

## **Wholeness and Holiness in Education: An Islamic Perspective**

*Zahra Al Zeera*

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and Biddles Limited, 2001. 158 pages.*

*Wholeness and Holiness in Education: An Islamic Perspective* is a very interesting book. Although the book is a result of her experience as a Muslim graduate student in Canada, she does not mention any personal reasons for writing this book, but rather tackles it very lightly without mentioning the hard experiences she faced when her faith was questioned. A Muslim who has taken her faith for granted for years and had had little or no communication with the West was questioned for the first time in her life about many aspects of her faith and found herself unable to provide adequate answers. Her book is the result of such an experience, one which many others in her circumstances and situation have faced and will have to face. Although the author frequently tackles abstract ideas, she always provides scholarly explanations and discussions by quoting and elaborating upon many well-known figures in various disciplines.

The book is divided into four parts and has a total of nine chapters. The first part, "Reflection on Personal Experience," includes two chapters. In them, she tries to take the reader from her own personal experience to the book's goal: preparing Muslim students in their homelands' educational systems to think and question their faith so that they can stand on solid ground. In chapter 1, "The Spiritual and Intellectual Journey," she apologizes for including her personal experience growing up as a Muslim. Actually, more elaboration upon such experiences and on the conflicts she faced while studying in Canada would have been appreciated, as such a topic requires that personal experiences be shared, given that they are not limited to one person but rather to millions of individuals. Chapter 2, "Spirituality: Woman's Best-Kept Secret," further analyzes the significance of such experiences to women specifically.

The second part, "Review and Critique," consists of two chapters that compare contemporary western and eastern schools of education. Chapter 3, "Conventional and Alternative Paradigms," presents the already existing paradigms in order to pave the way for the suggested Islamic paradigm. In chapter 4, "Critical Reflection on Existing Paradigms," she evaluates existing paradigms.

The third part, "Islamic Knowledge," includes three chapters that present the Islamic paradigm. In chapter 5, "The Islamic Worldview: The One and the Many," Zeera clarifies the differences in views between the secular West and the religious Islamic world. She explains the gaps found in the two worldviews, for the basis upon which they are built are totally different. This prepares the reader for her suggested Islamic paradigm, presented in chapter 6, "The Islamic Paradigm." She explains the six underlying principles upon which her paradigm is built. In chapter 7, "Islamic Epistemology: Gateway to Knowledge," Zeera presents epistemology from within an educational point of view to help all Muslim students relate to their religion.

The last part, "Transformation through Education," features two chapters in which she suggests the means of integrating faith and Islamic knowledge in the educational systems. In chapter 8, "Transformation Research Methods: An Islamic Perspective," Zeera emphasizes the role of scientific research methods based on *tawhid* (oneness and unity in the Islamic belief). In her opinion, both the eastern and western educational systems are one-dimensional. Therefore, she suggests integrating both systems to produce wholeness and holiness in the education system. In the last chapter, "Transformative Learning," she clarifies how to achieve this goal: First, allow dialectical thinking that will help students develop their thinking and evaluative abilities. Second, accompany this process with mediation and reflection, namely, guidance through spiritual means to confirm that the paths of thinking are guided by religious principles. Third, use conversation and dialogue. Zeera shows their power through many quotations.

Finally, there is an appendix in which the author mentions several of her personal experiences and thoughts. I believe that these are necessary if one wants to have a deeper understanding of the book itself from the author's point of view. Of course, as this book is based upon the author's personal experiences, many of which countless other people have experienced, subjectivity is impossible. Zeera is to be commended for presenting this topic in a scholarly way in order to address the crucial issue of the "nature of educational systems in the East" and the severe absence of dialectical thinking.

In general, the book is thrilling reading, for it reflects the experience of many others who did not try to crystallize their experiences as Zeera did. She presents all of her arguments in a scholarly method and, avoiding extremism, takes a moderate stand between faith and science. However, her presentation of her suggested educational system was more theoretical than practical. No concrete steps and methods to be applied were given. Her insistence on focusing upon dialectical thinking in the suggested educational system, and a combination between the totally eastern faith and totally western scientific thinking, are excellent points. The three elements she mentions (i.e., dialectal thinking, mediation and reflection, and dialogue and conversation) are great, but the empirical steps of implementation are missing. These three elements form the heart of her proposed educational system. She did not elaborate on the implementation method, which might cause many problems, as the ideas themselves might not be understood fully or may be understood subjectively by those entrusted with acting upon them. The ideas are abstract rather than concrete.

The book can serve as the starting point of guidance to a new educational system in the Middle East. Others can build upon her ideas, take them as a theoretical background, and build further the pedagogical steps and measures needed to implement such ways of thinking in the educational systems of Muslim countries.

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