

ISLAMIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE: BACKGROUND AND SCOPE

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Introduction

From the outset, it is pertinent to attempt a definition of “Islamization” and “Islamization of knowledge.” Islamization is the transformation of a worldview from one that is “crooked” or *jāhil* (ignorant) to one that is Islamic. This transformation has manifested itself time and again through a succession of prophets and messengers of God and culminated in the Prophet Muhammad. When the Arabian peninsula was gripped in the darkness of the *jahiliyya*—the period of ignorance, lawlessness, brutality, and fear—Islam came as a light. It began with the first revelation of the Qur’an to the Prophet Muhammad in Makkah in the year 610 A.D., commanding him to “Read in the name of Your Lord.” Knowledge, therefore, is the first and most significant aspect of Islam as Allah, by His revelation of the Holy Qur’an, has sought to guide mankind to the right path. The significance of knowledge is that it is only when people know and can distinguish between right and wrong that they can establish a justly balanced society and be the representatives of their Lord, Allah, on earth—which is mankind’s mission.

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From this simple definition of Islamization it is quite clear that Islamization of knowledge is synonymous with Islamization. Islamization can only precede knowledge, and without knowledge there is no Islam; hence, the revelation of the Holy Qur'an. But Islam is not just theory; it goes hand-in-hand with practice. During the initial revelation of the Holy Qur'an, whatever was revealed to mankind by Allah through the Prophet Muhammad was soon implemented by the Prophet and his companions (*sahābah*). Even now, every Muslim is supposed to study the Qur'an and the examples of the Prophet (Sunnah), comprehend them, and act according to their teachings. Muslims are supposed to establish a properly balanced community in the same way as the Prophet Muhammad did in Madinah, embracing all aspects of life—the spiritual, moral-social, economic, and political. All of these aspects, which are taught by the Qur'an, were implemented initially by the Prophet and subsequently by the numerous reformers (*mujaddidīn*) who appeared in several parts of the world—including Shaykh Usman Dan Fodio in Nigeria, Niger, and Cameroon; Shaykh Umar el-Futi in the Senegambia region; and Ayatollah Ruhulla al-Khomeini in Iran.

By the term "Islamization of knowledge," I seek to emphasize the fact that transformation of knowledge from whatever it was before to an Islamic one is the most significant milestone in Islamization; that is, changing a Muslim society that has gone astray to a completely Islamic one.

Background to the Islamization of Knowledge

The present-day efforts to Islamize knowledge followed the realization by Muslims, especially after the First World Conference on Muslim Education held in the holy city of Makkah in 1977, that the central problem of education in Muslim societies is its dual nature, that is, the existence of two parallel systems: the Qur'anic educational system, on one hand, and the secular educational system, on the other. Obviously, these two systems have differing historical and conceptual backgrounds. The Qur'anic educational system dates back to the era of the Prophet Adam, the first man created on earth and, therefore, the leader of the human race. Adam was taught by his Creator what had never been known before. Because of Adam's elevation through knowledge, the angels prostrated themselves before him. After Adam's death (AS), several other messengers and prophets were sent with divine guidance to their respective peoples. The last of such messengers was Muhammad, who came with the final message, the Qur'an, and his implementation of the Qur'anic teachings, the Sunnah. This message is meant to last until the Last Day, at which time the earth and its contents will crumble, death will overcome everyone and everything, and all will return to the Creator. The central theme of this final message is worship of Allah

through obedience to His injunctions, which guide believers in matters of personal and interpersonal behavior.

Secular education, however, is a fairly recent development. Modern secular ideas originated from the theories of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke in the 17th century and the French philosopher J. J. Rousseau in the 18th century. Gradually these ideas spread in Europe and, as a consequence of colonialism, into the rest of the world. Secularism is a way of life determined and pursued by man in accordance with his reasoning, wishes, and aspirations. However, it is commonly observed that man's reasoning often conflicts with his wishes and desires.

Aside from this brief historical analysis of the two differing systems of education, i.e., secular and Islamic, it is imperative to discuss their conceptual grounds. The first conceptual ground to discuss is the *concept of knowledge*. The main issues around which the concept of knowledge is centered are how did creatures (including humans) come into existence, and what is the purpose of existing things. Indeed, there are two basic ways of conceiving the world: Either you take it to be created by God or you accept that it evolved by itself. The way one looks at the issue influences the way one views the nature of knowledge. The secular scholar—who holds the view that matter, and indeed all creation, came about by chance—seeks knowledge through the evidence of the sense, facts rationally deduced from observables, and laws of logic and consistency.

Thus, what exists beyond consciousness hardly bothers the secular scholar. On the other hand, Islam considers revelation its main source of knowledge; it is direct from God to mankind through a prophet. Islam considers the three sources of knowledge (i.e., instinct, senses, and reason) inadequate. Each of these sources of knowledge has its limits beyond which it cannot function. Reason is the most potent of them but it, too, has its limitations. It can hardly comprehend anything beyond the senses and now and then comes into conflict with the desires and is overcome by them. Each source of knowledge serves as a correction to another: instinct is corrected by the senses and the senses by reason. Is there no force which may correct reason? The Qur'an answers that it is revelation and that it is the greatest divine gift given to man. Revelation is called *al-Huda* (the guidance):

Say: Guidance is from Allah! That is the true guidance and we are commanded to surrender ourselves to the Lord of all Being.
(6:71)

The second conceptual ground upon which the two systems of education differ is the *aim of knowledge*. From a secular point of view, knowledge is considered to be for academic and material purposes, that is, knowledge is a theoretical tool for the advancement of knowledge for its own sake as well as for the pursuit of society's material progress.

Knowledge has not much bearing upon the spiritual aspect of man beyond the personal worship of God.

The aim of knowledge, according to Islam, is to enrich the believer's understanding of the Creator so that he can implement the objective of his being created, that is, to worship Allah. This entails observance of His injunctions in all spheres of life constituting personal and interpersonal behavior. The essence of these injunctions is that Allah has created men and *jinn* and has prescribed ways for the believers among them to follow so that their lives on earth are healthy and a haven of peace and tranquillity and so that their return to Him (after death) will earn them the reward of a blissful paradise (*jannah firdaws*).

The injunctions in the Qur'an and Sunnah achieve their guidance through three approaches, i.e., the direct approach, the legal approach, and the incentive approach (El Khadi, 1985). The direct approach is through the provision of general regulations that guide the individual in the conduct of his or her daily affairs. It aims at building the faith of a believer. For example, prayer (*salah*), besides its deep spiritual significance, has moral and social advantages (Qur'an 29:45). It is also associated with the economic life of the community. This is because it improves the moral standard of people in doing business and changes their attitude to money. (It should make the rich distribute more of their wealth to the poor. This is the reason why *zakah* is mentioned with *salah* in many Qur'anic verses.)

The legal approach is through the provision of legislation prohibiting certain things and the punitive measures for violating the rules. It aims (among other things) at protecting human life (by punishing a murder), property (by punishing for theft), family (by punishing adultery), and human reason (by punishing alcohol consumption and the use of hard drugs).

The incentive approach is through the appeal to man's own conscience, insight or judgment. This is stated in various places in the Qur'an; for example:

O man! Read your book [i.e., your record in the day of judgment]: It suffices today that you judge yourself by yourself.
(17:14)

In other words the Qur'an appeals to human conscience by talking about a Day of Judgment, the day when man shall see the recompense for his observance of Allah's injunctions on earth or the failure to do so. Those who follow Allah's injunctions in theory and in practice shall be rewarded with *jannah* (a garden), and those who deviate shall be punished with *jahannam* (a blazing fire). It also appeals to human imagination through stories and vivid descriptions of people, events, and characters; for example:

generations before you We destroyed when they did wrong: their Apostles came to them with clear signs, but they would not believe! Thus do We requite those who sin. (10:13)

All of these approaches (i.e., the direct approach, the legal approach, and the incentive approach) appeal to various aspects of man: his thought, his senses, his observation, his experience, his conscience, his imagination, in short, his whole being, his total personality. This is because the injunctions in the Qur'an and the Sunnah aim not only at informing and convincing man of the truth but also making him act according to the truth.

The third conceptual ground upon which the two systems of education differ is in defining the concept of *accountability in the hereafter*. Secularism has no concept of the hereafter. This is because their goal is material pursuit and advancement; hence their motto: "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow ye shall die." So the secular person's life is for maximum happiness and enjoyment in this life without any regard to the hereafter, since he does not believe that it exists. On the other hand, according to the Qur'an, the cardinal principle of this life is its accountability in the hereafter. That alone gives it meaning and purpose (Husain, n. d.). In other words, the hope of reward makes believers act in accordance with the injunctions of Allah, and the fear of punishment when they sin makes them beg Him for forgiveness after intending not to repeat the same mistake again.

So he who does an atom's weight of good will see it. And he who does an atom's weight of evil will see it. (99:7-8)

Thus, a good Muslim should always intend good to himself and to others and act accordingly. The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said, "The best of faith (*imān*) is to live in peace with people and the best of Islam is that you do not hurt others with your hands and tongue."

From the above discussions on the differing historical and conceptual grounds of Islamic and secular education, it is clear that, in the Muslim world, the secularization of education in the present century (a consequence of colonialism) has brought its societies into conflict with the proper Islamic education that Muslims cherish as a means for the gradual return to a wholly Islamic way of life. The present dual existence of Qur'anic education on the one hand and secular education on the other (and especially the Muslim states' practice of secularism in their societies), has given rise to contradictions within the Muslim; hence, the need for the Islamization of knowledge.

Scope of Islamization of Knowledge

From the point of view of Islam, knowledge is classified into two broad categories: basic knowledge derived directly from the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and knowledge acquired by man primarily with the help of his intellect and experiments. However, these two are always integrated. As Ahmad (1978) observed, this is achieved by permeating the entire education with the spirit of the Islamic ideology. Thus in the teaching of every subject the viewpoint of Islam should be explained to the student and at every stage of his education proper care should be taken to arouse his sense of moral responsibility. For instance, Islam guarantees the fundamental rights of the individual and does not permit anyone to tamper with them. Thus, it makes the proper development of the personality of man one of the primary objectives of its educational policy. On the other hand, Islam also awakens a sense of social responsibility in man, organizes human beings in a society and a state, and enjoins the individual to subscribe to the social good. Prayer, in Islam, is offered in congregation, which inculcates social discipline among Muslims. Every Muslim is enjoined to pay zakat. It has been laid down in the Holy Qur'an that

In their wealth the beggar and the destitute have their due right.
(51:19)

The essence of this integration of knowledge is that man, according to Islam, is Allah's deputy, and all the things around him belong to Allah. Allah has chosen him to make use of these things for his benefit, and in this lies his test and trial. Then Allah will examine him in a second life (the Hereafter), and this examination will cover both his individual and social life. Man, therefore, is not an absolute master in the sense that he is not entirely free to determine his own behavior; the standards of right and wrong are determined by Allah (El-Tum, 1978).

In order to attain the integration between Islamic and secular education as suggested above, a work plan, which was proposed by the late Professor Ismail al-Faruqi (1982), for the Islamization of knowledge has been agreed upon. I have abridged it as follows:

Step 1: Mastery of the Modern Discipline

Every discipline ought to be surveyed and essays written on it to lay bare the broad outlines of its genesis and historical development and the main contributions which its great votaries have made.

Step 2: Mastery of the Islamic Legacy

Before any elaboration of the specific relevance of Islam to the discipline, it is necessary to discover what the legacy of Islam has to say on the discipline. Put in other words, the legacy of the ancestors must remain for us the starting point of the relevance of Islam. Those issues

which promise relevance to the problems of the present ought to be the object of Islamic educational and research strategy.

Step 3: Establishment of the Specific Relevance of Islam to the Discipline

In this step, the nature of the modern discipline, its constituent methods, principles, problems, objectives, and hopes, its achievements and shortcomings—all these should be related to the Islamic legacy, and the legacy's specific relevance to each must be deduced from the general contribution.

Step 4: Critical Assessment of the Modern Discipline

Now that both the modern discipline and the Islamic legacy have been exposed; their methodologies, principles, themes, problems, and achievements have been identified, surveyed, and analyzed; and the specific relevance of Islam to the discipline has been clarified and established, the discipline should be subjected to critical analysis from the standpoint of Islam.

Step 5: Creative Analysis and Synthesis

Having understood and mastered the modern discipline as well as the Islamic legacy, having assessed their strengths and weaknesses, and having established the relevance of Islam to the specific areas of inquiry of the disciplines, the stage is now set for the Islamic mind to make its creative leap. A creative synthesis must be struck between the Islamic legacy and the modern disciplines that will bridge the gap of centuries of nondevelopment.

Step 6: Textbook Development

Priority dictates that our first efforts be devoted to the production of a standard textbook in each discipline which would state definitively the relevance of the Islamic vision to that discipline and serve as a general guide for Islamic minds to follow in the future.

Step 7: Dissemination of Islamized Knowledge

Each of the works produced under the foregoing steps should be placed in the hand of every Muslim academician and thinker as a personal invitation to join in this enterprise. Equally, it is imperative to place such products in the universities and colleges of the Muslim world with the request to consider them for possible adoption as required readings in the pertinent courses of instruction.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the present reawakening of Muslims that inspired the current effort culminating in the work plan for the Islamization of knowledge is akin to the research activities that were inspired by the Caliph al-Ma'mun in his *Bayt al-Hikmah*, which ushered

in the golden era of the Islamic civilization. The work plan is a challenge to all Muslim academicians and thinkers. It is incumbent upon us to face this challenge seriously, knowing that it is an obligation that we owe our Creator, Allah. May the Almighty continue to guide us in this effort.

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