

Editorial

Islamic Education Reform: Top Priority in Intellectual Islamic Work

The earliest *ijtihad*, in the face of societal changes, can be traced back to the period of Khalifah Umar bin al-Khattab. The methodology of juristic preference (*istihsān*) was developed later as one way of instituting Islamic reform. It emerged as a response to the inadequacy of the method of mere deduction. Other forms of intellectual reform can be seen in the works of Al-Ghazali in *Ihya' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* and *Tahafat al-Falsifah*, and in Ibn Rushd's response, *Tahafat al-Tahafat*.

Many of these early efforts toward intellectual reform were individual and accidental in nature and did not reflect any methodological school or institution. Reformers and creative thinkers seemed as flashes in the history of Islamic thought. As the European challenge to the Ummah mounted, and the cultural and scientific imitation failed, many Muslim reformers surrendered themselves to culturally copying Europe while continuing to praise the heritage of the Ummah and the sublime values and concepts embedded in its legacy.

The movement for Islamization of knowledge tried to dig deep into Islamic intellectual tradition in order to provide Muslim thinkers with the capabilities and potential for the reform of contemporary Islamic thought and methodology. The genesis of the movement can be traced to the birth of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists in the United States and Canada (AMSS) in 1972, the establishment of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) in 1981, and the development of the Islamization of Knowledge program of the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) in 1989.

As a result of these efforts, the ideas of Islamization of knowledge and Islamic methodological reform have become central themes in the works of Muslim scholars, who find that these concepts give direction and purpose to their work. If we use the metaphor of a seed to describe the role of intellectual and methodological reform in developing and reforming societies, then political, economic, technological and all other contributions and reforms can be seen as the fruits of civilization. The question that presents itself is, if the seed is there—meaning proper thinking—

how can we get civilizational fruits? The answer can be found in the missing link, that is, the tree with its trunk, branches, and other organs. The missing link in our Ummah is human potential—psychologically and mentally well-built Muslim individuals and an Ummatic societal system with the potential to bear the fruits and overcome the challenges of civilization.

Mental recognition alone cannot produce real, creative, and efficient civilizational contributions and progress. Faith (*'aqidah*) and perspective should develop an educational and nurturing way and methodology (*tarbiyah*) with which to build the psychological force capable of positive contribution and creativity. Civilizational efficiency can be attained when the right ideas, developed through the right way of thinking, are planted and allowed to grow into an educational and nurturing system—that is, a healthy atmosphere that educates the members of the civilization to be morally strong, free, and dignified. A strong Muslim generation of this kind will be able to take initiative, produce the political, economic, and scientific capabilities to achieve the long-awaited progress which will put the Ummah back on the track of progress and leadership. The seed—Islamization of Knowledge—once planted, needs to develop a robust trunk and a system of branches—the *tarbiyah* system—which will bear the fruit of increased capability and progress.

Positive educational and *tarbiyah* systems may be developed by renewing the intellectual Islamic discourse, using originality, and going beyond the system of sermons and daydreams that characterize today's intellectual discourse. Obviously this task is not an easy one. It requires deep understanding, scientific reformulation of the *'aqidah* discourse, comprehension of the nature and psychology of the human being—his stages of development and his educational requirements and implications—and an understanding of the facts, laws, conditions, variables of life, and all input needed to motivate psychological potentials in Muslims.

The trunk of this Islamic tree (the educational and *tarbiyah* system) necessitates the interaction of the *'aqidah* and knowledge to build courageous and persistent Muslim characters—basic to acquiring civilizational efficiency and real progress. Muslim scholars—through IIIT, AMSS, and all other intellectual institutions and organizations—should take up this challenge of *tarbiyah* and educational reform. It is not only the most difficult task facing Muslim scholars, it is also the prerequisite for any other form of development and progress.

In developing a course of action to perform this task, careful attention should be paid to a wide range of *'aqidah* concepts, and the distortions which these concepts have suffered in content and form through a long period of backwardness in the absence of intellectual discourse. Attention should also be paid to the results of this backwardness—the

many negative, hesitant, disabled, powerless, and uncreative personalities of so many of the youth of today's Ummah.

The required Islamic educational and *tarbiyah* discourse should be able to rebuild the psychological identity of Muslim individuals and Muslim society and realize the long-awaited Muslim presence and contribution to redirect the course of human civilization within the higher purposes and values of *tawhīd*, *'umran*, *'adl*, and *tazkiyah*. It is not possible for Muslims to realize this noble mission while fear, powerlessness, and a sense of inferiority dominates the psychology of Muslim youth.

Hopefully, more focus in this direction and increased efforts in adequately defining our goals in this area will accelerate our steps in all other Islamic intellectual domains. Placing *tarbiyah* as a top priority in our present and future efforts does not mean that IIIT, AMSS, and other institutions must give up their plans for the Islamization of Knowledge program; on the contrary, far from being an alternative, it is an effort to emphasize one of the important areas of Islamic intellectual work, which should enliven our ideas, triangulate our views, and push our experiences forward. Such efforts in the field of *tarbiyah* and education will develop our knowledge in a systematic manner and make it available for other fields and for practical life. It is a collaborative effort of all intellectuals, each in his/her field, because all fields are related and all basic concepts and values are common and shared. This way reform in the *tarbiyah* and educational systems may serve as a practical vehicle for our endeavors and may help intellectuals to understand the scope of our mission and realize the complementarity of our Islamic intellectual and civilizational project.

May Allah Almighty guide us in the right direction and bless our deeds and actions.

AbdulHamid AbuSulayman
Editor-in-Chief