

Sawa man & woman:  
a 'Renaissance citizen' of our times!



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When I was a freshman student, I was quite interested in the fascinating nature of History 101. The reason was it helped me a great deal to comprehend a lot about history. Particularly for me, it was a captivating experience to identify myself with glorious civilizations and battles that were filled with thrilling adventure and danger. The customary history of civilizations goes like this: 'ancient Greece begot Rome, Rome begot Christian Europe, Christian Europe begot the Renaissance, the Renaissance was the Enlightenment, the Enlightenment begot the industrial revolution and the modern world...etc. Learning history reveals that the rise and fall of every society was often sparked through a fierce battle for power. We also learned that history has its own way of twisting or manipulating approaches. For example, history insists that the rise of a particular society, say the West, is not only natural but is a continuation of what all humans had gone through. This is, however, hypocritical because some societies with marvelous civilizations other than that of the West are being ignored for some reason.

Actually, through a Fresh man history course, many stories set me on the path to look at the world's past in different ways. Especially, the Renaissance period and the Renaissance man were amongst the many. Referring to the past, novel ideas are always important for the survival of every society. In the Renaissance period more attention was given to science and philosophy, which were not given ample attention during the Dark Age. Renaissance was a revolutionary tip

from which most western societies went from having made almost no scientific or economic progress for centuries to the rates of growth and change that sparked the birth of the Industrial Revolution, the foundation of the modern day. It was a cultural movement that had begun in Italy and later spread to the rest of Europe and covered roughly the 14th up to the 17th century. Functionally speaking, Renaissance brought back the knowledge passed down from antiquity. The humanists of that era searched through libraries and read widely in order to try and find as much ancient knowledge of the Greeks and Romans as possible to learn from it. They then applied these ancient ideas to their own world. In general, the main tenet of the Renaissance era was that humans are limitless in their capacity for development and transformation. Great thinkers, artists, inventors like Leonardo da Vinci had often been described as the archetypes of the Renaissance era. The name Renaissance man also came into being during the socio-cultural and political movement of this period.

Renaissance man literally means an instigator of social transformations of his/her own period. Thus, while I was reading the conducts of such a man, I came to understand something. That such a man or woman who lived hundreds of years ago still survives to this very day albeit in a different surrounding; enter the Renaissance man of our times, the Sawa Man & Woman. The Renaissance and the Renaissance man and woman made history and paved the way for the modern world. Sawa in a sense is our Renaissance and the Sawa man and Woman that emanated from it are contributing to Eritrea's modern History just as the Renaissance man and woman had done so for the world's modern History. Let me expand. Sawa has been in charge of maintaining Eritrea's national pride and consciousness in two approaches. First, Sawa is a true casual chain that connects the past with both the present and the future. By being a trainee at Sawa, you feel a refreshing wake-up call that connects you with compelling past experiences. Sawa links how we are currently living to how we once lived and how we should live in the future. In Sawa, we learn history as military trainees, and the school teachers and officials take it as a sacred responsibility to share their past experience with enthralling and anecdotal details. Second, Sawa is a perfect place where one can teach and motivate youngsters to take charge of not only our own future but that of our own country as well through academics and military training. Every trainee in Sawa works for perfection in mind, body and spirit. He/She believes that having multiple tools at his/ her disposal will make him/her a more versatile person, able to overcome challenges and figure out new ways of doing things. For this reason trainees try to develop capacities as fully as possible.

Renaissance wouldn't have been as momentous as it has become without the Renaissance man and Sawa would have no impact if there is no Sawa Man and

Woman who are ready to fulfill their National Service. In this respect, it is my sincere delight to define what a middle aged man should acquire in order to carry an emblem of a Renaissance man. A Renaissance Man was a man of curiosity and with inventive imagination that considerably put to use his left and right brain, a renaissance polymath. There are some general prerequisites that a man has to fulfill in order to be able to function to his fullest potential in society during the renaissance era. A man should be able to speak and write effectively, describe things clearly, and be persuasive. He should also be physically fit and have a deep knowledge of various subjects. Having all these abilities would result in the perfect gentleman who is able not only to talk about any subject, but also contribute to advancing several of these domains.

The ‘Sawa men and women’ are in their entirety polymath in nature. They are outstanding soldiers, engineers, inventors, scientists, entrepreneurs, technicians, athletes and artists. In Eritrea, in principle and practice, every social activity is in its entirety focused on human resources and human capital. The people are the focal point by which development projects are driven and our natural resources utilized. History will always remember our founding fathers for establishing Sawa. All in all, something important and profoundly significant on the strengthening of Eritrea’s national identity is always happening for the trainees in Sawa. In Sawa, youngsters are trained to be creative and responsible in the development and defense of their country.

Looking back at the amazing characteristics of the Renaissance, there are many conducts that are similar to that of Sawa Man and woman in spirit and pursuit. The similarity starts with the name itself. The word renaissance implies the revival or regenerating of old values while the word National Service in Eritrea implies a revival of or maintaining of old pursuits in moral, economic and political aspects. Whilst a Renaissance man was the heart of the Renaissance era, Sawa Man and Woman are the backbone and the heart of the National Service program. Curiosity, risk-taking, creativity, perseverance and self-discipline and life-time learning were some of the attributes of Renaissance Man. Similarly, prudence, industriousness excelling in physical, intellectual, artistic and social fields, thirst for knowledge and new experiences are also amongst the many characteristics of Sawa Man and woman.

Both the Renaissance Man and Sawa Man have the following demeanors in common:

**First**, both look at the past as a significant tool to make a bright future. What makes a Renaissance Man a successful transforming tool was his ways of referring to the ancient values, and books of past philosophers in order to try to

find as much knowledge as possible to learn from them. With respect to the Sawa Man or Woman, by attending Sawa he or she is required to socialize and learn Eritrea's revolutionary pursuits and historical values, struggles, glorious battles, and psychological warfare...etc. All the past teachings, militarily, technically and academically are provided there without a slight change and coached by very dynamic teachers. Therefore, every Sawa trainee has a chance to share past experiences in all fields so as to redefine his/her own future. We, as youngsters, are not only taught what history provides but we also become part of it as Sawa creates an opportunity for us to become part of something great and marvelous.

**Second**, both a Renaissance Man and a Sawa Man are characteristically polymath in nature and multi-disciplinary in functions. During the renaissance era, for a man to be identified as a renaissance man he was obliged to have multiple professions. He must be knowledgeable about economics, philosophy, astronomy, literature and law. For instance, when we hear the word "Renaissance Man", Leonardo da Vinci may come to our mind. Da Vinci is the epitome of the Renaissance humanist ideal. He was not only an outstanding painter but also an engineer, inventor, scientist, and philosopher. A Sawa Man is also a polymath of his times with near perfect quality in military science, art, academy and sport. In Sawa, there is a wide range of departments established to give training in various fields. Sawa Secondary School, Sawa Military School and Sawa Vocational Training Center create an Eritrean Polymath that could fulfill the national desire and more.

Author Robert Heinlein once said: "A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects." Accepting this, Sawa man and woman is a polymath Renaissance man of his times. Sawa Man and woman is the highest ideal of an Eritrean excelling in artistic, intellectual and physical activities.

**Third**, both characters are also so much similar in cultivating or giving higher attention to both the body and mind. Renaissance man was not only remarkable in following intellectual pursuits but did not neglect his body. Supposedly, he "excelled in all bodily exercises; could, with feet tied, leap over a standing man; could in the great cathedral, throw a coin far up to ring against the vault; amused himself by taming wild horses and climbing mountains." Sawa Man and woman can also practically excel not only in academic purists but in physical fitness as

well. In Sawa there are two prominent schools that complement one another in framing an Eritrean ideal both in mind and body. The first one gives lessons for the academic development of the trainees while the second one is a military center which gives military training and physical training to produce physically and mentally fit men as well as women. Personal accounts of many Sawa attendees provide a range of examples on how they have matured both physically and mentally.

**Fourth**, other traits which make the Renaissance Man and Sawa Man similar include perseverance, self-discipline, vision and the desire to learn. What a Renaissance man had contributed to history was very well appreciated in transforming the societies of his times in economic and political terms. Renaissance man set in motion the events that would produce the European Enlightenment and Industrialization, and was the founder of modern Europe and the American Republic.

The Sawa Man and woman are a staying power for Eritrea to overcome all national shortcomings, to survive and maintain its pride in the face of conspiring enemies. Sawa Man and woman set in motion events that still sustain Eritrean society in economic, infrastructural, security and cultural terms. If you go to a clinic, a Sawa Man and woman are there; if you go to schools, trenches, development areas, cultural show centers, research centers, and even outside Eritrea and all over the world, there are millions of Sawa Man and woman who are in charge of their own futures. Therefore, if Renaissance man was the perfect ideal man that played a critical role in renewing life in the past, Sawa Man and woman are the ideal human beings Sawa bestowed to Eritrea in the last three decades and will continue to do so.

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