authority or prevailing dogma in society or even outdated values and ways of thinking. And by so doing, they unconsciously assume that traditional

values and a long-dead past have more rights than living people and that the past and its legacy are more sacred than the dignity and life of people.

Such intellectuals are always busy promoting a future built on a fiction that never existed or happened except in their imagination. Yet, they have little capacity and patience to construct a workable plan to facilitate the realization of their favorite future. Because of such attitudes, traditional intellectuals are working hard, often unintentionally, to misinform the public, distort reality, and waste people's time, causing people to hate their present and lose their future, and live in despair entertaining a hopeless hope.

19

The Toolbox

The toolbox is full

It has many convenient tools

For the rich and powerful to choose

To manage our lives

So they win

And we lose

They love to borrow and spend

As a global debt crisis largely looms

Bailout banks and corporations

Without giving us the right to choose

So they win

and we lose

They build tanks and planes

And deadly missiles that cruise

Waste our resources fighting senseless wars

While our economies suffer the blues

They always win

As we lose

They export jobs to whomever they choose

As millions of workers languish in poverty

And import our shorts, socks, and shoes

And while homeless people sleep in public parks

They fly their corporate jets and cruise

They do not care what happens to anyone

As long as they win

And we lose

Traditional economists seem to have no clues

That the world has changed so much

It invalidated their classical tools

But why should they worry

They make more money

As we lose

We have lost our jobs and homes

And have nothing more to lose
They grin as they win and we lose
Thinking we are the world's only fools

But standing together
We empower each other
Create global power
Change our world forever
Win, and never lose

Ideas and Money

People who can create great new ideas do not need as much money as people who cannot create such things. On the other hand, people who have a lot of money, regardless of its source, do not need to create great ideas as much as those who do not have as much money.

People with ideas are usually able to make money by using their ideas in the financial or economic or service or industrial fields, or by selling their ideas to others who need and can use them. Consequently, people with creative ideas can make money and gain social status and public recognition. On the other hand, people with money can buy new ideas using their money and employ such ideas in activities that enable them to gain public recognition and social status, and probably more money as well.

People who can generate great ideas with ease tend to give generously to others and to social causes they believe in. Such people almost always derive a great deal of satisfaction from sharing their ideas with the people who need them most and probably can afford them least. In contrast, people with lots of money but with little or no creative ideas tend to be greedy; therefore they are less likely to give to needy people and social causes. As a consequence, greedy people are less able to derive a good deal of satisfaction from whatever money they may get or give.

Since people appreciate the act of giving and respect the givers, the recognition people of creative ideas usually get from the public is often genuine and reflect admiration and love. On the other hand,

whatever recognition people with money may get, it tends to be superficial and lacks admiration and love.

People who are lucky enough to have the capacity to generate great ideas and have substantial amounts of money are fortunate; they can invest their money and utilize their ideas in ways that enrich their lives and the lives of others. Unfortunately, however, those people are rare, because money tends to distract the attention of great minds, and great minds tend to care less about money and wealth.

Ideology and Democracy

Every Ideology is a comprehensive social philosophy that motivates its followers to form mass movements to transform the prevailing social, cultural, political, and economic orders and create a new, much different society. Popular movements are usually led by charismatic leaders who know how to communicate with the masses and mobilize them to achieve specific objectives. But due to their rigid, deterministic nature, ideologies tend to produce extremists who believe in the sanctity of the principles that form the bases of their doctrines; they also tend to believe in the absolute objectivity of the goals they seek to accomplish. Extremists tend to feel that changing the world they live in is a sacred mission they have to complete. As a result, ideologies and ideological leaders tend to behave in ways that reflect more irrationality than rationality and to sacrifice human rights and people's lives for the sake of an ideological zeal no one can prove its validity or utility, let alone its sanctity.

Ideologies can be divided into three major categories; sociocultural or religious; sociopolitical or national; and socioeconomic or Marxist. However, because of the discrediting of Marxism and the widespread belief in the economic effectiveness of free markets, capitalism has become an ideology that must be included in this category. Since religion has been the most dominant ideology throughout history; it does not need to create mass movements to survive and cause social change in its favor. In contrast, to be effective, nationalism and Marxism and capitalism need to create mass social movements to survive and affect change in their favor; they also need to create mechanisms to control state power and influence public opinion by incorporating the media

moguls into the ruling elite. Due to these facts, neither nationalism nor Marxism was able to survive the menaces of cultural and economic globalization. While Marxism was discredited three decades ago, nationalism is fading away and slowly becoming irrelevant except to racists. Capitalism, on the other hand, has survived many changes but at a substantial cost to people's lives and dignity; it lost its ability to be fair as well as the business ethics that make and break corporations.

But regardless of their nature and objectives, all ideologies tend to impose their will and worldview on others, not by persuasion only but also by manipulating and falsifying certain facts, and using force when necessary. Most ideologues believe that transforming the way people think and live and behave dictates confiscating most of their freedoms by changing the laws and controlling the major sources of economic and political power in society.

Since democracy is a system that derives its legitimacy from the will of people and because it is based on certain principles such as equality of rights and opportunities, freedom of speech and worship, and the rule of law, ideologues cannot function in a democratic society. Ideologues tend to view democracy and democratic principles as obstacles hindering their efforts to achieve their goals. Therefore, neither ideologies nor ideologues tolerate dissent or criticism or freedom of speech; they are also unable to accept pluralism or recognize the equality of rights and obligations. And this explains, at least partially, the reason for electing US President Donald Trump and the revival of discrimination and hate in the Western world in particular.

When ideologies are weak, their leadership tends to show some respect for the will of the people and to claim acceptance of the basic principles of democratic rule; they may even participate in the democratic processes. However, their objective has always been to gain power and use it to impose their will on the people and to

transform society in their image as President Erdogan is doing in Turkey. When ideologies gain enough power to rule, they usually go for the maximum they believe in and seek to accomplish without much regard for the interests of the people or the sensitivities of the minorities, or the human rights of the people they claim to be fighting for. Therefore, the majority of moderate ideologues must be treated as extremists in the making.

If the force were to be used to subdue extremists, or if extremists feel humiliated and their faith belittled, they are more likely to lose whatever sanity they may have had and resort to violence. Firm believers in faith and fate and others who believe in a national zeal tend to be racists; they often appear more willing to commit crimes and justify criminal acts in the name of the ideological zeal they believe in and seek to realize. Since extremism is a form of madness that defies rationality, most extremists must be regarded as people in need of compassion, reeducation, and long term therapy, not force or humiliation.

Ignorance and Arrogance

Ignorance, generally speaking, could be defined as a lack of knowledge about most things in life, or ignorance of a specific subject. Arrogance, however, is an attitude that often translates into a behavior displayed by most ignorant individuals who claim to know much more than what they know. Arrogance comes as a result of a feeling of superiority due to having power derived from either military might or unearned wealth. Arrogant people tend to denigrate others and belittle their opinions; they normally behave in such a manner to hide their ignorance. Besides, arrogant people refuse to acknowledge a lack of knowledge, because they believe that such an acknowledgment would raise serious doubts about their fitness to occupy whatever social or political, or economic positions they may occupy in society; acknowledgment of ignorance weakens their influence and undermines their claimed prestige and social status.

Uneducated people who realize and acknowledge the nature and extent of their ignorance tend to be modest and show humility. As a result, such people are more likely, to be honest, eager to learn from others, and often listen to what knowledgeable people have to say. In contrast, ignorant people who behave arrogantly tend to be dishonest and stubborn, which usually leads them to shy away from the truth. As a consequence, arrogant people are less able to learn from others, change their repugnant attitudes, and improve their stock of knowledge or correct their largely undemocratic and unethical behavior.

People who are largely uneducated but behave with modesty are a social asset despite their lack of adequate knowledge; they are an

asset that can be harnessed through better education and training and productive employment. However, ignorant people who behave arrogantly are serious liabilities; they represent a social and often an economic burden that weakens the potential capacity of society to be productive and nurture social trust and democracy. Largely ignorant people characterized by modesty tend to have good and positive attitudes; while ignorant people characterized by arrogance are more likely to have bad manners and negative attitudes.

When the ignorance of a person is reinforced by an arrogant attitude, it becomes hard for such a person to care about society or the needy or humanity; and whatever experience and knowledge he may have are usually used to reinforce his power and social status at the expense of others; arrogant people are also less likely to defend the rights of others or show respect for human rights in general. President George W. Bush is a good example of an ignorant, arrogant leader who took unwise decisions and made serious mistakes that adversely affected America and its people. Though his misguided actions undermined American credibility overseas and weakened the commitment of the US government to human rights at home; they started two major wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that caused untold atrocities and transformed both countries into failed states. In the meantime, these events were instrumental in igniting civil wars that caused millions of Afghanis and Iraqis to flee their homes and countries and seek refuge in neighboring Middle Eastern and European states, causing a regional and European refugee crisis of unprecedented proportions.

A person who is knowledgeable but arrogant is not less dangerous than an ignorant one; he is more likely to make serious mistakes in judgment that harm the interests and maybe the future of people close to him or associated with him. Such a person is also able and often inclined to commit certain white crimes that hurt the poor most, deceive the ignorant, exploit the weak, and cheat others of opportunities they cannot afford to lose. Executives of American

banks and investment funds and large insurance companies and regulators who managed the American financial system since the 1980s give an example of how dangerous and destructive the combination of knowledge and arrogance could be. These people have caused the global debt crisis to grow and become unmanageable while causing hundreds of millions of people in the world to lose the income they used to get from their life savings

When people who sit at the top of the social and economic ladder in society are blessed with arrogance, society becomes vulnerable to making all kinds of mistakes that cause people to lose their sense of direction. If arrogance and ignorance prevail as a cultural trait in society; and they do prevail in all ideologically committed societies, they create a mentality of cultural particularism that belittles new ideas and non-traditional ways of thinking, rejects creativity, and leads people to accept the unacceptable like oppression, poverty, and injustice; and that makes societal transformation and progress hard to conceive and harder to initiate; and this makes it almost impossible to implement a reform program that seeks to transform culture or society.

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 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. As a consequence, the tribe was replaced by the extended family or the clan, which formed the unit of each agricultural community and society; each farming community or village was 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, as a consequence was replaced by the nucleus family, which formed the basic unit of the industrial community and 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 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, be it the tribe or the extended family or the nucleus family.

As human societies began in the mid-1990s 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 result of this transformation, the will and wishes, and interests of society and state are being subordinated to the will and wishes and interests of the individual. In pursuing their gain, individuals have become nomads moving in all directions trying to subordinate everything in life to money and pleasure. Money making and wealth accumulation have become the focal point of most life activities 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. The individual gain in today's society translates into collective pain for other members of society, especially for the poor and the weak.

But since no action could shield individuals from harming themselves as they harm their society, the elites will ultimately become victims of their greed, selfishness, and individualism. 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 they are more likely to repeat the same mistakes wherever they may go, and thus meet the same fate as their victims. They are also likely to feel haunted by their conscience, assuming that they will still have a conscience after ruining the lives of millions of people.

Since elites in all societies form today one global elite, they are partners in this game of greed and selfishness and lust for power. Therefore, it is expected that the actions of these global elites will gradually transform all societies into victims, of course, unless states intervene soon to place restrictions on the free actions of the rich and powerful. But since the state in the West 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 lose, and no one will be saved from the consequences of individualism. Nevertheless, no logical argument seems able to persuade 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 they can do whatever pleases them regardless of their impact on the lives and fortunes of others.

Knowledge and Society

Knowledge is to be shared, not monopolized

Knowledge not shared is knowledge wasted

When knowledge is shared by the many, it becomes a social tool with a human mission that contributes to making society more progressive and life more pleasant; it also makes freedom more abundant, the economy more productive, and standards of living progressively better. Moreover, the sharing of knowledge makes our ability to communicate with one another much easier, and our sense of unity as one nation residing in one place facing the same challenges and destiny much stronger. As a consequence, our commitment to maintaining our unity of purpose and making more progress becomes much deeper, while motivating us to foster and enjoy our freedom and promote social justice. It will also make our commitment to a clean and healthy environment a collective goal we seek to accomplish and hold close to our hearts.

However, when knowledge is monopolized by an elite or a nation, it becomes a potent weapon with an ugly face and without a human mission. And since it would be controlled by the rich and powerful, it would be used to launch vicious wars and kill more people and undermine the principles of equality and justice in the world. In the light of the increasing scientific discoveries and advanced technologies, knowledge has become the most powerful tool to enhance our lives, as well as to exploit the poor and powerless, and enslave the weak and ignorant, and in the process, make life less pleasant for those who lack knowledge.

Because of the tendency of the few in each society to monopolize knowledge, we have become less free, less productive, and less happy, causing life for the majority to become less enjoyable and less peaceful, and our environment less livable. The monopolization of knowledge is destined to reduce our sense of unity and humanity, and undermine our commitment to sharing the world's resources for the benefit of all. Since knowledge is a product of many millions of people scattered in all corners of the world, it belongs to all peoples and therefore, should be made available to every institution that is committed to using it to make life better and more peaceful for every one of us.

Laugh and Smile

When someone's look is focused on something unseen and reflects seriousness and intensity, he or she would be looking into the future trying to read its hidden messages and track its movement; this is done in order not to miss the train of time and lag behind others. The train of time is the carriage that carries countless opportunities for people to exploit and enrich their lives. When someone misses the train of time or fails to ride on it for one reason or another, he will be left behind to languish in the arid desert of ignorance and despair, and sometimes poverty and oppression as well.

When a person laughs, he would be laughing with the present, in the present to express his enjoyment of the present or to make fun of it. Such a laugh usually reflects happiness and joy, while signaling that the person who is laughing is at peace with his place and time. Persons whose laughs reflect happiness usually feel satisfied with the present and with what it has to offer them, at least momentarily.

When a person smiles standing alone on the corner of an old street, or relaxing in his bed and looking at the ceiling of his room enjoying the scene of the lights seeping through the window to the outside, he would be smiling with the past. Such a person is more likely to be living a magical moment that brings back the events of a pleasant memory that lived in the past but refused to die with it. When such a person closes his eyes and sighs, he is asking the past to come back for a moment, knowing well that what is gone is gone and cannot come back. Yet, longing for beautiful days long gone is an unusual act that nurtures joyful memories that cause the eyes to smile and erase the sadness of the day.

When a person stands in front of his home emotionless or walks in the narrow alleys of his neighborhood aimlessly, or lies down on the bed looking at the roof without seeing the nearby lights coloring everything around him, he is likely to be lost in the wilderness of nothingness. He would be a person who is unable to enjoy the present, smile with the past, or think clearly of the future with confidence or hope; a person who lost direction in time and purpose in place and hope in life.

So we should laugh whenever laughing is possible, for as long as the impact of funny jokes lasts; we should also smile whenever we find ourselves alone, and let beautiful memories entertain and enchant us for some precious moments. Focusing on everything we do and making sure not to miss the tiniest detail helps us to succeed in whatever we do while giving us a secure path to life enjoyment.

Leadership

Leadership is a special role played in society by someone who can express the feelings and interests of other people clearly and honestly and lead them to where they want to go. No society or organization can function properly without a qualified person or a small group of persons to lead it and guide it as it attempts to achieve its goals. Leadership also plays a significant role in articulating the goals of the group or nation it tries to lead. However, leadership seldom comes as a present from the people who need to be led; it often presents itself as an opportunity to be grabbed by whoever can recognize that opportunity and has the capacity and training to lead; these are individuals who have the knowledge and courage and self-confidence to assume leadership roles in society. Therefore, people who do not have enough experience to lead should not try to assume leadership roles; they should give the responsibility of leadership to whoever knows how to lead and has the knowledge and experience to do so.

Realizing what you do not know or incapable of doing is a virtue; acknowledging that you do not know everything and there is a lot more to learn is nobility. Such an acknowledgment reflects humility and self-confidence and willingness to learn; abiding by these simple rules is a social responsibility. People who try to lead without having what it takes to lead properly will expose themselves unnecessarily to embarrassment, and possibly to failure and loss of credibility. Such people will also be doing no good to themselves or to the community they wish to lead or to the lofty causes they believe in and wish to serve.

Leadership needs adequate training and knowledge of the issues that need to be dealt with; therefore a good leader is one who knows the issues in question, and has the expertise in dealing with them, and can take tough decisions under stress. Leadership also needs to know the social and political and economic environments within which decisions would be taken, in addition to knowing what makes those environments react positively and negatively. Nonetheless, every educated man and woman should train themselves to be good leaders, and try to take advantage of the opportunity whenever it presents itself; otherwise, leadership will be left to people who do not know how to lead and often have no moral compass to guide them to do the right things. These are people who are “historical accidents,” happened to be in the right place at the right time to lead people desperately in need of leaders who care about the common good. Historical accidents sometimes bring leaders like George W. Bush who destroyed Iraq and got America involved in the Afghanistan quagmire from which it is unable to get out after 18 years of fighting and spending hundreds of billions of dollars and causing the killing of some 2,500 American soldiers and wounding and maiming many thousands more.

Lessons of Life

No one can teach without learning; whoever assumes a teaching role needs to learn how to teach students and guide them to learn and enjoy learning. A teacher also needs to know what is most interesting to his students, and what they need to know most. However, to know what your students, friends, children, employees, or subjects need to learn, you need first to know what they have; what kind of information, stories, complaints, aspirations, and life experiences they have and would like to share. Knowing what students have helps teachers to determine what students need more to learn, and how they could help students to fulfill their needs and meet their expectations. And by letting students tell their stories and how they feel about life and school, teachers learn how to stimulate students to be more alert and more willing to listen to what teachers and colleagues have to say.

As a result, students teach teachers and teachers teach students, making the teaching process a shared experience for all. And as teachers and students learn from each other, they build friendships based on intimate relationships, common understandings, and shared values. Therefore, parents, teachers, managers, professors, and leaders who want to lead but shy away from listening and learning from their children, students, audiences, employees and subjects will ultimately fail in their mission. We do not learn from other people only, we also learn from animals and nature; but to do so, we must be willing to listen to all whispering things and watch animals and nature and people in action.

No one should underestimate the intelligence of others, even people with little knowledge or even with no education like children. People live different lives under varied circumstances, and because of this, they tend to place different values from the ones we place on most things. 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 cannot and 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 regarding the time of arrival.

Successful parents, teachers, managers, and leaders need to understand that the people they try to teach are their best friends and most valuable teachers at the same time. If a leader listens to his students with interest, he will be able to enhance his understanding of how they feel and what concerns them most; and by incorporating this knowledge in the material he uses to teach, he would enhance his ability to lead them without much difficulty. But if a teacher or leader ignores his subjects and makes his relationship with them a one-way street, he is more likely to fail, not only the people who depend on him but himself as well.

Making and Breaking Relationships

Friendship relations are based on mutual admiration and trust, nurtured by empathy and understanding, and strengthened by positive reinforcements. Friendships overcome adversity as a result of passing the hard tests of disagreements and going through bad and good times. Since we shape and reshape our lives continuously, we need to mend our disagreements as they become known to us and avoid having to live with broken relationships and bleeding hearts, and confusing emotions.

The things that matter most in keeping relationships viable and enjoyable are mutual respect, understanding, appreciation, and the realization that occasional mistakes, disagreements, and misunderstandings are unavoidable. Finding excuses for unintended mistakes made by friends is a way to help them escape embarrassment and shame; it is also an important component of every good and trustworthy relationship. Meanwhile, doubt, ambiguity, and negativity are the worst enemies of human relationships; they are signs of mistrust and lack of appreciation that nurture bad feelings and lead to weakening good relationships in the short run and destroying them in the long run.

Doubt, negativity, and bad attitudes can be seen and felt in different acts such as habitual complaining, repeated criticism, and lack of respect for the other when circumstances demand it. Negativity and bad attitudes can also be seen in the tendency to spoil happy occasions by refusing to go along or putting conditions on participation that are normally hard to meet. Being defensive and insisting on reminding the other of bad deeds and mistakes while

ignoring the good ones is another sign of negativity that makes the other feel uncomfortable and sometimes bitter and apprehensive; and that causes relationships to deteriorate slowly, lose their warmth and intimacy, and die unceremoniously.

Doubt, negativity, and bad attitudes often reflect a lack of self-confidence or jealousy, or envy; as a result, they nurture bad feelings that cause relationships to fracture and become difficult to manage and fruitless to sustain. When partners in a relationship fail to strengthen their bonds and celebrate their friendship by positive reinforcements, they allow things that tie them together to wither away and, in the process, cause the relationships to become less important and slowly die; this could also cause the relationships to be transformed from friendly and enjoyable ones to bad relationships characterized by jealousy and sometimes by enmity as well.

The Conscience of Time

An old man once said

Soon, you will die, my son,

And become a prisoner in a dark grave

Lost in the wilderness

A victim swallowed by worms slowly

And no one will be there to plead for you

So, what good can books do?

Losing sleep worrying about the world

Writing countless article and poems

That no one has the interest to read

Be rational, my son

Stop writing and wasting your time

Obey the orders of your guardians

Be a role model for others to follow

So you can avoid a life inhabited by fear

Worries and nightmares that never end

Dark prison cells and humiliation

Science and knowledge, my friend,

Has never restored life to a dead person

Staying late at night has never prolonged life

Books and poetry have never farmed a field

The arts have never caused flowers to bloom

And philosophy has never brought rain

Or provided food for people in need

I shall never, ever die

He said

I am the science and philosophy

Poetry, creative ideas, and the arts

Books that carry the truth wherever they go

The conscience of civilizations

The hearts' beat of all peoples

The magician that makes life enjoyable

I shall live for as long as love lives

Bees and ants pace the wilderness
As long as stars glitter in the sky
And workers sweat in factories
As long as freemen suffer in prisons
Little children cry for attention
Dreams are born in beautiful eyes
And the sun rises and the moon shines

It's my spirit that transforms the world
It touches the land and makes it fertile
Blesses the fields and makes them green
Kisses flowers and makes them bloom
Hugs dreams and makes them real
Calms fear in little children's hearts
Inspires imagination in their eyes
And seduce people to love and make love

Science is wisdom that corrects mistakes
The arts is magic that renews dreams
Philosophy exposes myths and false beliefs
Poetry encourages the young to revolt

And destroy the castles of repression

I am the eternal spirit of all times

The orange revolution that never loses

It carries an olive branch in one hand

And the force of knowledge in the other

It undermines repressive regimes

Challenges oppressive rulers

And removes obstacle hindering progress

I am the eternal spirit of all times

That builds palaces for the arts

Little cottages for poetry

Grand monasteries for love

Minarets for freedom

Institutes for science

And Universities for learning

I am the arts and poetry

Science and philosophy

The master of the world

The free spirit of humanity
That no one can ever defeat
Enslave or imprison forever
Intimidate by using myths and illusions
Or scare by false prophets and ghosts

I may be forced to hide for awhile
Or be exiled for a few years
But my voice will remain strong
Traveling with the wind
Promoting freedom, peace, and justice
Fighting ignorance and poverty
And protecting the poor and weak

If the spirit of science and philosophy
Were to be tortured and imprisoned
And the spirit of poetry and freedom
Were to be exiled and forgotten
All pillars of progress will collapse
Cultures will get old and deteriorate
Scientists will die feeling sad in silence

Thinking brains will stop working
A life worth living will disappear
And become a thing of the past

Powerful rulers will become my prison mates
Prison keepers will become forever slaves
The rich will go hungry for days and weeks
And the love of life will be suspended
Living in a swamp waiting for my return

I am the science and philosophy

Poetry and the arts

A sun that shines and a moon that shines

The wise man of all ages

The master of all civilizations

The maker of all miracles

The ultimate light of human life

Man and Contradictions

There is no human being that is entirely good or entirely bad. Good and bad, virtue and sin coexist in every man's heart, while sanity and madness, intelligence and stupidity coexist in his head. Both the dark side and the bright side inhabit the same body and mind of every man and woman. Thus, every human being, with no exceptions, continuously exhibits in his behavior goodness and badness, virtue and sin, intelligence and stupidity, sanity and madness. However, some people tend to exhibit more of the bright side because they are good-hearted, clear-minded, and genuinely human; while others tend to exhibit more of the dark side because their hearts and minds are infected with cultural and ideological viruses that lead them to do more harm than good.

Some people are often kind to others, even to people they do not know; while others may at times commit crimes against people they know well and care about. People, moreover, cannot enjoy life without having friends they love and trust. However, when ideologies were developed and became a force in regulating man's behavior and influencing his attitudes toward the other, they began to affect his ideas and views and teach him to be less tolerant and more suspicious. As a consequence, ideology led man to become possessive and aggressive, and largely materialistic, even those whose ideology is spiritual; such people tend to hate others who disagree with them and care less about other people. Meanwhile, possessiveness, aggressiveness, and materialism led them to slowly forget the good aspect of their nature and remember the darker side of their personality.

Man can be taught to be more good than bad, to value virtue more than sin, to behave in more rational than irrational ways; and to think more intelligently and less stupidly. But for man to be good, virtuous, sane, rational, and intelligent, he needs to be taught how to think and behave and live according to the commands of the virtuous side of his personality away from the darker side. However, no man can free himself entirely from the binds of certain views that make him behave in ways contrary to his nature unless he frees himself first from the binds of all ideologies that restrict his freedom to think and act with a clear mind and an open heart.

Nevertheless, people cannot be challenged without having adversaries to compete with or enemies to wage real or fabricated wars against them. But when people wage war, they allow hate to occupy their hearts and madness to control their minds, causing both body and soul to be poisoned, at times beyond redemption. War and conflict which ideology usually inspires and sometimes promotes with passion, is the most destructive force in human history; it rubs man of his humanity and transforms his virtues into sins that kill innocent children and undermines the essence of life. Ideologies that include religions and nationalism and Marxism and capitalism are responsible for probably more than 95% of the killing and destruction throughout history.

Wise men believing in the humanity of mankind have continued to ask the puzzling question that has baffled all thinking minds: Why has the creative mind that painted so many beautiful images of life and the other has continued to make destructive bombs and war machines and wage wars to destroy the very life it worked to celebrate? Why the mind that built great bridges and water canals continues to manufacture poisonous gases and use them to kill plants and animals? Why the mind that produced so many gadgets to make life fun and living enjoyable continues to manipulate people and mislead them to do its bidding? While there are no simple answers to these vastly important questions, the survival of humanity

rests on finding the right answers. History and experience seem to say that ideology and man's commitment to it, and his deep belief in the righteousness of the ideals it espouses are the major culprits. Ideology motivates its followers to create mass movements that live and function in the shadows of the darker side of man's heart and mind. And this leads believers to dehumanize the other and wage war to harm the people who disagree with them and refuse to adhere to their ideology; they also tend to harm everyone who stands in their way as they seek to destroy the lives of their adversaries. Therefore, no solution can be found to save humanity from destruction until we transcend all ideologies and enable human consciousness to take control.

Man and His Times

Reflections on the essence of cultures throughout history

Man of the pre-agricultural tribal times or the tribal man had to fight to survive; he fought animals and other tribes that inhabited his harsh environment because he needed to get enough food to survive. Also, tribal man found fighting a source of pleasure and entertainment and an opportunity to show his manhood which led him to live his entire life fighting other people and animals and nature; so the life of the tribal man starts and ends with fighting.

The tribal man fought to live and lived to fight.

During the agricultural stage of societal development or civilization, the agricultural man spent almost his entire life planting trees and vegetables, and seeds because he had to get enough food to survive. As a consequence, he found planting the land and picking the fruits of trees and vegetables and flowers a great source of pleasure that enriched his family life and brightened his view of life. But since all of this was meant to make his life more secure and sustainable, food festivities became the major source of pleasure and entertainment in a seemingly timeless environment. The life of the agricultural man, therefore, starts and ends with eating, even for the slaves who worked and lived in the estates of their cruel masters.

Agricultural man eats to live and lives to eat.

During the industrial stage of development or civilization, the industrial man had to work to earn a living, feed his family and

survive; nevertheless, work provided him with an environment to build relationships with other workers and live a richer life. And though work relationships were built more on shared interest than on shared values, the industrial man found in these relationships a source of personal satisfaction and pleasure, and a means to gain social recognition. So the life of the industrial man starts and ends with working, even for some of the wealthiest people in the world.

The industrial man works to live, and lives to work.

During the newly emerging knowledge age, knowledge man has to learn to find a rewarding job, advance his career, and build virtual communities with like-minded people. Learning, therefore, has become the most enjoyable source of satisfaction and self-realization. So the life of knowledge man starts and ends with learning. Knowledge has also become a major source of wealth, while wealth has become the major source of power and social recognition.

Knowledge man learns to live and lives to learn

Memory and History

There is a big difference between history and memory; history is supposed to be a record of past events of public importance; while memory is more of a personal matter. Memory is a special connection to past events or a collective life experience important to its members only. Memory, therefore, is a feeling that ties people together through sharing experiences that leave a marked impact on their lives and perceptions. And because the human mind is more interested in reliving the good moments than the bad ones, memories tend to be emotional; and because of that, they are often unable, to tell the truth, or paint an actual picture of past events the way history usually does. This makes memories, particularly the personal ones, attempts to maintain strong connections to happy life experiences or certain moments in certain places and times where the experience had happened.

Nevertheless, some people tend to imagine things and convince themselves that what they saw are actual events that happen in the past in their presence. People who claim that they performed miracles or witnessed miracles happen in front of them are in no position to be believed or trusted; imagination cannot be a reality, and reality cannot be mere imagination. This means that memories are either illusions that have nothing to do with reality, or desperate attempts to condemn past tragedies, or an emotional state of mind to relive happy moments and forget the hard times momentarily. And while memories may reflect personal experiences lived by one person, the most precious memories are those that portray collective experiences that reflect the spirit of humanity and the essence of friendship and love for the other.

The less educated people tend to think that their collective memory represents the history and legacy of their past; as a consequence, most written history of such people has become more fiction than facts. Since memory replaces history in this case, the people understanding of history in general and their connection to the past in particular become emotional rather than rational, subjective rather than objective. Arabs, for example, tend to describe the past as “the golden age” and to yearn for moments no one had ever lived and may have never existed as imagined. Yet Arabs who put so much emphasis on the history of the past and invest so many emotions in recounting its accomplishments do not seem to worry much about the need to make the present as glorious as their claimed past was. And due to this attitude, Arabs have failed to make a new history worth telling by their children and grandchildren.

Miracles and Religion

A miracle must be considered as David Hume once said, “a violation of the laws of nature.” And violations of the laws of nature are not to be believed or accepted. Nevertheless, for people who believe in miracles, it does not matter who orders a miracle to happen or who puts the laws of nature in place, or who violates them. Miracles, most believers realize are beyond man’s ability to understand or order; nevertheless, they accept them as facts not to be doubted. Miracles to believers are signs that God exists and in control of the universe. God or chance may be the cause of an event that could be considered a miracle; nevertheless, it is an unusual event that should not be accepted as a part of the laws violated by God or nature, or as facts that are expected to be repeated and, therefore, should be predicted.

In teaching religion to students, religious men tend to stress the occurrence and fantasies of miracles as a part of the faith that everyone ought to believe in. Failure to accept miracles as an integral component of religion makes believers’ faith incomplete, and that causes doubters to feel less religious and sometimes guilty as well. Memorization of stories that the human brain cannot make sense of, such as details of how miracles happened in the past, or how they are expected to happen in the future tend to reduce the brain to a mere store for useless words and dates and images that overwhelm its capacity to process real information and differentiate between facts and fiction. Therefore, believing in miracles limits the capacity of the human mind to think rationally and make sense of the real world in which it lives and functions; minds that believe in miracles

often prefer to live with their illusions rather than face the challenges of their places and times.

Miracles, therefore, should be viewed as rare violations of the laws of nature; and though such violations do happen at times, they must be considered abnormalities and thus not a component of the laws of nature. This means that miracles must not be allowed to influence one's decisions regarding how to live his life or how to understand his religion or place in the universe. Taking miracles seriously is likely to make the life of most believers an illusion while making living a full life sounds like heresy that must be avoided or even condemned.

History of Human Talent

The societal processes of change and transformation are social tools that manage change in society and direct the results to benefit the social forces that control them. These processes are the sociocultural process, the political process, the economic process, and the Infomedia process; this last process includes the mass media and information technologies that include social media. The development of these processes came as a result of the development of human societies over time, and appeared one after the other, beginning with the sociocultural process, which began to take shape during the tribal age but matured around the middle of the agricultural age. The tribal age appeared some thirty thousand years ago, twenty thousand years before the dawn of the agricultural age, which appeared about ten thousand years ago.

In each stage of societal development or civilization, the societal process that enjoys the most authority in society claims most of its talent. During the agricultural age, which was dominated by the sociocultural process, the social forces that controlled this process attracted most of the talented people in each agricultural community and employed them to benefit themselves and promote their views. Since agricultural societies were largely religious, religion and its men and institutions were the major beneficiaries of the human talent of that age, using it to spread the faith and regulate social relations and individual behavior. But as agriculture spread and agricultural communities grew in size and numbers, the political process emerged slowly to challenge the sociocultural process.

As the political process began to dominate life in the second half of the agricultural age, and particularly during the transition period from the agricultural to the industrial age, it began to attract talented individuals from every place under the state control. Such talent was employed as military commanders, tax collectors, and bureaucrats to manage state affairs, and foster the power of the state and the status of its men. Since the sociocultural and political processes tend to concentrate on stability and resist change and social transformation, they denied society the opportunity to use its talent to develop the national culture and economy, directing talent instead to ensure continuity and stability. However, continuity and stability can only be achieved at the expense of cultural transformation and scientific and economic progress. Nevertheless, around the end of this era, the economic process emerged to challenge the political one.

With the advancement of the industrial age in the 19th century, the economic process became the most dominant societal process in every industrial society. Since this process is dedicated to industrial expansion and economic diversification, and to exploiting the financial and investment opportunities available everywhere, it was able to attract the best human talent in every place it operated, which covered at the time many regional markets. Such talent was employed in managing industrial plants, accounting, marketing, trading, as well as financial and investment activities; talented people were also employed to invent new industrial and financial products and services.

Due to the information and telecommunications revolutions of the last few decades, the Infomedia process emerged as the most dominant societal process; as a result, its forces were able to attract most of the human talent available in most parts of the world. This process includes mass media and information technology and social media. Since the goal of this process is to reach every individual everywhere all the time, it established business activities in every

corner of the world. As a consequence, the activities of this process cover the entire world and employ the talent it attracts to serve the interests of the forces that control it; these interests include advancing scientific development, information and telecommunications technologies, artificial intelligence, finance, investment, marketing, advertising, and information gathering and news broadcasting.

Since the social forces of the economic and Infomedia processes opt for change and social transformation rather than continuity and stability, they tend to employ world talent to develop and expand the economic, financial, and telecommunication services everywhere. Consequently, the social forces that control these two processes have managed to enrich themselves at the expense of most people of the world, causing the world's wealth and power to be concentrated in the hands of the few. And that has caused the socioeconomic gaps in every society to widen, and the sociocultural divides to deepen, and the size of the middle class to shrink at the national, regional, and global levels; they have also caused knowledge to become more materialistic and less humanistic. As a result, the material richness is being translated into social injustice that causes poverty, alienation, extremism, racial discrimination, and ideological polarization to spread everywhere, undermining stability, and threatening world peace.

Domestication and Indoctrination

Domestication of animals is just like the indoctrination of human beings, the first is usually used by ordinary people to train their pets to follow their instructions, particularly at home. The second, however, is usually used by religious preachers and ideologues to persuade people to believe in certain ideas and eventualities that often defy rational thinking and scientific facts.

When an animal like a stray dog or cat is taken from a street to a home to be domesticated, it slowly gets accustomed to getting its food without having to hunt for it; as a consequence, it slowly loses its ability to live in nature that represents its original habitat. And that, in turn, causes that pet to become dependent on its owner for food and survival. Besides, domesticated animals lose their freedom and instinctive ability to adapt to changing environmental circumstances and thus become rather lazy; and this causes many of them to get fat and sometimes die prematurely.

As for human beings, when anyone gets indoctrinated by a preacher or an ideologue he becomes less able to use his mind to react rationally to most challenges he faces in life. Consequently, he becomes dependent on the preachers and ideologues who indoctrinated him for answers to the many questions he faces in life, and thus unable to lead a normal life. Since preachers and ideologues tend to target the young whose minds are still developing and whose curiosity is still growing, the minds of such people become less able to develop to their potential. As a consequence, indoctrinated young people usually become less sociable, more content, and often discriminate against people with whom they

disagree regarding ideological issues. No society of strong religious believers or ideologically indoctrinated crowds has been able to develop and make socioeconomic progress, live a normal life, guarantee freedom of speech or compete with most other societies, especially the highly educated and scientifically advanced ones.

The world's rich and powerful men have been accumulating wealth and power for decades, some for centuries, and using their power and the seduction of money to suppress and control people. In the meantime, the media which they own and control are being used to domesticate the masses and make them behave like their house pets. As a result, the masses in a world controlled by the rich have lost their independence and ability to think freely or free themselves from the leashes around their necks. Such leashes include having to work very hard to make ends meet, which robs people of the time they need to relax and think like free people. In the meantime, the prevalence of a culture of consumerism has made most people lose the satisfaction that comes with self accomplishments and delayed gratification. Greed, jealousy, envy, and lust for money and power have replaced contentment and undermined normal life everywhere. So as domesticated pets have become uncomfortable being left alone to live in their natural habitat, ordinary people have become uncomfortable, even fearful of living without the luxuries and gadgets that keep increasing and diversifying day after day.

While no one is usually able to know what others think, everyone can see what they normally do. Therefore, indoctrination, by confiscating the ability of people to think freely, makes people look naked and thus easy for others to see what they do and how they behave. Indoctrination, regardless of being religious or nationalist or Marxist or capitalist controls the thoughts and actions of people, making them behave more like programmed robots than free women and men. And by controlling people's thoughts and actions, people

become easy to manipulate and direct to do whatever is asked of them; mere tools in the hands of the masters to use as they wish.

As indoctrination makes people less able to think for themselves, it makes the process of making decisions easier for them because their ideology has the answers to all questions. However, such answers tend to be for hypothetical questions that have probably never existed or been tested. On the other hand, having little information and experience, due to dependence on others for answers, tends to weaken confidence in one's ability to make daring decisions. Such situations lead some people to be more cautious, less aggressive, and more rational; while pushing others to rely either on their instincts or ideologies, leaving their brains to languish in ignorance and neglect.

Since no one can avoid making mistakes, and no one can live without taking decisions, thoughtful thinking that reviews all options available is the safest way to minimize the chances of making mistakes and maximize the chance of good judgment. Ideologies that seldom change their basic claims and assumptions are fit more for animals rather than human beings; therefore, there are no alternatives to thinking minds armed with the right information and the right attitudes.

Reader and Writer

I believe that the most fortunate people in the world are the ones who love reading and have the ability to write and express their inner feelings and convictions and views. People who love writing must also love reading because books are an inexhaustible intellectual spring that nourishes the minds and refreshes the souls of readers, especially writers of fiction and science. On the other hand, people who love to read and have the ability to write never age or feel lonely; they are always busy telling stories to themselves and others about the books they read, and creating new ideas that challenge readers to think, sometimes deeply.

Whenever a reader, a writer, or a thinker feels bored or lonely, he finds a faithful friend hiding inside a book on a neglected shelf fully prepared to challenge his thoughts and calm his worries and enrich his life. Books also keep forcing people who read to reconsider previous convictions and positions toward everything in life, the past, the present, the future, and the others. This causes writers' minds to excel and be constantly alert and active, producing new works of literature and thought, such as scientific theories, poems, stories, movies, fiction, and works of art.

The history of science, philosophy, and technology tells us that every distinguished thinker, scientist, and inventor has continued to live after his death through public recognition or usage of his works. Intellectuals, who committed their lives and works to defend the rights of the poor and the weak and to promote peace and justice, were turned into monuments after their death; while some of their books lived for decades, others lived thousands of years. Works of

such people keep the spirit of succeeding generations alive to fight for what is right and against what is wrong and keep the social, political, and economic leaders largely honest.

Reading and writing are two gifts that cannot stop giving. But while the first one can do without the second, it gives a lot to the reader but little or nothing to others. Nevertheless, some readers become good storytellers, which enable them to become givers as well, particularly to children who love sitting on the floor or the ground in public parks listening to stories that open their minds and eyes and make them a little more curious. Writing, on the other hand, represents an inexhaustible source of new ideas that challenge readers to read and think and reconsider old convictions and belief systems as well as expectations. However, writing cannot do without reading, because reading is the most important source of inspiration.

People who ask me what do I do; I tell them that I make love to my ideas at night, and turn them into singing and dancing and crying little birds on the pages of my books during the daytime. They sing the songs of love in my poems, dance at the music of nostalgia for a lost homeland in my autobiography; and cry for attention because my time is limited and my ideas keep pouring like heavy rain. Writing is a gift that does not stop giving, no matter how long the writer lives, how much he sometimes suffers, and how painful it has become, to tell the truth.

Economic and Political Markets

Economic markets are supposed to give people a wide range of products and services from which to choose what meets their needs and satisfy their desires; economic markets also offer people products that entice them to pursue the hobbies and interests of their choice. Since needs, desires and interests are subject to people's financial resources, talents, and cultural backgrounds, the economic markets must offer people plenty of products and services of different qualities and prices. And this is supposed to cause markets to be competitive where the number of sellers is large to facilitate competition, and the information made available to consumers is good enough to help them to make the right decisions. So when products are of varied quality and prices and information about them is good, it enables all sellers and buyers to make educated decisions.

Capitalism is a system of economic production and distribution and investment that is supposed to make the best use of available natural, human, and financial resources. But for capitalism to do its job the right way, economic markets must be free of government control, consumers must be free of the pressure and manipulation of the media and the advertising agencies, and good information about markets must be available to everyone. But neither markets nor consumers are free today, and information has never been accurate. The more markets get freer of state intervention, the less competitive they become, because mergers of corporations and business cartels formed by them reduce competition, make information less credible, and limit consumer choices. Corporate mergers and business cartels are driven by a strong desire to consolidate power and wealth in the hands of the rich and make the most profits possible, regardless of

the impact of such actions on the lives of consumers and the future of the world economy.

The drive of the rich to accumulate as much wealth as possible has led the richest 1% of the world's population to own more than 50% of the total wealth in the world. As a consequence, the incomes of the working classes in America and most other states have remained either stable or declined over the last five decades. But since the working classes represent the bulk of the world's consumers, having less money to spend causes demand to weaken; and this causes economic growth rates to decline. So the more money the rich make and accumulate the less money would be available for consumers to spend, and that causes economies to slow down and the ability of the rich to make more money to weaken. Thus a vicious cycle is created whereby everyone becomes a loser, while some losing much more than others. As a result, capitalism has lost its appeal and ability to serve the public interest. By worshiping money and greed, the wealthy have driven the world economy to the brink of a serious crisis that threatens the lives of the poor and the fortunes of the rich at the same time.

If free economic markets reflect the fair prices of goods and services offered by the many corporations to consumers, political markets must be free to reflect the actual will of the general public regarding their leaders. In the light of the public objection to tax policies that favor the rich, and due to the increasing influence of money on politics, the political markets no longer reflect the will of the people, particularly in America. Some might argue that the fact that the US President and members of Congress are elected by the people means that the political markets are working. But when the numbers of voters are carefully examined, the percentage of people who vote in the presidential elections rarely exceeds 55% of eligible voters; and the percentage of those who vote in congressional elections rarely reaches 40%. This means that most people have

given up on the democratic process and therefore stopped voting; while others feel having no choice but to vote for the least bad option.

The loss of public confidence in all branches of government seems to rise year after year. According to Forbes business magazine, trust in US institutions in 2018 was as follows; 37% in the Supreme Court; 36% in the presidency; 30% in banks; 25% in big companies; 23% in newspapers; 20% in television; and 11% in Congress. Based on this information, it is easy to conclude that most Americans no longer trust the democratic system or the free market system. Therefore, both systems must be judged as having failed the American people and require fundamental restructuring or replacement.

Books and their Social Role

Books come in too many forms, designs, sizes, and colors; every book, however, has a purpose, and therefore, it tries to address the interests and needs of a certain segment of society. Books, in general, tend to inform, instruct, persuade, inspire, provide entertainment, and challenge readers to think about the past, deal with the present, and speculate about the future.

Books that are intended to persuade are often religious and ideological; they usually try to address the needs of believers who seek information to confirm the correctness and sanctity of their convictions rather than to challenge such convictions. Believers in religion and nationalism and Marxism and capitalism tend to discriminate against others who have different religious and ideological beliefs and views. Such books, therefore, need to be avoided because they make our world less hospitable and tolerant and more ridden with enmity and conflict. Of course, there are many critical books written to challenge religious and ideological ideas by exposing what may be considered illogical or irrational arguments that contradict scientific knowledge.

Books that are meant to inform only are good, but tend to be boring; they often present the facts and ideas they contain in ways that make it difficult for most readers to understand. And what is difficult to understand is difficult to use and thus benefit from. Nevertheless; there are informative books that make information look interesting and entertaining at the same time. Such books make reading more enjoyable while helping readers to understand the complexity of life and deal with its many challenges. Scientists who

write informative books must strive to make themselves and whatever they write understood by their readers, particularly to people who need their knowledge most, and can afford it least.

Books that provide entertainment only are fine; however, they tend to waste some people's time and seldom compensate them for the time they spend reading. Of course, some people have plenty of time to spend on books meant to entertain, as well as on television shows and entertainment programs. People under stress, for example, often find such books relaxing and enjoyable. On the other hand, books that display pictures of places and rare birds and animals and artistic works tend to be special; they often provide both entertaining programs to enjoy and information to use and benefit from.

Books that inspire readers to reflect, and challenge them to think differently and creatively tend to help people to modify or change their views and attitudes, and ways of thinking, and motivate them to be creative. These are good books to read and own and share with others. Such books are more likely to lead people to do the right things in life, and be more helpful to others. Books that inspire, therefore, help people to harness their potentials, take advantage of opportunities, and exploit their talents and time in ways that improve living conditions for them and others.

Books that inform and inspire and challenge at the same time are the best to read, own, share, and recommend; they are the ones that help individuals and societies to transform their cultures and ways of thinking and social relations, and challenge them to change their attitudes towards nature and peoples who hold different views; they are also capable of bringing real change to society. Thus books that inform and inspire and challenge are the most capable books of playing a constructive role in helping all peoples, advancing all civilizations, and making and remaking human history more peaceful and productive.

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Acts of Life

I wonder what life is all about

Is it a tragedy that has no end?

Innocent souls lost in the wilderness

Meaningful words, meaningless acts

Is life God's wonderful act?

A spectacular show of his artful art

Devils and angels playing a game

Without an end in sight

Is the life you, she, and I

Rich and poor

Strong and weak

Masters and slaves

Fat rats and hungry cats

Acting their instinctive acts

A cat waiting for a tasty meal

A trembling rat living in fear
Mother earth is watching silently
And no one with a heart is there
To save a poor rat from a hungry cat

Life, after all, is an act
Of God and man and nature
Playing the game of cat and rat
An interesting, boring, senseless play
That has no end in sight
Yet, no one is willing to admit the fact
That life is a craft for us to learn
How to live a meaningful life without pain
As we live, play, cry and die in the act

Choosing How to Live

Life on earth never stops changing, causing circumstances surrounding our lives to change continuously and at times rapidly and profoundly. People, having to live in this world, must, therefore, adapt to changing life conditions that affect and are affected by many things; such as technological developments, new scientific facts, creative ideas, strategic changes, sociocultural and socioeconomic transformations, and peoples' perceptions. Since most change is beyond man's control, people have to make their choices based on where they live and how they view life and its complexity, as well as on how they imagine the future and the nature of change itself. So, as we live, we are faced with two choices; to accept change and let it influence our lives or build our capacity to face change we do not like and use our resources to influence its direction to serve our needs and meet our expectations. And that means that instead of waiting for change to happen to us, we should try to make change happen for us.

Most people usually choose to bend to changing life conditions and accept change as is; but by so doing, such people lose their ability to shape the future and enjoy life as they wish. In contrast, some people try to bend changing circumstances to suit their purposes; and by so doing, they strengthen their capacity to live the lives they wish to live and face its challenges without fear. People who are poor and lack the proper education are more likely to bend to changing life conditions rather than challenge them; their belief in faith and fate makes acceptance and contentment not only possible but the right thing to do. Meanwhile, people who are rich or at least financially comfortable and have the right education are more likely

to try to bend change to suit their purposes. Nevertheless, no society is willing to surrender to every change in life conditions and lose its way of life and what it aspires to achieve; and no society can bend all changing life conditions to meet its desires.

Time and change are a train that carries everything in life and every living person to an undisclosed destination; we may be able to control the train's speed, modify its direction and force it to make some stops on the road to relax and enjoy the scenery, but we cannot change its destination. Therefore everyone is forced to adapt; some people and cultures are more capable of adapting than others. However, peoples and cultures that allow change to control their lives lose the most; and peoples and cultures that are capable of influencing change gain the most.

Wisdom of the Past

Past events and old ideas and life experiences, to be fully understood and appreciated, must be placed in their proper historical, cultural, and geographical contexts. This means that to make the legacy of the past beneficial, it needs to be examined in light of the present situation and future expectations as compared to the past. Comparing the state of life or the way of life that gave birth to old ideas and accomplishments to those of the present is a must to determine the relevancy of the past to the present. Failure to do so makes relying on the wisdom of the past less helpful, if not an obstacle to change and progress. Appreciating the importance of the trends of global change and understanding the nature and extent of change should not be attempted using the wisdom of the past. Today, planning where to live and how to live, and what to study at college, and what are the most promising investments are determined by future expectations rather than experience.

We study the wisdom of the past to understand events and developments that happened in the past, why they happened, how they happened, what change they produced or provoked; and how they relate to the times we live in at the present. If past circumstances and living conditions that produced the great ideas of the past are similar to the ones we have in the present, then the wisdom of the past may be of help to us; but if past circumstances and states of life are different from the ones that engulf our lives at the present, then the wisdom of the past is of no use to us at all.

Deferring to past wisdom, therefore, is a mistake that could cause serious negative consequences, particularly when it is

considered a reference to restructuring social or political relations and issuing religious edicts. So to make good use of the old and new knowledge available to us, we must place every idea and piece of information in its proper past and present societal context; otherwise, we are likely to misunderstand the past as well as the present and thus deny ourselves the opportunity to use past wisdom to face the challenges of our times and plan for a better future.

Some people like the Arabs and the Persians and the Chinese are obsessed with the past and its legacy because of its glory and great accomplishments compared to the West of older times. But people obsessed with the past often get intoxicated by the mostly imagined glory of the past, and that makes them unable to realize how far times have changed over the centuries. Obsession with the past makes people less able to understand how the past relates to the present and how the present differs from the past. Such peoples are neither able to recognize the complexity of the present nor the simplicity of the past. And this makes it difficult for them to identify what is relevant and what is irrelevant of the past wisdom. And without knowing these facts, people obsessed with the past cannot face the challenges of their times and compete with their peers.

Therefore, history must be employed to help understand the connection of the past to the present, and how to free the present from the chains of the past, and construct a future capable of achieving in its times what the beloved past had achieved in its much different times; otherwise, the wisdom of the past could become a grave to bury the dreams of people who live on the hope of overcoming the problems of the present and building a better future. People who have an eye on the past but fail to have the other eye on the future are neither informed nor wise; they are unable to influence the present or shape the future; and therefore, they are doomed to lag behind their times and peers, and rob their children and grandchildren of their dreams.

Knowledge and Wisdom

People tend to think that knowledge and wisdom go hand in hand; meaning that everyone who gets a good education and acquires a good deal of knowledge becomes a wise person. There is no doubt that knowledge contributes to making most people more thoughtful and thus wiser. However, knowledge, just like technology, is a valuable, multi-task tool; it could be used to build houses and increase crops, or destroy villages and kill innocent people. Physicists, for example, could be employed to produce nuclear bombs to destroy human and animal life or build desalination plants to produce clean water for the poor people of the world to drink and cook their food. This means that what determines the role knowledge plays in societal life is not the quantity or even the quality of knowledge itself, but the morality and ethics of people who have the knowledge and possess the right to use it.

Education is a continuous process through which knowledge is taught and acquired and spread in society; therefore, schools and universities bear a huge responsibility regarding what kind of knowledge to teach and where and how it should be employed. Educational institutions must ensure that students who come to them for education are taught not only how to acquire and retain knowledge, but also how to use it to help improve the quality of life for themselves and other people. The learning process, however, starts at home where children are raised and continues at school and university; parents, teachers, and educators share the responsibility for teaching children and young men and women how to be good persons and responsible citizens. Besides, the way traditions are practiced, and how laws and regulations are enforced and perceived

by the public contributes to shaping people's values and attitudes, and views toward science, work, time, life, and others.

Knowledge without ethics and the right attitudes is knowledge either wasted or used to harm rather than help people. The 2008 financial and mortgage crises have demonstrated that smart people with advanced management degrees used their knowledge and talent and imagination to invent new financial products that no one understood and use those products to cheat people, manipulate the poor and old, deceive governments, and enrich themselves. While many of the talented computer experts are using their brains and knowledge today to develop new programs and applications to make our computers more efficient and easy to use, some of them are using their knowledge to develop computer viruses to spy on some people, blackmail others, steal intellectual work and credit cards, and destroy people's lives. The knowledge that corporations like Google and Facebook collect and trade have made people and their private lives and secrets commodities to sell, and in the process, these corporations made huge profits and hurt millions of people worldwide. Such actions of corporations and experts are wasting a good deal of people's time, limiting their freedom to think freely, and undermining the future of millions of young people, particularly the vulnerable ones.

Knowledge, properly used, helps people to become wiser in managing their life affairs and using the knowledge they have to benefit themselves and others; wisdom, meanwhile leads people to appreciate the value of knowledge which encourages them to acquire more of it and use it to enrich human life in general. So, knowledge and wisdom go hand in hand, but neither one can guarantee that the other will behave responsibly. Nonetheless, the more knowledge people acquire, the wiser the majority becomes; and the wiser people become, the more knowledge they acquire. However, the best way to use knowledge is to share it with others; though some people might use whatever knowledge is offered to

them to harm others, the majority tends to use knowledge to generate social benefits that will eventually reach millions of people and contribute to making our world a better place for all to live in and love.

Knowledge not shared is knowledge wasted.

Words to Remember

A popular proverb says; “you can go fast by yourself, but you cannot go far without the help of others. Yes; people could be your hands if you need to carry something heavy along a road; their words could inspire you to think and reflect and become wiser, and their ideas could become an important part of your stock of knowledge. And no matter what you do and where you live, you are a part of a group of people, because everyone lives in a community of many 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 in their company without worrying about drowning or getting lost in a vast, empty desert.

You cannot keep relationships in your life unless you continuously inject new life into your relationships. Relationships are like a flowering tree; it needs to be watered now and then, and be cared for; when neglected for a while, relationships fade and slowly die leaving behind memories that often make you feel bad to have missed the opportunity to nurture them and help them bloom and spread their aroma around.

No one fails in life, but everyone misses opportunities in life; you should not feel bad if you miss an opportunity; you will have a second and a third chance; just stay alert, keep your eyes open, and your mind focused on what you want to be in life. You also need to do the right things that help shape your personality to be the person you want to be. Knowing what you want to be in life is an invaluable compass that helps you to navigate the sea of life, and find the

shores of hope where opportunities live and continue to grow and multiply.

Everyone has the right to make mistakes, but smart people know that they have no right to repeat their mistakes. People who think, work hard, and try to do substantive things are destined to make mistakes; a mistake, however, is an experience to learn from, not a sin to regret making. Whoever fails to learn from his mistakes, often fails to reach his 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. Whoever feels that he does not need to change, misses living a real-life, because life is a special love project in the making that does stop evolving and challenging its lovers.

College is not a place to indoctrinate you to believe in grand ideals and lofty goals or adopt a certain ideology; rather, it is a place to expose you to many ideas and competing ideologies and help you, using your eyes and critical mind to evaluate what you see and hear without outside pressure. And based on that, you decide what you like and dislike and consequently choose for yourself what you like; smart and wise students chose what is lofty but realistic, what is exciting but moral, and what is materially rewarding but ethical. These principles are capable of guiding each student to choose what is good for him to learn and pursue as a career.

Religion and Freedom

Religion was developed in older times as a legal system to regulate human relationships in society and to set rules for behavior according to certain traditions, values, and ethical codes. Besides, religion claimed to know how the universe came into being, how it works, and who is in charge of it. The lack of scientific knowledge to explain things claimed by religion at the time was instrumental in facilitating the development and spread of religions in all parts of the world. In the meantime, the absence of political and legal systems to regulate man's behavior and social relations among people gave religion the legitimacy and power to expand its sphere of influence and deepen its roots in society. Since no other systems existed at the time to challenge religion, religious men found an opportunity to gradually transform worldly religions like Christianity and Islam from being belief systems only into comprehensive philosophies leaving nothing for experimentation, scientific inquiry, or speculation.

As a consequence of this development, religion became a tool to manipulate people and make them subservient to religious thought, while causing human life in general to become an instrument dedicated to serving religion and the men who spoke in the name of its god. In such an environment, it was rather impossible for the concepts of freedom, liberty, free speech, and human rights, including women's rights to be conceived, let alone developed and institutionalized. Consequently, all forms of freedom suffered and continue to suffer in every society dominated by religious thought.

When societies were small and social relationships were still largely primitive and subject to traditions, religion was very much

needed to create communities and give meaning to life and a sense of direction to people. During tribal and early agricultural times neither government nor law existed; religion was the only institution to provide a code of conduct to make people more civilized and community life more peaceful and productive. Religion reduced the level of enmity in older societies united by faith and transformed harsh social environments into more hospitable ones where people were able to live and interact with each other without fear. In the meantime, the lack of religious diversity enabled religion to achieve its goals in each society it dominated.

Religions in general claim to be the only belief systems capable of giving life meaning and explaining its complexity, as well as social systems capable of regulating human behavior and guiding people to live moral and rewarding lives. Some religions insist on owning the whole truth regarding the creation of the universe and man's place in it, and what lies afterlife. Such claims and people's belief in them have made scientific speculation about the past and the future largely unneeded, and often unacceptable, if not a heresy. As a result, religion became a bind that ties people to certain notions, assumptions, and claims that could not be proven. And since people tied to a rigid set of convictions are unable to think freely about the future and plan for it; strong believers found themselves happily enslaved by men who are busy manipulating them instead of helping them to live moral and productive lives; the changeless ideas and rituals and symbols of religion made people content and gave them peace of mind.

For humanity to become free of its binds it needs to transcend all ideologies, and reduce the role of religion in human life to what it meant to be; a social system to govern man's relationship to his god without mediators; and an ethical code of conduct that guides people to do good deeds. In older times, when religion was a mere social system, it served humanity well, uniting people and creating communities of faith where social justice, harmony, and tolerance

largely prevailed. In contrast, when religion became an ideology, it made religious communities exclusive, transforming harmony and tolerance into enmity and hatred; and because of that, it precipitated countless wars and caused the death of millions of people needlessly.

Today, there is no religiously conservative society or a group of believers that tolerates dissent or is socially progressive, or politically open, or scientifically advanced, or economically developed, or technologically innovative. Also, no socially conservative society provides an environment where its members feel free to think and write and publish and pursue happiness without fear; and no religion considers the followers of other religions as equals or treats them as such. If humanity fails to transcend religion in its ideological form, man will not be able to enjoy freedom, live life as it is meant to be lived, reach his potential and employ his talents and creativity to serve a culturally diverse society, or attain the level of humanity he is capable of attaining and deserves to enjoy.

Creativity in History

During the transition from the agricultural age to the industrial age, which lasted about 300 years, (1450-1750) Europe witnessed intense intellectual, philosophical, political, and cultural creativity. In the process, this creativity caused fundamental and irreversible social, cultural, political, and economic changes that paved the way for the industrial revolution. However, the philosophers, thinkers, and reformers who dared to challenge the teachings of the Catholic Church at the time and promote change were harshly punished; many of them were tortured or killed by the church and its men. While those reformers were fighting for humanity and justice and rationality, the church was fighting to preserve the status quo and protect its economic interests and control of society. Nonetheless, science, rationality, and humanity triumphed at the end, and the church was defeated; consequently, its role in the life of society was vastly reduced, particularly after separating state and religion from each other in Europe in 1648 after some 80 years of religious wars.

This great transformation happened while people had no modern communications or transportation systems, and no mass media or freedom of speech. The absence of central states having strong armies and police apparatuses had enabled thinkers and philosophers and scientists to spread their ideas across the continent and cause the transformation process to run its course. However, this transformation was helped by the invention of mechanical printing which facilitated the publishing of books and the spreading of knowledge and new ideas. The state at the time, just like the church, had none of the means of control and suppression which the modern state of today has. These institutions are an army, a police

force, an intelligence apparatus, a bureaucracy, and an official media to inform, manipulate, and misinform the public.

Today, we are passing through another transitional period that promises to take us from the industrial age to the knowledge age within a few years from now (2019). However, it seems that this transition is characterized by intellectual rigidity and timidity instead of intellectual creativity and openness; it is, therefore, less likely to witness the kind of intellectual and philosophical creativity that characterized the last historical transition. This is largely due to the great advances in communications and information systems that tend to limit rather than facilitate the spread of new ideas and thought-provoking views. And in an attempt to defend the status quo and oppose change, the mass media work hard to falsify the consciousness of people by creating and spreading fake news. But fake news causes the public to lose trust in the ruling establishment that includes the media itself. The change that the US media is supporting today is not meant to transform society or spread intellectual thought, but to change the political leadership of the ruling establishment that guards the status quo.

However, in so doing, the American media is protecting not the public interest but the interests of the ruling political, military, and economic elites at the expense of the country and people, and humanity. And to facilitate this practice of brainwashing, the media is allowing the old guard to engage in non-stop recycling of old ideas and worldviews that have become a heap of trash that has no practical use anymore.

Every historical transition, when completed, produces a new civilization that brings with it a new society with its unique social and economic structures, and a new culture, and a new economy; all of which are much different from the previous ones. During this process, however, change invalidates the existing laws and ideas and theories and causes the old institutions that represent the pillars

of society and state and economy to become largely dysfunctional. Two of the major institutions of the passing era that have become largely dysfunctional are democracy and capitalism. And this creates a need to restructure these institutions or replace them; otherwise, the chaos and loss of direction that characterizes national politics and social relations, and economic uncertainty will continue until the breakdown of the existing system and probably the downfall of the ruling elite.

If one considers life during the pre-industrial times, neither the agricultural age nor the tribal age had democracy or capitalism; these institutions are products of the age of industry and its unique society, culture, economy, and civilization. And since we are entering a new age, the democratic and capitalist systems must be restructured or replaced. To clarify this point further, we need only to consider what happened to the clan which was the unit of the agricultural society; it disappeared and was replaced by the nucleus family in the industrial age. And as the knowledge age advances, the nucleus family is being replaced by the individual as the unit of the new knowledge society. In the meantime, capital and its forms and role in the industrial society have changed; as industrial plants and powerful labor unions are disappearing, services and the individual entrepreneur are exploding.

And this calls for new thinking, new ideas, new systems, new laws, new theories, and new roadmaps to guide us into a still uncharted world. Today, the five largest corporations in the world are not industrial corporations that own huge brick facilities and produce cars and radios and airplanes and household appliances, but service companies that produce almost nothing material; they are Amazon, Apple, Google, Facebook, and Microsoft. Therefore, it is expected that the movement toward the breakdown of the democratic/capitalistic system will continue until the American state with its three branches of government recognize what is happening and turn their attention to transforming the existing social order;

otherwise, the system will soon lose whatever life is left in it and dies due to a heart attack. With the ideological polarization that divides US politics and politicians and most people, and because of the revival of racism and discrimination against nonwhite minorities, it is hard to imagine how the system could survive for long without fundamental restructuring, or even fade away and die peacefully.

Dictatorship and Human Rights

Dictators who emerged in the wake of the national independence of many Third World countries made most citizens victims of cruel political and economic systems, as well as prisoners of traditional social orders and oppressive cultural environments, and outdated educational systems. Human rights are abused, dissent is suppressed, freedoms are confiscated, and the rights of people are an exclusive privilege that rulers monopolize. The concept that rights are given at birth and that all citizens have equal rights was never established, promoted, or even seriously considered by Third World dictators or the systems they established. And since absolute power corrupts absolutely, political and economic corruption spread and became structural; and with time, corruption became a normal state of mind shared by most citizens.

Traditionalism has played a role in encouraging the new rulers to become authoritarian, allowing them to monopolize political power and use it to gain economic power and to employ both to suppress and oppress the masses and confiscate their rights. Nepotism is only one aspect of traditionalism that regards favoritism and discrimination against others as legitimate acts, particularly in societies that live in pre-industrial times. People with the right political and social connections are likely to get the jobs they desire and whatever favors they may ask for. People without the right political or social connections are unlikely to get the jobs they deserve or be granted favors they may badly need. And to get what they are entitled to in an unjust society, ordinary people are often forced to pay bribes and submit to denigration and humiliation by state representatives who run the bureaucracy.

Generally speaking, regimes ruled by dictators tend to view every independent thinker as a threat to its existence; they tend to say, “He thinks, so he is a traitor”; and traitors usually face one fate: isolation and deprivation or imprisonment in dark prison cells. As for the traditional nationalist forces in society that see political and economic independence as the ultimate goal, they tend to view every thinker who calls for freedom, democracy, and equality between men and women as a foreign agent not to be trusted; they tend to say, “He thinks, so he is a foreign agent”; and foreign agents usually have one fate: to be shunned and discredited or forced to immigrate. Meanwhile, conservative religious forces view such individuals as infidels betraying religion; they tend to say, “He thinks, so he is an atheist”; and atheists have only one fate: to be eliminated or, if they’re lucky, to end up living in exile and dying in obscurity.

Because of this treatment and attitudes, a large portion of the highly educated men and women of the Third World were forced to leave their homelands and seek refuge in Western countries, particularly in Western Europe and the United States. Also, millions more, despite being largely unskilled and uneducated, had to emigrate to earn a living and get a taste of the freedom and education that others enjoy. As a consequence, most Third World nations today suffer from a serious brain-drain problem that makes attempts to develop the national economies and institutions and transform traditional cultures very difficult indeed.

Dreams and Freedom

Poverty is the mother of all social ills, of which despair, ignorance, and abdication of rights are only a few; people in need are unable to think of anything except how to survive one day at a time. And this forces most of them to work for more than one employer to make enough money to support themselves and their families. Poor people also lack the financial resources to send their children to good schools, causing their children to grow up with little education to enable them to climb the social ladder and move a step upward. As a result, poor people usually get tired of life, often abdicate their rights to free themselves from worrying, seldom participate in elections or public life, and therefore, live most of their lives in desperation. Most children born to poor families stay poor for the rest of their lives, and most children born to rich families stay rich for the rest of their lives. Today in America, the average lifespan of rich people is about 15 years more than the average lifespan of poor people.

On the other hand, injustice is the father of anger and outrage that drives people whose rights are violated to demand justice. But no people can recover lost rights peacefully in societies where injustice prevails as a state of mind. Consequently, injustice leads to radicalism and often to extremism and violence as well. And since the majority of radicalized people tend to be poor, they often resort to destroying the unjust system that controls their lives rather than reforming it. However, no deprived minority can reform an unjust system by itself. And since minorities are seldom able to work together, sabotaging a system or revolting against one becomes the

only way to destroy it and force society to rebuild a new one where justice prevails. Nevertheless, history tells us that such revolutions have little chance of succeeding; and in the process of failing, they often cause bad situations to get worse. The millions of Latin American immigrants to the United States and the millions of Middle Eastern and African immigrants to Europe prove that neither peaceful nor violent revolutions against tyranny and injustice have succeeded in this age.

For people to free themselves from whatever chains that limit their freedom and ability to think and live dignified lives, they need to dream of a new future and concentrate on planning for a better future and work hard to construct it. There is nothing that can help people in distress more than dreaming and thinking positively and planning constructively. However, dreaming and thinking positively can only be attempted in societies that have a margin of freedom to allow people to think loudly and dream comfortably, which means that people need the basics of security and stability. Besides, society must have opportunities that give desperate people hope that changing their lot in life is possible. While forces that limit the potential of people in most societies are socioeconomic and sociocultural, in poor societies such forces also include sociopolitical binds that tie them to poverty, injustice, and anger. The need, therefore, is for a new vision to transform the existing unjust social, economic, and political orders, and create sociopolitical processes to make change peaceful and rewarding.

Education in the Knowledge Age

Anytime we fail to learn something new, we become less educated and less knowledgeable compared to most other people, and thus less able to compete and live productive lives. The reason for becoming less educated and knowledgeable is because most other people continue to learn and gain more knowledge and experience day by day. Anytime we fail to produce something of value to us and other people, we slip behind those who continue to produce more; and due to such failure, we become relatively poorer and more dependent on others. Any day we stop moving forward for any reason, we lag behind others who keep walking without looking backward. And this, in turn, causes the knowledge and income and wealth and power gaps that separate us from most other people to widen and become, over time, much harder to bridge and overcome.

Anytime we fail to learn something new and produce something of value to us and others and climb the civilization ladder, we become less able to live in our times, enjoy what it has to offer, and contribute to the making of human history and civilization. And when we become less able to contribute to shaping the future, we become less civilized in the eyes of the world, if not the barbarians of the present. And that causes us to become frustrated and less able to think positively and creatively to reconstruct our shattered individual and societal life. Frustration and anger undermine the human capacity to think rationally and do what is needed to be done to catch up with the people who continue to accumulate more wealth and knowledge and thus more economic and political power.

As we approach the end of the transition period separating the industrial age from the knowledge age, all societies have become less structured and less homogeneous than before. Societies are today divided into socioeconomic classes and sociocultural groups. While socioeconomic classes reflect disparities in income, the current trends of change are causing the income and wealth gaps in every society to persist and widen. On the other hand, sociocultural groups reflect differences in ideological convictions and disparities in education levels and knowledge. Socioeconomic disparities create conflict in society between rich and poor that lends itself to mediation that often leads to peaceful resolution; this is possible because mutual interests tie socioeconomic classes together, forcing them to compromise to avert fights that produce more losers than winners.

In contrast, sociocultural differences create conflicts that often do not lend themselves to compromise solutions, because sociocultural groups have almost nothing in common to tie them together. And when sociocultural conflict escalates it leads to extremism and often violence that undermines the capacity of society to live a normal life. Sociocultural conflicts rarely end before one group destroys the others and creates a closed society ruled by an ideologically oriented leadership that governs with an iron fist. And since neither freedom nor tolerance nor respect for human rights is possible in an ideologically governed society, normal life cannot exist. And that causes people living in such societies to live in a state of constant fear, unable to think rationally or positively or develop their economies and cultures and make substantial progress in most fields of human endeavor.

People who fail to acquire special skills and good education are unable to compete in the fast-developing knowledge age; and therefore, they are destined to lag behind those who have the right education and skills in high demand. In contrast, people who learn special skills and get quality education, which the knowledge age economy and the global market demand, are destined to succeed

and prosper, regardless of their color, nationality, religion, and place of residence. Knowledge people have become capitalists without having a lot of money in their banks; they have knowledge that can be sold to the highest bidder and bring substantial financial and social rewards. So people with knowledge and talent can get the jobs they like and have the social status they aspire for. This is why the knowledge people have become the nomads of the new age, moving from one place to another, from one company to another, and from one country to another with ease, enjoying the journey and getting financially and socially rewarded in the process.

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A Dreaming Dream

I have a wishful dream

To spend one day in the royal castle

Alone, with her majesty the queen

Follow her like her little shadow

And her big, overblown ego

Without being heard or seen

Watch her sleeping, walking, and dancing

Listen to her singing, yawning, and laughing

Crying like a baby, screaming in her dream

Standing naked in front of her magical mirror

Hiding behind brick walls and a mental screen

Watch her putting on her gown and crown, and a serious look

A queen must be seen elegant, but rather mean

Follow her to the balcony as she greets her admirers

Laugh as she waves her hands and people scream

Imagination is a beautiful dream never to be seen
Fly to the shantytown hiding in the castle's shadow
Share an intimate evening with my favorite queen
A woman unashamed to be seen naked, but not mean
Eat, drink, read poetry, hug and make love
And steal a night from Scheherazade's dream
Walk along the banks of the ancient river
Where ducks swim up and down the stream
Climb the top of a wooded mountain
Sit, think, contemplate and write a poem
Listen to nature's music and forever dream
Walk in the forests, deserts, and fields
Listen to love birds sing and dance
Watch wild animals play the game of life
Make passionate love and freely scream
Follow farmers as they pick yellow flowers
Admire a woman hiding behind her donkey
Protecting herself from the sun's eye

Using the donkey's shadow for a screen

Watch taxies rush, trains run, planes roar

Boys peddle worry beads, traders make dirty deals

Listen to mothers read stories to little children

As babies cry for attention and scream

Follow lovers as they swim in the river

Enjoy the sunshine on sandy beaches

And do whatever they wish in between

Look at the blue skies and wonder why

So many people miss living life like a dream

Embrace life and sail with the wind

Travel up and down every willing stream

Learn, teach, succeed, fail, fall and rise again

And be the envy of king and queen

Never mind wearing an old dirty shirt

A pair of worn socks and shoes

So long as the mind is clear

The heart is beating and pure

And the conscious is clean

Walk along the memory lane and plan

How to be every young man's hero

And every beautiful woman's dream

The man she lives to meet and love

And be forever his heavenly queen

Freedom and Progress

Whoever does not miss freedom is usually unaware of the meaning of freedom and the role it plays in human life; and therefore, he cannot appreciate the value of freedom and help make others aware of its meaning and value. In traditional societies where women are controlled and often oppressed by men, a mother cannot explain the importance of freedom to her children and help them grow up to live and think like free people. Instead, children are brought up as members of a family normally dominated by a man who represents the sole authority in the house; and as members of a society controlled by a man who represents the highest political or religious authority. Consequently, most people accept willingly being dependent on others and having no choice or a voice in running their affairs.

In such societies, the individual is denied the right to be free, and authority confiscates all the freedom available in society, even the limited freedom that small groups are supposed to enjoy. People are usually treated as slaves responsible for whatever authority asks them to do while having no right to hold authority accountable for whatever it does or fails to do. Freedom, therefore, becomes an asset that rulers own and grant a small portion of it to please and appease the few they like and trust to serve them well. And that discourages most people to do anything that might anger the traditional or political or religious authority, fearing the harsh consequences. Because of such rules, neither individuals nor groups can take the initiative and lead change that paves the way to making individual, group, and societal progress possible. Cultures whose core is religious and others based on grand ideologies such as

nationalism and communism are usually less aware of the importance of freedom and the role it can play in initiating social change and causing progress.

Freedom encourages people to be creative, discover their talents, and utilize them to benefit themselves and society; and by so doing, freedom contributes to making progress in all fields of knowledge and business. Freedom is not the spirit of history only, as the German philosopher Hegel claimed; it is the spirit of humanity, without which no human being is complete. Therefore, freedom must be viewed and treated as a human right, a moral value, and a basic requirement for social, cultural, political, and economic change, and thus progress. Man's longing for freedom and struggle to attain it, nevertheless, does not happen except when he feels that his freedom is being compromised or confiscated. But for a man to reach this conclusion, he must first become aware of the role freedom plays in sustaining his humanity and enriching human life.

This means that freedom and the longing for it, and awareness of its societal role remain a cultural issue, dictating that traditional cultures be transformed to become more open and able to recognize that people have rights and obligations that are equal. This transformation also requires the restructuring of traditional relationships that exist between the ruler and the ruled, and man and woman to reflect fairness, equality, and respect for the mutuality of rights and obligations. And as these values become the rule and not the exception, social progress becomes not only possible but inevitable.

God and Man

A friend student sent me a message quoting the French scientist/philosopher Pascal, in which Pascal says; “There are two kinds of people that one can call reasonable: those who serve God with all their heart because they know him, and those who seek God with all their heart because they do not know him.” However, there is another quote attributed to Pascal that adds a third type of people; “those who live not seeking, or finding God.” Pascal says that “The first group of people is rational and happy, while the second group is unhappy but rational, and the third group of people is foolish and unhappy.”

By dividing people into three categories, Pascal demonstrated that he is rather irrational and probably unhappy as well because no one knows if other people are happy or unhappy, or what makes anyone feel happy or unhappy. Sources and expressions of happiness and unhappiness differ from one person to another, from one culture to another, from one social class to another, and from one age to another. But before commenting further on Pascal's claims, we need to explain the meaning of the word “know”. Knowing a person or a thing means having enough information about the person or the thing one claims to know. So if a person says that he knows another person, it means that the first has a close relationship with the second that often includes having lived or worked with him for a considerable time, or having exchanged news and views with him regularly, or having read his works of science, philosophy, literature or otherwise.

Though members of the first group of people, according to Pascal's categorization, tend to feel happy because they know God, it is doubtful that they are rational, because their claim of knowing God from which they derive happiness is itself irrational. Members of the second group who do not know God but seek to know him cannot be rational either, because they do not seem to realize that no one can find God because he is supposed to be everywhere and nowhere at the same time. As for members of the third group who live not seeking or finding God, they are the only ones actually who tend to be rational and happy, because they know that no one can find God and that God does not play a role in their day-to-day lives.

God, assuming that he exists, is not in contact with any man or woman to allow people to know him. Some people claim that they can know God spiritually through prayer and meditation, but the true source of spirituality is not God but nature. Probably without the many religions that God had created or authorized to be created, our world would have been less chaotic, and people would have been more kind to each other, and hate and violence and war in the name of God would have been absent from our lives, making us able to be happy without having to seek God and attempt to know him.

A person with a scientific mind, no matter how little knowledge he has, is unlikely to believe a claim without logical or scientific proof; in contrast, a person with a believer mind, no matter how much knowledge he has, is likely to accept any claim without logical or scientific proof, as long as he trusts the source, and the claim is made to reinforce a religious belief they share. The first sees every mystery as a claim to be proven; the second sees every mystery as a sacred message to be believed and interpreted. So, to convince simple people to believe in anything, you only need to make your claims sound like miracles that only God can make happen.

The Arabic philosopher Ibn-Rushd (Averroes) once said that "If you want to control an ignorant person, you must wrap every false

claim with a religious gown”. Unfortunately, we live today in a world where most claims and counterclaims are made by the media, often without factual or scientific proof, causing ignorance to spread and belief in miracles to replace belief in science and logic. As a consequence, the brains of most people are neglected and left alone to live in the dark alleys of ignorance. As a consequence, our world has become a hotbed for nurturing conspiracy theories, hate, discrimination, conflict, and war.

History and the Past

William Faulkner once said that “the past is never dead. It’s not even past.” Yes, the past, to a great extent, does not die; it lives with us and in us for as long as we live. However, the past lives in us in the form of either hope or despair or nostalgia or anger. People who see the positive side of the past are more likely to be inspired by it and work hard to change their living conditions to bring the glory of the past back, and in the process participate in the making of their history and probably the history of others. People who see the negative side of the past, however, are more likely to dream of changing their living conditions and ways of thinking, but often do nothing to make change happen to them because the ghost of the past makes them fear change and sometimes detest change and oppose it.

Nevertheless, no one and no nation can remake the past, because every past loses its spirit and life the moment we pass it and leave it behind. No time that is gone can be brought back or recreated, no matter how hard we may try. Yes, we can and we must make our future by ourselves if possible and with the help of trusted friends if we cannot do it alone. If we fail to make our future, the major political, economic, and military forces that surround our life will make a future for us that meets their needs and suits their desires, and advance their interests often at our expense. And by so doing, they will be able to dominate us and exploit our human and natural resources and keep us submissive and poor for as long as we continue to accept our lot in life and feel content.

Whoever concerns himself with the past only is more likely to live and dream in the past, and, therefore, is unlikely to understand the

present and its imperatives or contribute to making a better future for anyone. And whoever ignores the future, the future ignores him as well, leaving him to live in neglected ghettos, deprived of most things that make life worth living. Believing in faith and fate, and waiting for mysterious forces to make the change we need and desire is a recipe for perpetuating ignorance, poverty, dependency on others, and loss of options.

History is not a self-driven train moving from one point to another by itself without being influenced by human hands and brains. On the other hand, knowing where we are at any point in time does not enable us to know where we are expected to be at another point in the future. History also is not the only force that shapes the future and determines the fate of individuals, nations, states, and civilizations; every one of us can and does participate in the making of history, and influencing the speed and direction of societal change.

History is a record of life experiences as lived by individuals, groups, nations, institutions, and states, as well as cultures, science, technology, and the environment. And since nations and states function under different circumstances as times change and places develop, the human experience changes from one age to another and from one place to another, causing historical records to change as well. Times and histories changed in the past, continue to change in the present, and will never stop changing in the future. While a lesson of a certain experience may be helpful to some people, no experience can be repeated, and therefore its lessons should not be used as a model for what the future should look like. Since circumstances change from time to time and from one place to another, nothing can stay the same. As a consequence, all humans and societies and their histories and cultures, and experiences will continue to change.

A well-articulated strategy for societal change needs five elements to succeed and cause genuine change to happen; First, a vision that explains the present, identifies the obstacles hindering change, and paints a picture of the future sought; second, a detailed plan to translate the vision into a reality on the ground; third, a leadership that is aware of the need for change, committed to change and capable of leading change; fourth, a mass sociopolitical movement to promote change according to the vision and its plans; and finally, a strong popular and intellectual will to make change happens.

The Burden of History

History is both an asset and a liability; no one and no nation can claim one side and ignore the other. To utilize history's assets one has to acknowledge its liabilities and deal with them honestly and openly. Since every nation has a history that influences its attitudes and contributes to shaping its culture and defining its identity, no nation can run away from its history for long. The more a nation tries to run away from history and ignore it, the more it feels the weight of history. History is a package that every nation and every person carries on his back wherever he goes, regardless of whatever he thinks and does and claims. As one gets tired of thinking about history and its legacy and glory, the liability side of history becomes more pervasive.

To deal with history intelligently and be in a position to utilize its potential, one needs to acknowledge history's assets as well as liabilities. Untapped assets usually deteriorate in value because they get old as time passes, while ignored liabilities keep growing and accumulating as time passes. Distorting or denying parts of history lead ultimately to wasting the opportunity to utilize its assets, reduce its liabilities, and employ both to change direction and chart a new path to a more promising future. Nations, just like companies, pay a heavy price for keeping liabilities on their books, while ignoring the potential of assets they have. And as time passes, the burden that liabilities represent transforms itself into psychological and cultural problems, while the potential value of assets evaporates slowly.

Just like a big lie invented to hide a truth, the more one promotes the lie and magnifies its presence, the more the truth becomes evident. Big lies, to continue to be believed, must be repeated all the

time, promoted everywhere, and defended at all costs; otherwise, they die a natural death. But as a lie is repeated and defended, it becomes suspect and questionable; only diehard ideologues and simple people accept lies at their face value. Smart and fair-minded people tend to question most claims and give counterclaims a chance to make their case. Life experience tells us that there is nothing as honest and powerful as the truth, even when it is hard to swallow and hurts to acknowledge. No matter how hard one may try to hide the truth for the sake of defending a lie, the truth will eventually win. People who believe in big lies tend to agonize and resist before acknowledging the truth; because they know that there is a price to pay for supporting a lie. Being deceived and cheated is not an excuse to stick to your position and refuse to acknowledge the truth.

The history of White Americans in confiscating the rights of the natives of the land, and enslaving the black people who were kidnapped from Africa to serve in the homes and work on the farms of the rich White Americans is one of the big liabilities of American history. Although this part has been acknowledged by almost all intellectuals and historians and most politicians, the state continues to resist dealing with this issue with honesty. As a consequence, discrimination against all non-white Americans has continued, causing the sociocultural and ideological divides in America to deepen. And during the Trump era, discrimination found a strong supporter in the White House, causing the weight of this historical liability to increase and become pervasive. The official stand against Hispanic and Muslim immigrants is an aspect of a problem that divides Americans and poisons the environment where they live and work, causing the creation of many cultural ghettos that threaten the unity of the nation. Unity of people is not a byproduct of harmony or the melting pot claim; it is rather a product of diversity; so without acknowledging diversity, no unity could be achieved.

For example, American support for Israel is based on a big lie created by the Zionist movement in cooperation with the British and French governments for the sake of justifying their collective colonization of the Arab land and dividing the Arab people. All three states continue to defend the big lie and support it by creating smaller lies to keep people of the world, including their people busy thinking of the lies instead of seeking the truth. In the meantime, the western media, in general, was happy to play the role of the accomplice in promoting the big lie and the little ones and hiding the truth. However, hiding the truth is always more difficult than promoting a lie, because the life of lies is short, while the life of truths is long-lasting.

But no matter how hard the promoters of a lie may try to hide the truth, and no matter how much support the lie gets from people who benefit from spreading lies, no lie can succeed in concealing the truth forever. As more and more people discover the truth, they will see the ugly face of the lie and the crimes committed in its name by its inventors and promoters. And this is destined to make all honest people feel angry because they were deceived by their leaders and the media. History will punish the inventors and promoters and defenders of lies no matter how long it may take, and make them pay a price for their crimes against the humanity of others and the suffering of innocent children. Sadly, however, the inventors and beneficiaries of lies often die before the truth prevail, leaving the poor to pay the price for their crimes.

Feelings and Meanings

When you feel sad, you appreciate happiness;

When you fall in love, you appreciate sharing;

When you feel sick, you appreciate health;

When you are in love, you enjoy life;

When you lose a friend, you understand loneliness;

When you lose health, you understand weakness;

When you lose your money, you understand poverty;

When you gain wealth, you understand envy;

When you succeed, you understand jealousy;

When you fail in life, you understand pain;

When you concentrate on the afterlife, you lose life;

When you lose the desire to love, you lose the desire to live;

When you lose dignity, you lose everything.

When you try to be clever, you lose wisdom;

When you try to be smart, you lose intelligence;

When you become dogmatic, you lose rationality;

When you become ideological, you lose freedom;

When you become religious, you lose joy;

When you become private, you lose universality;

When you become national, you lose fairness;

When you become wealthy, you lose friends;

When you become powerful, you lose humility;

When you become arrogance, you lose decency;

When you become obsessive, you lose life excitement

When you become materialistic, you lose the sense of justice;

When you try to succeed without doing much, you lose honesty;

When you try to be rich without working hard, you lose ethics;

When you become truthful, you gain freedom;

When you manage to be yourself, you gain everything;

And when you gain everything, life becomes boring;

And that dictates that you reinvent your life to make it interesting.

Al-Khwarizmi, the famous mathematician and astronomer was once asked about the value of human beings; he said;

A person of high morality and ethics has a human value equal to 1;

If he has beauty too, then add 0 to the 1, so his value is equal to 10;

If he has money also, then add another 0 to the 10, so his value is equal to 100;

If he is from a good family, then add another 0 to the 100, so his value is equal to 1000;

If he were to lose the first one, which is morality and ethics, the 1 would be gone and what remains of his value is equal to three zeros.

Facing Societal Crises

When society faces a serious crisis, small steps to deal with the crisis do not usually work because crises tend to spread faster than the presumed solutions, which cause small steps to fail to ameliorate the deteriorating situation. The political crises of Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Ukraine, and Yemen are examples where piecemeal solutions have failed. The political crisis in America is another example of a system that failed to face ideological polarization with comprehensive solutions. The spread of Islamophobia and immigrant phobia in America and Anti-Semitism in both America and Europe, have lately caused many Jews, Muslims, and Latin Americans to feel less secure and less appreciated in both continents.

Partial solutions, particularly to economic and financial crises are worse than small steps because they tend to belittle serious problems, causing the core issues of the crises to be overlooked. The 2008 financial crisis is another example where the business people who caused the crisis in the first place were not punished; instead, they were allowed to remain in their positions without having to change their practices, causing the income and wealth and educational gaps in society to widen. And this caused the middle class to shrink in size and the sociocultural divides to deepen in society and become hard to bridge. As a consequence, society's cohesiveness and unity gradually deteriorated and individual loyalty to the state and nation was undermined. The rhetoric of President Trump and the declining social position of the middle class has led the American people to be divided along ethnic and political lines that

seem hard to erase. The case of Yugoslavia proves that the consequences of social crises are destructive, inhumane, and irreversible. Many massacres were committed, thousands of women were raped, and several cities were destroyed and looted before the NATO forces intervened militarily and the United States got involved politically, forcing all parties to accept a plan that divided the land and people of Yugoslavia forever.

Therefore, postponing decisions needed to deal with pressing challenges and difficult situations is foolish and dangerous; thinking that the future is likely to make decisions easier to take is stupid because the desired future may never come and most likely will never come. As the future continues to unfold, it causes situations to change and often shift; making them hard to understand and harder to deal with. Every future creates different situations that require different ideas and decisions that in turn require different tools and often more money and effort to handle. Therefore, challenges need to be faced without delay; and social and economic crises need to be dealt with decisively and comprehensively before they turn into societal crises. Social crises in particular, if left alone to simmer, transform themselves into political crises that question the legitimacy of governments in control; and that eventually leads to upheavals and sometimes to revolutions that cause untold damage.

Freedom and Social Justice

Historical records suggest that no people were able to see an end to their struggle for freedom and liberty because people seem to view freedom as a limitless space; the more you see of it, the more you feel the urge to go further. Nevertheless, the tribal society was the only society in history to have all the freedom it needed to live a nomadic life; it, therefore, did not experience flagrant slavery or injustice, particularly since it was not divided into social classes or cultural groups. But with the dawn of the agricultural age some 10,000 years ago, the space of freedom began to shrink and appear limited, causing some people to get more freedom than others; and that forced the many to get less freedom than needed and desired to live dignified lives. The agricultural society was the first society in history to be divided into social classes separated by wealth, which enabled the rich to subjugate and enslave the poor. In the meantime, ambitious leaders and states began to expand and create empires, causing conflict and war to characterize relations between nations and states of older times.

Today, people struggle peacefully and otherwise to free themselves from poverty and need and injustice, from political oppression and suppression, from ignorance and disease, from prejudice and discrimination, as well as from economic exploitation and foreign domination. And with the arrival of globalization in the 1990s, every society found itself forced to compete with other societies for a fair share of the global economic pie, causing conflict to become an aspect of life within societies and between them. As a consequence, no society feels that it is entirely free, and no social system claims to guarantee social justice. Every society, therefore,

has more than one reason to feel that it should continue the struggle for freedom and social justice, either to protect what it has, or get what it feels it should have, or to regain what it had lost because of the absence of freedom and social justice.

Globalization, just like all other international systems of the past, has produced winners and losers. While the number of winners is small but growing fast, the number of losers is large and growing faster. In the meantime, as the winners try hard to protect the status quo, the losers try harder to change it, causing conflict within and between societies to widen. Both winners and losers, however, are scattered all over the globe, which makes cooperation and competition a difficult task to manage, especially since the borders are not only political but also ideological and cultural, and linguistic. But since the number of the winners is very small compared to the number of the losers, The winners can cooperate, contain conflict and protect their interests, while the losers are only able to fight with each other over a relatively shrinking global economic pie that is not within reach to grab or even share.

One of the striking facts of our times is that the richest 1% of the world's population owns today more than 50% of the global wealth, leaving less than 50% of the wealth to be distributed among the rest of the world's population. In other words, 770,000 persons have a wealth pie of more than \$40 trillion to share, while some 7.7 billion people have less than \$40 trillion wealth pie to fight over. And given the relatively high growth rate of the poor, social justice has become a mirage, the more you think you are getting closer to it the more it gets further away.

As societal systems evolve and production relations change, they produce winners and losers. While the winners can avoid conflict and preserve what they have and even get more, the losers, feeling cheated and deceived, are pushed to struggle to get a fair share of the wealth that keeps growing and accumulating in the bank

accounts of the rich. And as the losers struggle, they find themselves in conflict with their neighbors who are as poor as they are which causes their status and relative power and wealth to decline. Therefore, the struggle for freedom and social justice and against oppression and injustice will never end. However, no one should count on keeping this conflict under control, because greed has no limits, while patience has its limits.

Ideology and Freedom

Ideologies, in general, are social philosophies, or grand ideas articulated by able thinkers and transformed into mass movements to cause a fundamental change in society. While some ideological leaders use persuasion and vague promises to recruit members and supporters; most ideological leaders resort to deception and manipulation to achieve their objectives. However, all ideologues work hard to entice young people to become members and supporters by falsifying certain facts and using brainwashing techniques. Wherever an ideology dominates the life of a group of people or a society, strong believers tend to develop soft minds that make them easy to manipulate. Such minds tend to believe every claim that praises their ideology and reject every claim critical of their ideology without blinking. And as this attitude spreads ignorance and irrationality in society, it hardens believers' convictions and positions. As a result, ignorance and irrationality transform themselves slowly from a state of mind to a state of affairs on the ground, causing the situation of freedom and injustice to worsen.

On the other hand, while ignorance and lack of awareness tend to invite ideology into the life of society, ideology tends to work hard to perpetuate ignorance, falsify the conscience of its followers, and deepen their lack of awareness. But since most ideologies claim to know the ultimate truth, belief in them becomes a matter of faith beyond doubt, which causes the minds of believers to close gradually and stop thinking about their lives and fate. And with closed minds and ignorance and lack of awareness, freedom becomes a fugitive living its entire life hiding in the dark corners of largely damaged brains. As a consequence, science becomes of little use to society

or a heresy not to be believed or trusted; and that leads most followers of ideology to draw the wrong conclusions regarding the realities of life and the times where they live. And because the truth that ideology claims to represent its core is eternal, no ideology is capable of changing as times and circumstances change. But since nothing stays the same in the long run, all ideological systems are destined to fail and cause the societies they usually dominate to lag behind most other societies, missing one opportunity after another.

Scientific facts and philosophical inquiry, by their very nature, present a challenge to the conventional wisdom based on history or traditions or ideological myths. This means that neither science nor reason nor philosophy can thrive in a society burdened by ideology; no people can discover or develop their potentialities under authoritarian rule based on a national or communist or theocratic or military doctrine. The system authoritarianism imposes on society, and the obedience it demands of people, tend to suffocate freedom and limit individual and group initiative and imagination. Therefore, where science and philosophy thrive, ideology stagnates or retreats; and where ideology thrives, science and philosophy stagnate or retreat.

Since we live in a dynamic world where reality changes every day in front of our own eyes, thinking in purely abstract terms inspired by ideology causes politics to lose touch with reality. Total commitment to an ideology is not compatible with global economic activity, political plurality, intellectual freedom, human rights, cultural diversity, or scientific and philosophical inquiry. On the other hand, total commitment to creating and accumulating personal wealth has never been compatible with justice, fairness, or economic progress; therefore, neither human rights nor freedom nor democracy nor the environment can flourish under the hegemony of ideology or authoritarian rule, or unrestrained capitalism. Money in capitalists' states had become the only god that the rich worship, the only house

they feel comfortable living in, the only ideology they adhere to, and the only place to which they belong.

Ignorance and Knowledge

People who are ignorant due to lack of education and others who have empty stomachs due to lack of food are more likely to be influenced by the spoken word rather than the written one. The spoken word, however, tends to steer people's emotions, which makes them more attracted to demagogues and traditional leaders. In contrast, people who have the education and trained minds to think rationally are more likely to be influenced by the written word, and less likely to be influenced by the spoken one. And this leads them almost always to stay away from demagogues and their empty slogans and deterministic claims. As a consequence, the first group tends to believe in whatever they hear and see no need to read books, while the second group, in contrast, tends to be thoughtful and believe in the written word and see a need to read new books. Scientific Knowledge and philosophical ideas do not reside in empty spaces or stomachs for people to see or feel; they reside in books that intimidate the ignorant and poor and lead them to stay away from both scientific knowledge and challenging ideas.

Ignorance and poverty, therefore, reinforce one another, keeping the minds of the ignorant people largely closed and the stomachs of the poor largely empty and the environments they inhabit underdeveloped. Consequently, most people who are poor are less able to develop rational minds and use them to avoid the traps of poverty and the deceptive slogans of the spoken word and the demagogues. In contrast, rich people can escape the traps of poverty and ignorance, and avoid the spoken words of demagogues, and be less emotional and more rational. But no ignorant mind is necessarily irrational and no educated mind is necessarily rational. Neither

rationality nor knowledge can guarantee fairness or justice or honesty; they also cannot necessarily protect an environment or respect human rights. Greed and lust for money and power are wild animals that have no feelings for little animals, and no patience to deal with issues of fairness and justice.

Therefore, the need to humanize both knowledge and rationality remains an issue of particular concern; a requirement for creating progressive societies and functioning democracies that care about educating the ignorant and feeding the poor. However, the people most involved with the production and application of knowledge tend to change faster, benefit more, gain added wealth and power, and use it to protect their interests and achieve their goals; all of which at the expense of the poor and the ignorant. And this causes the socioeconomic gaps and the sociocultural divides within and between societies to widen and deepen further. In light of the continued accumulation of scientific knowledge and the increasing complexity of life, we find ourselves faced with many challenges that are difficult to handle. However, one of the most important challenges we face today is how to make knowledge accessible to those with little money to buy it, and make people who produce knowledge easily understood by others who have little education but need knowledge most.

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The Road to Nowhere

Running, running everywhere

From here to there to nowhere

Running night and day

Without knowing

Where to go, where to stay

A dispossessed refugee

Deprived of home, identity, and land

Must flee war and hide

Keep looking for a haven

A make-believe homeland

Holding hand in hand

Young and old are walking together

One eye on the road ahead

The other on what left behind

Moving from cave to cave

Valley to valley

Across mountains of snow

And oceans of mud and sand

Bodies are tired

Eyes are tired

And souls are sad

He lived in the East and West

In the North and South

In miserable refugee camps

In large crowded cities

Charming old villages

Sleepy hamlets tucked in mountains

Enjoying life on lakes with imported sand

Losing childhood innocence

And missing friends left behind

Flying in planes

Riding on trains

Sailing on boats and ships

Traveling from land to land
Feeling at times happy
But often deeply sad
Unable to regain peace of mind

He kept searching for people
Open-minded and kind
To listen to his agonizing story
Give him another chance
To rebuild his shattered life
Free his children from fear
And tortured memories that bind

The soul is getting angry
Unable to accept or understand
Why it should be forever a stranger
No matter where it goes or land

The brain is feeling the pressure
To keep records of a twisted life
Colored with agony and pride

Before memories get too old
And get buried deep in the sand
And history forgets the life they once had

Soon the body will die
Without a whisper or cry
It does not matter how or where
Strangers have no right to question fate
In any land, they may love or hate
But cannot call it homeland

Worms will multiply eating the flesh
Transforming it into natural fertilizer
To enrich the soil of abandoned fields
So wildflowers could grow and bloom
And the sunflower shines like a little moon

The soul will resume wandering
Flying across turbulent oceans
And serene dunes of sand
Promoting peace and justice

Freedom and liberty
The sharing of love
And the love of the land

Blessing the good
Forgiving the bad

Unifying people across cultures
Religions, colors, and regions

Building brick by brick
Land after land

A dream the body never had
A happy, peaceful living
In a shared homeland

The Role of Information

Information in this age is very important indeed; it is a source of knowledge and power and influence in society; a commodity that can be traded everywhere to serve many purposes, a tool that can be used in many ways related to peace and war, freedom and suppression, justice and injustice, exploitation and fairness. Information is a necessity that everyone must have to do whatever he likes to do and avoid mistakes and traps that forgive no one.

Information is a source of power and influence because it helps to explain certain situations and provides facts that most people need but often cannot afford. Any accurate piece of information is itself a unique fact unless it was manufactured to mislead some people and falsify the consciousness of many more. The global media and politicians and public relations firms are the most active players in the field of collecting and manufacturing and disseminating information worldwide. Information is also a valuable commodity that can be sold to generate income for its owners and serve the interests of buyers who could be individuals, organizations, states, merchants, writers, futurists, venture capitalists, or others.

Besides, information can be used as a tool to explain the trends of change regarding different aspects of human and animal life and the environment, examine the attitudes of certain people, and study public opinion. And by learning more about trends of change and people's attitudes and views at a certain time, information helps to predict what might happen in the future regarding almost all facets of life, from politics to economics, and from population growth rates to the spread of poverty and unemployment. Moreover, information is

what every one of us needs to do, things he likes to do or must do, and do them right.

For example, no strategic thinker can predict future change with some degree of accuracy without information regarding the historic trends of change and the state of the world; and no state or leader can estimate the power of an enemy or know the weather in a day or two without reliable information produced by specialized institutions. Also, no new industrial, commercial, financial, or education project can be planned without good information about national and global demand, availability of resources, competition and prices, laws and regulations, financial and manpower requirements, and the like.

The fact that information has become a component of everything we do in life is probably the reason that prompted many western historians and strategic thinkers to call the age we live in today “the information age”. However, despite the undeniable importance of information, I call this age “the knowledge age” because all information is only one component of the tremendous amount of knowledge we have produced and continue to produce. On the other hand, since information changes continuously, it must be considered a perishable commodity that must be used at the time it becomes available; old information can be used as a reference point for comparison but cannot be used to evaluate the present. However, no person or group of people or a state can use information properly and harness its power without appreciating its importance and knowing where to find it and how to use it. Nevertheless, information can be manipulated to serve special interests not necessarily shared by the general public or the world.

Society and Justice

Laws in older times were based on justice anchored in religious teachings; in modern times, however, justice is based on freedom anchored in the collective will of people living in democratic societies. But to determine what justice is, we need to define what virtue is; otherwise, one man's justice could be another man's injustice. Virtue is a value that reflects a clean conscious and free will. Justice also means fairness, and therefore no society could be just unless it is fair, and no society can be fair if it allows greed to become a component of its national culture. Fairness prevails in societies where its members deal with each other as equals and thus share the fruits of progress and the sacrifices made to achieve the desired goals; meaning that members of society share what good times and bad times have to offer.

Justice consequently requires freedom of individual and collective choice, with the first being subordinated to the second; otherwise, no social justice is possible. Systems dominated by dictators and corrupt officials, or greedy elites and manipulators are unjust; they enable the powerful few to enrich themselves and dominate the majority that represents the poor and powerless. The free-market economic system is driven by competition that produces many winners and many losers. But winning in America is often achieved by resorting to manipulation and cheating and disregard of business ethics, and that means losing is more likely to be caused by unfair competition. The free-market philosophy or market capitalism creates desires and needs we never felt before, and that leads us, at times forces us to do bad things to satisfy the new desires, causing our freedom to be compromised. Emanuel Kant

said that whenever our behavior is socially conditioned, we lose our freedom. And this is what is happening today in almost every country in the world, particularly in western countries adhering to the free-market philosophy.

Judgments are normally based on certain principles and rules; but neither principles nor rules are capable of reflecting moral convictions or ethical values at all times, even if they claim to do so. The free market system, for example, claims to be based on freedom of choice, but it gives the powerful and the rich and the politically-connected the upper hand to do what pleases them. And by so doing, the system uses the power it controls to deny the powerless and the poor the opportunities open to the rich and powerful. And this means that the free-market system is rigged against the poor and powerless. Since people sometimes behave in ways that violate moral convictions, states and societies must intervene to control the partition of the economic and political pie and ensure fairness and equal opportunity for all.

Philosophers of the free market system claim that whatever free markets produce is fair and anything that limits the freedom of markets is unfair because it limits the freedom of people. But in so claiming, promoters of free markets say that markets have more rights than people. Since people have rights as well as obligations that tend to be equal, markets cannot and should not have rights but no obligations; they have to have obligations that are equal to the rights they claim. Markets, therefore, need to be regulated to tie their rights to their obligations and hold them responsible for their failures. The only way to promote virtue and reward morality in society is to give people what they are entitled to in a just society.

However, morality rooted in dogma or theology fails to meet the standards of morality and ethics, because no religion accepts others as equals to its followers, entitled to the same rights and obligations. When a person follows customs and traditions or ideological dictates,

his capacity to differentiate between right and wrong weakens to the point of making him lose his sense of direction and ethical compass. While he is prevented from deciding for himself what to do and what not to do, he feels obligated to follow instructions prescribed by traditional elders of society or leaders of the ideology to which he belongs. No one following instructions prescribed by others can use his mind properly. And by not using his mind, man's potentials and talents would be undermined and misused. If a person is not free to decide what to do and where to stand, whatever harm he may cause society would not be his responsibility, but the responsibility of the visible and invisible forces that control his actions. And that causes society to become a jungle where the strong eats the weak, and the rich confiscate the rights of the poor; and that causes society to slowly fracture, lose coherence, and gradually disintegrate.

Since everyone belongs to a community rooted in values or interests or both, no one can escape being at times proud of his community's virtues and accomplishments; and at other times, ashamed of its failure to live up to the expectations of its members. This dictates that everyone should feel obligated to do whatever he can to promote the virtues of his community and take pride in its accomplishments and share responsibility for its failures and bad deeds. If these principles were to be adopted, everyone would be motivated to promote the good and reject the bad, and to do whatever he can to improve the behavior of his community and the efficiency of its leadership and strengthen its commitment to the common good.

Every society must, therefore, develop a fair system to distribute power, income, wealth, health service, education, and economic opportunities among all citizens in ways that guarantee fairness. If this were to happen, the system would provide incentives for people to work hard, be honest, and contribute to the welfare of society. But for this to happen, society must regulate the usage of all common goods, and enact laws to protect the environment, and supervise the

management of natural resources and economic and financial activities. No society should leave these vital resources and activities for guesswork or subject to the whims and desires of the rich and powerful who use the free market argument to enrich themselves, control the means of power, and impoverish the poor and dismantle the middle class.

Photos and Memories

A photo is not a mere image of a person or an object only; it is rather a space in which we store some of our most happy and sad memories. It is a mirror that reflects what happened in the past or how things were at the time when and where the picture was taken. Every photo, therefore, embodies a memory that has a special meaning to us, to our lives, and our relationships with other people, and often to nature as well. Photos reflect how we relate to places we lived in, to people we played with as children, to incidents we encountered, and even to the times and nature itself. Every time we look at an old picture, we smile, sometimes happily, sometimes sarcastically, because pictures bring back old memories and the feelings they evoked at the time of taking them. Nevertheless, some photos bring back sadness because they remind us of people we lost, and opportunities we missed, and time foolishly wasted.

In just a blink, pictures take us years or decades back to the times and places where they were taken, and lead us to experience the old feelings, forcing us to reflect, smile, and sometimes cry. Therefore, pictures we choose to take should be as real and beautiful and happy as possible, particularly the personal and family ones. Therefore, personal pictures must convey happiness that makes you smile rather than feeling sad; photos need to reflect good times rather than bad times. Thinkers and professors and renowned intellectuals and teachers have special relations to photos; because photos remind them of the admiration that their followers and students have for them, as well as the commitments made by many of their students and followers to imitate them and be good citizens and more caring human beings.

Pictures are resilient reminders of exciting times long gone, incidents encountered that impacted our lives, happy occasions we lived, beautiful places visited, opportunities missed and people loved; all of these are cherished memories that deserve to be kept, enjoyed, and relived. Photos are also lessons to be remembered, and fantasies to inspire us to do more and better in the future, and particular experiences to try to repeat when possible. Therefore, no picture is bad, and no memory is worthless.

A photo, as often said, is better than a thousand words. Since pictures are meant to tell the truth, they make the truth stand naked in front of our eyes to see and judge. However, new technologies and apps have undermined the capacity of pictures, to tell the truth; they enabled people, using certain techniques, to make faked photos look like the real ones; as a consequence, people viewing the doctored photos are led to pass judgments based on falsehood rather than on facts. Sometimes photos are made to look funny and thus entertain rather than deceive and mislead, but many are made to deceive the eye rather than inform the mind.

Technology has allowed big corporations and major Internet and social media companies such as Facebook and Google to collect peoples' photos and sell them to advertisers, but by so doing advanced technology has enabled companies to expose the private lives of innocent people. Sometimes a woman posts a photo of her having fun at a club or during a school activity that undermines her chances of getting the decent job she deserves. So photos need to be protected and shared with people we trust only unless they are used to serve a human or environmental cause.

Ideology and Humanity

Ideologies are in essence social philosophies, or grand ideas transformed by able, and often ambitious men into mass political movements whose major objective is to control power and change the reality on the ground according to the precepts of their philosophy. As leaders transform philosophical ideas into plans of action, the transformed philosophy becomes an ideology with its precepts and articles of faith that are not supposed to be questioned. To achieve their objectives, ideological leaders try always to control politics, the media, the economy, and the state. And to guarantee popular support, they create mass movements by changing people's perceptions and convincing them to subordinate their passions for the sake of what they believe in. However, in the process of causing such a change, ideological leaders often find it necessary to falsify people's consciousness and lead them to limit reliance on their brains and to be more passionate and less rational.

Philosophers of history have concentrated their efforts on studying world history and human behavior to explain reality and provide guidance for a better life. In contrast, ideologies, being political movements inspired by grand ideas and ambitious leaders, have concentrated their efforts on changing every reality according to the rigid principles of ideology by using the power of persuasion, deception, coercion, and the spread of fear among the masses. So, while philosophy is a social tool of rational thinking and change, ideology is a sociopolitical tool of irrational thinking to force change on largely unwilling and uniformed masses.

Religion, for example, is a grand idea meant to prescribe a way for man to reach God. If religion were to remain as it was intended to be and concentrates on developing man's consciousness to do good deeds and stay away from bad ones, religion would render a valuable service to society and humanity. But when religion concentrates on convincing its followers that it is the only path to knowing God, and tries to convert them into missionaries and worriers, it becomes a political movement with an ideological zeal. All social philosophies acquire zeal in the process of being transformed into ideologies meant to change the reality of life and people's relations with one another.

Marxism was articulated as a social philosophy by Karl Marx to explain the history of civilizations and the role of social conflict in making human history; it criticizes capitalism and private ownership of property, condemns the exploitation of workers, and calls for social justice. If Marxism were to stay as such, it would render a valuable service to society and humanity. But as an ideology, Marxism has caused the killing of millions of innocent people and denied many nations the right to choose their way of life, which led to creating dictatorships that paved the way for the spread of corruption and fear, and denial of human rights.

And if nationalism were to remain a sociopolitical idea to unite the people of each state, and convince them to act as free citizens with equal rights and obligations it would motivate people to help each other and work together for the common good. As a social tool to unite people around shared values nationalism would be a humanist idea serving the interests of all peoples wherever it may exist. But as an ideology, nationalism has become a racist philosophy that promotes discrimination and hatred; it convinced its followers that people belong to different races and that some races are more intelligent than others and, therefore, deserve more than others. As a consequence, nationalism has caused the spread of discrimination against minorities and thus weakened the idea of one

nation. Nationalism has also committed untold massacres and atrocities and carried out ethnic cleansing of many millions of people throughout the last five centuries. No system of governance based on nationalism can be just or democratic or respectful of the human rights of all citizens.

Every noble social idea acquires a negative, at times evil aspect in the process of being transformed into an ideology; it adopts an attitude that rejects competing ideas and systems, as well as peoples and cultures it views as different. And since the feeling of rejecting something is usually stronger than the feeling of liking something else, all ideologies have become more negative than positive. As a consequence, the major achievements of ideology are fostering hatred and enmity and undermining the human spirit of unity of purpose and destiny. All rejectionist forces, throughout history, on the left as well as on the right, have demonstrated a great capacity to define what they stand against, but have failed to define what they stand for, making them less able to do good and more able to cause harm to themselves and others.

Man and Ideology

Our human experience suggests that man cannot know the truth and be honest with the self and others unless he is free from oppression and traditions and, above all, from all forms of ideology. Ideology, by nature, is a mental prison where man is forced to stop thinking for the sake of believing; the places and spaces where ideological believers live and function are surrounded by high walls of convictions that have little to do with real life. Being confined in a mental prison, man cannot explore the world of ideas or the many ways of thinking and living that exist behind his prison walls; and therefore he cannot live a normal life or accept followers of other ideologies as equals whose convictions deserve respect.

Since ideologies claim to be based on eternal truth, they tend to be rigid and deterministic; however, determinism makes ideologies simple to understand and easy to follow, because they provide definite answers to most questions that bother people. And this makes analysis easy and conclusions predetermined and judgment final, causing the mind to lose its major function and value. Nevertheless, all forms of determinism ignore one or more important aspects of life; and this reduces the ability of every ideologue to understand the dynamics of life and deal with it accordingly. For example, religious ideologies tend to ignore the economic factor and its role in shaping man's values, attitudes, and aspirations. As for nationalism, it tends to ignore the human side of life and to portray culture as a rigid value system incapable of real change. And by so doing, ideologies discourage thinking and encourage commitment to systems based on dogmatic principles and slogans.

The minute a person chooses an ideology to adopt, he, unconsciously, often closes his eyes, ears, and mind. But closing the eyes and ears causes the believer to be blinded and deaf, and that forces him to rely on others for reading the reality of life and guiding him along the way. Closing the eyes and ears also undermines the capacity of most believers to see the world as it is, while distorting almost every image they see. Closing the mind, on the other hand, causes ideologues to live in cultural ghettos that limit their abilities to interact freely with people who do not believe in their ideology and accept their interpretation of history.

Since no ideology can escape being challenged from the outside as well as from the inside, a strongly committed ideologue feels an obligation to protect his ideology and defend it at all costs. But the only shield an ideologue usually has and can use to defend his ideology is the unproven claims the ideology makes, and the false promises it promotes. And since only simple, largely ignorant people are likely to believe ideological claims and promises, ideological leaders often try to intimidate those who express doubt and employ force or the threat of force to suppress them. Nevertheless, believing strongly in the premise and promise of an ideology relieves the believer from having to think and live in a complicated world where change never stops and life challenges never relent. But as time passes, the tenets of ideology become instincts that drive ideologues to become human robots moving according to programmed minds that can neither think nor reflect.

Believing that a certain sociocultural ideology or socioeconomic system is the only valid and legitimate one contradicts human nature and experience. Human nature suggests that man tends to try different ways of living; while history suggests that man was able to survive and achieve notable things living under different political and economic systems and varied cultures. Claims that history has ended with capitalism and democracy, as Francis Fukuyama claimed in 1992, has contributed to transforming capitalism into a rigid

ideology that is dying slowly as these words are being written; and transformed democracy into a corrupt system that cannot play its traditional social or political role. As a result, the world has entered a new crisis that threatens to end the way we live, think, and function. And this creates a need for a new social order designed to build a better and fairer future for all.

Rules of Competition

Competition is a human activity where individuals and groups and companies and nations compete with each other to prove that they deserve to win. So to serve this purpose, the rules of completion must be fair and acceptable to all participating parties. Depending on each competitor's preparation and talents and experience, his chances of winning might be good and might be bad; sometimes one's chances of winning are better than his chances of losing, depending on his competitor's preparedness and talents, and experience. However, for each competitor to enhance his chances of winning he must have the right tools such as good education, good ethics, good health, and sound judgment; he also must be willing to endure hard work, be patient, and choose the right timing for every move he makes. Competitors who fail to own such tools and knowledge strengthen their chances of losing and weaken their chances of winning.

In an open sociopolitical setting where people are free, and the rules of each competition are clear and fair, everyone would have a chance to win. However, people who do not have the right tools and education, realizing that their chances of winning are slim, often resort to unethical practices such as cheating, deceiving, or taking advantage of others who are not aware of the roles of competition. But by so doing, such people make it difficult for honest people and hard-working individuals, and small nations to succeed and get a fair share of the scientific or economic global pie. On the other hand, nations that deny their best and brightest individuals a chance to succeed are doomed to fail; even if such nations succeed in the short run, they are more likely to lose in the long run and cause their

societies to lag behind most other nations and become dependent on them.

In a competitive world where winning has become everything, and where money and wealth have become the only thing by which success and intelligence are measured, business ethics and personal values have become victims of unfair competition and sheer greed. As a result, most poor and rich societies have lost the basic principles that underpin fairness and justice. But when societies ignore such principles or fail to respect them, they lose their sense of unity and collective ability to make the right choices. As a consequence, envy, jealousy, and cheating become the rules that govern relationships in society, replacing ethics and education, and hard work. And that causes fairness and justice and hope to become a mirage, easy to be seen from afar, but hard to be realized anywhere.

In societies where opportunities are limited and freedom is largely restricted and corruption is widespread and nepotism is accepted as normal, winners cannot win unless the poor and the weak and the honest lose. And as the numbers of the poor and weak increase, destructive competition rather than constructive cooperation wins and overwhelms society, undermining its capacity to function normally and be productive. And when destructive competition prevails, honesty and fairness and decency slowly disappear, causing social conflict and societal failure to become a matter of time only.

Wealth and Power

Since wealth usually translates into power; wealthy people can have more power, and powerful people can use their power to have more wealth and use both wealth and power to influence sociopolitical, sociocultural, and socioeconomic change in their favor. In contrast, people who have no wealth are unable to gain power, particularly if they lack quality education and experience; and people who have no power or good education are unable to gain wealth. Since neither the poor nor the weak nor the uneducated can gain wealth or power, they cannot use either one to make a real difference in their lives or the life of society, unless they join together and create an effective collective power. On the other hand, because wealth facilitates the acquisition of power; and power facilitates the acquisition of knowledge and more wealth, the rich and powerful, regardless of where they live tend to sit on the top of the social pyramid, while the poor and weak sit at the bottom.

Being seated on the top of the social pyramid, the rich cannot see the poor who sit at the bottom, and therefore they cannot feel the pain of the poor or understand their needs. In the meantime, the poor and weak who sit at the bottom of the social pyramid cannot reach those who sit on the top or breathe the air they breathe. And since the poor and weak and the largely uneducated cannot gain either wealth or power to climb the social ladder in an orderly manner, the divides that separate the two groups from each other deepen as time passes, causing society to slowly disintegrate and violence to become an aspect of daily life.

Consequently, people with power and wealth can have more freedom to do the things they like to do and engage in activities that enrich their lives. People who have neither wealth nor power have little or no freedom to do what they prefer to do; they are often forced to do whatever others ask them to do. And contrary to conventional wisdom, freedom in every society as well as in the world is limited, so when some people acquire more freedom; others lose some of what they have. On the other hand, people who have enough freedom usually feel that life is fair and enjoyable; people who have little or no freedom usually feel that life is neither fair nor enjoyable nor holds a promise worth living for. And this often causes them to either abdicate their rights and be content, or form radical movements that seek change using force or violence.

Life and Awareness

As industrial society advanced and made more material, scientific, and cultural progress, the role and status of capital in the social, political, and economic arenas became more visible and pervasive. And while wealth has enabled the wealthy people and corporations to gain more power, the information revolution has enabled the poor to become aware of their limited power and wealth and modest social status. As a result, the poor began to organize and demand change, asking for a larger share of the political and economic pie. But no matter how much the poor may get, they will always feel worse off compared to their rich friends, relatives, and neighbors. Awareness of the nature and extent of the socioeconomic and sociopolitical gaps separating the rich from the poor always leads the poor to feel deprived and frustrated. As a result, awareness often causes conflict to arise in the marketplace as well as in society, and make peaceful coexistence between the rich and poor hard to prevail and often hazardous to entertain.

While this awareness grew slowly and incrementally during most decades of the twentieth century, it began to grow fast with the advent of the twin revolutions of information and telecommunications, and to accelerate during the last two decades due to the development of the Internet and social media. The infomedia, by facilitating contacts across political, cultural, religious, and political lines, empowered people to create virtual communities as private spaces to meet and exchange views and information; and this has enabled participants on all sides of the wealth and power and cultural divides to gain a good idea about how the others live and think. So as the rich and powerful began to gain some knowledge about the

lives of the poor and weak, the poor and the weak began to gain more knowledge about the lives of the rich and powerful.

But as the poor and the not so poor become aware of the new facts of life, they discover the existence of products and comforts beyond their reach that only the rich and powerful have and enjoy. And this causes many of the poor and the not so poor to get frustrated and lose satisfaction. Realizing the width and depth of the income, wealth, education, and power gaps separating people from each other makes most of the poor angry, and makes many of the middle class jealous and envious, and makes both groups less happy and content. In contrast, such knowledge makes the rich and powerful more aggressive but less secure. Fearing change usually encourages them to do whatever it takes to perpetuate the status quo and insulate themselves from the poor, both physically and emotionally.

Just like a regular summer day in most parts of the world, every fact and every piece of information has two sides; sunrise followed by a warm or hot and humid afternoon, and sunset followed by a breezy evening or a dark rainy night. To live a normal and rather productive life, free of the ups and downs of daily surprises, people need to adjust their state of mind to accommodate change and to be prepared to hear shocking news and expect the unexpected. Otherwise, they will lose satisfaction and live a rather empty life, moving in closed circles. However, awareness of how the poor of poor states live makes some of the poor in the rich states feel content, which helps the rich of their countrymen to get richer and more powerful at their expense. Though contentment helps poor people to have peace of mind, the feelings of despair and helplessness are the worst enemies of the poor and powerless everywhere.

The Meaning of Hope

Hope is a soft feeling that expresses itself in several forms and influences people's mental states in varied ways; all of which tend to be positive. Hope is a psychological tool to inspire people to imagine what they like to see happens in the future; some people use hope to visualize the kind of world they wish to live in away from the present. Hope could be just a feeling that something exciting is in the air and is about to happen, which usually makes people optimistic. Due to such feelings, people usually get motivated to act with some confidence to change things they do not like.

Nevertheless, hope could be just an attempt to escape a situation that people do not like for an imagined situation they like, but have little or no chance of realizing. While attempts to escape reality are often helpful; they are unlikely to lead most people to do what is required to change their living conditions, and that often makes them feel helpless and accept being subjects rather than objects of change. In contrast, hope that leads people to feel optimistic and motivate them to act and pursue the things they wish to have is more likely to strengthen their self-confidence and encourage them to cause positive change to happen for them; and that gives such people more reasons to live and enjoy life and lean toward optimism.

Change, however, is a complex social process that no person can accomplish without the help and involvement of other social actors; societal and organizational change, in particular, requires wide cooperation and coordination between many players in society. Even an 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 to accept him the way he is and tolerate seeing him live in a world that does not exist except in his head. However, acceptance of such a person represents the first step taken by society to recognize that bad situations exist and need to be changed sooner rather than later; and that often motivates many people and organizations to feel obliged to change it.

Every life experience we live as human beings is a shared experience; we share it with other people close to us and with animals we like, as well as with nature we enjoy watching; even with our ancestors via our dreams. However, no life experience can be fully lived without interacting positively and negatively with many components of our environment that form the natural, social, cultural, political, economic, and technological spheres of life.

People who wish to help others feel optimistic and hopeful should try first to hide their fears and anger and apprehensions; and should second stop complaining in public, because such feelings cannot make others feel optimistic or comfortable. And instead of complaining, they should share their courage and accomplishments and hopes with people they decide to help. By so doing, they show the people that they wish to influence positively how to face life's adversities with confidence; and that usually gives people in despair a good reason to be hopeful, and encourages them to work hard to realize their dreams.

Hope, therefore, is a deep but soft feeling that expects some good to happen shortly and rejects living conditions perceived as bad and looks forward to seeing life conditions change for the better. Hope is also an act to escape a perceived bad reality that often causes the hopeless to postpone decisions; hope is also a call for action to create a new, more favorable reality to end despair and helplessness and ignite the candles of optimism.

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Lovers and Strangers

Time goes by so fast

Creating past after past

Joyful moments

Saddened moments

Special feelings never last

Yet, we are still the same

Lovers and strangers

Sharing love, living apart

Unable to share the day

Or live the magical past

Two innocent children

Beautiful twinkling eyes

Passionate hearts

Wonderful minds

Souls searching for eternity

Where love knows no bounds

A little inspiring story

Like most historical records

It challenges your mind

But fails to make you wise

A sea of tears and cries

A monument of sights and lights

Let us share a glass of wine

Under stars that wink and shine

Secrets that excite the eye

Feelings that cannot lie

Dreams that never die

The time, darling is now

And now is the only fact of life

The future may never come

So why should we wait

Until now is gone

And time has finally come

To hug and say goodbye

Darling, days are migrant birdies

They build nests everywhere

But have no home anywhere

They sing, dance, and then fly

Leaving behind broken hearts

Saddened souls and eyes

Unable to sigh or cry

Wealth and Happiness

Most people tend to associate happiness or the feeling of being happy with money and wealth; how much money they have compared to what their neighbors and friends have. No doubt that getting more money gives people new opportunities to do things they cannot otherwise do; such as buying things they had wanted to buy for some time; helping friends or relatives or some people in need; or providing financial support for organizations serving good causes. Because of the role money plays in individual and social life, it has become a major target that everyone tends to pursue with diligence. While most people pursue money through legal and ethical means; some people resort to cheating and manipulation and even stealing to get more money and accumulate more wealth.

However, money does not always bring happiness or even satisfaction to its owners; it may even bring misery to people who have a lot of it but do not recognize the role it plays in public life. Most wealthy people tend to be greedy and stingy and sometimes have no friends; yes, they associate themselves with like-minded wealthy people, but they often have no close friends they love and can trust. Money makes most wealthy people feel that whoever seeks their friendship is seeking to get some of their money; so they tend to think that he is more interested in their money than in them. And because of this feeling, most wealthy people tend to isolate themselves from most other people and live lonely lives.

Rich people tend to work harder than the average person to make more money and accumulate wealth. Some wealthy people give a smaller portion of their wealth to good causes as they become

wealthier; however, it is almost unthinkable for a wealthy person to retire and stop pursuing money because the making of money is his life mission. 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.” (Charles Van Doren: A History of Knowledge, 1991, 242) And this means that cultures and personal ambitions set the priorities and leave the burden of achieving them to people and economic activities. However, contentment no longer prevails except in traditional societies living in pre-industrial times, and among small communities of faith whose numbers are on the decline.

More money, therefore, could bring to its owner's worries and loneliness rather than joy and happiness. Meanwhile, most relatives and friends of wealthy people, realizing how much less money they have compared to their wealthy friends, tend often to feel less happy, or poorer than before, even if their incomes increase and their living standards improve. This means that the wide disparities in wealth distribution have become a curse rather than a blessing for most people living in this age, especially people who live in countries like the United States, Britain, China, and Saudi Arabia, where the extremes of wealth and poverty exist side by side.

People who keep their eyes on what their wealthy neighbors and relatives and friends have, and not on what they miss having and trying to have, cannot be happy. Thinking of what others have tends to make people jealous and envious, causing relationships with and between wealthy people to often lack warmth and sincerity. What people should be thinking of when considering what they have and miss having is not money only; knowledge and social status and friendship and health should be essential components of what they should seek to have because they are the major things that make people feel happy. Associating money with happiness is a mistake; it is a way to perpetuate dissatisfaction, spread jealousy, and envy,

and make neighbors and friends less able to enjoy their relationships and live in peace together.

Knowledge and Freedom

The scientific truth sets responsible and thoughtful people free; nevertheless, no man or woman is fully responsible or thoughtful to think clearly and behave rationally. People have varied and often contradictory traditions, belief systems, worldviews, goals, and prejudices that are very hard to reconcile with the scientific truth. And since these are value-related, they are very difficult to change by logical arguments or even scientific facts. Diehard believers in claimed religious facts and miracles tend to reject, or at least, suspect scientific findings that contradict their deeply held convictions.

According to newly discovered scientific facts, the human brain is about 2% of the size of the body; nevertheless, it consumes about 9% of the energy produced by the body when it is in a state of relaxation. However, when the brain is under stress or highly activated, it consumes about 25% of the energy produced by the body; and that makes the body tired, and causes it sometimes to experience panic attacks. Since belief in religion relieves the brain from having to think deeply and worry about the complexity of life, religion helps the brain to relax, which leads religion in this case to play the role of an anxiety relaxer or pain killer. As a result, man's need for relaxation and desire to stay away from daily stress causes most people to believe in claimed religious facts and miracles. However, by so doing, diehard believers become less knowledgeable, less free, and more vulnerable to the influence of religious men, whose goal is to manipulate their followers and control them. And whoever is subject to manipulation by others, and less able to question religious claims cannot be free.

This explains four major phenomena prevalent in religiously conservative communities in general. The first is the popularity of religions that drive followers to accept religious claims as facts beyond doubt, which reduces their need to use their brains to think and worry. Second, the tendency of believers to stay away from brain provoking ideas and complicated issues, which often leads them to accept dependency on others. Third, the tendency of most religious people to be lazy, which often leads many of them to prefer poverty over hard work. And fourth, the tendency of most believers to stay away from reading non-religious books and knowing more, which causes traditional and cultural illiteracy rates among them to be relatively high.

Specialization in science and most professions created a need to develop new and more complex systems to coordinate and integrate the functions of organizations that deal with similar issues and complementary ones. This development was dictated by the ever-growing numbers of organizations and institutions and associations in society, especially the ones that provide public services. Specialization makes teamwork, work ethics, and flexible working hours essential to performing certain tasks and facilitating the creation of more wealth and knowledge. Specialization makes success and failure a function of knowledge and attitudes while making new knowledge and changed attitudes preconditions for individual and societal success. Peter Drucker argued more than two decades ago that “With knowledge being universally accessible, there will be no excuses for nonperformance. There will be no poor countries. There will only be ignorant countries.”

Indeed, the creation of more knowledge creates more economic and technical, and service-oriented opportunities, which in turn make it easier for more people to learn and work and succeed in life. On the other hand, the availability and accessibility of scientific knowledge make it easier for nations that hesitate to get the right knowledge and acquire the right attitudes to fall behind other nations

rather quickly and stay there for a long time. People that fail to learn and acquire the right attitudes and fall behind others cannot be free. So knowledge needs freedom to develop, accumulate, and be more beneficial, while freedom nurtures knowledge that serves the needs and interests of everyone.

Man in History

The Tribal Man

The tribal man lived his entire life as a free man roaming the meadows and deserts and forests in older times; there were no political or social forces or borders or states at the time to restrain his ability to move freely. However, he was dependent on nature and its whims, which made him subject to chance. And due to this dependence, he was economically and personally insecure. And because he had no technology or scientific knowledge; and no conception of time, he was unable to make progress in any field; he, therefore, lived about forty thousand years without witnessing any meaningful social or cultural, or economic change in his life.

The Agricultural Man

The agricultural man lived his entire life semi-free because some people owned enough land and water resources to support themselves and be largely free; while the rest were owners of small farms, or farm laborers and slaves who worked and lived on estates owned by rich masters, and thus were not free. The agricultural society had two social classes; rich landlords, and poor farmers and farm laborers and slaves. Besides, the agricultural man had to struggle with nature to produce enough food to feed his family, feel secure, and make some progress. In the meantime, the state provided protection and order, while religion and traditions provided peace of mind and an ethical code of conduct to regulate relations in society. However, the agricultural age witnessed the birth of the progress idea in producing agricultural products and making primitive

tools, and inventing money as a medium of exchange that facilitated trade. But rigid traditions and religious beliefs, and suspicion of strangers made social transformation difficult to conceive and hard to implement. On the other hand, primitive technology and viewing time as a liability served as obstacles that hindered real change and caused the genuine sociocultural transformation to wait for the arrival of the industrial age.

The Industrial Man

The industrial man lived his entire life largely free of social and political binds, but being tied to machines industrial plants robbed him of a good deal of his economic freedom and humanity. The industrial society has three social classes; a rich class of owners of industrial plants and land and trading houses and banks; a middle class of professionals and middlemen, and a poor class of industrial workers and servants. As a result, most people in industrial societies have to work long hours to earn a decent living and get a chance to climb the social ladder.

In the meantime, winning battles over capital exploitation and ideology, particularly religion, nationalism, and Marxism, made the industrial man's life an unending struggle for survival and freedom. However, fast advancement in science and technology made progress easier to achieve, causing the pace of social and cultural transformation to accelerate. And that caused time to be transformed from being a liability to an asset to sell and make money. However, capital exploitation forced the industrial worker to sell most of his time to earn enough money to support a decent life; and this left little time for workers and even for the super-rich to enjoy life. While workers had to invest all their time to earn enough money to survive, the rich had to invest all their time to compete with other rich people and accumulate more wealth.

The Knowledge Man

The knowledge age was supposed to free man from the bonds that tie him to machines and pave the way for the knowledgeable to enjoy life. But the fast pace of change in the fields of science and information technology on the one hand, and the commercialization of every piece of information on the other have made life more stressful and less free than before. In the meantime, the transition from the industrial age to the knowledge age caused the middle class to lose its social status and most of its power, causing its ability to influence change in its favor to be vastly reduced. In the meantime, the division of society into socioeconomic classes became less important, while the division of society into sociocultural groups more important. As a result, the knowledge society is no longer divided into three social classes; but into sociocultural groups that have little in common to tie them together. The interest ties that used to tie people together in the industrial age were weakened, and conflict that usually characterizes relationships between sociocultural groups was deepened. And the dismantling of the middle class upended the social balance that kept the old society united and enabled democracy and capitalism to function properly and flourish.

Today, neither the democratic system nor the capitalist system is functioning properly, and this creates a need to restructure or replace both systems. The balance that exists today is a function of the complexity and multiplicity of institutions and civil society organizations that have conflicting interests and deal with different issues. However, while the multiplicity of institutions and interests can maintain some balance and reduce the possibility of widespread conflict, they cannot guarantee social justice or liberty for all. As a result, the new society is witnessing the decline of ideology, the rise of individualism, the widespread of virtual communities, and the creation of cultural ghettos that deepen the sociocultural divides in society and cause conflict to become an aspect of everyday life.

Maps of Life

Every person needs a map to guide him as he tries to navigate the ups and downs of life and deal with its increasing complexity and challenges. And since people are born without maps, argues Scott Peck, they have to make their maps or adopt a map made by others. If a person chooses to make his map, he must be willing to invest a lot of effort and time, and probably money thinking about making a special map for himself. Due to this fact, most people tend to borrow maps from others that seldom reflect their living conditions and meet their particular needs and ambitions; such maps cannot often reflect the views and situations of everyone; therefore they tend to be vague and too small or too large for others to adopt.

In most cases, however, people tend to inherit maps made by others that reflect life conditions long gone, causing such maps to be outdated and largely irrelevant and unhelpful, if not harmful. As a consequence, the adoption of inherited maps tends to make the world view of people who follow them narrow and distorted, and incompatible with the times. All ideologies regardless of their nature and claims tend to have their particular maps and to impose them on their followers either by persuasion or coercion. But since all ideologies are deterministic, no map based on ideological precepts is suitable to deal with a reality characterized by dynamic change and increasing complexity. This should explain why there is no religiously conservative community anywhere that lives in the times that surround its life and has achieved respectable scientific or cultural achievements or enjoys high standards of living.

People who develop their maps recognize that they need to modify those maps as life conditions change and situations become more diversified and complicated. In contrast, people who choose to use existing ideological maps developed in the distant past realize that they are not allowed to change any part of those maps, which makes life more difficult to manage and the future more obscure to see through. Religious maps that claim to know the entire truth represent formidable social and cultural obstacles that cannot be overcome except by overcoming the ideology that stands behind them, which could endanger the lives of those who dare to do so.

Since time never stops changing and life never stays the same, you need to examine the validity and utility of your map continuously. The easiest way to validate your map is to expose it to criticism by others, and allow it to be challenged by maps made by people who live in the same age and face similar life conditions and challenges. Nevertheless, all maps need to be continuously revised and updated and made more flexible to reflect an ever-changing reality.

Maps based on cultural or historical or religious facts and claims and traditions usually refuse to accept criticism by others or allow themselves to be challenged by other maps or map makers. This is why no ideological state has succeeded in building a developed economy or a free and just society. All life maps based on ideologies are rigid and narrow and therefore cannot adapt to changing times and life conditions fast enough to remain current and relevant. Nevertheless, we need to realize that revisions and adjustments, and changes of life maps are difficult tasks for most people to undertake, even when they admit that their maps are no longer relevant.

Marriage Relationship

Husband and wife, being together or apart often makes little difference; only mutual love and understanding make a big difference in marriage. When love or mutual respect is lost, husband and wife may talk, fight, make love, or even laugh together, but nothing of this lasts long, except the emptiness of the relationship. As a result, every day of staying together becomes a difficult task that needs efforts to manage; and caution to avoid anger and misery becomes a major daily concern. This causes the relationship to be transformed from an enchanting space housing free spirits and passionate love and into a prison where the air is progressively becoming more polluted and suffocating.

Seeking freedom from such a situation dictates ending an unhealthy relationship before it becomes poisonous and fatal. So before things get this bad, the husband and wife should try to rebuild the relationship according to a plan they make together whereby each one acknowledges the needs and positives and negatives of the other and agrees to respect them. If they fail to agree on a specific plan, they should end the relationship peacefully and amicably; otherwise, life will become like hell with no end in sight. Worrying about children is legitimate, but having children grow in a poisoned environment is worse than having them grow in a healthy environment where one of the parents is largely absent, but the other is present and caring and loving. However, children need to know the reason for separation and the arrangement to keep them together and cared for.

A woman that likes to keep her husband and lead a happy marriage needs to know what kind of man her husband is; what he

likes and dislikes; what his hobbies are and what makes him happy, and what he prefers to do during his free time. The wife also needs to acknowledge her husband's positives and strengths and achievements; and what makes his eyes led with excitement and passion. A woman that concentrates on her husband's negatives and what she perceives as weaknesses are destined to lose him, and she deserves to lose him. A woman that knows, for example, that her husband does not like going to malls for shopping, should avoid dragging him to a mall; instead, she should encourage him to do what he likes in the meantime.

Likewise, a husband that likes to keep his wife and lead a happy and peaceful marriage needs to know what kind of woman his wife is; what she likes and dislikes, and what her hobbies and fantasies are; he should not try to pressure her to wear things she does not like or feels the occasion demands. He should also acknowledge her positives and strengths and sensitive feelings and achievements, particularly if she is a professional woman. A husband that considers his work more important than his wife's work or belittles her work makes marriage a difficult task to manage. And when marriage becomes only a task to be managed, no mutual love or admiration will be left there worth keeping the marriage.

If the husband or the wife ignores the other's achievements, such an action is likely to be seen by the other as an insult that defies love and respect. And that opens a little wound in the heart of the person whose achievements are ignored. But little wounds, if not attended to in time, usually grow slowly to become deep and incurable. And if the other partner reacts by doing the same, the life of each one becomes of no concern to the other; and that is a recipe for causing the marriage to become an empty box where two strangers are housed against their will, each waiting nervously for the box to crack open to escape, and reclaim his freedom.

Conflict and Peace

The institution of private property appeared and gained social recognition in the early centuries of the agricultural age, and since then it has played an important role in the life of all societies. And though private property divided societies into socioeconomic classes separated by income and power; it encouraged people to utilize their talents to work hard and make money and accumulate wealth, and this caused wealth to become a major source of power and leisure. As a consequence, the rich people found enough time to think and engage in scientific research and technological development as a way to make new things that enrich their lives and enhance their incomes. In the meantime, continuous change and scientific and technological progress caused societies to be divided into sociocultural groups separated by education and culture, in addition to being divided into socioeconomic classes. And this caused competition in society to intensify and conflict to appear and persist.

For example, the tribal society, which preceded the agricultural society, did not know the institution of private property, and therefore it was a homogeneous classless society that knew no social conflict. In contrast, the agricultural age, which witnessed the full development of the private property institution, was divided into two social classes; a poor class made up of slaves and farm workers, and a rich class made up of landlords, meaning that the two classes were separated by land ownership. This enabled people who owned more land to gain more power and enslave and exploit others who did not own enough land to support a decent life. And as the rich used their land and slaves to produce more products, they were able to improve their standards of living and enhance their social status.

But with wealth and power and social status being unevenly divided, awareness of the importance of freedom was born and conflict was activated. However, agricultural society experienced little progress during its long life due primarily to its rigid social structure and convictions and lack of education. Lack of education caused the accumulation of knowledge to lag behind the accumulation of wealth, which was concentrated within the domain of land ownership.

During the industrial age which followed the agricultural age, the pace of scientific discoveries and technological innovations accelerated, causing all aspects of the life of the industrial society to be transformed. Corporations engaged in industrial production and trade were the first to realize what science and technology could do to advance their interests. Consequently, scientific research and technology development was institutionalized, which facilitated the advancement and accumulation of knowledge. While industry employed the new technologies to raise productivity and enhance profitability, the state used industry to build armies equipped with guns, ships, cannons, and military planes to fight wars and colonize the poor and weak nations of the world. And as economic activities multiplied and diversified and trade expanded, banks and investment houses began to expand and grow to serve the fast-growing economies and investment ventures; and this caused the industrial society to be divided into three social classes; a rich class whose main components were the owners of industrial plants and bankers; a poor class whose main components were the industrial workers and the small farmers and household servants; and a middle class whose main components were the professionals and the middlemen.

While the rich and poor classes had existed for some ten thousand years without much change during the agricultural age, the middle class produced by the industrial economy caused society to experience unprecedented dynamism. Although the economic role of the middle class was initially limited, it nevertheless was able to

distinguish itself by a high degree of awareness regarding its social role, place in society, and rights. Such awareness led the middle class to become an active force, promoting democracy and employing it to enhance its political power and protect its social and economic interests. However, the continued accumulation of wealth and knowledge, and the increasing cost of having the right education led to widening the socioeconomic gaps and deepening the sociocultural divides in industrial society.

But as the economy began in the 1980s to shift from manufacturing industrial products to creating and marketing services, the middle class began to lose its power and social awareness as well as its ability to influence the direction of change in society. Today, no middle class anywhere has enough awareness, power, or confidence to protect its interests and maintain its social position. The age of industry also witnessed the movement of the bulk of wealth and thus power from the domain of land ownership to the domain of industrial plants and banks and trading and investment companies.

As the knowledge age advanced, the information and telecommunications revolutions became the leaders of change, causing the traditional industrial society and its economy to change fundamentally and irreversibly. The knowledge economy made the production and marketing of services such as information and entertainment and telecommunications and healthcare the major economic activities. Since the middle class came as a result of industrial expansion and diversification, the movement toward an economy based on services has weakened the middle class tremendously. While the knowledge-based jobs are beyond its reach because it lacks the kind of education and skills needed to hold knowledge jobs, the low paying service jobs do not bring enough income to sustain it. I believe that the industrial society was the first and last society in history to produce a credible middle class able to bridge the gap between the rich and poor and bring balance to

society. Therefore, to restore societal balance in the knowledge age, we need to create a new middle class by inventing a new economic system based on social justice and business ethics.

Besides, the shift from the production of industrial goods to services has caused wealth to move from the domain of industrial plants to the domain of knowledge. As a consequence, the five largest knowledge-based companies have become the largest corporations in the world; they are Amazon, Apple, Google, Facebook, and Microsoft. And because the business of these companies is concentrated in the production and marketing of services; they made us and our desires and private lives commodities to sell and profit from, without much regard to the probable negative consequences of these acts on our lives and the future of our children.

On the other hand, we need to realize that no age of development was free of conflict or competition; people often fight each other and compete with one another over the same things, making competition and conflict more negative than positive. During the tribal times, tribes fought one another to steal the animals that the other had and to kill or kidnap their children and rape their women. Jared Diamond says in *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, that until 7500 years ago, people used to kill whoever they found in their way, suspicion rather than trust had characterized tribal relations and colored their interactions with one another. Nevertheless, stealing the property of others and hurting them did not change life in society, because the conflict in tribal times was a zero-sum game; it nevertheless made the defeated feel loss of dignity and honor, while making the victors feel good having destroyed the lives of others.

Because conflict in tribal times was a zero-sum game, people and societies were forced to move in place rather than in time; a movement in place causes no change in any major aspect of life, while a movement in time causes all aspects of life to change. During

the agricultural times, things began to move incrementally in time as the nature of competition and conflict changed slightly. Nevertheless, the movement of agricultural society remained largely in place rather than in time. In fact, neither the tribal nor the early agricultural peoples were able to develop a real conception of time; and without a practical conception of time that recognizes the value of time and the cost of neglecting time, people would not be able to know what change and progress mean, and what lagging behind the times entails.

During the industrial age workers and investors and corporations began to compete with each other to produce more and better industrial and agricultural products and services, causing competition to be more positive than negative. As a result, the industrial age witnessed more construction than destruction, more change than continuity, more dynamism than stability, and more scientific and economic, and political progress. Yet, the conflict did not stop; it continued to make the poor and weak victims of the whims of the greedy and powerful rich. And to enhance their wealth and social status, the rich began to corrupt politics and politicians and support the military and acquiesce to police brutality to protect them and secure their interests.

As for the knowledge age, it is expected to produce a society that lives its entire life in a state of transition, where the life of everyone moves in all directions without a sense of direction; and where conflict dominates the relationships between the poor themselves rather than between the poor and rich. Conflict in this age is expected to be fuelled and sustained by invoking discrimination against ethnic and cultural minorities; rich individuals and corporations are expected to finance whatever it takes to keep the poor busy, unable to pay attention to their economic, social, and political schemes. As a consequence, the poor and weak are expected to be forced to accept a relatively diminished lot in life and be submissive and content. Nevertheless, there is still hope that a new state of affairs

and a new culture will emerge and produce a new class of intellectuals committed to defending the rights of the poor and all minorities, and creating new systems based on social justice, equality of rights, business ethics and a peaceful world for all.