

**SPEECH BY THE HON TUN DR MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD  
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**“The Thinking of a Thinker”**

1. I would like to thank the International Islamic University Malaysia for inviting me to speak on this very interesting subject “The Thinking of a Thinker”. Perhaps I should begin by pointing out that of Allah’s creatures; the only one that He endowed with the power of thinking is Homo Sapiens or Man. This power differentiates Man from the other creatures of Allah, giving him greater strength than the most powerful animals.
2. All creatures big and small have some kind of a brain. The main function of the brain of all creatures including Man is to remember. Animals remember past experience and react in the future based on memory of the past. The Russian scientist Pavlov demonstrated how a dog could learn to associate the ringing of a bell with food being given at a particular place. The memory was such that the animal salivates at the sound of the bell even if no food is laid out.
3. But man thinks and reasons so that even if the situation is not exactly the same he can work out what would happen and would react accordingly.
4. There are of course internal signals that all creatures react to. When hunger is felt, all creatures know that it should be assuaged by taking food. That is how human babies respond to feelings of hunger.
5. But adults respond more intelligently. A fasting Muslim would not respond by taking food because he is hungry. He takes into account other considerations and ignores his hunger. He reasons.
6. Primitive people eat all the time if there is food available. Civilised man regulate his food intake to certain periods – breakfast in the morning, lunch at midday, tea in the evening and dinner at night. Unless there is famine he does not worry whether there would be food or not.
7. The civilised man eats intelligently, choosing his food, preparing it, and avoiding what may be harmful to his health. He thinks not only of assuaging hunger but also of his tastes, time, the way the food is laid out and his table manners even.
8. Thinking which involves reasoning based on memory and personally acquired information and experience, with inputs from deliberately acquires knowledge from books and other sources of information enables the thinker to formulate and choose the reaction that could most benefit him.

9. One of the best examples of deliberate training in thinking is that which involves mathematical calculations. We are endowed by Allah with 10 fingers and 10 toes. It could not have taken long for the early man to relate quantities to the number of fingers of the hands especially.

10. By giving a figure to the fingers, the need to count the fingers could be replaced by the counting of numbers. With that mathematics must have taken off, no longer constrained by the number of fingers. We cannot only add and subtract large numbers but we can also multiply and divide, i.e. repeated addition or subtraction. We memorise the answers so that there is no longer a need for repeatedly adding or subtracting. This speeds up the calculating process.

11. The ancient mathematicians invented the abacus to add further to the speed of calculating. Thinking led to the invention of the calculator, using logic embedded in software. Now there is practically no limit to the variety of software which use mathematical logic to recall and work out answers to any question.

12. With the computer, there is probably no need to think. But we cannot produce the software without thinking. The thinking itself may be aided by software. We have come a long way indeed. But we still need to think for there will be problems which the computers will not be able to provide answers. In our daily life there would be personal problems, company problems and for some, national problems which require a lot of thinking in order to find solutions, viable solutions.

13. In 1997 Malaysia was attacked by the currency traders. We had had no experience of dealing with this kind of assault on our nation. Unless we did something we would become destitute, would have to ask for aid from others, and would be indebted to the creditors. They would then gain control our economy and eventually over our politics. We would lose our independence, would be again a colony of the big powers.

14. This fear of colonisation galvanised us into thinking, into seeking for a solution that would not only rehabilitate our economy and finance but also save our independence. To come upon this solution, or to think up the solution we needed to know everything about currency trading and exactly what was happening. After educating ourself about the workings of the currency, the way currency trading is done, and gathering all the data, it was possible to devise a way to prevent access to the currency and put a stop to the trading.

15. The solution was not perfect of course. There was always a risk of failure. Contingencies had to be prepared. Much thinking, much analysis had to go into the formulation of counter measures. The possibility of retaliation by the currency traders, by the International Agencies like the IMF and World Bank, by

the rich and powerful countries which dominate the world's economy and finances -- all these have to be imagined and defence against all these had to be worked out. Fortunately the solution we formulated worked.

16. Knowledge is important when thinking yourself out of a problem. With age and experience the amount of knowledge is increased. That is why in the old days age was much respected. But today knowledge can be acquired not just by experience but through learning. A young man of today can be more knowledgeable than an 80 years old man if he cares to study the knowledge accumulated by others before him, by the scholars and observers of the past.

17. There could be among the knowledge that he had acquired actual models which he could use. The thinking here is limited to comparing his problem and the problem he had read about. With some modification he can solve his problem.

18. Many of the things we did in Malaysia were the result of studying the strategies and the successes of other countries. The ethnic Europeans had shown us the importance of method and strategies. The Sultan of Melaka with his big army and elephants lost to the Portuguese with a much smaller force because the Portuguese forces were better organised, had a distinct hierarchy of command and adopted a clear strategy. Against the systematic way the Portuguese fought, the Sultan's forces could not prevail. And for 450 years after that Malaya was effectively a colony of the European powers.

19. We learnt the importance of methods, systems and strategies from the ethnic Europeans. But we noted that after the war the defeated Japanese were better able to recover than the victorious Europeans. We decided to Look East, to learn from the Japanese success story.

20. I need not explain what we learnt from Japan but, although some may not think so, much of Malaysia's success is due to Looking East. The thinking part here is really that about deciding to Look East based on the accumulated observations of East and West, of the knowledge that we have regarding the West and its performance before, its subsequent poor performance and comparing all these inputs against our observations of the East.

21. Copying the successful is logical but Malaysia was able to decide who was more successful and worth copying. Others may have seen Japan's success but did not think of using Japan as a model.

22. The majority of us are Muslims, the followers of Islam. Largely we are followers because we were born Muslims. We did not make a conscious choice. We did not think. We are taught not to think about why we believe in our religion. We must just accept all the teachings without questioning. But what is it that we

are asked to believe. Is it the Islam that was brought and taught by the Prophet of Islam or is it the Islam of our interpreters, the learned ulamas. Over the last fourteen centuries the learned ones, have been interpreting and reinterpreting Islam, each according to his own understanding and perceptions. The result is that today we have hundreds of religions which purport to be Islam but which are so different from each other that the followers fight each other, each accusing the others of not being Muslims, not following the teachings of Islam.

23. We may not question Islam that was brought by the Prophet. But are we not allowed to question the hundreds of different interpretations by the learned people who are not prophets. Could they all be right? If they are all right then why are they so different to the point where their followers fight and kill each other, something that Islam forbids?

24. We need to pause and think. True, if we start interpreting the religion ourselves we may end up with even more religions which claim to be Islam. There would be hundreds of Ayah Pin's and Ashaari's, hundreds of tarikats and groups. There would be chaos. There would be a worst anarchy among Muslims than now. Our detractors would have a field day pitting us against ourselves.

25. On the other hand the situations of the Muslims now belie the teachings of Islam. They are divided, weak and easily manipulated. Yet we know that when the Jahilliah Arabs embraced Islam they became so united, strong and knowledgeable that they were able to spread the teachings of Islam and build a community which controlled two-thirds of the world. They became a world power giving Muslims a good life free of oppressions by others.

26. If the Muslims are divided, weak and ignorant today it cannot be because of Islam. But it can certainly be because of the wrong teachings of Islam. We can question these teachings even if we cannot question the religion of Islam. Among the things we need to question is the teaching that there is no reason to be found behind the injunctions of Islam. If we seek reasons for what is enjoined upon us to do then we will have doubt about our faith. Just do whatever we are asked to do and you will be good Muslims.

27. We live in an age when the mind has been sharpened, when there are reasons for everything. We live in a scientific age. Blind faith is not enough. To say that our sad plight is the will of Allah is not enough. The mind sees that it is the failure of the ummah which have brought about the disaster upon us. Is rejecting science the answer? Think.

28. If we think we will find that knowledge of science would actually strengthen our faith. For science merely answer the question "how" but has failed completely to answer the question "why" things are what they are, why

things behave the way they behave. The ultimate answer is that there is a power which determines all these. Some try to attribute it to nature. But what is nature? In the end you must conclude that there is a power which determines this. You can try to give it any name but ultimately we must conclude that that power must be Allah. Science therefore proves and enhances the power of Allah. Science must increase our faith in Allah. We must therefore study science and not reject it as secular, the study of which earns us no merit. In fact science can actually save Islam and the Muslims. Can we believe that studying something that can save Islam and the Muslim would earn us no merit? Can we accept the teachings that we should not study science, teachings by those who do not understand science?

29. In the era when Muslim scientists were the pioneers Islam and the Muslim were highly respected. The Muslims were not oppressed. They were not labelled terrorists, hunted and hounded all over the world.

30. Now Muslim are far behind because someone interpreted that only studying religion would earn us merit in the akhirat. The misfortunes in the world must be ignored, because for us there will be heaven in the akhirat. If they are to be ignored why are we sending young men and women to blow themselves up to avenge the killing of Muslims today? We should just bear it. But one cannot believe that the humiliation of Islam and the Muslim is foreordained. The humiliation that we suffer from is because we have disregarded the injunctions in the Quran that Muslims must always prepare for their own defence. In the days of the Prophet they must have war-horses etc. Today they must have modern weapons. But because they did not study science they are unable to make their own weapons. They have to buy and they cannot buy those weapons which can really defend them.

31. If we think about our religion we must certainly conclude that those who teach us to merely submit to whatever befalls us are wrong for we are capable of influencing our future and even our present situation if we do certain things which are actually enjoined by our religion. It is because we are taught not to think but to accept blindly what is told us by those who have some knowledge of Islam that we are often misled by the Ayah Pin's and Ashaari's in the Muslim community. And remember that when we think and the thinking helps us to overcome our problems, prevent our oppression by others; this too would be foreordained. It is not only failures and misfortunes which are foreordained, but success and good fortune, whether the results of our efforts or not are also foreordained.

32. And thinking is also necessary when we are assailed by ideas and ideologies coming out of the ethnic Europeans. They preach democracy as if democracy will solve all human problems. They are ready to kill and destroy so that democracy is accepted and practiced by all. They claim a right for pre-

emptive attacks and forcing regime change in order to impose their ideologies on us.

33. Democracy is no doubt the best political system yet devised by Man. It is compatible with Islam. The Prophet allowed his successors to be chosen by the community. But democracy can only work if the people as a whole understand democracy and its limitations, the discipline that is required and the imperfections of the result. If the people and the aspiring leaders do not understand the workings of democracy, if they use their rights and freedoms to disrupt and destabilise then democracy will not work. In fact democracy will bring about anarchy and will blight the nation and its people.

34. We are seeing today many countries attempting to practise democracy only to see their countries incapable of developing and their people suffering from chronic poverty and insecurity. Yet the ethnic European proponents of democracy seem to thrive and to prosper through democracy. They do and we don't because we really do not understand how democracy works.

35. If we think, then we will be able to devise a step by step approach so that the switch to democracy will cause less pain, for all changes must be disruptive, even if the change is for the better.

36. We can succeed and be strong if we think before we leap, if we use the faculty to think which Allah has endowed us. The faculty to think is the greatest gift of Allah to mankind. More than that Allah has made those who think to become more and cleverer all the time. Not to think is to fail to appreciate and value this gift. Similarly to abuse this gift and do wrong would be to show ungratefulness to the Maker.

37. Humankind is imperfect. We will off and on do wrong. But if we think then we would do less wrong, would commit less sins but would instead adhere to what is right and good. And this world would be a better place because of it, because we do not follow base desires but we think about what we have to do all the time.