The Past, Present, and Future

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**Question:** You previously emphasized the importance of evaluating the past, present, and the future with a comprehensive perspective. How does this fact apply in our lives with respect to individuals and the society?

**Answer:** Although the past, present, and future are three different segments of time for those who only live the present moment, these are only three different facets of the same whole. Those who evaluate everything in terms of their carnal pleasures prefer to lead a heedless life with considerations such as:

*Neither cry for a passed day in vain,*
*Nor mind a future day for nothing.*
*Nothing but tales are past and present,*
*Enjoy yourself, do not let your life be ruined!*

On the other hand, those who journey on the horizons of the heart and spirit, take all three into consideration and do not sacrifice any one of them for the other; because, neglecting one of them will cause a serious defect in the others as well. For example, it is not possible for people who are detached from their past and do not have an insightful perspective of the present to build a new future. As a matter of fact, in response to Ziya Gökalp who said, “You are not a ruins-dweller but one ruined! Your gaze is on the past; you are not forward-thinking!” the poet Yahya Kemal replied, “I am neither a ruins-dweller nor ruined, but a forward thinking one with roots in the past.”

**Walking into the Future with the Momentum of the Past**
The past is full of so many stimulating good examples to provide hope to thinking minds with ideals. The parables of the Messengers of God related in the Qur’an, peace be upon them all, and authenticated sunnah are the most striking examples of this fact. And the most dizzying of those examples is the life of the Master of the Messengers of God, peace and blessings be upon him. As it is known, he came at a time when humanity was in a world of darkness, a time when brutality, tyranny, and ignorance of the worst kind prevailed. That is, people of the Era of Ignorance did not know the answers to questions such as: “What are we? Where did we come from, and where are we going?” Indeed, they were not even aware of their ignorance. Might was right and those in power imposed their views on everyone. The entire society was polluted in these feelings and thoughts. The late poet Mehmed Akif portrayed that grim picture with the following words:

*Human predators were much worse than hyenas;*
*A man without teeth would be food for his brothers!*
*Horizons on all sides used to be inflicted*
*With the trouble of anarchy, now destroying the East.*

However, the Pride of Humanity brought down emperors in a single move and saved humanity from that dark and gloomy atmosphere. At a time when no means of telecommunication and mass media existed and when everything was entrusted to individuals, the Messenger of God realized a great revolution by God’s grace in less than a quarter of a century. It was such a dizzying phenomenon that the deeds of the Prophet and his Companions can only be explained as a miracle of the Qur’an. So if the past is seen as such a source of dynamism and is benefited from accordingly, one reaches the following conclusion: given that such a revival was experienced in the past, there is no reason for not having it once more in our time.
There is a source of hope and power in the examples after the Era of Happiness. For example, as Muslims made progress and took their place among the world powers, different hostile circles appeared. At a certain period, there were attacks by Mongols and then the Crusaders, one after another. By God’s grace and protection, Muslims stood firm and the attackers bounced back every time. Different commanders from Kilijarslan to Saladin stood as a barrier before them, may God’s mercy be upon them all. Many times Muslims were clothed in shrouds, but consequently pits of death were transformed into comforting climates with pleasant gardens in which to stroll. Thus, even though we are under the attack of many hostile circles, there is no reason for not overcoming these and having a new revival. Why should we not make the face of humanity smile once more? Why should not we become a factor of balance to speak up for truth and to maintain justice?
When history is seen from this perspective, it will be seen that in the example of the Ottomans, which began as a small princedom in the bosom of Sögüt, it can be said that God Almighty created a butterfly out of a caterpillar. A handful of people, who only filled a few hundred tents, were at the wheel of the world within one and a half centuries. To such a degree that the Western world began to term them as an “empire.” This was an indication of acknowledgement. That Sublime State brought to a halt an entire world charging over them at full gallop with the Crusades and made them stay in Europe. It is necessary to insightfully discern all of these historical events together with their backgrounds and derive a lesson from them. It is stated that one of the most important qualities that distinguished Muawiya, may God be pleased with him, from other Companions was his analyses of history. He would constantly study history and draw lessons from it. This comment about Muawiya is not surprising; although surely I acknowledge Ali ibn Abi Talib as the rightful caliph, there are so many the valuable services of Muawiya ibn Abu Sufyan to the society that cannot be underestimated. For example, the Roman threat was neutralized at his time. Even though events do not occur in exactly the same pattern, it is a reality that there are certain historical recurrences in certain respects. If we interpret the past correctly, and evaluate our time by drawing a lesson from those recurrences, then we can walk on to where we should, without being hindered by obstacles.
There is one thing that we should be careful about while trying to appreciate and benefit from the past like a treasure. There may have been certain mistakes and sins we committed in different sections of the same society and may have given offense to one another. In my opinion, it is not right to depict those bitter pictures in our time, as it happens in novels and movies, and thus make long-forgotten incidents rise from the grave as a matter for dispute. Surely, the events in history are a reality and cannot be denied, but it is wrong to raise new disputes through them. While saying this I am not trying to say, “Let us solely see the clean pages of history.” On the contrary, historical events must be analyzed with all of their bitter and sweet aspects so that we can try not to repeat the same mistakes again. That is, it is necessary to analyze troublesome periods as well and understand how the difficulties were overcome; however, this should be carried out without bringing grudge and hatred back to life again. Instead, we should try to adopt amicable approaches to use those sources of wisdom as projectors to shed light on the present time and future.

**No Future without a Vision for the Future**
There is a future that starts from tomorrow and extends to eternity for those who believe in the Hereafter. As for those whose ideal in life is making merry, they neither care about the past nor the future. While they think they cannot obtain any truth by scrutinizing the past, they do not wish to spoil their enjoyment by thinking about the future. For the volunteers devoted to God’s path, not only the past, but also the future, bears great importance. They have hopes, expectations, and ideals. However, those expectations have nothing to do with love for status or enjoying worldliness as some claim. On the contrary, their ideal is to establish truth and justice everywhere, being representatives of peace, making the whole world feel a spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood once more, developing a culture of coexistence in the globalizing world, and thus raising a warm atmosphere of peace everywhere. As it is also stated in the works of *Risale-i Nur*, the absence or forgetting of an ideal in life causes people to concentrate upon themselves and their own self-interest. As for such individuals who are crushed under the weight of their arrogance, they orient everything to their selfish concerns and continuity of their present enjoyment. However, members of humanity are honored with the best pattern of creation. They represent yesterday, today, and tomorrow altogether. Therefore, they definitely must cherish hope and ideals for the tomorrows. Otherwise, they get—may God forbid—stuck in their own selfishness and eventually become egotists, egocentrics, or narcissists who become dizzy and lose their balance with appreciation. As for those who aim certain ideals for the future, they are heroes of revival and monumental examples. They constantly try to blow the inspirations in their souls to others. They prepare the plans and projects of their future acts of goodness from today and try to do their best for the sake of realizing them.

**The Golden Segment of Time: Present**
The present time is also very important for a true believer. Such a person views the present moment as a golden segment of time and tries to make the best of the opportunities granted by God Almighty without any waste of time. Actually, all of us are at a certain point with the guidance and channeling of God Almighty. What falls on us is fulfilling our position of responsibility in the most efficient way. So much so that even if they leave us on a barren mountain top, we should take a hammer and nail and try to extract soil out of the rocks—and then call out to others, asking them to send up a few seeds, striving for greenery to grow even on barren rocks. That is, when they put a believer on a rocky ground, he or she should manage to derive water from rocks—as Moses did by striking a rock with his staff—obtain soil, and consequently even plant seeds on rocks.
One should never be content with minimal effort, instead of seeking to make the best of the available means. There are definitely certain good deeds everyone can do with respect to his or her own position. Everything granted by God must be used on His path by making the best of the present moment, and everybody must to what they can. A person should even question his-or herself frequently, asking: “I wonder whether I am thoroughly fulfilling what I am supposed to do with respect to the available means that God has granted to me? Or am I like a sick person suffering in misery?”
In short, the intellectual laborers of the future must understand well what they can effectuate with the means in hand and then use them efficiently for the sake of realizing the noble ideals that they pursue. By undertaking seemingly impossible tasks, even in the most adverse conditions, they must make the best of the present moment and let humanity enjoy new springs by God’s grace and help.

*This text is the translation of “*[*Geçmiş, Hâl ve Gelecek*](http://www.herkul.org/kirik-testi/gecmis-hal-ve-gelecek/)*.”*