

There is light at the end of the tunnel. In the past two weeks, I have seen it. I am enlightened and dazzled. From the last twenty years, my sincere and devoted colleagues and I have been working for this time to come – and it has arrived.

‘Elevating the human spirit’ has been our mission since 1991; awash with adventure; immersed in an urgent drive to witness people of Pakistan recognize and stand up to their immense potential. The seed then planted; was preparing its roots. The first buds are opening now.

There is a new mindset emerging. The yearning for hope in desperation, amidst daily gory news of blasts and bodies, strikes and strife; has shaken and lifted the soul. The tremors are light, but can clearly be felt.

Since I joined this profession of developing the human factor in 1996, the thousands I have worked with have enhanced my craving for good news. So far, most of what I saw was a head, torso and limbs coming to work; habitually going through the motions of doing a ‘job’ to oblige the necessities of life. The head on this form clearly had a brain powerful in every respect. Yet, the rote of activity pressed this intelligence and tucked it away in the corners of fear, lest a spark ignites it to challenge kismet (fate). Glimpses of this beautiful mind were evident in expressions of desire; often brutally slaughtered at the altar of ‘what will others say’.

People want to become moral beings but find few examples in their environment – an environment created by our actions; so they turn to an imbalanced and extreme view of religion and become fanatic about it; an apparent struggle with their own guilt. Dr Thomas Harris in his book ‘I’m OK, you’re OK’ states that when a child grows up to find his reality differing from the script authored by his parents, his mind enters a state of conflict in which he tries to uphold the integrity of that script. This internal conflict keeps the intellect occupied, thus diverting its capacity to be creative. Often desperation results, leading to yet more irrational attachments for escape to freedom which the soul seeks.

As I saw in these fifteen years, the common notion and belief of well-paid-or-not educationists and corporate, social and public sector employees has been predominantly one: My self-esteem and motivation, depends on what others say I am and think of me. This self-abuse was entrenched at senior, middle, junior and smart new-entrant levels, recent graduates from even the likes of Cornell and Princeton. Mood swings and internal conflict/peace were mostly

controlled by an entity other than the individual. 'Shadenfruede' a term explaining a state of joy one feels at the pain of another, was ghastly evident. Criticism of anything and compliment of nothing was the most indulged in pastime. Impatience brought push to shove for more material self-expression. The strongest desire was the desire to be noticed, without which nothing was worth doing. Not doing what you say and saying what you're not doing came naturally, instigating hypocrisy. Not coming on time was fashionable. Lying was justified as a necessary way of life. Self-centered talk was the hottest topic. Ingratitude aroused moaning; mistrust corroded relationships, and arrogance the normal cover up for insecurities. The outcome – a quality of work, personal and family far removed from its possibilities. Over these fifteen years, I saw the graph of self-worthiness falling. I feared the crash on the rock bottom.

A few brilliant leaders of organizations struggled to pull, push, tug, twist, cajole and heave this dying force. A combination of relentless efforts by several from the many sectors of society has brought us to a tipping point. A consciousness is developing. Smart, fresh views and opinions are becoming dimly visible. Thought processes are flipping. There is not only a sense of shame at what we have been, but a badgering desire for self-questioning. The awareness has always been there in the head but never urgent enough to move (or stop) the hand. The eye is roving, but now knows the look it is giving – control of its lid is slowly in grasp. My proof comes from working with people mostly from local organizations and some multinationals, who make statements such as:

- "Those who seek appreciation, are not worthy of it. Those who are worthy of it are too busy doing good."
- "Often it is the lazy and incompetent who oppose talent."
- "We always look at others. Let's stop and ask, What have I done?"
- "Why can't we look at women with respect, as we do our mothers?"
- "We see people who say and do what Islam requires, but their life doesn't reflect gratitude."
- "Why are we so far from the rest of the world; because we have become like machines, only our hands and legs are moving. Like a calculator, we add one plus one is two; and no more."
- "Our jealousies keep us occupied and take up our time; thus we cannot think creatively and invent."
- "We want justice and wait for others to give it to us; not asking why we don't give it first."

The actions that support such thoughts are:

- Need for challenges has become the top motivator; not adding to but replacing appreciation, reward and recognition (the HR department is threatened). These latter have intuitively become a 'by the way' thing of the past.

- Stopping the hand, midway, while attempting to throw garbage. Bending to pick up litter from the floor thrown by others (ego – you too are threatened).
- Conscious effort to be on time.
- A hunger for knowledge and openness to fresh paradigms (another bookshop has opened at Karachi airport. Bookshops are the largest stalls in Sunday Bazaar. Youth-led conferences and learning/action forums have increased ten-fold in the past 3 years).
- Guts to ask questions and share an opinion.
- A need for trusting and happy expression, clean from shame and remorse (we have had madrassah teachers in Swabi dance to Michael Jackson songs and ask for more, purely out of innocent fun and joy).
- Young people working with the poorest with unmatched sincerity, not for a certificate but the sheer pleasure of having a purpose.
- People not being ashamed to, for a change, serve a waiter and cater to his emotional needs as a human being.

And so much more .....

This oasis is not a mirage – I strongly believe. Don't say I am fooling myself; I have proof. You find what you seek. The quest continues; conception is ongoing; the embryo of change is forming AND the labor pains are getting stronger. Soon, the head will emerge.

Science validates that entropy is stronger than evolution. I say there is nothing more powerful than the human soul on fire. Trap it, constrict it, beat it, burn it – it has to rise.

A quotation says, "People don't change when they are given a choice; they change when there is no choice." Is that so?

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