

Restoring Islamic Golden Age: 21st Century Bayt al-Hikmah

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Bayt al-Hikmah in the 21st Century.

When we speak about this, we should focus on the following questions:

1. Is it possible to have a Bayt al-Hikmah today?
2. If Yes, HOW? In WHAT form? WHERE? Or WHICH Country does deserve to be a place for it?

Or, as Muslims, are we **capable** to build a world center of learning and knowledge? Do we **deserve** it?

These questions are the most important ones when we discuss about the **possibility** of Bayt al-Hikmah in the 21st century. I usually discuss this topic with my students in Islamic Civilization class every semester, rather, listen to them. They are so obsessed with describing of its destruction by the Mongols in 1258. Although their knowledge about its civilising and educating roles in Islamic civilization is so limited, yet, every student in my class will narrate the story about how the river water become black from the ink of books thrown to water by the Mongol army to reach the other side of the river.

Sometimes even funny stories happen. A year ago, one student was presenting about Ibn Firnas (9th century), how he was flying at the age of 70 plus, she said, no books survived up today. Another students asked her why. She said because of the Mongols that they destroyed Bayt al-Hikmah. I said excuse me? Are you blaming the Mongols for the disappearance of the books of Ibn Firnas, who lived in Muslim Spain in the 9th century?

Then I asked the class: ok, let us blame the Mongols for destroying Bayt al-Hikmah in 13th century. But more than 850 years have passed since then. Why we were not able to create another Bayt al-Hikmah in the span of these 850 years?

Brothers and Sisters!

This brings us to a very important point: until we will shift our focus from **blaming** others for our failure to **positive attitude**, we will be never able to build another Bayt al-Hikmah. It requires dedication, inspiration, motivation, selflessness, caring, sincerity, inner peace and happiness.

Bayt al-Hikmah was not just a center of learning, it was a heart of the world, a heart of latest innovations and motivations. It was the place, where al-**Khawarizmi** and his team drew the world map or where he invented the concept of zero.

It was the place, where in the 10th century, **Ibn al-Haytham** (Alhazen) laid the foundation of experimental method, mainly in optics, later was used in chemistry and physics.

Bait al-Hikmah was a the working place of the **best doctors of the world**, who were writing textbooks in medicine which will be translated into Latin and other romance languages and will be utilized in European universities until the end of the 17th century.

The most advanced observatories of that time were located in Bayt al-Hikmah with the most advanced astronomical instruments.

But the most importantly, Bait al-Hikmah was a **center of translation**, a translation of earlier world heritage from Indian, Chinese, Persian, Greek, Egyptian and Syriac into Arabic from an Islamic perspective. It was the place, where integration (or Islamisation) of earlier knowledge with Islamic principles did happen. Accordingly, its library became the **container of wisdom of humanity** from the beginning of mankind up to that period.

Amazingly, most of the translators were from another faith and working together side by side with Muslim scholars for the sake of knowledge and progress.

Then, we can **make another point here** and Bait al-Hikmah was an example of center of learning built by a **superpower**. Muslims were ruling the world and its order as superpowers. Arabic was used as a language of diplomacy, education and science for centuries even in European kingdoms. It was a shame for European princes when they were ignorant in Arabic. As the most powerful states, Muslims collected all books and wisdom of the world.

Superpowers own science and technology, and, through science and technology, they spread their values and principles, fashion and ethics as well as their worldview and ideologies.

But my question is: if Muslim science was the most advanced in the world until at least the fourteenth century, why did it decline? Why are Muslims, who once taught the world, now pupils of their former students?

What is our condition today in science and technology? Are we superpower?- this question even cannot be asked? What is our contribution to the world of science today? Let me bring some statistics here.

The spirit of science in the contemporary Muslim world is as dry as a desert, argues Hillel Ofek from the University of Texas at Austin. According to statistics provided by Pervez Amirali Hoodbhoy, a Pakistani nuclear physicist, mathematician and academic, contemporary Muslim countries have nine scientists, engineers, and technicians per thousand people, compared with a world average of forty-one. There are around 1,800 universities in the Muslim world, but only 312 with scholars who have published journal articles. Nobel laureate physicist Steven Weinberg stated that, “for forty years I have not seen a single paper by a physicist or astronomer working in a Muslim country that was worth reading.” Thus some European politicians call Muslims as “parasites”.

Now we come to the third point. Is it still possible to have a Bayt al-Hikmah in our days? I would like to say NO if we will remain at this miserable state. Today the majority of Muslims are infected with either of two sicknesses: inferiority or superiority complex.

Superiority complex means that we are so proud of being a Muslim and even consider ourselves as the best humanbeings without any sin, a chosen people of Allah, we are sure that we will enter paradise and busy with making others in a kafir camp.

Or we are sick with inferiority complex, we do not have self-confidence, we lost hope, we live in despair.

Brothers and Sisters!

Allah Subhana wa Ta’ala calls the Muslims as “ummatan wasata’ and “kuntum khairan ummatan ukhrijat linnas”. Are we the best nation today who are capable to come to people with the best values and ways of life? Best nation means the best learning institutions, best in everything good, in science, technology, industry.

Thus I do not want to ask even that: Is it possible to have a Bayt al-Hikmah in the 21st century? We must have it. It means of being the best nation who spreads its values, principles, innovations and worldview to others to benefit humanity.

But how to achieve it? We should focus more on that point.

Steps:

1. Positive action and hope is required. We should be hopeful, this is medicine for those who are infected with inferiority complex; or we should be humble for those who are sick with superiority complex.

2. Focus on positive side of everything. Khair Insha Allah. Do not complain! This is the most important step.
3. Hard working is required. It is why I am mad when my students are late to my classes for 20 minutes due to rain or without any reason. I cannot build a Bait al-Hikmah with those who do not value time or who are irresponsible or lazy. Unfortunately, the majority belong to this group. We should wake up. We should learn to value time and work hard.
4. Take responsibility of being the best nation with humbleness, honour, dignity. This is not the same of having “white man’s burden.’
Responsibility of best nation is a noble mission, it is amanah, condition to be called caliphatu Allah.
5. Change should be started at individual levels, but we should remember that few individuals cannot build Bayt al-Hikmah, it is a team work; it is work of the best nation.

Thank you!