Transformative Inquiry
and Production of Islamic Knowledge

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Abstract

Transformative inquiry is proposed in this paper as an alternative research method that emerges from the Islamic paradigm and leads to the creation of Islamic knowledge on one hand and inner self transformation on the other. The emphasis, however, will be on transformative research methods based on this union of inner experiences of awakening of the soul from *inside* and unfolding of research experiences and knowledge from *outside*. Before doing that, I will shed some light on related issues of conventional and alternative paradigms such as positivism and constructivism. Also related issues to transformation, such as wholeness and relationships, are discussed. Finally, four methods of inquiry, are proposed as transformative methods that have the potential for producing Islamic knowledge.

Being concerned about the knowledge produced by Muslim scholars and thousands of graduate students at western universities, I propose using research methods that are open, yet rooted in the Islamic paradigm and the essence of *tawheed:* oneness and unity. The Islamic communities in western societies are deprived of knowledge that is genuinely Islamic and contemporary at the same time. Apart from some creative and serious work produced by Muslim scholars and thinkers in the West, the Islamic academic world at western universities is far behind what one would expect. Thousands of Muslim students have been registering and graduating from universities in North America and Europe for decades, yet

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their contribution to the advancement of Islamic knowledge is very small. The majority of our students are choosing topics for their theses that have no relevance to Islamic issues and, therefore, do not contribute to the development and growth of Islamic knowledge. Moreover, by avoiding Islamic topics for their research, students are denying the development of their inner selves. The result is advanced intellectual development yet immature spiritual development, in other words, imbalance between the mind and the soul and fragmentation of the self and knowledge produced by that person. So positivism in the West created fragmented knowledge through its secular and one-dimensional epistemology and quantitative research methods. Mainstream professionals and academicians in all fields created fragmented knowledge. Despite the fact that their view is a radically erroneous one, they form an influential portion of the academic population.

Their view is erroneous because positivists tend to believe that reality is "outside" of themselves, not only objective but also concrete and quantifiable. That is, they believe that they can stand totally outside of what is real, be neutral toward it, and be able to compartmentalize, measure and quantify it. They pride themselves on adopting scientific methods to study, control and understand reality. What makes their method scientific, they claim, is basically the objective approach to reality. It is their belief that what is not quantifiable is less than real, merely subjective. Due to positivist indoctrination at universities, Muslim students, like other students are following the mainstream as an easy and safe passage to their graduation. By doing so, students waste the most precious years of their life doing research that neither advances Islamic knowledge nor increases self-awareness and awakening of the soul.

Positivism, with a sharp knife, cuts apart the soul and the mind. What is not tangible and visible is not worth researching and studying. It simply does not exist for them. So Muslim students are torn between the development of the mind and the soul. They are indirectly made to choose between the sacred that lies inside them invisible, silent and profound and the secular, the aggressive demands of the modern mind. The rationale is that they have to be practical and worldly. The more they feel fragmented the more they feel the pain of separation with their inner selves.

Disenchantment with positivism prepared the grounds for the emergence of constructivism/ interpretivism. Yet both positivist and constructivist paradigms are fragmented, each in its own terms.

Reality, according to positivism, is objective and exists somewhere outside the research. Accordingly knowledge is associated with pure

objectivity and absolutism. Constructivism, on the other hand, is associated with subjectivity, and reality according to constructivists is subjective and socially constructed. So we have gone from one extreme to another, either subjective or objective. That is to say, constructivists believe that the nature of reality is relative, and therefore there is no objective reality out there; nothing is absolute; everything is relative and hence this –worldly. Both views are reductionist, although constructivism reduces the scope of fragmentation, allowing for more humanistic methods of inquiry at the worldly level only.

It is important at this point to emphasize that a great potential lies in the *integration* of transformative inquiry and an Islamic paradigm that allows for the production of Islamic knowledge. It is through an Islamic paradigm that researchers can utilize Islamic and 'tawheedi' interpretation. Transformative inquiry, if used within the Islamic paradigm, can reduce the fragmentation of knowledge and self and produce Islamic holistic knowledge. My concern is two fold: a) production of holistic Islamic knowledge that is suitable for the Muslim community in North America and Europe; b) connection of students to their souls and their inner selves through methods of transformative inquiry and dialectical thinking. By doing so I am hoping that Muslim academicians and scholars will contribute to the faded Islamic civilization, and to the world literature and knowledge that is both whole and holy. Wholeness can be achieved through producing, holistic knowledge and holiness through connecting to one's inner self and acknowledging the sacred inside us.

The concept of transformation is not a novel one; what is new is reclaiming the role of the sacred and the spiritual in the process of research and inquiry in the academic arena. There appears to be a current need and opportunity within the scholarly domain to explore the spiritual dimension of one's life and work. It is, no doubt, an inquiry that is fraught with difficulties, complexities and confusion. I must admit that despite the deficiency in the constructivist and interpretivist paradigm, it is through this open paradigm that issues related to the heart and the soul started to leak out and be acceptable, since the main assumption of constructivist is that the nature of reality is relative. Some researchers have taken that to mean "everything goes," as long as it is not restricted by positivism and their assumptions of reality. I consider constructivism as the back door of transformative inquiry that might lead to studies of spirituality if used in the right context. Transformative inquiry, I believe, is a higher stage of

development in research methods that emerged naturally and organically from the Islamic paradigm. Such an approach to inquiry has also arisen in other contexts. As methods are evolving from one level to higher levels, transformative research methods might too evolve to higher levels of development and be replaced by yet other more comprehensive methods. The idea of transformative inquiry is not a novelty for me. I developed this idea more than ten years ago in my doctoral thesis, and others have proposed transformative and dialectical approaches as well. I believe hermeneutics, heuristics, phenomenology, narrative inquiry and other qualitative research methods can be categorized as transformative inquiry. The idea of integrating qualitative research methods and the Islamic paradigm was further developed within the context of the quantum world-view. I borrowed from the quantum worldview two major principles of Complementarity and Uncertainty to present my ideas of transformative research methods through the holistic Islamic worldview. In this section the focus is on the concept of transformation and its relationship with research methods that I call close and open systems. Closed systems such as positivism prevent transformation, while open systems such as constructivism have the potential of promoting transformation. However, it is argued here that neither system is appropriate for the production of Islamic knowledge. This is presented in detail in the coming sections.

The transformational perspective is holistic and relational, since it emphasizes viewing the world from a complementary perspective that accommodates and accepts extremes, as they are part of reality. An aggressive clash or a peaceful dialogue between extremes opens the channels for flow of energy and transformation. An important point in the process of transformation is that the researcher adopts a holistic paradigm, a paradigm that holds as its basic premise that reality is ideal and relative, subjective and objective, spiritual and material. Holding such an open and wide perspective encourages interaction and relationships between contradictory elements. Transformation gradually leads to transcendence. That is to say, we are able to go beyond transformation and transcend to higher experiences through reflective research methods. An attempt is made here to show that the transformational perspective is rooted in the Islamic worldview.

Reflection helps researchers to transcend their knowledge of themselves, bringing them to the knowledge of the unity of the natural and the divine Principle, helping them to go beyond realization and experience oneness,

tawheed, that is the ultimate goal of Islam. The importance of reflection lies in its unifying nature, that connects the person to her or his experience and then transcends that experience to higher levels. Human beings evolve gradually through self-realization to realization of the unity of God's knowledge. Islam is a developmental school of thought that eventually transcends the material and rises to the spiritual.

> An understanding of the world hinges on understanding the way unconscious energy mobilizes a relationship between self and situation. Human knowledge is a direct product of the process through which humans engage and act in their world; it expresses a relationship between internal and external, subjective and objective. Traditionally, social sciences has sought for a knowledge emphasizing one or another extreme in this relationship. The transformational perspective suggests that it is necessary to bridge the gap between these extremes and ground knowledge in an understanding of the way the internal worlds of ideas and ideals is linked to the external world of matter.[1]

Transformation is stressed in this paper because it indicates a change in kind rather than degree. Transformation is defined by Williams as "a process theoretically more open to the natural process of human development. It has, as its undergirding thought process, the theory of dissipative structures and shifts in kind rather than degree, a difference that makes a difference a difference." So transformation indicates inclusive change or a reconstruction. Transformation occurs when the system is open and has dissipative structures (Prigogine,) where elements, ideas, thoughts and feelings flow freely consciously and unconsciously. The theory of dissipative structures "is relevant to everyday life-people. It offers a scientific model of transformation at every level."[2]

Dissipative Structures and Transformation

The theory of dissipative structures won the 1977 Nobel prize in chemistry for a Belgian physical chemist, Ilya Prigogine. It explains the "irreversible processes" in nature: the movement toward higher and higher orders of life.

> Prigogine's theory resolves the fundamental riddle of how living things have been running uphill in the universe that is supposed to be running down.... It explains the critical role of stress in transformation

and the impetus toward transformation inherent in nature... A dissipate structure might well be described as flowing wholeness.[3]

Stress and tension play an important role in transformation and in open systems or, as termed by Prigogine, "dissipative structures". *Instability* is the key to transformation. "The dissipation of energy creates the potential for sudden reordering."[4] Ferguson explains how the concept of dissipative structures can be seen in human society.

The greater the instability and variations of the society, the more interactions occur. We are transformed through interaction with people, the environment, and the situation we are studying. If the research methods we are using are open and allow for free and powerful interaction between the researcher and participants or the researcher and the situation she or he is studying, then transfer of energy is possible and transformation is more likely to happen.

To go back to the concepts of change and transformation, Ferguson proposes four ways in which we change when we get new and conflicting information. These are: *change by exception; incremental change; pendulum change; and paradigm change*. Change by exception is the most limited way of change, where our old belief system remains intact but allows for a handful of anomalies. Incremental change occurs bit by bit and the individual is not aware of having changed. Pendulum change fails to integrate what was right with the old and fails to discriminate the value of the new from its overstatements. Pendulum change rejects its own experience, going from one kind of half-known to another. Change by these three ways does not lead to transformation. The brain cannot deal with conflicting bits of information unless it can integrate them or accept them through a dialectical way of thinking.

The fourth way of change suggested by Ferguson is the paradigm change. "The paradigm change-transformation is the fourth dimension of change. The new perspective, the insight that allows the information to come together in a new form of structure. Paradigm change refines and integrates. Paradigm change attempts to heal the delusion of either-or, of this-or-that."[5] Thus transformation within dissipative structures happens holistically and dialectically. It embraces the individual and the society. It touches the individual and the collective consciousness.

Positivism as a closed System

Two major paradigms, namely positivism and constructivsm or

interpretivism, are reviewed briefly in this section to see how each paradigm promotes or prevents transformation.

The dominant paradigm that has guided educational and psychological research for many decades is positivism. As we all know, positivism is based on the rationalistic, empiricist philosophy that originated with Francis Bacon, John Locke, and August Comte. The underlying assumptions of positivism include the belief that the social world can be studied in the same way as the natural world, that there is a method for studying the social world that is value free, and that explanations of causal nature can be provided. Guba states that:

> The basic belief system of positivism is rooted in a realist ontology, that is, the belief that there exists a reality out there driven by immutable natural laws. The business of science is to discover the "true" nature of reality and how it "truly" works.
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> The ultimate aim of science is to predict and control natural phenomena. Once committed to a realist ontology, the positivist is constrained to practice an objective epistemology. ...The most appropriate methodology is thus empirical experimentalism.[6]

Positivism, then, rests upon five assumptions summarized by Lincoln & Guba. These assumptions are conscious building blocks that prevent personal and social transformation through research methods.

- An ontological assumption of a single, tangible reality "out there" that can be broken apart into pieces capable of being studied independently; the whole is simply the sum of its parts.

- An epistemological assumption about the possibility of separation of the observer from the observed –the knower from the known.

- An assumption of the temporal and contextual independence of observations, so that what is true at one time and place may, under appropriate circumstances (such as sampling) also be true at another time and place.

- An assumption of linear causality; there are no effects without causes and no causes without effects.

- An axiological assumption of value freedom, that is, that the methodology guarantees that the results of an inquiry are essentially free from the influence of any value system.[7]

After examining and reflecting on the above positivist assumptions, we see that the positivist paradigm and the knowledge produced by it can be

regarded as a closed system, detached, artificial, unrealistic, objectivist, duelist, manipulative and fragmented. Ontologically researchers, consciously or unconsciously carry on a study assuming that there is a single, tangible reality out there and that they are capable of getting hold of that reality, provided they follow some experimental and, statistical protocols, so that they are able to fragment the problem to be manageable and thus, to be able to manipulate the situation and eventually control it.

According to positivism, the more detached the researcher is from the data and the more "objective" she or he is in collecting and analyzing the data, the more rigorous, valid and reliable the results are considered to be. The results, then, can be generalized assuming that problems, situations, circumstances are replaceable so results are treated as time-and-context free. Some of these generalizations take the form of cause-effect laws.

So all the limitations imposed by the paradigm on the researcher and consequently by the research on the problem, the data and the design prevent the positivist paradigm and related research methods from being open, and transformation is hindered. A manipulative system controls energy to flow hierarchically and in one direction only. This consciously blocks all other directions and prevents a natural flow of energy.

Transformation, therefore, is prevented because all variables are controlled consciously in such a way that transformation does not occur. Interaction and openness disturbs the design and violates the rules and regulations of pre-designed models and dependent and independent variables are interacted and the researcher loses control over the study. So transformation is not allowed under the positivist paradigm because it causes instability and disturbance to the variables and to the design of the study.

The positivist paradigm and the research methods attached to it are closed systems that prevent the flow of energy mainly because of their   rfragmented nature. In fragmented, compartmentalized research methods such as experimental design, there is no place for interaction. As a matter of fact, it is prevented consciously and scientifically by statistical design and manipulation of data.

Therefore, qualities such as single and tangible reality, objectivity, control of variables, manipulation of data, cause and effect relationships, all connote lack of interaction and fragmentation of the problem studied by the researcher. Relationships suffer when there is fragmentation of knowledge, manipulation and control, since variables are controlled. Objectivity, for example, is an essential pillar in the positivist paradigm and statistical

designs. The more detached the researcher is from the "subjects" of the study and from the data collected, the better off she or he is, since interaction with the data might affect the results. This factor causes severe damage in relationships and blocks the flow of energy and hence prevents transformation.

The Constructivist Paradigm as an Open System

Disenchantment with the positivist paradigm and knowledge produced through quantitative methods and analyzed statistically led social scientists to look for alternative research methods and alternative paradigms. Constructivism/Interpretivism is presented here as an alternative paradigm that is less rigid than the positivist paradigm and has the potential for transformation. Issues related to the above paradigm are now discussed, with respect to ontology, epistemology, and methodology.

The basic assumptions underlying the interpretive paradigm, identified by Guba and Lincoln[8] are as follows:

- An ontological assumption of a multiple, constructed and holistic reality; realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions.

- An epistemological assumption about the knower and the known as interactive and inseparable;

- An assumption of temporal and context dependence; only time- and context-bound, working hypotheses and ideographic statements are possible.

- An assumption of causality and that all entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects;

An axiological assumption that methodology is necessarily value bound, interactive, subjective and based on participants' views.

From an ontological point of view, the basic belief system of construtivism is rooted in a non-absolotist ontology. Realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, dependent in their form and content on the persons who hold them, some of which may be in conflict with each other. So perceptions of reality may change during the process of the study. Constructivists reject the notion that there is an objective reality that can be known, and take the stance that the researcher's goal is to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge. The value of empathy is emphasized in the constructivist and the phenomenological doctrine of *verstehen*, which

undergirds many constructivists inquires. *Verstehen,* a concept emphasized by Dilthey, means to make sense of the world, to understand.

Epistemologically, the constructivist takes a subjective position. The knower and the known are co-created in the process of inquiry. The researcher opts for a more personal, interactive mode of data collection. Constructivist epistemology has unique qualities that distinguish it from positivist epistemology. Developmental perspective, empathy and subjectivity are assumptions that uniquely set apart constructivists from positivists.

Constructivist researchers strive to understand phenomena or a situation as a whole, looking for the unifying nature of particular settings. This holistic approach assumes that the whole is to be understood as a complex system that is greater than the sum of its parts. It also assumes that a description and understanding of a person's social environment or an organization's political context is essential for overall understanding of what is observed.

The advantage of qualitative portrayals of holistic settings is that greater attention can be given to settings, interdependencies, complexities, idiosyncrasies, and context. Deutscher has argued that, despite the totality of our personal experiences as living, working human beings, researchers have mostly focused their studies solely on parts or fragments of wholes.

> We knew that human behavior was rarely if ever directly influenced or explained by an isolated variable; we knew that it was impossible to assume that any of such variables were additive (with or without weighting); we knew that the complex mathematics of the interaction among any set of variables was incomprehensible to us. In effect, although we knew they did not exist, we defined them in to being.[9]

It is no simple task to undertake holistic study, to search for wholes in a given situation. The challenge for the participant observer is to seek the essence of the life of the participant, to sum up and to find a central unifying principle. Understanding and seeking meaning in any situation requires a great deal of openness, empathy and patience. Constructivist and interpretive studies become particularly useful where one needs to understand some special groups, particular problem, or unique situation in great depth and where one can identify and analyze complicated cases. The more a study aims at individualized outcomes, the greater the appropriateness of interpretive research methods.

Methodologically the constructivist/interpretive paradigm is hermeneutic and dialectic. Individual constructions are elicited and refined hermeneutically, and compared and contrasted dialectically, with the aim of generating one or a few constructions in which there is substantial consensus.[10] Multiple perspectives yield interpretations of meanings by participants and the researcher, who is considered to be participant observer in the study.

> Qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, document-review and analysis are predominant in a constructivist paradigm. These are applied accordingly to the assumption of the social construction of reality that, therefore, research can be conducted only through interaction between and among the researcher and participants.[11]

The methodological implication of having multiple realities is that research questions cannot be definitively established before the study begins; rather they will evolve and change as the study progress. Qualitative methods are developmental and dynamic. A primary interest of a qualitative researcher is describing and understanding this dynamic question-formulating process and its holistic effect on participants who are providing ideas. In real-world conditions where settings, situations and programs are subject to change and redirection, qualitative inquiry replaces fixed treatment and controlled experiment with a dynamic process of changing and reflecting on the data. Flexible and dynamic research is not tied to a single treatment and predetermined goals or outcomes. It focuses on the actual process and operations over a period of time.

The constructivist researcher sets out to understand the situation and describe it, making no attempt to manipulate, control or eliminate situational variables or any development as it occurs, but accepting the complexity of a changing situation. The holistic, dialectical assumptions of qualitative research methods allow the researcher to understand multiple interrelationships among dimensions that emerge from the data without making prior assumptions or specifying hypotheses about the linear or correlative relationships.

The Subjectivity-Objectivity Issue

The subjectivity–objectivity dilemma is discussed here to challenge the myth of objectivity and shed some light on the subjectivity issue and its place in transformative inquiry methods. The subjectivity-objectivity issue

has been considered a major focal point of the methodological and epistemological debate. Subjectivity is often used to signify a form of contamination in social and scientific inquiry (Apple, 1990). To be subjective is to be biased, allowing one's values to enter into and prejudice the outcome of one's research. Subjective data imply opinion rather than fact, intuition rather than logic, impression rather than confirmation.

The conventional means for controlling subjectivity and maintaining objectivity are the methods of quantitative social science: distance from people being studied, operationalizing and statistical measurement, manipulation of isolated variables and experimental designs are all means used by positivists in their research. Yet the ways in which measures are constructed in educational and psychological tests and questionnaires are, in fact, no less open to the intrusion of the researcher's biases than making observations in the field or asking questions in interviews. "Numbers do not protect against biases, they merely disguise them. All statistical data are based on someone's definition of what to measure and how to measure it."[12.]

Scriven argues that quantitative methods are no more synonymous with objectivity than qualitative methods with subjectivity. Objectivity has been considered the strength of the scientific method. The primary methods for achieving objectivity in science have been conducting blind experiments and quantification. Data are gathered through objective tests that are, it is said, not dependent on human skill or perception. However, no one doubts that tests and questionnaires are designed by human beings and are subject to the intrusion of the researcher's biases, her or his intellectual abilities, and other personal or professional qualities. There are many cases of unconscious bias or even dishonesty on behalf of the researcher in the skillful manipulation of statistics to prove a hypothesis in which the researcher antecedently believes.

Qualitative rigor has to do with the quality of observations made by the researcher. Therefore instead of focusing on refining and re-refining the instrument and limiting it more to fit into the statistical design, emphasis must be put on refining the researcher's professional and ethical qualities. That is mainly because she or he is the instrument for gathering information and also the means for summarizing, classifying and interpreting the data. Underlying assumptions of qualitative research emphasize the importance of human contact and intensive involvement of the researcher in the respondents' lives. Dialogue and dialectic are major

concepts in the constructivist paradigm and qualitative methodology; therefore, the researcher has to find ways of being fair and objective without being detached and indifferent. "Distance does not guarantee objectivity, it merely guarantees distance." Guba suggests 'fairness' as a substitute criterion. Patton suggests the concept of neutrality as a substitute for subjectivity. "The neutral researcher enters the field with no axe to grind, no theory to prove and no predetermined results to support. Rather, the researcher's commitment should be to the principles of the constructivist paradigm and its assumption of understanding wholeness and the multiple realities of the situation under study."[13] The constructivist paradigm and interpretive research methods can be described, cautiously though, as open systems that possess dissipative structures, subjective, dialectic, holistic and interactive. These characteristics allow for free flow of energy in all directions. *Relationship* is a key concept in dissipative structures and transformational research methods.

Wholeness, Relationships and Transformation

Two important concepts that allow a system to be open or closed and can embrace the rest of the qualities in both paradigms are the concepts of wholeness and relationships. Open systems accept the flow of energy in all directions and all levels by the interaction between the inquirer (researcher) and the inquired into the situation. The flow of conversations and open interviews promotes transformation. The fact that, in the constructivist paradigm, realities are multiple and researchers are willing to listen to other realities and other opinions facilitates the process of personal transformation.

Subjectivity in constructivism encourages open systems that allow for free interaction. "The knower and the known are interactive and inseparable."[14] In the constructivist paradigm there are no causal linkages, or cause-and-effect laws. Instead "all entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping", so that it is impossible to distinguish the known from the knower. In open systems, control and manipulation are less excersized than in closed systems. There is no hierarchy in open systems; the elements interact dialectically and human constructs are understood dialectically.

> Transformative relationship is a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. It is synergistic and holistic. Like a dissipative structure, it is open to the world –a celebration and exploration, not a hiding

place._To have a transformative relationship you must be open and vulnerable. Most people meet only at their peripheries.... The transformative relationship is a shared journey toward meaning. The process itself is paramount and cannot be compromised.[15]

Islamic Paradigm and Transformative Inquiry

Although the constructivist paradigm and interpretive research methods have the potential for promoting transformation at certain levels, the Islamic paradigm and transformational research methods have the capacity for more comprehensive and more coherent transformation that goes in harmony with the Islamic belief system. A holistic worldview must, in the end, draw all these levels –the personal, the social and the spiritual– into one coherent whole. The Divine Principles of wholeness and complementarity play a crucial role in creating coherence and integration between dichotomies, on both the macrosmic and microcosmic levels.

The Islamic worldview transcends the dichotomy between mind and body, as well as between inner and outer. The creative dialogue between mind, matter and soul is the basis for creativity in the universe and is also the basis for human creativity. The self experiences no dichotomy between the inner and the outer because the two – the inner world of mind and soul, the outer world of matter –give rise to each other.

The Islamic worldview is religious and rational. It is both divine and realistic. Islamic epistemology is both religious and rational. What relates these conceptual frameworks is *divinity* and *humanity*. At all conceptual levels there are two threads, a golden thread and a silver thread, which are intimately interwoven in this conceptual tapestry to formulate Islamic designs and thoughts.

The *golden thread* is the divine, the spiritual, the religious, the eternal, the constant, the absolute and the ideal toward which individuals strive. The *silver thread* is the human, the material, the rational, the temporary, the mutable, the relative and the actual that we live and experience. The golden and the silver threads are so intimately interwoven in the Islamic tapestry of knowledge and action that any separation between them will damage the unity, harmony and coherence of the Islamic designs which give this uniqueness to Islamic thoughts.

What is important here is that these two threads are both working together to create *one* design; the golden thread on the divine and spiritual level, the silver thread on the human and material level. Although they are

working at different levels, they are working toward one ultimate goal. This intermingling between the spiritual and material, between the golden and the silver threads eventually ends up as a pure single golden thread, which embodies the concept of *tawhid* –unity and harmony in Islam.

The fragmented worldview of positivism and quantitative research methods that social scientists have adopted for decades increase the dichotomy in our consciousness and the knowledge produced through such research methods.

> Ever since Plato, the West has stressed the rational and the analytic, the rules by which we form thoughts and make decisions... The cost of this has been the overlooking of another side to human knowing and experience, what might be called the intuitive side, the side that draws on wisdom, imagination, and creativity. In modern neurophysiological terms, these two sides of our mental life have been spoken of as the right brain/left brain split, and our culture as a left-brain culture. Using an equally good metaphor from quantum physics, we might speak of this situation as a particle/wave split and say that our culture has emphasized the particle aspect of the mind.[16]

To sum up, transformation in any field and at any level is possible only through an open system and dissipative structures. In this paper, the positivist paradigm and experimental research methods and statistical designs are regarded as closed systems that prevent transformation consciously or subconsciously. On the other hand, the constructivist paradigm and interpretive inquiry and research methods are considered too-open systems, because of their underlying assumptions, which are not appropriate for the production of Islamic knowledge. Finally, the Islamic paradigm and transformative inquiry and qualitative research methods are considered as open systems guided by the Islamic paradigm that promote and encourage transformation because of the underlying concept of wholeness.

In the following section I will present four research methods that have the potential to be part of transformative inquiry, mainly because of the wholeness and openness of the methods and their ability to encompass the complexity of the relationships of human beings and the society. In addition, complementarity and uncertainty are built-in qualities in transformative inquiry. Transformation occurs, I believe, when the system is open and has dissipative structures where elements, ideas, thoughts, and feelings flow freely, consciously and subconsciously. Phenomenology,

hermeneutic, heuristic and narrative inquiry are presented here as open systems that allow for transformation, and if integrated with the Islamic paradigm, have the potential of producing Islamic knowledge.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is defined as "the systematic investigation of subjectivity".[17] Langeveld explains the aims of phenomenology are to study the world as it appears to us in and through consciousness. The value of a phenomenological study is measured in terms of its power to let us come to the understanding of ourselves and understanding of lives of those for whom we bear pedagogical responsibility. The phenomenologist views human behavior, what people say and do, as a product of how people experience and define their world. The task for the phenomenologist and for us, the qualitative methodologist, is to capture this process of interpretation. In brief, the phenomenologist attempts to understand things from other people's points of view.

A phenomenological system has different sets of premises, and consequently demands ethical restraints. The system is premised on rather radically different presumptions and assumptions regarding reality, the role of the researcher, the interaction and the relationship between the researcher and the researched, and the possibility of a value-free science. Beginning with the premise that reality is a socially constructed entity, the phenomenologist looks in natural contexts for the ways in which individuals and groups make sense of their worlds. The collection of those intact realities or constructions, and interpretation of how those realities got constructed, and the understanding of meaning-making are the main features of phenomenologically oriented inquiries.

At this point I would like to discuss how an open system, like phenomenology for example, can act as a two-edged sword. On the one hand an open system of inquiry can be considered as mind-and-soul liberating because of its openness to accommodate different views from all participants in the study. This process is called constructing realities, when the phenomenologist listens to participants as they are revealing their stories and reconstructing them. That is definitely those participants' realities and nobody else's, and that is why phenomenology is defined as a systematic investigation into subjectivity. The danger lies not in constructing those "realities", but in *interpreting* them from a relativist perspective. It is here that many qualitative methods fail to create holistic

knowledge. However, the problem is not in qualitative methods, phenomenology, or narrative. The problem is in the constructivist/interpritivist paradigm that is relativist and whose reality is socially constructed; that is to say, there is no belief in an objective reality 'out there'.

From an Islamic perspective, reality is holistic and one, and from the wholeness emerges the absolute and the relative, the permanent and the temporal, the good and the evil. Therefore, realities should be interpreted in the light of the Islamic essence of *tawheed*. This is to say socially constructed realities have to be understood with reference to what "ought to be" and not to what "is."

In thinking about reconstructing knowledge that facilitates and creates an Islamic epistemology, methods of social studies should be reconstructed first. Islamic scholars as well as western scholars have expressed disenchantment about scientific research methods. Al Faruqi highlights three major shortcomings that render scientific approaches to research inappropriate to Islamic knowledge: (a) the denial of relevance to a priori data; (b) false sense of objectivity; (c) personalist versus *ummatic* axiology. He states that

> The western student of human nature and society was not in the mood to realize that not all the pertinent data of human behavior are observable by the senses and hence subject to quantification and measurement...Being spiritual, these elements are not isolable, separate from their natural carriers. Nor are they ever subject to the only measurement science knows, the quantitative. Science treated them as nonexistent or irrelevant.[18]

He discusses an important feature of scientific, western methodology that violates a crucial requirement of Islamic methodology, namely unity of truth. In addition Al Faruqi explains how empathy and perception of values are themselves subjective processes.

> The perception of value is impossible unless the human behavior is able to move the observer. Similarly, the observer cannot be moved unless he is trained to be affected, and unless he has empathy with the object of his experience. The subject's attitude toward the data studied determines the outcome of the study. This is why the humanistic studies of western scientists are necessarily "western" and cannot serve as models for the study of Muslims or their society.[19]

Finally, perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of Islamic methodology is the principle of the unity of truth. This principle holds that truth is a modality of God and is inseparable from Him, that truth is one just as God is one. It is hence invalid to seek to establish knowledge of human reality without acknowledging what that reality ought to be. Any investigation of a human "is" must therefore include its standing as an "ought to be" within the realm of possibility.

An important feature of Islamic methodology and knowledge throughout history is its wholeness. A holistic, phenomenological or naturalistic methodology no doubt could create integrated, unified knowledge that leads to the realization of the unity of truth. By realizing and accepting the dialectical concept of *tawheed,* Muslim scholars are challenged to search for truth in contradictory and opposing ideas and situations. Studying any problem phenomenologically allows the researcher to examine the situation as it reveals itself naturally without a priori conditioning. It also allows the researcher to observe the relationship between various elements as they interact in a natural setting. By doing so, the researcher is in a position to see and experience a "whole" picture, or at least as whole as human limitations permit.

An educational problem, for example, if studied holistically or phenomenologically, reveals the interaction between the individual and the situation. Philosophically speaking, the method reveals the interaction between human beings and the universe. Scientific approaches, however, can not encompass the wholeness of problems.

The answer to these shortcomings lies, of course, in the phenomenological method, which requires that the observer let the phenomena speak for themselves rather than force them into any predetermined ideational framework; let the eidetic vision of essence order the data for the understanding and be corroborated by them. These essentials of the phenomenological method were known to and meticulously observed by the Muslim scholar Abu al Rayhan al Biruni (440/1048) in his classical study of the religion and culture of India. The methodological principles he established were continued in a long tradition of comparative learning and writing by Muslims. The phenomenological method was first introduced into western philosophy by Edmund Husserl, and into the study of ethics and religion by Max Scheler.[20]

Al Biruni used phenomenology and other methods of inquiry to study and understand India and its complex and rich culture. When he started his

study on India in his book, *Verification of What is Said on India, (Tahgig mà lil-Hind min Maqàlatin)*, Al Biruni was confronted with a difficult task of how to understand a civilization with radically different customs, values, language and understanding of the world. Al Biruni was recognizing the dilemma involved in all interpretations of other civilizations, especially when he had his doubts about the reliability of the reports and translations that were available. So he created his own multi-methods for studying other cultures. Nine centuries ago, Al Biruni used what is called today triangulation to gain understanding of Indian civilizations. According to Chelkowski, Al Biruni used three methods. First he would let the Hindus speak for themselves in their own words. "It was rather a way towards truth." Second, Al Biruni went through the painstaking task of "learning the language most suitable for gaining insight into the civilization."[21]

Al Biruni's choice was Sanskrit. He chose Sanskrit to be able to read and analyze the written documents and to understand the roots of the culture. He wanted to know the "ought to be" from the Hindu perspective. The third method used by Al Biruni was the comparative method, in "his comparison of Hindu with Greek ideas, and secondly, with Sufi and Christian concepts... he wanted to emphasize the common humanity of the Hindus to bring their learning into the same kind of fruitful relationship with Islamic thought as Greek thought had already attained."[22]

By analyzing the multiple methods used by Al Biruni in his studies of a different civilization and culture, we realize that he used qualitative research methods in his phenomenological approach. He used three major techniques for collecting the data for his study. First, he interviewed Hindus and allowed them to reveal their stories or to "construct their realities". Second, he studied the language of the religious text to be able to read and understand the belief system from the written text so that he was able to interpret what is said by people as they construct their realities, what "is" with what "ought to be" as it is written in the books of religion. So interpretation is done in the context of that civilization.

Thirdly, Al Biruni used comparative study methods to compare and contrast to understand the similarities and differences. So Al Biruni employed interviewing, participant observation, document analysis and comparative methods for his phenomenological study. This is an illustration of how constructivist/interpretive and phenomenological methods can be used effectively if guided by an Islamic worldview, a worldview that is holistic and open and does not allow for a priori

misconception. The emphasis is always on the worldview because it is the root and the base for all other elements that constitute any civilization. No matter how powerful any methodology is, if it is based on a fragmented paradigm or worldview, that methodology is doomed to be fragmented and reductionist.

> It is this all-embracing emphasis on the unity of science and religion, knowledge and values, physics and metaphysics, which gives Islamic science its unique character. And it is its insistence on multiplicity of methods which gives it a characteristic style with synthesis as its main feature... As such, Islamic science is subjectively objective, that is, it seeks subjective goals within an objective framework.[23]

Hermeneutics

Any inquiry regarded from an Islamic perspective ought to be multi-dimensional and multi-leveled. No issue, no matter how small, is one-dimensional. Accordingly, a multi-dimensional problem cannot be understood and analyzed if multi-dimensional methods are not used. Researchers have to be open and flexible to operate within different inquiry methods to be able to capture the complexity of the phenomena under study. Both phenomenology and heuristic inquiry deal with personal, subjective experiences of the participants or the phenomena under study. "Hermeneutics itself is a very old type of text study that was originally confined to theological documents. The word simply means 'interpretation'. Over time, the strategies of hermeneutics have undergone various reformations."[24]

Hermeneutics is much older than phenomenology, essentially a form of exegesis. It was developed for examination of biblical texts. It is defined in dictionaries as "the art and science of interpretation". "Martin Heidegger and then Paul Ricoeur masterfully appropriated hermeneutics for the social sciences by suggesting that human actions can be understood and interpreted, the same way a written text appears to the reader."[25] Accepting the idea of "reading society as a text' as suggested by R. H. Brown[26], we can use hermeneutics as an effective tool for understanding the complexity of the society and the collective action of human beings in certain situations.

> The notion of text is a good paradigm for human asction. [because] human action is in many ways a quasi-text. Even more like a text, of which the meaning has been freed from the initial conditions of its

production, action, like a text, is an open work, addressed to an indefinite series of possible "readers".[27]

Hermeneutics, therefor, deals with social issues and the collective consciousness. Social issues are as important as personal issues if not more, because they touch the lives of many people. Islam addresses social issues in the Divine Book and emphasizes on concept of *ummah* (the concept of Islamic community and nation).

> The social order is the heart of the society, and stands prior to the personal. Indeed, Islam views the personal as a necessary prerequisite for societal and regards human character as warped if it rests with the personal and does not transcend it to the societal.[28]

Hermeneutics is more interested in the social than the individual meaning of actions. "Unlike phenomenology, hermeneutics is not concerned with the experienced intention of the individual, but takes action as an access through which to interpret the larger social context of meaning within which it is embedded" (Anastoos, 1987, p. 15). However, like phenomenology, hermeneutics involves an attempt to describes and study meaningful phenomena in a systematic, sincere and passionate manner. Passionate, because the researcher cannot distance herself or himself from the phenomena under study, whether engaged in hermeneutic, heuristic or phenomenological inquiry. Within a hermeneutic approach, the relationship between the knower and the known may be a close mutual relationship of respect and empathy.

Reflection on Personal Experiences and Connection to the Self

It is through methods like heuristic and narrative inquiry that this paper contributes, I hope, to the paradigm shift in contemporary Islamic literature. By that, I mean the inclusion of personal experiences as the base for discovering and revealing stories or events in the past and the way those events have participated in knowledge acquisition and knowledge production. Reflection on personal experiences allows one to realize the hidden meanings of events which otherwise go unnoticed. By reflecting, we are able to deconstruct what outsiders and strangers to our culture have documented as facts and reconstruct our experiences in the light of the current situation and the new knowledge we acquire.

Starting with our selves, I believe, is crucial for both students and scholars. If the aim is to contribute to the creation of Islamic knowledge, as most contemporary Muslim scholars advocate, then an examination of the inner soul is essential. In personal experiences are hidden stories of the soul, stories that touch the core; we know they are not only important but sacred too. We treasure those experiences because we know they are real, and only we know that.

Islamic knowledge is used in this paper to mean knowledge that is based on an Islamic paradigm and emerges from Islamic epistemology and Islamic methodology. So both graduate students and scholars are able to create and produce knowledge that is appropriate for Islamic communities and addresses their concerns and their problems. Production of Islamic knowledge is a major concern of this paper; reflection on personal experiences provides researchers with an immediate, real and original source of knowledge which has been neglected and down-played by positivists for too long.

I started the journey, which I wrote in detail in my book *Islamic Epistemology: Wholeness and Holiness in Education*, reluctantly; thinking this undertaking is personal and not academic or professional. I felt uncomfortable, at first, stumbling in the darkness of the subconscious. Gradually, I started seeing a glimpse of light here and there. Then suddenly I was in an open plane with a blue sky flooded with sunshine. In a moment of realization, I saw the tapestry of my life in front of me. I saw the golden thread of spirituality and Love woven in that tapestry from one end to the other. I realized the conflict between the intellectual and spiritual sides of my being, and I perceived the conflict between the East and the West inside me and in my society. Working my way through the conflict and the struggle, I reached a stage of reconciliation in myself and hoped that it would happen in the society too. Through dialogue, conversation with the 'other,' we can reach a peaceful stage of reconciliation.

Ever since, I have started writing on the notions of the Islamic paradigm and have tried to interweave it into my teaching and my theories of learning and teaching. Education became more meaningful for me and my students at the university when it was pursued from an Islamic, holistic perspective. Being introduced to the Islamic paradigm and Islamic epistemology in evaluation and research methods courses, my students started analyzing and understanding theories of psychology, sociology and education from that perspective. Their exposure to Islamic epistemology

affected all their university courses. They were set on journeys of self-exploration and reflection.

One way of regaining our wholeness and holiness in education is through connecting to our inner self through our intimate experiences. Retelling those experiences, however, allows us to reconstruct them and evaluate them in a different light. Reconstruction of experiences, I believe, facilitates transformation that should be the aim of education. Therefore, this paper aims at integrating the personal and the professional; the intellectual and the spiritual; the inner and the outer, so as to fulfill the thesis of wholeness and holiness in education.

My aim is to encourage Muslim students in North America and Europe to reflect on their personal experiences, to find the golden thread in their lives, the spiritual, acknowledge it and utilize it in their personal and professional lives. I want to encourage becoming whole, and acknowledging the Sacred that is inside every one, and making it part of our daily living. The moment of realizing the Sacred and acknowledging it will be a turning point in lives, and inevitably their study will take an Islamic turn. No matter what they are studying – science, technology, sociology, psychology or astronomy- when they start analyzing theories on those fields from an Islamic perspective, the spiritual and the sacred permeate naturally and profoundly.

Although personal experiences are basically 'personal', when we as human beings reflect on them and share them with others, we realize to what extent our personal experiences are intermingled and interconnected with the 'other' and with the experiences of the society. We start to see the common grounds we share with others, and how similar or different our experiences are. By sharing our personal experiences we also realize how unique each individual's experiences are. Reflection on my personal experiences helped me first realize, then develop my dialectical thinking which helped me in going back and forth between my intellectual and spiritual experiences, between the East and the West, and between the experiences of the society and community and my personal stories.

In the process of reflecting and narrating my personal stories, I learned how to construct and reconstruct past experiences in the light of new knowledge. I realized that we human beings make meaning out of our experiences, and that is an essential part of being human. We pass through many experiences, but if we do not reflect on them and reconstruct the meaning in these experiences (and we usually do not), they pass our

consciousness and are stored in the subconscious until an event triggers them and brings them to life. Polanyi says,

> As human beings, we must inevitably see the universe from a center lying within us and speak it in terms of a human language shaped by the exigencies of human intercourse. Any attempt to rigorously eliminate our human perspective from our picture of the world must lead to absurdity.[29]

If we do not value our experiences that are deep within ourselves, we will always feel estranged and alien to ourselves. And as Oscar Wilde rightly said, denial of our experiences will be like the denial of the soul. We as spiritual beings know what denial of the soul means. We know the pain of separation that is caused by denial of the soul.

Research and thinking are always based on personal concerns. Even when the issues that preoccupy us, as researchers, are mainly social, political, spiritual, or affect humanity in general, there are always highly personal reasons why these more universal issues mean so much to us.

Through narrating my stories to myself and reflecting on them, I came to an awareness of the importance of narrative inquiry as a research method that enables us as writers and researchers to shed some light on our personal experiences. By doing so we reconstruct our experiences and create meanings that help us understand, value and appreciate those experiences or reject them consciously and try to deal with them at the conscious level. What is certainly true is that we trust certain methods of research and reflection because they make sense to us, because they shed light on issues that are personally important to us, possibly even because they lend themselves naturally to researching and reconstructing personal experiences. For reflection on personal experiences, I relied on narrative inquiry as a profound method.

It might BE worth reminding the reader that the major theme of this paper is to promote an alternative holistic paradigm for developing holistic education that leads eventually to the production of Islamic knowledge, an education that addresses the personal as an essential part of the professional as one whole entity. As Morgan (1983) tates:

> There is a contribution of knowledge if the researcher can identify generic process or patterns through which human beings construct and make sense of their realities. This evidence generated by the interpretive researcher is much more likely to be of an evocative rather than comprehensive kind, to be sustained, rejected or refined through

future studies. The conclusion of one study merely provides a starting point in a continuing cycle of inquiry.[30]

We have to be taught to take our own experiences seriously. I am convinced that hidden in our lives are springs that, if tapped at the right time, can quench the thirst to discover the source for our struggle, pain and conflict.

By reflecting on personal experiences, I also want to encourage students and scholars to follow the golden thread of their spiritual experience and to bring to life the wholeness and holiness of their Islamic identity, or lack of identity for that matter. Muslim students can contribute actively in deconstructing, constructing and reconstructing Islamic knowledge not only by choosing topics related to the Islamic ummah but, more importantly, by using research methods that are rooted in the Islamic paradigm and interpreting their studies from an Islamic perspective and within an Islamic paradigm. For the purpose of this paper two research methods are presented as having the potential for reflection on personal experiences, heuristic research and narrative inquiry.

Heuristic Research

Heuristic Research is another type of inquiry that I categorize as an open system and that has the potential for transformation both of the research and the researcher. I focus in this section on the approach used by Moustakas. The nature and the underlying assumptions of heuristic research are such that it engages the researcher in an intense relationship and transformation is only a natural process of such inquiry. As researchers, we always choose the methods that are more appropriate for the nature of the questions that are asked. Moustakas focuses on transformation of the self during the processes of the research. The importance of heuristic research lies in its ability to engage the researcher in intense relationship with the phenomena she or he is studying. The phenomena under study in such inquiry is usually a deep personal experience that had or still has a great effect on the researcher, an experience that touched deeper corners of her/his being. Moustakas defines heuristic research as

> The process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experiences and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis... Heuristic processes incorporate creative self-processes and self-discoveries. In such a method not only

is knowledge extended but the self of the researcher is illuminated.[31]

It is this illumination and awakening of the soul that I would like to emphasize in the academic world and in this book. Research can be empty, cold and dispassionate if it does not touch the core inside us. Heuristic inquiry involves self-search and self-discovery and self-dialogue. The intensity of the experience reflects the importance of that experience to the awakening of the soul. Because of the autobiographical nature of the heuristic inquiry, the researcher is set on a journey to the inner self. When she or he is touched by the meeting of the soul, nothing can be the same again; it is here that transformation occurs. Experiences take different directions and deeper meaning. The Heuristic research demands the total and undivided presence of the whole person-body, mind and soul, to enter this intense experience and "to risk the opening of wounds and passionate concerns and to undergo the personal transformation that exists as a possibility in every heuristic journey."[32]

Heuristic inquiry is a method that has the potential for engaging researchers in soul searching and the discovery of the inner self. The ultimate aim, however, is transformation from divided mind, body and soul to a whole person who accepts her/his intellectual as well as her/his spiritual experiences as one unified whole. Moustakas suggests six stages that a researcher passes through to accomplish a heuristic research: 1) Identifying the focus of inquiry; 2) self-dialogue; 3) tacit-knowing; 4) intuition; 5) in-dwelling; 6) focusing (pp. 15-25). Then he identifies the phases of heuristic research: 1) initial engagement; 2) immersion; 3) inculcation; 4) illumination; 5) explication; 6) creative synthesis.[33]

> The conscious aspect of the individual consists of transformed unconscious energy. Transformation occurs as energy moves from unconscious side of the person to the conscious side. Another way of appreciating the significance of this process and the importance of the unconscious in social life, stems from the realization that transformation lies at the basis of meaningful action. Meaningful experiences involve the discovery of capacities and potential in self and situations that have previously remained hidden.[34]

What is important thus in any research is the positive energy produced by such transformation and realization for reconstructing of the self and the situation under study. Without such transformation, education remains a

meaningless process that has no real effect on students, teachers and society in general. The choice of methodology determines to what extent the researcher is aware of the importance of her/his study and the knowledge that will be produced by such methodology. Being ready and prepared to go through the pain of creating and discovering also reflects the maturity of the researcher and the work that is going to be produced. The transformational perspective focuses on creating a dialogue between the extremes in life: the internal and the external, the subjective and the objective. The problem of the social researcher, as Morgan states, is thus "one of finding an appropriate means of linking one's self to the situation being researched."[35] Therefore, to fulfill the thesis of this paper, which is promoting production of Islamic knowledge, it is important to suggest paradigms and methods that are appropriate for developing Islamic knowledge. Methods that help researchers in the transformation process and in relating their inner self to the situation under study.

What are important in any methodology used are not only the techniques and protocols of that inquiry but more importantly, the paradigm that regulates and affects the interpretation of the constructed meanings. What makes any research Islamic or non-Islamic, however, is not the research method only, but the paradigm that leads the interpretation. Any Islamic interpretation cannot be called so if it is not rooted in the Islamic, holistic paradigm where the Divine Principles of the One and the Absolute are in the center.

Narrative and Autobiography

We are coming to realize the power of rhetoric and narrative and dialogue for understanding ourselves and others. The telling of stories or songs of experiences, if you will, signals the return of the inquirer as a morally and emotionally engaged knower. We are obligated to explore how acknowledging and celebrating this engagement furthers our efforts to interpret ourselves to ourselves.[36]

Narrative inquiry is another complementary method in the multi-method approach to research that has gained momentum over the last two decades; interested readers may refer to the following authors on narrative as an inquiry: F. Connelly and D. Clandinin (1989); D. Clandinin and F. Connelly (1996); J. Mezirow (1990)D. Furlong (1994); D. Thomas (1995). Narrative inquiry, like several other qualitative research methods, has the potential to create holistic knowledge if rooted in a holistic paradigm.

However, if narrative is rooted in one-dimensional paradigms like the interpretivist/constructivist, where the nature of reality is relative and there is no absolute, objective reality, or guided by idealists/positivists, where the nature of reality is absolute and singular even if applied to temporary and daily-life situations, then knowledge produced by narrative is one- dimensional and does not contribute to production of holistic knowledge. Since reality is both relative and absolute, this-worldly and otherworldly, subjective and objective, it is only common sense that methodologies employed to understand and interpret this complex reality must be of sufficient power and sophistication to understand these complexities. No one methodology has yet been discovered that is able to do so. Therefore, multiple methods, for the present time, may construe a trustworthy approach to use.

Research and thinking are always based on personal concerns. Even when the issues that preoccupy us are mainly social, political or spiritual or affect humanity in general, there are always highly personal reasons why these more universal issues mean so much to us. What is certainly true is that we researchers trust certain methods of research and reflection because they have made sense to us, because they have shed light on issues that are personally important to us, possibly even because they are related to important events of childhood. Stories prove that much more is hidden in our lives than we at first realize. We have to learn to take our own experience seriously. My reflection on personal experiences has persuaded me that, hidden in our lives, are resources for understanding and interpretation. Contact with our own life story is for us a way to self-discovery, self-dialogue and self-knowledge, and beyond that an entry to our soul and our spirituality. No matter what the internal phenomena is that we are trying to understand, as long as it is inside us and we risk opening old wounds, that journey puts us in touch with our real self, our soul.

Seeking knowledge within the self or seeking the meaning of one's life can be the hardest riddle or koan of all. Each of us is unique and the journey inward leads us through the blind spots of our own vision. Yet, we know the way; we have come from there.[37]

Narrative inquiry, if practiced within an Islamic paradigm, can illuminate the soul and awaken the inner self because of its inherited qualities of intimacy and courage. Such inquiry involves the difficult task of entering one's own soul and subconscious. Yet doing so empowers us with the courage to create and reconstruct our personal experiences and to go

beyond the pain and the hurt, and transforms the pain to higher qualities of acceptance, understanding and submission to God's will. Narrative inquiry can be the first step in the long spiritual journey, where we are in continuous dialogue with our inner self, God and the "other".

Conclusion

To sum up, education has been suffering from unidimensionality at all levels for a long time in schools and at universities in the East and the West. Being scientific and rational is the key word for success in schooling and in life in general. The human being is regarded as mind and body only, and that is reflected on the education system. Intellectuality and rationality are reinforced and encouraged, while spirituality and intuition are downplayed and ignored. The ultimate goal of life is being reduced to achieving worldly and material objectives. The goal of purifying the soul to attain the ultimate truth and the hereafter is being ignored in education and in the life generally.

This paper is an attempt to bring back wholeness and holiness to education through transformative inquiry that leads to an Islamic theory of knowledge as a first step in producing Islamic knowledge that is based on the Islamic paradigm and emerges from Islamic epistemology. Being a teacher for a long time in school and at the university encourages me to address philosophical issues at a practical level that allows students to look at the roots of the knowledge they are acquiring and the knowledge they are producing later in graduate schools and as researchers. Fragmentation of knowledge and therefore of the self exists in all circles consciously and/or subconsciously. Philosophical questions are an essential part that exists within us from an early age. If they are not addressed at that early age, then we are planting the seeds of fragmentation. So education has to be rooted in philosophical issues and students should be aware of that philosophical base to be able to see the roots of what they are learning. Without such awareness, what students learn does not exceed their academic records and the celebration of their graduation. The transformational perspective is proposed in this paper as a means of creating Islamic knowledge, a knowledge that is meaningful to Muslim students and scholars, because transformation lies at the basis of meaningful action as Morgan says. Transformation has been proved to be of irreversible flow upward in the scale of being.

What is intriguing to me is that both Sader al Mutalheen Al Shirazi, who is known also as Mulla Sadra, the 16th century Muslim philosopher, and the 20th century Belgian physical chemist, Ilya Prigogine, the winner of the Noble prize in 1977 for his theory of dissipative structures and the "irreversible processes", reached the same conclusion, one from a philosophical perspective and the other from a purely scientific perspective. Prigogine (1980) explains in detail his theory of dissipative structures and how living things have been running uphill in the universe. He also explains the inherent transformative nature of living things and the movement to a more complex and perfect thing. The paradox in this theory is an intriguing one. The more coherent the structure, the more unstable it is. This very instability is the key to transformation. The dissipation of energy, as Prigogine demonstrated mathematically, creates the potential of sudden reordering.

Mulla Sadra, on the other hand, explains the process of transformation and perfection of body-soul complex as follows:

> Movement-in-substance is not universal change or flux without direction, the product of conflict between two equally powerful principles, or a reflection of the non-being of the world of nature when measured against the world of permanent forms. It is rather the natural beings' innate desire to become more perfect, which directs this ceaseless self renewal, self origination, or self-emergence into a perpetual and irreversible flow upward in the scale of being – from the simplest elements to the human body-soul complex and the heavenly body-soul complex, both of which participate in the general instability, origination, and passing of being that characteristics the entire corporal world. The human body-soul complex and the heavenly body-soul complex are not moved externally by the intelligences. Their movement is an extension of the process of self-reflection. Having reached the highest rank of order of substance in the corporal world, they are now prepared, and still moved by their innate desire, to flow upward and transform themselves into pure intelligence.[38]

This topic opens new avenues for researchers and scholars to look into transformation in more depth and to relate philosophical concepts and scientific research of applied sciences to understand in a practical way the relationship of the microcosm and the macrocosm.

Notes

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