Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on dogma, myopia & asphyxiating policies vs research, innovation, creativity & pragmatism

"Professional standards and assumptions can provide a form of intolerance, pride and myopia as intractable as the rigidities of traditional societies."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1987 McMaster University Convocation Ceremony address (Hamilton, Ontario, Canada)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3409/

"[P]rogress is possible when complex issues are subjected to competent, intelligent, nuanced and sophisticated analysis, free from dogmatism, and based upon what I would describe as 'empathetic knowledge.' This happens best in open, meritocratic societies, where people's responsibilities are based on their competence."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2014 Stephen A. Ogden Memorial Lecture, Brown University (Providence, USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10725/

"What was behind all this attention to structure and process [of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture]? The goal was to create an intellectual space -- something we might think of as a beautiful bustan in which there would be no possibility of suffocation from the dying weeds of dogma, whether professional or ideological; where the flowers of articulation and
challenging ideas could grow without restraint; where the new plants of creativity and risk-taking could blossom in the full light of day ..."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2001 Eighth Aga Khan Award For Architecture Prize Ceremony address (The Citadel, Aleppo, Syria)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6043/

"[I]f you are open to listening, and you can respond better to local concerns. Essentially the network has been people driven -- not dogma driven, not driven by material return. The only thing the we are concerned within the network is improvement of the quality of life of people. And in so far as those goals are achieved, then I think that our initiatives would be considered positive."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1999 Pranay Gupte Interview (United States, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5676/

Geoffry Barker: Has any writer or thinker been outstandingly influential in forming your political or commercial attitudes?

Aga Khan: I have taken, I think, a pragmatic attitude because I think that in the developing world that is the only attitude that can be taken. What we are talking about really is the maximisation of resources ... the most effective way of assisting the growth of these countries and of their economies and therefore of getting that benefit back to the people who reside in those countries. If one political system is working and is giving good results, the idea of disrupting it for an 'ism' is not an applicable concept to me.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1979 The Age Interview with Geoffry Barker (Melbourne, Australia)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10329/
"With regard to let’s say some of the notions that I’ve tried to develop, it would be important that those notions should be validated by time. I would be uncomfortable if some of these notions turned out to have been fashionable short-term issues. I wouldn’t want that. By nature I am suspicious of fashion, of isms, of dogmas, because I think human society changes all the time. And the moment you get frozen into a mental prison, then, you know, things actually start becoming very damaging....

"I’m very tolerant [of my children] in the sense that because they have all had a good education because they think clearly, I enjoy the process of dialogue. And most often, we come to a consensus view because we go through a rational process. And, you know, that an infinite part of the sheer interpretation of Islam is the rational process. And I attach enormous importance to that because it’s a significant part of the way we live and work. So I encourage that."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1999 Pranay Gupte Interview (United States, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5676/

"The complexities of world problems and societies today require people educated in broad humanistic traditions in addition to the guidance and direction provided by the teaching of their religion. The history of the twentieth century is replete with examples of the danger of the systematic propagation and uncritical acceptance of dogmas, ideologies, and even theologies."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2001 Association of American Universities Centenary Celebration address (Washington D.C., USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5920/

"Since my last visit [to India], many changes have taken place in our world. The end of the Cold War, the dismantling of the Soviet Union, the
emergence of newly-independent states, worldwide economic uncertainty, exploding ethnic forces -- all must cause us to reflect on the horizons of our future. One result of these changes is that the imposition of certain long-held political and economic dogma on the human mind is disappearing, leaving greater space for the human intellect to make pragmatic decisions."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1992 address at the banquet hosted by the Vice-President of India (New Delhi, India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4571/

"One of the reasons governments have failed in highly diverse settings around the world is that dogma has too often been enshrined at the price of more flexible, pluralistic approaches to political and economic challenges."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2008 Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat Opening Ceremony address (Ottawa, Canada)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9151/

"History, both Muslim and non-Muslim is studded with examples of societies which have stagnated through failing to adapt to new historical and human trends. Paralysis gained control of the body of these groups through a progressive attack on the military, moral, material, social and economic features of these societies. From this gradual paralysis death has invariably ensued, either after longer or shorter periods. I believe, therefore, that a continuous review of the history which is being made every day is necessary so that the processes of adjustment for the bases of our society are brought up-to-date, and I would say even more, are projected into the future so that specific goal can be obtained over a number of years. One fact seems to hold true throughout human history and that is that any society or nucleus of human beings, which has moved in a specific direction, regardless of the environing historical trends, has met with dismemberment or destruction."
"With the deaths of King Charles the First, and Louis the Sixteenth, Western culture initiated a process of secularisation which grew into present day democratic institutions, and lay cultures. Islam, on the other hand, never endorsed any political dogma. So the historical process of secularisation which occurred in the West, never took place in Muslim societies. What we are witnessing today, in certain Islamic countries, is exactly the opposite evolution, the theocratisation of the political process. There is no unanimity in the Islamic world on the desirability of this trend but it would certainly be less threatening if the humanistic ethics of the faith were the driving force behind the processes of change."

"If ignoring the past was a problem on one side, then the opposite danger was an exaggerated submission to the past, so that some creations and creators became prisoners of dogma or nostalgia. There is a danger, in every area of life, everywhere in the world, that people will respond to the hastening pace of change with an irrational fear of modernism, and will want to embrace uncritically that which has gone before. The Islamic world has sometimes been vulnerable to this temptation -- and the rich potential for a new 'Islamic modernism' has sometimes been under-estimated."
"What should have been brotherhood has become rivalry, generosity has been replaced by greed and ambition, the right to think is held to be the enemy of real faith, and anything we might hope to do to expand the frontiers of human knowledge through research is doomed to failure for in most of the Muslim world, there are neither the structures nor the resources to develop meaningful intellectual leadership."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2003 Institute of Ismaili Studies 25th Anniversary Graduation Ceremony address (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6826/

"One of my institutional commitments has been to help the developing world explore the keys to social and economic progress. But sadly, over these fifty years, I have seen too many developing countries search for those keys in disappointing directions. For a while, it was thought to be enough to simply throw off the yoke of colonialism and to reassert an indigenous cultural identity. Education, from that point of view, became largely a matter of tapping into ancient wisdom. In other cases, the promises of a charismatic ruler would capture the public imagination, reducing the role of education to relative insignificance.

"Over time, other potential cures would have their moments in the sun, ranging from the siren songs of state socialism on one side to the allure of unrestrained capitalism on the other. The demands of dogma came to replace the disciplines of reason -- and education too often turned into indoctrination.

"But as a wise observer once said, it’s not so much what we don’t know that hurts us, but also all those things that we are sure we know -- but which are just not so. And so it was with many of the so-called certainties of the past.

"What the modern world requires, however, is an approach which is the polar opposite of indoctrination. As world affairs have been steadily transformed by the process of globalisation, the ability to command and control has become less important than the ability to anticipate, connect
and respond. And educational institutions which can instill and enhance those capacities have become essential to effective development.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2007 Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa, Residential Campus Foundation Stone Ceremony address (Mombasa, Kenya)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8188/

"The challenge of development in education, as in other fields, is highly complex and it calls for complex responses. We must replace old, dogmatic prescriptions with new pragmatic approaches."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2007 State Banquet address (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8225/

"Education, in the past, has too often been a matter of indoctrination -- advancing the demands of dogma instead of the disciplines of reason. What is required today, in my view, is an educational approach which is the polar opposite of indoctrination -- one that nurtures the spirit of anticipation and agility, adaptability and adventure. To this end, the Academies curriculum will encourage its students in the practise of what I would call 'Intellectual Humility', recognising that what they do not know will always be greater than what they know and launching an ardent, lifelong search for the knowledge they will need. In an age of accelerating change, the most important thing any student can learn is how to go on learning."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2007 Aga Khan Academy, Kampala, Stone Ceremony address (Kampala, Uganda)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8258/

"For too long some of our schools have taught too many subjects as
subsets of dogmatic commitments. Economic insights, for example, were treated as ideological choices rather than as exercises in scientific problem solving. Too often, education made our students less flexible -- confident to the point of arrogance that they now had all the answers -- rather than more flexible, humble in their life-long openness to new questions and new responses. An important goal of quality education is to equip each generation to participate effectively in what has been called ‘the great conversation’ of our times. This means, on one hand, being unafraid of controversy. But it also means being sensitive to the values and outlooks of others."

*His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2006 Address to the Evora University Symposium (Evora, Portugal)*
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7653/

See also: *His Highness the Aga Khan on thinking independently and the search for new knowledge -- the spirit of adventure*

See also: *His Highness the Aga Khan on embracing controversy in the search for new knowledge, truth and creative solutions*

See also: *His Highness the Aga Khan on the essence of the Enabling Environment: enabling and assisting individual creativity*
See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on ideas and innovation: on nurturing, respecting, harnessing them from whomever they come


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