[**The greatest gift**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1662963/the-greatest-gift)

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The writer is an educationist with an interest in religion.

AFTER appointing Muadh Ibn Jabal as governor of Yemen, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) asked him how he would govern if he did not find a clear ruling in the Holy Quran or the Sunnah. He responded that he would strive (ie use the intellect to solve problems). The Holy Prophet approved of his reasoning.

The above incident is an indication that intellect is the greatest gift of the Almighty to humans, which allows them to respond to the needs of the time, face all kinds of situations and solve the difficult issues of life.

What is the intellect? It is the capacity of the mind to search for the right way of action that leads to the ultimate truth. It is done through pensive thinking, reflecting, analysing and concentrating on the signs of Allah that are spread all around us.

Islam is clear as to where and how to use one’s intellect; the Holy Quran says that it is to be used in the service of faith and fellow human beings. In other words, it is to be used for sifting right from wrong, in discovering the secrets of the universe, in promoting ethics, in shunning evil practices in society, in solving social issues, in meeting challenges and in fixing the future direction of society.

Exercising one’s intellect is a demand of faith.

For this reason, the human being is considered to be the crown of creation. He is superior in God’s entire creation.

The biggest difference between humans and other creatures is that of the intellect. Humans are driven by reason and logic. They can engage in intellectual activities, while other creatures are mostly driven by their instincts. It is the fundamental difference that separates human beings from other creatures.

Historically, human beings in all societies and in all epochs have exercised their intellectual tools including observation, logic and ability to experiment, along with imagination and insight to understand emerging problems and solve them in a proper manner. Hundreds of years ago, many of us used to live in mud houses, spend nights in the darkness and cook food by burning animal dung or firewood. But now every aspect of life has changed. It is the wonder of the intellect that has enabled us to modernise life.

With the systematic use of their intellect, human beings have been able to change their lives. In fact, their lives are continuously changing. Our intellect requires us to think over day-to-day problems seriously, objectively, competently and purposefully. Allah helps those who strive to solve problems in the greater cause of humanity.

Though humans are essentially intellectual beings, most of them barely realise the fact. They do not use their intellect systematically as many of them are controlled by their instincts and emotions; they act ignorantly and make mistakes. Pakistan is facing several problems in the area of economy, the environment, healthcare and other aspects of human life. The solution lies in exercising one’s intellect which is a demand of faith. Islam is an intellectual faith; it encourages the use and promotion of the intellect by providing education to the masses. It does not encourage rote learning, cheating or plagiarism but exploring the intellect through research.

Nations that have made it their policy to use the intellect in a systematic manner have progressed a lot in the comity of nations. They have created many think tanks where intellectual thought is explored in order to find solutions to problems. They guide their leadership in policymaking in the areas of politics, economics, healthcare, defence etc. The failure of some nations who lag behind can often be found in flawed thinking where the use of the intellect remains elusive.

It is a given that we are confronted with new situations every now and then, that new issues arise, new phenomena appear and new challenges emerge — all of this demands that human beings use their intellect to face the circumstances. Therefore, Islam, right from the time of its revelation, has been very emphatic about the use of the intellect in all matters of life.

Islam likens those who do not use their intellect to cattle. They have been termed ‘dumb’ and ‘blind’ and ‘dead-hearted’ as their hearts have been sealed off. In the Quranic verse 25:44, Allah says “or do you think that most of them hear or understand? They are only like cattle; nay, they are even farther astray from the Path” (future direction of the community).

Keeping in view the religious emphasis on the intellect, it is the responsibility of the state, especially the education ministry, to promote the systematic use of the intellect in educational institutes so that today’s students are better trained and equipped to solve the emerging problems of life.

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