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## Muslim World Needs a New Mindset to Face Modern Challenges

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**By Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak**

In a world full of contending ideologies, Muslim communities throughout the world face an enormous amount of challenges in preserving their identity, faith and culture.

The world media which is under the control of some powerful western conglomerates, projects Muslims as an uncultured and backward people. In many occasions, leadership crisis and other political upheavals that happen in Muslim countries are blown out of proportion and reported in a condescending way so that the world would see the Muslims as a problematic bunch of people. The sort of message it intends to narrate to the world is one that

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towards the Muslim community by calling them with all sorts of obscure names like terrorists, extremists, fundamentalists and *Jihadis*, etc. Western journalists also use derogatory terms and caricatures to show that the Prophet of Islam as a warmonger who promotes violence and killing of the innocents.

### **How to Confront the Situation**

In the past, for the many negative media reports and provocations that came from western media, the global Muslim community has responded with anger, protest, boycotts on food products from the West, etc. Though the vast majority of Muslims chose to show their displeasure in a peaceful manner, in some isolated cases a tiny minority retaliated in a violent manner giving a bad name to Islam and the Muslims.

Since all responses from the Muslims come from the way they digest information and think, this article intends to call upon today's generation of young Muslims to re-evaluate their mindset and come up with a new way in dealing with the challenges that come from the modern world. The new way should in no means isolate Muslims from the rest of humanity, but should be one that calls Muslims to use good thinking, persuasion, diplomacy, tolerance, good rhetoric, co-existence, etc.

Moreover, by the good use of the human intellect, Muslims should not only be able to preserve their religious heritage and way of life but also be able to contribute for the betterment of humanity.

### **The New Mindset**

In their effort to defend their faith and to convey the true message and beauty of Islam, the global Muslim community needs to reprogram their minds in a three pronged manner. Through this new approach, the young Muslim minds should be able to think spiritually, philosophically and scientifically. Such qualities of the mind existed in the past during the Golden Age of the Muslims

Rushd (1126-1198) and Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) will be a few to name here. It is believed that early Muslim thinkers, philosophers, astronomers, physicians, and scientists contributed immensely to the later development of science and philosophy in the West.

An avid reader into the works of Iqbal (1877-1938), Malik Bennabi (1905-1973), Said Nursi (1877-1960), Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Sheikh Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) and other past Muslim thinkers will derive at a conclusion that there is a need for the modern day Muslims to revive the traditional Muslim mind in order for them to reclaim back their bygone glory and fame. At the moment, though some regions of the Muslim Ummah are affluent materially, many are lagging behind other communities of the world in terms of science, technology and good governance.

In realising the existence of such problems in the present day Muslim world, the following will be a brief discussion on the three qualities of an integrated Muslim mind that can be a great help in restoring the Islamic civilization to its ideal position:

### **1. The Spiritual Mind**

The Muslim mind has to be religious for the reason that all of us have come from Allah and will return back to Him. As such, we should lead a God-centered life. It is said that the soul entity in man is the “Divine Spark” from God. For this reason, Man who is the Khalifah (vicegerent) of Allah has to live by the ethical principles mentioned in the Qur’an and Sunnah. The spiritual mind is one that demands a Muslim to stay connected with God in all his/her ups and downs in life. Moreover, the spiritual mind which is imbued with the quality of love should not only bind a good relationship with God but also with fellow human beings (Muslims and non-Muslims) and nature (the flora and fauna). It is true that science is important for the human survival on this planet. But only believing in science won’t be able to explain to man the comprehensiveness of life on this planet, particularly on a Muslim’s pre-existence, death

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Conversely, the spiritual mind of a Muslim explains the questions on why we are put here and what is expected of us in this life. At times, science can fail to answer such philosophical questions. In such a situation, man needs greater wisdom and guidance from God who is the Creator of the Universe to explain to him/her as to why he/she has been placed on this planet.

## 2. The Philosophical Mind

The second quality of the mind is that it has to be philosophical, because there are many verses of the Qur'an that call humanity to contemplate and reason in what one sees in the grandeur in the creation of the heavens and earth, in the form of celestial and terrestrial beings. For this reason, Ibn Rushd's argument holds water when he criticized Al-Ghazali for opposing philosophy. More to say, the mind that is developed in the philosophical manner would be able to conduct syllogism, thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis in looking at any given problem.

Additionally, the philosophical mind is capable of looking at an issue from different perspectives, coming up with an in-depth analysis and perhaps able to debate on a given topic much more persuasively than of a simple mind. The last thing that can be said about the philosophical mind is that, it is a mind that is critical, creative, innovative and analytical. It is believed that such qualities are very much needed in the present condition of the Muslim Ummah.

## 3. The Scientific Mind

The third quality of the mind is that it should be scientific in nature. Compared to the early days of Medieval Christianity in Europe, the scenario in the Muslim world was diametrically opposite. Ever since the coming of the first revelation up until the Muslim era of civilization and to the present time, science was never seen as a rival to religion. In fact, science helps in many ways to elucidate theories found in the Qur'an more elaborately with its cutting-edge

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Any keen researcher of the natural world will be surprised to find scientific information on the fetal development in the mother's womb and other aspects of embryology (Al-Qur'an: 23:12-14, 53:45-46; 39:6; 75:37), how the universe was created and other matters on cosmology (Al-Qur'an: 13:2; 15:19; 65:12; 21:30; 41:12) sea currents and oceanography (Al-Qur'an: 24:40; 55:19-20; 27:61; 25:53), formation of the mountains, tectonic plates and other related issues to geology (Al-Qur'an 24:40; 25:53; 27:61, 81; 55:19-20) all mentioned in the Holy Script of the Muslims.

Iqbal as well as many of the earlier mentioned Muslims thinkers urged the Muslim Ummah to get on the bandwagon of science and to get interested in the scientific investigations. According to these scholars, such an act will be a soul-enriching endeavor when one discovers Allah's mighty hand behind the making of the universe and the secrets found in the natural world. At the personal level, Iqbal metaphorically praised the scientists for their observation of nature and the universe at large. According to him, scientists are a sort of mystic seekers trying to get closer to the Creator by probing the wonders of the natural world. He calls this act of the scientists a form of *ibadah* (worship) in Islam.

Likewise, Iqbal also calls the Muslim Ummah to improve their lives by utilising science and technology to extract the bounties of Allah in the natural world and use them for their spiritual development.

A precise explanation of what Iqbal says is that Muslims should extract the natural resources from the belly of the earth and convert them into wealth and use it to improve the condition of the Ummah. Simply put, a mind that is interested in science and its calculations and discoveries will most probably appreciate not only the spectacular beauty in the natural world but also the precision orbiting of the planets and the presence of God behind all created matters, including man.

### The Benefit of the New Mindset

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obstacles an individual has to face. In the Qur'an, Muslims are encouraged to think, ponder, contemplate, etc. As such, the following will be some of the benefits we can get if we can restore the qualities of the traditional Muslim mind:

1. It can help Muslim communities to rebut many of the negative perceptions of non-Muslims with regard to Islam, Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an and Islamic practices.
- A well-developed Muslim Mind that uses logic, rhetoric, diplomacy and persuasion will be in a better position to counter Islamophobia, racism and prejudice that comes from the West.
  - By and large, a mind that is spiritual, philosophical and scientific can do great wonders in bringing in the much-needed development in the Muslim World.

**The Role of IIUM in Developing the New Mindset**

It is the belief of many Muslim scholars that education is the best way to cultivate, nurture and bring back the qualities of the traditional Muslim Mind. The International Islamic University Malaysia better known as IIUM, right from its inception has contributed efforts towards the development of the new mindset in its students, mainly Muslims, who come from 160 countries of the world.

As such, students are required to take courses in the areas of basic philosophy, Islamic and other worldviews, knowledge and civilization from the Islamic and Western perspectives, ethics and Fiqh of contemporary issues. In addition to that, they are recommended to take a course on creative thinking. For those doing postgraduate programs, they will be required to take a course on Islamization of Knowledge.

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Though the teaching staff of DFIDS comes from many diverse backgrounds and specialization, they are well grounded on issues pertaining to the Islamic belief system and modern sciences.

In their classroom teachings, students are well taught and equipped with the proper understanding on the importance of knowledge and values as the Khalifah of Allah. Moreover, students are also trained to think critically, creatively and analytically on how to co-exist with others and on how to rebut the negative media propaganda that comes from the West.

Since the Muslim world is embroiled with countless problems, a return to their blended and integrated style of thinking is vital. The exemplary model practiced at IIUM in molding the young minds and personality can be followed by other Islamic universities around the globe. \*\*\*

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