

# Dialogue among civilizations

M HARUNUR RASHID

THE Merriam Webster Dictionary gives several meanings of the word civilization, of which the following could be noted: a) a relatively high level of cultural and technological development; b) the cultural characteristic of a particular time or place;

c) the process of becoming civilized; d) refinement of thought, manners and taste and e) a situation of urban comfort.

From out of these meanings we can single out two key words *culture* and *technology*. One refers to man's development in his inner world, which Saint-Exupery prefers to call an inner expansion. All those fine words about refinement, manners and taste could be seen within this broad category. The other refers to his development in the outer world. This is where he has learned to adapt the outer world to suit his physical convenience and comfort. Rather than living on a treetop or a mountain cave, he learned to make his own home. Man here took a big step forward; instead of depending on nature, he would mould nature to suit his physical needs. This was his taking a step into the world of technology, which provided him with an extra power power that he created for himself by his acumen and sweat.

What emerges from this concept of civilization is the co-existence of two opposites within a cycle of history. Technology is power and is basically aggressive; culture is a refined state of the human mind and is essentially a product of leisure and quietude. All civilizations start with aggressive technological superiority that destroys a superior but decadent culture. It then, in course of time, loses its destructive edge as it provides leisure for its creative talents who build its matrix of taste and refinement. It goes on, in its turn, to lend itself to a process of decadence until it yields place to a superior technology and an equally aggressive band of humans who undertake to reform the subor-

dinate order.

With this few words as a general introduction to civilization, we would like to point out that during the last one hundred years the world has undergone a stupendous change, a metamorphosis which humans have failed to absorb culturally. This change comprises an element of pace or speed along with a concurrent element of violence. During the initial years of the last century man learned how to fly or run a locomotive. Today his spaceship is hurtling across the endless void at a speed,

The present day world has become a difficult place for any form of dialogue, civilized or otherwise. After the dissolution of the USSR, the world has tended to be unipolar with the rise of the United States as the single superpower controlling the destiny of the whole world. This has had far-reaching consequences on the cultural, moral, social, economic and political life of the world community. As a result the role of the United Nations too, which came into being on the ashes of the League of Nations in 1945, has

culture.

But as I said before, technology has an element of violence in its race for the unknown. When external challenges are gone, it starts inventing challenges for itself. The whole controversial concept of NMD and going back on the SALT treaty is a challenge which America has chosen to invent for itself, if not for meeting a real adversary, at least for keeping up its national pride and boosting its thriving arms industry.

As a beneficiary of the European

government of British Guiana may have a Marxist dentist to run it. Cicero's definition of the early Roman empire was remarkably similar. It was the domain over which Rome enjoyed the legal right to enforce the law. Today America's self-appointed writ runs throughout the world, including the Soviet Union and China, over whose territory the U S government has asserted the right to fly military aircraft. The United States, uniquely blessed with surpassing riches and an exceptional history, stands

come. Already, the American intervention in Afghanistan has become a role model for India and Israel who think they have the 'moral' right to intervene in neighboring lands in their hunt for the terrorists. In this tense situation, the only dialogue the people are interested in is the talk about bangles the two South Asian heads of government have promised to present to each other.

The criterion by which I prefer judging the excellence of a civilization is its cuisine. It is the way you cook your food and serve your food and the way you eat your food, which determine the extent of excellence you have attained. The Chinese and the Iranians have had a thriving cuisine for the last five thousand years or so. A student of civilization can hardly remain uninformed about their attainments in culture. It is not for nothing that the cue for a dialogue among civilizations came from President Khatami of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In a world which is breathlessly helping itself to a beef burger or a doughnut, the Chinese still patiently eat their soup and dexterously wield two bamboo sticks to carry the food onto their civilized palate. So do the Iranians their special traditional dishes. I think these are the two states, which have carefully kept themselves away from the turmoil, which seem to destroy the very foundation of human civilization while keeping themselves abreast of the technological advances.

I don't think the United Nations is irrelevant; it ought to be strengthened if humanity is to survive the present crisis. A meaningful dialogue among civilizations is a crying need of the hour. It is only then humanity will realize to what extent culture is relevant to the technological advances. The future of the world lies in a happy marriage of the two. It is then the individual will be able to realize his full potential as a human being.

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which was unthinkable even fifty years ago. With the IT revolution gaining real momentum during the 80s and 90s, the world now is just a mouse click away from each other and is compelled to respond to the need of globalization. So what individuals had to do in such dizzying pace is just go with the tide and try and get ahead of the race. The important thing was getting ahead of others by means fair or foul. Look at the increased use of drugs in games and sports which are no longer mere pleasure; they are now a breathless dash for the finishing line. Lying deep within that lust for victory, there is an innate sense of violence. There seems to be something terribly wrong with the human civilization, if you may call it civilization any more. The traditional values are obsolete and short of a new set of values, which need be defined, humans are in a quandary. In this confusion, the individual has fallen to pieces. Nothing seems to be wrong as long as you get away with what you desire. Let us remember that it is in this general backdrop that we are discussing what the UN has chosen to call dialogue among civilizations.

Any dialogue is a two-way traffic and it takes place between partners willing to interact for mutual benefit.

undergone a significant change. The United Nations, which has been compelled to assume a sub-servient role, is as good as dead. The Peace Prize recently awarded is a requiem for the dead, because the dead has quietly accepted the strident monologue of the single superpower. But this is not to say the United Nations has spent its role as a world body. I personally am glad to celebrate its mummified remains, for they are the last remnants of hope for humanity.

No talk on civilization is complete without a reference to the United States, because modern civilization has been tellingly influenced by its technological superiority. The rise of the States after the WWII, is a phenomenon with which human civilization has never been conversant with. American English along with McDonalds and Coca-Cola is pervasive. The fast-food shops are an American concept, which is finding a world market. Along with this, the hi-tech business is what makes America a power which can be ignored at one's own peril. There are refinements too: Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Jefferson, Franklin, Chomsky, Chaplin, Griffith, to name a few of a galaxy of stars, are those who have enriched its nearly three hundred years of

colonial and imperial domination of the world, America has taken on an imperialistic responsibility of putting the world right. American interventions in world affairs during the last four decades has all the symptoms of an imperialistic creed, 'a sense of mission, historical necessity, an evangelical fervor' (Barnet, *The Roots of War*). The following excerpt from Barnet's book may be of some interest regarding American role in world affairs.

"The imperialistic creed rests on a theory of law-making. According to the strident globalists, like [Lyndon Baines] Johnson, and the muted globalists, like Nixon, the goal of US foreign policy is to bring about a world increasingly subject to the rule of law. But it is the United States which must 'organize the peace', to use Secretary of State Rusk's words. The United States imposes the 'international interest' by setting the ground rules for economic development and military deployment across the planet. Thus the United States sets rules for Soviet behaviour in Cuba, Brazilian behaviour in Brazil, Vietnamese behaviour in Vietnam. Cold War policy is expressed by a series of directives on such extraterritorial matters as whether Britain may trade with Cuba, or whether the

above the international system, not within it. Supreme among nations, she stands ready to be the bearer of the Law."

Needless to say, Barnet's book was published in 1972 and much of what is there in this extract is dated. Today, after the dissolution of the cold war enemy, America enjoys a unique position with no state left to even record its note of dissent from what America thinks best for the world. The only veto that matters in the UN today is that of the United States. The September 11 tragedy was the doing of some senseless maniacs, but what America did in response to that in Afghanistan is simply a way to appease its wounded pride. Her armed intervention did not even wait for the UN sanction. It was not fighting terrorism, for terrorism is not going to dissolve in the death of one Osama or Mollah Omar. If the next Theatre of American intervention becomes Iraq, the issue will be far more complicated than it is deemed currently. Already there is a growing sense of anger in the entire Muslim world. If the issues that threaten peace in Palestine, Kashmir and other parts of the world are not politically and patiently addressed, the world is going to see more conflict and tension in the years to

# Muhammad Ali, the real lord of the rings

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

writes from Princeton

ALI," Michael Mann's much anticipated film about boxing legend Muhammad Ali opened to rave reviews on December 25, Christmas day. The writer was one of the first to watch the movie about the life of his hero.

As is to be expected of a Michael Mann production, the movie is visually spectacular. The meticulously reconstructed boxing scenes, half an hour in length, are authentic to a fault. What impressed the writer is that not only Ali's three most worthy adversaries, Sonny Liston, Joe Frazier and George Foreman, looked like the real characters, they boxed like them right down to their idiosyncrasies. As Will Smith, who played Ali in the film was to reveal on the Jay Leno's Tonight Show, he put on 30 pounds and trained to box like Ali for thirteen months, before the actual shooting, which took another seven months. Smith would sit in a dark room, watch footage of Ali's fights and for hours practice to jab like Ali.

The other remarkable feature of the movie is how much Will Smith sounded like Ali throughout the movie. Once again Smith revealed that Mann traced Ali's voice intonations to the speech pattern of Baptist African-American preachers of the South and flawlessly reproduced those through Smith's vocal chord. Another character that looked and sounded remarkably like the real character is ABC television's sports commentator and Ali's verbal sparring partner, the late Howard Cosell, played by Jon Voight.

Ali's life is so eventful that even a two and a half hour movie is not long enough to cover his entire life (Parkinson's disease-ravaged Ali, who was the film's consultant, is only 59.) The movie spans a ten-year period, from February 1964 just before the first Sonny Liston fight, to Ali's epic encounter with George Foreman, in Kinshasa, Zaire, in October 1974. (The Zaire fight segment was shot in Mozambique.)

The Beatles, who on their maiden tour of America was taking the nation by storm, visited Ali at his training camp at Miami in February 1964. The Beatles knew all about Ali because a year earlier he had visited England and demolished British Champion Henry Cooper, with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor begging the referee to stop the fight. At his Miami camp Ali joked with the Fab Four: "you are not as dumb as you look!" John Lennon shot back: "But you are!"

In reality, as the fight approached, things were not comical, but deadly serious. Ali was seen associating with the Black Muslim leader Malcolm X and there were rumours that he had converted to Islam. The promoters wanted Ali to denounce Malcolm X and deny that he was a Muslim. Ali would have none of that. For the fight to proceed the promoters prevailed upon Ali not to profess his new faith until after the fight.

## LETTER FROM AMERICA

Ali, the "World" Champion had fought all over the world – in London, Dublin, Germany, Tokyo, Jakarta, Manila, Kuala Lumpur and Latin America. He had never fought in his ancestral home, Africa. The fight against the Champion George Foreman was therefore staged at Kinshasa, Zaire in October 1974 after President Mobutu put up 10 million dollars for it. As with the first Sonny Liston fight, no one gave 32-year old Ali a chance against Foreman, who routinely knocked out opponents with half a punch...Defying everyone, including his trainer Angelo Dundee, employing the now famous "Rope A Dope" tactic, Ali just laid on the ropes, let Foreman punch himself out, before knocking out Foreman.



Ali, the Champion

here in America do not have freedom. No Vietnamese never called me no nigger!" In April 1967 after Ali, as a conscientious objector refused to be drafted, pending appeal he was sentenced to the maximum five years in jail and fined 10,000 dollars. Ali's passport was seized. In a hypocritical display of moral fervour, The World Boxing Council and The World Boxing Association both stripped Ali of his title. All the US state boxing commissions banned Ali from boxing in their state.

Had Ali not become a world figure, Ali's story would have ended there. But it did not. British philosopher, mathematician and literature Nobelist Bertrand Russell, who in Sweden was holding a mock trial of US crimes in Vietnam, wrote to Ali offering support. "You surprise them," he said. Ali became the hottest draw on the campus circuit, where middle class white kids fully supported Ali's views against the war in Vietnam. As Ali's court appeal headed for the Supreme Court, his handlers realized that the state of Georgia did not have a boxing commission. After being prevented from fighting for three and a half years of his prime (between the ages of 25 and 28 and a half) Ali returned to the ring in Atlanta and demolished the late Jerry Quarry in October 1970. Eventually the Supreme Court ruled in Ali's favour, 8-0, with only the current Chief Justice William Rehnquist abstaining.

Many of us thought that Ali should have had more fights before taking on the Champ Frazier in March 1971 at New York's Madison Square Garden. Ali lost for the first time in his professional life, although Frazier ended up spending time in

the hospital. Ali avenged this defeat by beating Frazier twice subsequently, in the Madison Square Garden in February 1974, and in Manila, the Philippines in October 1975. But Frazier was not the Champion then; he had lost his crown to George Foreman in Kingston, Jamaica, in early 1973.

Apart from the US and Canada, Ali, the "World" Champion had fought all over the world in London, Dublin, Germany, Tokyo, Jakarta, Manila, Kuala Lumpur and Latin America. He had never fought in his ancestral home, Africa. The fight against the Champion George Foreman was therefore staged at Kinshasa, Zaire in October 1974 after President Mobutu put up 10 million dollars for it. As with the first Sonny Liston fight, no one gave 32-year old Ali a chance against Foreman, who routinely knocked out opponents with half a punch. The writer remembers British papers prophesizing: "Ali comes home to Africa too late!" Defying everyone, including his trainer Angelo Dundee, employing the now famous "Rope A Dope" tactic, Ali just laid on the ropes, let Foreman punch himself out, before knocking out Foreman. Although the film ends with the Foreman fight, Ali's career does not. He lost his title to Leon Spinks in February 1978 and in September of the same year regained it by defeating Spinks, thus becoming the first fighter to regain the title three different times.

The verbal jabbing between Ali and Cosell provides comic relief in the movie. To Ali's question whether he really went to college, Cosell, a lawyer, laments that he abandoned the quest for wealth "for the likes of you." When Ali teases Cosell, "without me you are just a white man

with a mike in his mouth," Cosell retorts, "without me, you are just a mouth!" In a Press conference at Zaire when Cosell informs Ali that people are worried that he (Ali) is not the same man he was ten years ago, Ali quips: "Howard, I spoke to your wife. She said you are not the same man you used to be two years ago!" Beyond the joking and jiving, Howard Cosell was one of Ali's biggest supporter, confidant and advisor. When Cosell, who was Jewish, died in May 1995, Ali who had gone to perform the Hajj that year, rushed back to attend the funeral of his lifelong friend.

There is another character that gets surprisingly large exposure, Drew "Bundini" Brown, Ali's corner man cum cheerleader. He is credited with coining the immortal Ali mantra: "Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee!" As befits a "World" Champion, Ali, a Muslim, was trained by a white Catholic (Angelo Dundee) and cheered by a Jew. In

the movie, "Bundini" Brown steals a line from the late entertainer Sammy Davis Jr., lamenting that as a black, a Jew and a short man life was stacked against him! Surprisingly, the movie diminishes the role of Angelo Dundee, Ali's only trainer, who had pronounced Ali the "Greatest," even before his troubles with the draft. Ali could have been a little more loyal to his friend Malcolm X. When Malcolm X (Shabazz Malik), fighting the tyranny of Nation of Islam's Chief Elijah Muhammad became a Sunni Muslim and requested Ali's help, all Ali would say is, "You should not have gone against Elijah Muhammad." It is generally believed that supporters of Elijah Muhammad, with the full knowledge but not assistance of the US intelligence agencies, assassinated Malcolm X in Harlem in early 1965. To his credit, Ali eventually left the racist Nation of Islam and became a mainstream Sunni Muslim.

All of Ali's four wives get their time in limelight in the movie. Ali's first wife Sonji (played by Will Smith's real wife), a waitress, is clearly a misfit. Belinda, his fiery second wife, was brought up as a Muslim and kept Ali honest. Ali married his third wife Veronica, a Creole, in 1977; they both visited Bangladesh in 1978. Ali's current companion is his childhood sweetheart Lonnie, whom he married in 1986. The Ali-Frazier rivalry continues with the second generation with a twist. Last year, Ali's daughter Laila Ali defeated Frazier's lawyer-boxer daughter Jackie in his first encounter. Stay tuned.



All health information to keep you up to date

## ABC of fever

Fever means when the body temperature is raised.

Normal body temperature is 37.4°C at your centre or core. We usually measure body temperature at another place such as in the mouth or armpit. The temperature here should be a little lower, as can be seen from the table below.

Body site as measured at Different Sites in °C			
Body site where temperature is measured	Mouth	Rectum	
Armpit			
Normal temperature	36.8	37.3	36.4
Fever is a temperature higher than:	37.3	37.3	37

### What causes fever?

Usually a fever is triggered by an infection in your body. White blood cells are drawn toward areas of your body where there is an infection. In the local area of the infection there will be pain, warmth and swelling. A more severe infection will cause a release of chemicals into your blood stream making you unwell and giving you a fever.

### What tests will your doctor do?

From your symptoms and examination your doctor may be able to decide on a cause for the fever.

If your fever is very high or has been present for more than four days your doctor may do a set of tests to screen you for serious infections.

These would normally include:

- λ a blood test
- λ an urine test
- λ a chest X-ray
- λ a special test for infections that you may have been exposed to or that you are at risk of developing
- λ Tests for illnesses that you have previously had.

If your fever persists for 14 days or longer you may need more extensive testing or admission to hospital in order to establish a cause.

### What are the complications of fever?

Children who have a high fever (greater than 40°C) or a sudden increase in fever may have a convulsion. Approximately five per cent of children under five years of age will have a febrile convulsion. This will usually not last very long but does require an urgent review by a doctor to exclude serious conditions such as meningitis

### When to see a doctor?

When you have high fever for more than 24 hours seek the advice of your doctor. If you or your child is very ill with a fever of greater than 39°C, it is best to seek medical advice as soon as possible.

Calculate your dose of Paracetamol			
	Body weight	kg	
Dose for high fever or initial dosing	kg x20mg=	mg	Repeated every 6 hours
Dose every 4 hours or for mild fever	kgx15mg=	mg	Repeated every 4-6 hours
Maximum dose in 24 hours	kgx20mgx6=		

Next: Believe it or not