

Rethinking Islamic Education in Facing the Challenges of the Twenty-first Century

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The Muslim ummah, as a world community, faces many challenges at the threshold of the new century. The fateful event of 9/11 has revealed yet another facet of the problems plaguing Muslim society: the existence of radical, or what some media have labeled “militant,” Muslim groups. Despite the Muslim world’s condemnation of the 9/11 terrorist attack, the United States considered itself the victim and thus launched its “war against terrorism” against the alleged perpetrators: the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Iraq, which was alleged to be building weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and assisting al-Qaeda, became the second target. Iran would have become the immediate third target if the international community had supported the Bush administration’s unilateral declaration of war against Iraq. But it did not, for the allegations could not be proven.

Unfortunately, this new American policy has not helped to curb aggression or terrorism; rather, it has caused radical groups to run amok and indulge in even more acts of terrorism in Israel, Palestine, Indonesia, Turkey, Spain, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. The 9/11 tragedy has caused the West to hold more negative images of Muslims and Islam and has made life more difficult for Muslims living in the West. In response, anti-Americanism has grown throughout the world, particularly in the Muslim world.¹

September 11 seemed to provide certain Muslim governments with the license to combat terrorism on the local front more rigorously. This action heightened the conflicts between local Muslims and the ruling governments, as in the case of General Musharraf of Pakistan, who decided to cooperate with Washington in its “war against terrorism” by providing bases for American forces. After 9/11, Egypt, Tunisia, and Malaysia all received repeated praise from Washington for their experience and seriousness in combating terrorism and joining the alliance against it, despite their track record on, for example, human rights violations vis-à-vis the ruling elites’

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political opponents. The Malaysian authorities have detained Muslims for interrogation based on the suspicion that they have links or some type of association with al-Qaeda because they were in Afghanistan during the war against the Soviets, or in Bosnia or Chechnya, such as members of the Kumpulan Militan Malaysia (Malaysian Militant Group).²

Furthermore, 9/11 made it easier for occupation forces in Muslim lands (e.g., Palestine, Kashmir, Xinjiang, Mindanao, and Chechnya) to crush indigenous liberation movements. These occupation forces jumped onto the American “war against terrorism” bandwagon by presenting their situations as strikingly similar to 9/11 and identifying the major enemy as Islam or Islamic extremists. Israel crushed the Palestinian uprising and further tightened its grip. In an act of desperation and defense, the Palestinians began a jihad through self-destruction, labeled “suicide bombers” by the non-Muslim community.

More significantly, however, 9/11 led to an increased scrutiny of the madrassah (traditional Islamic) system of education. Washington claims that the militant groups arose from the followings of leaders who had a strong affiliation with Islam. Consequently, it believes that terrorism’s roots lie in how Muslim children in Islamic lands are educated. During the Afghan war against Soviet occupation, Washington considered the term *jihad* as positive. But now that it has been used against the United States since 9/11, Washington believes that the term should be removed from the Islamic studies curriculum.

In 2002, the International Crisis Group, which is led by western scholars, statesmen, and corporate leaders, conducted a study of Pakistan’s madrassahs. In its report, the group acknowledged the system’s importance for Pakistani society, proposed its integration into the formal education sector as well as its proper regulation and monitoring,³ and expressed its concern with the provision of job opportunities for its graduates. Washington has even used its influence to persuade Saudi Arabia and a few other Middle Eastern countries to revise their Islamic education curriculum,⁴ and has used its might and influence to ensure that the madrassah will not breed hatred against the West. “In some places, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the education debate has focused on how, or whether, the religious curriculum promotes intolerance and extremism.”⁵

Malaysian religious schools were not spared from this fate. In October 2002, the government decided to “terminate temporarily” federal financial aid to all *rakyat* religious schools (SAR). This is a critical matter, because federal funding, which is higher than state funding, comprises a major pro-

portion of these schools' revenue. (This is true for all states, with the exceptions of Kelantan and Kedah.) At that time, Prime Minister Mahathir said that the goal was not to close down the schools, but "to find out which are religious schools and which are political ones."⁶ He argued that these schools were preaching a culture of hatred and were not providing quality education.⁷ Furthermore, he "found out that the teachers there had deviated from such [Islamic religious] teachings and SAR students were taught to hate the Government and other Muslims."⁸ It was not clear if there was any external pressure, but it created so much opposition from the Muslim masses that the funding had to be reinstated.

Clearly, the Islamic world seems to be experiencing an ummah-wide struggle, one made conspicuous by the 9/11 tragedy: Muslims who believe in the value of secular institutions versus those who are committed to the idea of governing according to the Shari`ah (Islamic law). Others view this as a battle between moderate and hardline Muslims. Abdullah Ahmad, a Malaysian journalist and ex-politician, asserts that "following September 11, there was a struggle for the soul of Islam."⁹ Responsible Muslims must raise their voices against the bigoted ones, for the 9/11 tragedy is a good example of what can happen if the moderates keep silent and allow Islam to be hijacked by the likes of the Taliban.¹⁰ According to Karen Armstrong: "September 11th has confirmed a view of Islam that is centuries old, which is that Islam is inherently violent and intolerant of others."¹¹ Islam was painted as a rigid religion and its people as intolerant fanatics resentful of the West's prosperity, democracy, and freedoms.

Schoolrooms are the battlefield for these conflicting beliefs, and what is at stake is the next generation of Muslims. For example, in Turkey, two dozen soldiers reportedly stand guard daily at Istanbul University's main gate to watch students walk through the great Ottoman arch and intercept those wearing hijabs or turbans. Those who insist upon wearing such attire risk expulsion.¹² The conflict has also spread to the West: The French government has banned headscarves in state run schools since 1989 and recently established a law to that effect. Singapore, a country with a large Muslim minority, seems to be taking similar action. In the Netherlands, concern over the spread of hate speech prompted an investigation into the nation's 32 state sponsored Islamic elementary schools. Its security service has just issued an intelligence report saying that as many as 10 of those schools have been heavily subsidized by Muslim hard liners in Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Turkey.¹³

Besides the problems resulting from globalization and 9/11, poverty, illiteracy, and educational access seem to be perennial challenges in the

underdeveloped Muslim world. Meanwhile, the more economically developed and rich Muslim countries, which are gearing up for industrial development, are infested with the social ills traditionally associated with modernization: hedonism, crime, drug addiction, deviant sexual lifestyles (e.g., homosexuality, lesbianism, adultery, and premarital sex), and the associated diseases (e.g., STD, HIV, and AIDS). Even abandoned newborns who were born out of wedlock have found their way into the social fabric of Muslim society. Such trends pose another great challenge to modernize harmoniously while keeping Islamic values intact.

Statement of Purpose

Faced with these challenges, Muslims and Muslim societies should examine the roots of their subjugation, internal conflicts, and lack of dynamism. Muslim scholars of the 1970s identified the problem as lying in the secularized educational system and called for the Islamization of contemporary knowledge. This paper would like to put forth another thesis: The problem lies in the teaching methods and curriculum of Islamic Education (also known as Islamic Studies or Islamic religious knowledge) in schools, which has lost its heart and mind. Hence, this paper argues for a rethinking of this subject and attempts to answer the following fundamental questions: Has contemporary Islamic Education been able to produce students who can think critically or generate original and creative ideas? Has it been able to produce students who possess good hearts and live by Islamic values? Have Muslim youth been successfully educated and prepared to face the challenges of their time? What improvements are necessary in the teaching and curriculum of Islamic education for the twenty-first century?

To address these issues, we need to reexamine the goal of Islamic education as well as its curriculum, teachers, and teaching methodologies. Although we cannot stop the rapid flow of information, ideas, and cultures coming from the outside as a result of globalization, which has been induced by information and communication technologies, and the economy, we can help our people, especially our young people, defend their beliefs and values by teaching them how to evaluate and be selective when dealing with the information available and the influx of non-Islamic and even anti-Islamic values. Given this fact, devising an effective Islamic education program is vital for the survival of our beliefs and the endurance of our values. An effective Islamic education program would help instill Islamic values, develop

strong character, and, more importantly, develop critical and wise minds. But we still need to ask if the current teaching methods are fulfilling this goal or breeding intolerance and hatred.

The Goal of Islamic Education

The goal of Islamic education is to produce good people who will achieve ultimate happiness (*sa`adah*) in this world and the Hereafter. This ultimate happiness will be attained when all people become true servants (*`abd*) and vicegerents (*khalifah*) of Allah. As true servants, it is necessary for their own well-being to perform acts of worship (*`ibadah*) in the broadest sense to purify their souls and to perfect their character. As His vicegerents, they are obliged to preserve and safeguard the universe, which has been created for their sustenance and, more importantly, to spread the message of Islam (peace) through working for social justice. To achieve this task, people have been endowed with the faculty of the intellect (*`aql*), which distinguishes them from the other creatures. God Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as the perfect person (*al-insan al-kamil*) who has great characters (*khuluq al-`azim*). The Hadith literature also relates that he was the living Qur'an. In one hadith, the Prophet (pbuh) emphasized that he came to perfect moral character (*akhlaq*). Therefore, Islamic education ought to strive to mold Muslim individuals who embody the Qur'an.

From this, it can be inferred that Islamic education should be directed toward perfecting moral character. For example, such social institutions as the family, society, and the state, as well as the international community, should embrace this goal. Similarly, each individual is responsible for his/her own self and, therefore, needs to exert enough effort to achieve this goal both for himself/herself and for society. The school is one state organ that can play a significant role in helping to educate people through its curriculum, teachers and their teaching methodologies, climate, and leadership.

Unfortunately, many teachers, including teachers of Islamic Education, fail to reflect upon the goals of education from the Islamic perspective. Some never really think about why they teach the prescribed prayers (*salat*) or the Qur'an. It seems that they are just repeating what earlier teachers taught them, regardless of whether the content or the methodology applied is relevant, effective, or otherwise. They teach students to prepare for public examinations and excel in knowledge of the subject, and are least concerned whether students internalize the values imparted and become better behaviorally, mentally, spiritually, or morally.

The situation is even worse when the emphasis is purely cognitive instead of spiritual or moral. As the “diploma disease” has infected most teachers, school personnel care only about ensuring a high percentage of the “A” grades on the public examination. Thus, it is not unusual to teach the Islamic sciences (*‘ulum al-shari‘ah*) in a way similar to all other subjects: emphasizing the cognitive domain, although it might not be of a high level, which often does not reach one’s heart. Therefore, the teachers’ intention (*niyyah*) of teaching the subject has departed from its true aim. If we regard the soul of Islamic Education as purification of the heart, which is the spring for good or evil actions, then its greatest weakness is that it has lost its soul.

Islamic education has failed to establish the bridge between God and His true servants (*‘ibad al-Rahman*). In most cases, the five daily prayers have been taught mechanically as a ritual and with little understanding or spiritual meaning. Similarly, recitation of the Qur’an no longer stirs the heart and gradually transforms the person. “Knowledge” has not led to good deeds (*‘amal salih*), and the Islamic Education class has not been able to establish a strong link between them. All of the prayers and acts of worship (e.g., charity, knowledge seeking, and fasting) are done because of compulsion, as a servant’s duty and obligation. Most of our teenagers probably perform them to avoid Hellfire rather than seek the pleasure of God.

Consequently, despite obeying His commands, people’s lives and characters have not been transformed and their souls have not been purified. Even worse, if everything was done to show off or acquire status or position in this world, or due to peer and societal pressures, they are no more than hypocrites: “So woe to the worshippers who are neglectful of their prayers, those who want but to be seen (by others) but refuse (to supply even) neighborly needs” (107: 4-7). Our hearts are so tainted that they feel no fear when hearing the Qur’anic verses: “To those whose hearts when God is mentioned, are filled with fear ...” (22:35). Probably Islamic Education has also been swept by the secondary goals of education, mainly the utilitarian goal of vocational efficiency and, recently, the commodification of knowledge.

The Curriculum of Islamic Education

Another aspect worthy of examination is the curriculum. As a school subject, the curriculum of Islamic Education ought to be the least difficult to formulate, because its major content is derived primarily from the Qur’an, the Sunnah, and the *sirah* (history) of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Since the perfection of character and the intellect is an important aim of educa-

tion and the Prophet (pbuh) is the perfect model, the curriculum of the Islamic sciences should see to this. It is not enough just to emphasize the acquisition of facts about Islam without the accompaniment of the good mind and character.

Since a major goal is to raise individuals who embody the Qur'an, it goes without saying that they must know its content and love it. Unfortunately, this is never the case in the teaching of Islamic sciences. In most cases, students only read textbooks written in accord with the syllabus and that contain certain Qur'anic excerpts. They never possess or recite the Qur'an systematically, but learn to recite it from cover to cover only after school either at home through their parents or private tutors, or in the tutor's home. This after-school exercise only stresses its proper recitation (with *tajwid*), and rarely the content, because most Muslims do not know Arabic. Therefore, the Qur'an has never been the main textbook for Muslim students even in the Islamic religious science classroom. As a result, students neither understand nor embody the Qur'anic assertion that "This is the Book, in it is guidance sure, without doubt to those who have *taqwa*" (2:2). Moreover, they cannot begin to love the Qur'an because they have not known enough of it. Undeniably, reciting the Qur'an as a habit, say at a certain time during the day, could, by the Grace of God, cause one to love it. But that is not guidance, only affection.

Therefore, it stands to reason that in order to understand the Qur'an, students ought to know Arabic or be exposed to a translated version. The absence of Arabic from the curriculum of Islamic religious science is too glaring. It should not be considered another foreign language to be learned outside the curriculum or as similar to other foreign languages, such as English or French, for Arabic is part and parcel of Islamic science. Therefore, the Islamic religious science curriculum ought to include Arabic, just as it includes *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *'aqidah*, and *akhlaq*.

Arabic is the tool or instrument for attaining the *'ulum al-Shari'ah*. How can someone attain or reach an object without acquiring the necessary instrument? It is just like aspiring to a scientific goal without undertaking the necessary systematic observation and experimentation. Being exposed to the Qur'an and hadith texts will enable students to develop enough to understand the difference between the authentic texts and scholarly interpretations. Otherwise, the problem of Muslims preferring commentaries to the original text – to the Qur'an in particular – even when resolving current problems, will remain. These shortcomings in the curriculum's content and implementation must be resolved.

The Teacher and Teaching Methodology

The methodology of teaching the Islamic sciences is plagued with weaknesses and is, in fact, the greatest hindrance to developing wisdom and building Muslim students' character. In fact, this weakness probably explains why Muslim students or young people are easily swayed by those western cultures and values that contradict Islamic culture and values. This phenomenon reflects their fundamental weakness of character.

We would like to believe the truth of western psychological theory as put forth by E. Erikson and Lawrence Kohlberg, such as the belief that adolescents go through an identity crisis and thereby seem to be doing and trying every new fad to find their identity. But we also know from our legacy that such Muslim adolescents of the past as Usamah ibn Zaid and Imam al-Shafi'i were already serving on the battlefield as the captain of soldiers and leading prayers and study circles as the imam, respectively. In our culture, adolescence is reached at the age of puberty, when young people have to assume heavier responsibilities. It is not a period of searching for one's identity. Their weak character also reflects the weakness of our teaching of Islamic Education. Of course, Islamic Education should not shoulder this blame alone, for all sciences taught in school should be concerned with the students' moral development. However, given the nature and the core aim of Islamic religious sciences, this responsibility weighs heavier on those who teach them than those who teach the other subjects.

Examining our teachers' teaching methods reveals a tendency for moral prescription or blind indoctrination. "You must not steal because that violates the commandment of the Qur'an. You will be punished and thrown into the Fire." "You must be honest because Allah loves those who are honest." "You must pray, because if you don't you will not be able to enter the garden of Paradise." "You must recite the Qur'an because you will be rewarded for every letter recited, not only for each word but for each letter!" "You can have more than one wife because that is the *sunnah* of the Prophet." Individuals who are moral and have *taqwa* do not arise from moral prescription alone, for that approach cannot teach them how to reason morally by themselves given situations peculiar only to them. But the current teaching method does not provide for this. Students raised through moral prescriptions do not consider contexts and so cannot judge unfamiliar situations correctly. They have not been taught how to think according to religious principles, how to weigh and judge circumstances, and how to think critically.

The resulting misfortunes are many; however, I will illustrate it with one sad incident. In 2002, several schoolgirls in Saudi Arabia burned to

death during a school fire because the *mutawwi`* (religious police) would not allow them, even though they were already at the front gate running to save their lives, to go out without wearing their hijabs and *abayas*. In fact, the *mutawwi`* chased them back into the school. By the time they were “properly” clothed, it was too late. Why was the *mutawwi`* so blind to the difference between a normal and a life-threatening situation? Why was he so adamant? Is the hijab more important than a girl’s life? This is a clear case of imposing an Islamic religious principle without the use of reason. One can find many other cases in which members of the opposite sex would not offer to help each other because they are not the other person’s *mahram* (close blood relatives). Men are afraid to offer women who could be their wife’s friend even a short lift to the university or the city because they fear the resulting *fitnah* (temptation, disorder). What is wrong with our understanding of Islam or the Qur’an? Even Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) visited Khadijah’s friends and brought them gifts after her demise.

In other circumstances, the teaching method seems to emphasize Allah as the Harshes Punisher (*dhu intiqam*) and not as the Most Merciful. This is ironic, because the phrase *Bismi Allāh al-Rahmān al-RahḂm* (In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful) is found and recited at the beginning of each of the 114 chapters of the Qur’an, with the exception of the ninth. This excellent formula is even recited at the beginning of any daily activity. Even though *dhu intiqam* is rarely mentioned, the teaching of Islamic Education leaves students with the impression of a cold and angry God Who neither understands nor forgives. In other words, the goal here is to implant obedience through a deep fear, rather than a deep love, of God. Is this what *taqwa* is?

Islamic Education seeks to raise Muslims with the character of *taqwa*. But what is *taqwa*? Some define it as God-fearing, but I believe it is more exact to define it as God-consciousness. This understanding of “God-fearing” causes Muslims to see God as very vengeful. As a result, they worship Him not out of love or fear of His displeasure, but out of fear of going to Hell. Thus, they seek to ensure that His laws are observed through force, just like soldiers who obey orders, rather than out of love for their fellows and humanity in general. Could this be one of the reasons for the rise of hard- and cold-hearted Muslims, in addition to the fact of the injustices that have been inflicted upon them in many parts of the world? We tend to forget that *taqwa* is spiritual and its manifestation is upon our conduct. Although *taqwa* is spiritual and describes the individual’s relationship to

God, it is also related to our situatedness in society. It would be pointless for an individual to claim to have *taqwa* and yet tolerate social injustice. *Taqwa* ought to be accompanied by *`amr bi al-ma`ruf and nahy `an al-munkar* (enjoining the good and forbidding the evil). But this should be in the spirit of mercy and not revenge.

In the same spirit, some teachers, especially those who have not been to the West and so have not learned to appreciate its good values, teach that everything from the West is bad for Muslims. This false notion, if implanted successfully, will leave a strong fear and hatred of the West in their students' minds. There is always a lot to learn from other cultures or civilizations, a fact that has been highlighted by the Qur'an, which encourages Muslims to travel, and illustrated by such Muslim scholars as al-Biruni, al-Afghani, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, and Muhammad `Abduh.

Finally, teachers of Islamic sciences are not innovative and creative when it comes to devising effective teaching methods. There are many ways of teaching the Qur'an and Islamic history that can make these subjects more interesting and lively. Teachers frequently employed the lecture or dictation / memorization method when delivering theory or facts, or demonstration when explaining rituals. Other innovative methods, such as integrating the Creator's *ayat* (signs) found in natural phenomena to illustrate the Qur'anic verses have not been attempted. One such way is to show His *ayat* in the human body in order to impress His Majesty through something that is very close to the students. We now have a great deal of scientific knowledge on the workings of the human body, a lot of which has been illustrated in beautiful charts, diagrams, presentations, and even in video or CD-Rom that could be used in the classrooms. Unfortunately, our teachers are not well versed in these sciences and thus cannot use such materials effectively. History and archaeology could also be used to make teaching more meaningful.

The School Environment

The school environment also has a bearing on students' development, for it affects their nurturing. This climate is determined by the educational leadership, which, in turn, is influenced by the philosophy underlying its beliefs. Different philosophies have given rise to different styles of leadership, from the authoritarian to the *laissez faire*. The school's leaders and teachers are role models. If students see harshness and injustice or kindness and justice on a daily basis, they will learn to live with these, internalize them, and make them part of their character.

Unfortunately, some schools are not sensitive to this reality, especially when they have pupils of multicultural and multi-faith backgrounds. On the other hand, some Muslim school leaders are so lax in adhering to their religious principles that their toleration of un-Islamic or even anti-Islamic behavior indicates to their Muslim pupils that Islam sanctions such activities (e.g., the principal allows unsupervised mixed parties on school premises to celebrate a school-related event). Some Muslim school leaders are so rigid that they cannot tolerate such differences as allowing non-*halal* food for non-Muslim students in a corner of the school cafeteria. The only solution to this is to establish a proper justification for each policy or act and then inform all of the school's staff members and students about it. Individual principals might use force rather than education to enforce religious commands, such as making it compulsory for female Muslim students to cover their heads in school. But this is no more than hypocrisy, because some of them fear the principal more than they fear Allah and so take it off once they are outside the school compound.

The school ethos is very important in instilling the correct values in students. If the school upholds cleanliness, thoughtfulness, care, and discipline, the students will catch these values. Students need good role models, and the school environment ought to provide them, especially in the way of a wise and God-conscious leadership. More awards should be given to motivate good moral character in comparison to those given for academic achievement. This can be done by recognizing good deeds and community service.

Recommendations

In the previous discussion, I have analyzed four aspects of teaching Islamic education: goals, curriculum, teaching method, and school environment. Based on the highlighted shortcomings, I shall now suggest some steps to improve the teaching of Islamic Education.

The Teacher and Teaching Goals

Since teachers and teacher educators are the most important agents in achieving the goals of Islamic Education, we must be very careful when selecting teachers. Having a diploma or a degree in teaching is not enough. Since teachers are the role models in conduct, thinking process, worship, and character, the selection procedure should evaluate all of these four aspects, in addition to knowledge and pedagogical competency, and communication ability.

This has implications for the teacher education program, for any evaluation of student teachers specializing in the teaching of the Islamic sciences should not be confined to the paper and pencil test in the classroom alone. Rather, it has to be a holistic and qualitative evaluation based upon observation inside and outside the classroom. A new method of evaluation, with different weights given to the four aspects of the above-mentioned role model, ought to be designed and then used, along with an evaluation of their professional competency, to ensure that only fully qualified teachers are passed on to the schools. Teachers need to internalize the values and knowledge that they would like to pass on to students in order to prevent the emergence of the common “Do as I say, not as I do” attitude.

Furthermore, teachers of the Islamic religious sciences should have a basic knowledge of the natural sciences so that they can refer to them for signs of the Creator. This can make their teaching more relevant and interesting. In addition, they should be exposed to a teaching methodology that provides a model of analytical and reflective thinking. It is not enough to teach about thinking: They need to be exposed to teaching for thinking and the methods that could give rise to it. Teachers need to understand that two contradicting philosophies underline the lecture and discussion methods. They should also be given the opportunity to reflect upon and inquire deeply into the aims of education. Therefore, the philosophy of education should be a compulsory course for our teachers, and even moral philosophy ought to be introduced for moral reasoning, in addition to courses on Islamic ethics.

Curriculum

Regarding the curriculum, first of all, the school’s Islamic science curriculum ought to be improved. If Muslims want to succeed and lead the world, the Arabic language, which is the key to understanding the Qur’an, must be made compulsory for Muslim students. A language ought to be taught not just because it has economic value. That will come later, just as English now has an economic value. A language’s main purpose is communication. Without Arabic, there is no communication between Muslims and the Qur’an. The benefit will be obvious in the long term, not in the short term. There will be a chain reaction as in the past, when Muslims could really “read” the Qur’an and thus became leaders in almost all fields of human endeavor.

First, the Qur’an does not give Muslims the key to the sciences directly; rather, it is a very strong motivating factor for making a commitment to acquire knowledge and learning. This is our missing dimension. Until it is no

longer “missing,” we cannot succeed in regaining the leadership. This is what we ought to expect to achieve from a true comprehension of the Qur’an, this form of worship. If Arabic is not taught as a “language subject” like English, Urdu, Persian, or Malay, then the “Islamic Education subject” must provide room to teach it weekly. In fact, a method ought to be devised to integrate the teaching of the Qur’an and Arabic. I believe that various educators and teachers are working in this area, especially for non-speakers of Arabic. Our problem, however, is our lack of commitment and poor vision.

Second, the Qur’an must be the school’s primary textbook. Students ought to be exposed to reading its translation in the higher primary grades, after they have completed reading it in Arabic (the current practice is to recite it without understanding). This first blind recitation must be replaced by reading it with understanding and for guidance. Even if this second reading is not completed at the end of secondary school, the school will, at least, have succeeded in cultivating the habit and possibly, the love of the Qur’an and learning.

Third, the consistent reading of the Qur’an’s translation and, later on, possibly in the original Arabic, could enable them to integrate the signs that they read in the Book with the signs in Nature. Then, their learning of the other acquired sciences will become meaningful and the Qur’an will become decompartmentalized from the other acquired sciences. The sacredness of knowledge, which has been lost in these sciences and whose revival forms the mission of the Islamization of Knowledge, will be attained by our new generation at a younger age. We hope that they will be greatly motivated to acquire all of this knowledge as *‘ibadah* and follow the examples of our great classical-era Muslim scientists and scholars.

Teaching Method

The teaching method and approach for Islamic Education needs to be improved greatly. First, the teaching approach should represent Allah as He is. Of all of His names, the ones most often recited are *al-Rahman* and *al-Rahim*. Therefore, He should be presented as the Most Merciful and the Most Compassionate. He is not cold, for He is *al-Ghaffur* (the Most Forgiving). This implies that all students, being human, are liable to making mistakes. They should not be punished immediately, for Allah indicates a system of gradual punishments, as in the case of a man who is disciplining a disobedient wife (4:34-35). Therefore, students should be encouraged to gain His love and pleasure for its usefulness and significance, rather than

to fear Hell or gain Heaven. It is in this context that some elements of Sufism are important because *fiqh* that is taught without Sufism tends to make the teaching of Islam dry, cold and hard. However, Sufism without *fiqh* could lead one astray.

Second, the teaching of moral or ethical reasoning must be encouraged in Islamic Education. Actual or potential situations, or dilemmas within Islamic history and contemporary situations, ought to be presented so that students can implement the religious principles that they have learned and use reason to analyze them. The intellect has an important role in the deliberation of religious issues, which is what *ijtihad* is all about. Only when we have strengthened both religious principles (which are also ethical and moral) and their moral reasoning can we be confident that students will act wisely when faced with morally problematic situations. Then they will not act blindly, as the *mutawwi`* did, or unjustly.

Third, pre-service teachers need to be selected from the pool of intelligent people. Only those who have been endowed with this intellectual potential can reflect and think of better ways to reach their students. Unfortunately, our present candidates do not come from this pool, but rather from those who consider teaching as a stepping stone or the last resort. Therefore, we are not getting the cream of society to become our torchbearers.

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to suggest that the soul of Islamic education be brought back. Teaching should not just emphasize the cognitive, physical, and ethical and moral domains; rather, it should emphasize the spiritual and emotional domains. The act of thinking of the *ayat* in natural phenomena could also be converted into the spiritual domain by transforming it to remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*). Reading/reciting the Qur'an is not just remembrance of Allah, but also a cognitive act. Thinking, remembering Allah, and praying will purify the heart from all of its diseases, such as arrogance (*takabbur*), hypocrisy (*riya'*), envy (*hasad*), and conceit (*`ujb*). These diseases cause disputes, disunity, and destruction among humanity. Islamic education must include Sufism to purify and strengthen the heart. Then, we can truly say that the soul has been regained.

This would agree very much with the verse: "He has sent among the unlettered an apostle from among themselves, to rehearse to them His signs, to sanctify them, and to instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom – although they had been, before, in manifest error" (62:2). This verse indicates that we

have been focusing not on the degree of excellence, but on the teaching of the acquired and the revealed sciences. But we have not succeeded in sanctifying or purifying our students or in endowing them with *hikmah* (wisdom), which Allah claims is of great benefit to those who possess it (2:269). Only by regaining Islamic education's soul might we be able to put the phenomenon of militant Islam in its proper place: going to war to defend Islam, not to disgrace it. *Allahu `alam.*

Endnotes

1. For more details on this, see Rosnani Hashim, "American Images of Islam and Muslims, September 11, 2001, and Their Impact on Muslim Society," in L. Hein and D. Yui (eds.), *Crossed Memories: Perspectives on 9/11 and American Power* (Tokyo: CPAS, The University of Tokyo, 2003), 30-53.
2. All thirteen men in the first group of suspected Kumpulan Militan Malaysia members detained under the Internal Security Act between December 9, 2001, and January 3, 2002, have been sent to the Kamunting detention center for two years. See *The New Straits Times*, 15 March 2002.
3. See International Crisis Group, "Pakistan: Madrasas, Extremism, and the Military," *ICG Asia Report*, no. 36 (Islamabad/Brussels), 29 July 2002.
4. For changes in school textbooks in the Middle East, see "Sweeping Reforms in Qatari Schools," *Star*, 9 March 2003. Qatari leaders have warned of an American-led campaign to rewrite textbooks, change time-honored teaching methods, and cut back on the amount of religion in the curriculum.
5. Ibid.
6. See S. Jayasankaran, "A Plan To End Extremism," in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 December 2002 - 2 January 2003.
7. See "SAR UMNO Tidak Dikecuali [UMNO's SAR Is No Exception]," *Utusan Malaysia*, 14 February 2003.
8. "Students Taught To Hate Other Muslims," *New Straits Times*, 14 February 2003.
9. *The New Straits Times*, 15 August 2002.
10. Ibid.
11. Interview with Karen Armstrong in July 2002, published in *Al-Ahram*, no. 593, Cairo.
12. Anna Kuchment and Sam Seibert, "School by the Book," *Newsweek International*, 11 March 2002.
13. Ibid.