Islamic Education:
A Challenge to Conscience
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Introduction

The aim of this article and its importance is to show how the Islamic view of education can make a timely contribution to the contemporary world. This can be demonstrated because Islam is inclusive of the material and spiritual dimensions of human existence and emphasizes primordial values for the cultivation of life in this world and for the preparation of life in the postresurrection. Although Islam acknowledges the great strides of the human mind in the accumulation and application of acquired knowledge, and though it recognizes certain virtues in humanism, it does not make man "the measure of all things." Islamic education goes beyond secularism by making God's revelation in the Holy Book/Qur'an the absolute measure of all things. This is the norm by which we must determine our intention in all our actions, as well as our sense of duty, responsibility, and accountability to God, our fellow human beings, and nature without compromising fundamental values.

Modern Western civilization has seen the rapid rise of science and technology and their enormous potentials for production as well as destruction. Two world wars, the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, and (in our present day) the Gulf War have demonstrated without the shadow of a doubt that whereas science and technology can create and produce, they can also destroy. However, it does not follow that because we are advanced in nuclear physics we have wars. The cause-and-effect relationship between technology and war does not necessarily follow. There is no such thing as scientific/technological determinism. Technology of its own accord cannot determine a course of action. Nor is there such a thing as the conscience of science or technology. It is only the human being who has a conscience, and it is always the human being in the background who determines how science and technology should be

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used. Technology is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end and the qualitative nature of that end is determined by the moral and spiritual character of the human agent(s) who makes the decisions. Whether it is used for good or evil depends on the conscience of the agents who make the decisions. "Knowledge is power" is a famous dictum of Bacon, and history has proved him right in the various transformations of the world. But the dictum that knowledge is power has to be understood in light of power to do either good or evil. Milton Mayer reminds us that the motto of the university which created the atom bomb stated: "Let knowledge grow from more to more, that human life may be enriched." And he goes on to explain that not too far from that motto there is a plaque which commemorates "the achievement of the first sustained nuclear chain reaction." The inscription on the plaque was to have commenced with the words "For good or for evil" but someone made the suggestion that if that were so, then the motto of the university should read "that human life be enriched or impoverished." The disorder and suffering caused by the bomb is a moral issue of great proportions. Mayer writes:

> When the most knowledgeable (and therefore the richest) societies, with the longest history of civilized institutions, lead the world in suicide, insanity, alcoholism, divorce, crime, delinquency, and the splendid control of disease (including venereal disease), what critical need have they—or, for that matter, the least knowledgeable societies—for knowledge?[1]

The critical issue here, however, is not knowledge, but the abuse of it. Knowledge per se is amoral. It is the human agent who can defy his conscience to aim at goals that violate human rights and freedoms. Any hope that technology will play a salvific role in society has now faded. The fact remains that so long as a secular and materialist mentality dominates our educational and political systems, production, nationalism, militarism, and economics will be the goal.

In a very real sense, Islamic education is a form of jihad.[2] In Western societies, the term jihad is often misunderstood. It does not mean an excuse for violence. In essence, it means "striving," "struggle," or "exertion" in the path of God, and this is the very core of Islamic training. In the first place, it is to be understood as an internal, conscientious struggle of every believer against egocentricity, greed, and all forms of evil thought. In the second place, it is an external struggle against evil as it manifests itself in society at large. It is a struggle to pattern one's life on the principles of the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the Shari'ah, with the intention of establishing right relationships with God, man, and nature; and thus it promotes order and justice, rights and freedoms for everyone. Looking at it from this perspective, jihad is the struggle against the tri-dimensional alienation that is so characteristic of our existential condi-

tion: alienation from God, from one another, and from nature. Syed Ali Ashraf explains:

> The development of personality is seen in the context of Man's relationship with God, Man and Nature. Therefore the organization of disciplines and arrangements of subjects are planned with reference to Man as an individual, Man as a social being and Man as a being who has to live in harmony with Nature. His individuality, his collective existence and his existence as a natural entity are all conditioned by his relationship with God.[3]

Muslims must pursue a system of education that will cultivate human conscience in the ways of God to "battle" against religious, social, and ecological divisiveness that is so characteristic of our modern technological world. The real culprit here is the human agent, and the only hope for a lasting remedy is a radical transformation of life. Without such a conversion of conscience, all attempts to treat the threefold divisiveness will amount to nothing more than a treatment of symptoms, leaving the root of the problem to rejuvenate itself. As long as a materialist and secularist mentality governs our educational and political institutions, revealed truth will be relegated to a secondary position in relation to science and technology; and the problem of divisiveness will persist while the threat to our total well-being will continuously haunt us. All forms of enlightened doctrines on ethics, morality, and the philosophy of education will fall short of a satisfactory remedy, in spite of their noble intention. Granted, these may provide temporary solutions to some of our problems, but it is not until human beings submit themselves to the will of God that there can be any real hope for a lasting remedy. The Islamic position is quite clear. The man whose will is in tune with that of the Divine arouses no fear, because he understands all his relationships and activities in terms of his duty to the Divine. In light of this, Islam upholds those two great maxims of Socrates and Bacon, respectively, that "knowledge is virtue" and that "knowledge is power."

The Pursuit and Application of the Good

The Islamic philosophy of education provides the scope for the preparation of life in this world and in the hereafter. Education has a temporal as well as a supratemporal goal. Nevertheless, Islam does not share in the Western dichotomy of secular and sacred education. It is a processive unfolding and cultivation of the essential nature of human beings in relationship with God, the community, and nature. Knowledge is power for good and noble ends, if it is directed in accordance with the Divine will; but for this to take place the human being must be ready to become an instrument of the Divine through total surrender to His will. In his pref-

ace to *Crisis in Muslim Education,* Ashraf gives a comprehensive frame of reference to education when he writes:

> Education is a process involving three references: the individual, the society or national community to which he or she belongs, and the whole content of reality, both material and spiritual, which plays a dominant role in determining the nature and destiny of Man and Society.[4]

Islamic education steers clear of the two extremes—the ascetic negation, which emphasizes the spiritual and the mystical but negates the material; and the materialist affirmation, which emphasizes that the empirical and scientific have supreme value, but negates the spiritual and mystical. Muslim education is concerned with development of a well-integrated personality, which includes the spiritual, physical, intellectual, social, and moral faculties that comprise the human.

Muslim educators are very cautious of Western liberal education. And understandably so, because almost every area of knowledge has been influenced by it—though not for the better. Husain and Ashraf are strong advocates for the formulation of "Islamic concepts as substitutes for liberal concepts." They contend that "The greatest danger of liberal education is the creation of a bewildering variety of ideas and thoughts."[5] Cragg and Speight responded to this critique by arguing that such a view of "education is not dynamically open but serves to inculcate a given creed."[6] I would like to respond to Cragg's and Speight's critique of Husain's and Ashraf's position. In the first place, it is the responsibility and primary duty of every healthy religion to educate its adherents in the fundamentals of its tradition as they pertain to their historical and cultural backgrounds, doctrines, rituals, ethics, manners, and customs. Islam has carried out this responsibility in an exemplary manner. Undoubtedly, this is one of the major reasons why it is the fastest growing religion in the world today. Unsurprisingly, by the year 2020 Islam will comprise one quarter of the world's population. Certainly, Islam does not need to take any lessons from Western liberal education, and definitely not from some Western Christian seminaries and theological colleges whose educational programs are so "dynamically open" and so liberal about their "given creed" that their entire system has reached a point of *reductio ad absurdum,* where self-gratifying intellectual gymnastics, individualism, and liberalism have substituted divine revelation and faith with skepticism.

In the second place, Husain and Ashraf are by no means advocating a narrow approach to the pursuit of knowledge and a well-rounded education. If this were the case, they would stand in contradiction to the Islamic aim of education. The development of Islam and its dynamic intellectual expressions in various disciplines, especially during the

West's slumber in the so-called Dark Ages, are historical phenomena that testify to the fact that the Islamic pursuit of knowledge is dynamically open, contrary to Cragg's and Speight's observation. And if there has been any indication of the inculcation of a given creed, Islam is exempt from all apologies because *iman/shahada* (belief/witnessing that "there is no god only Allah and that Muhammad is His messenger") and *'ibadat* (acts of worship) comprise its orthodox and practical dimensions, which are foundational to the entire tradition. Education as a processive pursuit of truth is insufficient, unless human beings are challenged to become the doers of truth. Consequently, the inculcation of the noble creed, the challenge to surrender to the will of Allah, and the invitation to perform God's commands as a duty to Him and to all His creation is what, when taken together, gives to education its real existential depth and meaning from the Islamic perspective. Contrary to the assumptions of Cragg and Speight, Husain's and Ashraf's appeal to substitute liberal concepts with Islamic concepts is not intended to negate free, rational, and critical investigation or helpful methodologies in intellectual inquiry. By an appeal for such a substitution they are not recommending a defensive education that will paralyze freedom of speech, self-assertion and free reflection, nor are they advocating a disinvention of technologies and reversal of contact between East and West; however, they are committed to the liberation of human beings from the dangers of "a bewildering variety of ideas and thoughts" created by liberal education. It is such ideas and thoughts that have become a threat to primordial values as they pertain to a sense of duty to God, man, and nature; to marriage and the family; to law, justice, and order. Western liberal education has placed so much emphasis on individuality—individual rights, freedom of choice, freedom of speech and expression—that the right of the individual takes priority over a sense of duty, responsibility, and community. It fails to recognize that having a right without a keen sense of duty and responsibility is a radically aggressive and offensive by-product of a philosophy of education that excludes God as the *alpha* and *omega*. Neither the Aristotelian view that man is a rational and a political animal nor the Petrarchan view that man is a sentient, rational, and volitional being goes far enough, because man is also a religious being insofar as the human soul longs for transcendence and for relationship with the Divine. Education must cater to this quest for transcendence, and Islamic scholars are committed to it in all their deliberations. Once this metaphysical dimension of education is kept intact, Islamic educators need not fear the spiritual sterility of Western liberal education, orthe scientific and technological revolution. Husain and Ashraf contend:

> Much as the Muslim, anchored in faith, disapproves of the spiritual nihilism of the West, he himself, because of his neglect of sci-

ence and technology, has created around his society a suffocating atmosphere as oppressive as the spiritual sterility of the West. Want and poverty, disease and epidemic, colonialism and economic humiliation have forced him to realize that it is only by mastering science and technology that he can escape these problems. But when he turns to the West for his knowledge of science and technology, he finds that the whole of it is riddled with premises antithetical to his faith. Modern science and technology would lead him to banish God, to renounce faith and to commit himself to the mindless pursuit of mindless materialism.[7]

It is important to point out that Muslim scholars are not discriminating against science and technology. They believe that knowledge is not harmful by itself. It is neutral. Difficulties and dangers arise from "the extraneous values and assumptions which man imparts to it" and which leads to "a spiritually harmful fall-out."[8] This is the major difficulty that faces those Muslims who are seeking modernization. On one hand they would like to maintain their cultural and religious identity; on the other, they aspire to modernization without infection by Western materialism and liberalism. In order to accomplish this goal, they must reject those values and assumptions in their Western education that are in conflict with Islamic teachings.

The Central Goal of Islamic Education

At the First World Conference on Muslim Education, Muslim scholars agreed on the following definition of the aims of education:

> Education should aim at the balanced growth of the total personality of Man through the training of Man's spirit, intellect, his rational self, feelings and bodily senses. Education should cater therefore for the growth of Man in all its aspects: spiritual, intellectual, imaginative, physical, scientific, linguistic, both individually and collectively and motivate all aspects towards goodness and the attainment of perfection. *The ultimate aim of Muslim education lies in the realization of complete submission to Allah on the level of the individual, the community and humanity at large.*[9]

There is nothing in this definition that suggests that Muslim education is not dynamically open or that it is restricted to creedal fundamentalism. The above definition gives a comprehensive view of the aims of education that takes into consideration the whole human being and seeks to cultivate all his/her faculties into a well-integrated personality under the sovereignty of God. Moreover, it is a definition that does not negate any of the disciplines. It includes all branches of knowledge: the humanities, the social sciences, the natural sciences, etc. This definition of the aims

of education presupposes a methodology that will cultivate individuals for the best and the worse of all possible scenarios within empirical existence and for the attainment of the "supreme good," namely, perfection through submission to God. Immediately, we see that Muslim education is much more than the production of informed human beings. The informed individual is commended but, according to the Islamic aim of education, he or she is not necessarily fully educated. There is an existential challenge in Muslim education which seeks to lead the individual beyond the stage of "knowing" to the stage of "being." Muslim education, therefore, poses an existential challenge with an ontological goal, when the state of comprehensive and total well- being completes the process of knowing. This is the ultimate state of the ultimate transformation of life, and as the *summum bonum* of Muslim education, its value transcends the scientific and technological. At this stage, to grasp the uniqueness of the Muslim aim of education, some understanding of the Islamic view of man will be helpful.

The question remains, what is the nature of man who, through a Muslim education, can attain such a state of being? Islam has one of the noblest views of man when compared to others. For example, the renowned philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, an atheistic existentialist, speaks of man as a bundle of passions who is absolutely certain of only one thing: that one day he will surely die. The Judaeo-Christian tradition portrays man as a fallen creature and the victim of original sin in whom evil is inherent. Although Islam acknowledges the "fall" of Adam, it does not hold the view that the descendants of Adam are inherently corrupt and evil. Islam maintains that every individual, like Adam, "is born in a state of innocence" and everyone who succumbs to temptation and evil does so, not because of inherent evil, but because of his or her failure to overcome temptation to evil thought, speech, and action.[10] In several places the Qur'an speaks about the noble status that Allah has given to Man. In 15:29, Allah says that He breathed His own breath into Adam to give him life. In 2:31, Allah says that He taught him all the names.[11] And in several places the Qur'an mentions that Adam was given dominion over all creatures. Moreover, Allah appointed Man to be a representative (*khalifah*) on earth, even though the angels foresaw and spoke of his disobedience. In the Hadith literature Man is given one of the noblest ranks; it is declared that God created Adam in His form. Man is a composition of spirit (*ruh*), soul (*nafs*), and body.[12] The spirit and soul comprise the spiritual dimension of Man. By virtue of this dimension, he is endowed with the potential to rise to supra-empirical truths, which complete his education and fulfill his ultimate quest. Given this account of the sublime nature of Mankind, the challenge to Muslim educators is one of great responsibility as well as honor, insofar as they are, in a very special way, the vicegerents of God seeking to sensitize the human con-

science toward good, to cultivate the soul toward God-consciousness, and to bring to full actualization the spiritual potential with which God has endowed Man. Husain and Ashraf speak of the goodness of human nature as follows:

> The essential goodness of human nature, man's accountability, his commitment to a set of God-given primordial values—these formed the foundation of whatever education a Muslim youth received. The result, it has been rightly claimed, was the growth of a society in which different generations and occupations and strata lived in harmony with one another, by a common faith.[13]

Muslim education aspires to cultivate men and women of sound faith and knowledge. Faith and reason are not polarized but are complementary. Whereas reason functions within the limitations of the various categories of thought, faith transcends rational and categorical exactitudes to accept the content of Divine Revelation, and thus to challenge reason to experiences and truths that continually elude it. Reason clarifies, systematizes, and communicates the content of revelation at the conventional, theological, and philosophical levels. Whereas reason may create sound ontological, cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments for the existence of God, it is faith and the human intuition that make the leap beyond the rational to an existential breakthrough, in an experience of the Reality of all realities. There is a real sense, then, in which rational faith has an important place in Islam. The pursuit of knowledge "without reference to the spiritual goal that man must try to attain cannot do much good to humanity." The best that can be attained, without a degree of faith in God, is nothing more than a "fragmentary view of the universe" and of human existence itself.[14] The ethical monotheism of Islam which characterizes the entire tradition makes it imperative that God be placed at the center of all activities and aspirations. It is precisely for this reason that the Muslim system of education insists that "faith and piety" must comprise an essential part of its syllabus.[15] The real test to an effective syllabus is whether or not it has a built-in component that will challenge students to a better understanding of God and the universe and that will foster a deeper relationship with God, other individuals, and the environment.

Muslim parents, educators, and leaders are entrusted with the responsibility of bringing up children in the nurture and admonition of God and of maintaining a society in which the laws of God are upheld in the welfare of all human beings so that peace, justice, and brotherhood may prevail. There are, then, three environments that we have to take into consideration when dealing with the individual and his education; and there is one Book, the Holy Qur'an, which is the "mother of all books" and which is pivotal to all branches of learning insofar as it is the "revealed

blueprint" for human existence. The first, most intimate, and most important environment is the home and the family, where parents and guardians are the first teachers of the essential lessons of the faith and the Book. Some have rightly argued that the child's most impressionable period is the first seven years. Children's minds at this stage are like sponges which absorb sense-data and verbal information without discrimination, since their critical faculty is not yet developed. They learn from what they see, hear, and feel. Parents and guardians are children's first and most effective teachers, because at this stage in their development, children learn best by example.[16] They imitate and model their elders; hence, parents and guardians must keep their conscience in check as role models to undertake the responsibility of beginning the process of Islamic education at home, preparing their children for the second and third environments, school and society. For Muslims it is not only charity that begins at home, but also education. Once the foundations of the faith are established in the mind of the child by loving and caring parents, the child is ready to study the secular disciplines at school; and though his faith would be challenged as he progresses, it is hoped that there will be Muslim teachers at the second level of environment (the school) to guide him to a deeper and fuller experience of Muslim life and piety.

The third level of environment is society. Islamic leaders are needed to foster Islamic faith, Islamic piety, and values through Islamic institutions. However, leadership is extremely difficult, if not impossible to find among Muslims in minority groups throughout the Western world. Even though there may be outstanding Muslim leaders in such groups, they may not have the scope to establish Islamic institutions for an Islamic education, because of a lack of finances or opposition from the majority (or both). But there is a glimmer of hope for minority Muslims and their education since many Western countries are beginning to give state support for the establishment of Muslim schools. To mention just one example, the government of Trinidad and Tobago in the West Indies has opened several Muslim schools at the elementary and secondary levels. The challenges are great for Muslim students at the postsecondary level in non-Islamic countries. In such countries the great responsibility of the family and the ummah can never be exaggerated. Islam is neither anti-intellectual nor opposed to science and technology. As God's vicegerent on earth, the Muslim is fully aware of his responsibility to study and to learn the ways of God and the universe; however, he is also aware that no knowledge or methodology should replace God, deny His existence, reject His revelation, or be made into an idol.

Knowledge as Cosmotheanthropocentric

Syyed Hossein Nasr discusses some of the difficulties that modern science poses for the Muslim in his quest for higher knowledge.[17] It is neither *al-'ilm* (knowledge, as used in the traditional sense) nor the traditional sciences such as physics and mathematics (which flourished in Islamic civilization) that threatens the faith of Muslims. Nasr observes that what really threatens Islam's hold on its believers is "science as it is currently understood in the English language,"[18] that is, today's modern science, which asserts a monopoly on the knowability of the universe and natural laws without any reference to a higher realm of knowledge and intelligence. In fact, science's claim to a monopoly on knowledge is not truly a problem for Islam as such, although it poses a temptation to its adherents, but a problem for science itself, insofar as the scientific methodology does not permit recourse to the metaphenomenal dimension of reality. What can be known through science is limited to the empirical/phenomenal world. This does not pose a problem for Islam, because Islam considers "knowledge" in its totality from two perspectives: first, as it pertains to the phenomenal world and the scientific method of investigation; second, as it pertains to the metaphenomenal (i.e., the Divine and His revelation to humanity) and the Islamic method of acceptance through faith and verification, through devotion and experience. For Islam, knowledge is not only "cosmoanthropocentric"—as it is the case with science—but also "cosmotheanthropocentric," which is inclusive of the three fundamental frames of reference: the cosmos, God, and Man. This is the tridimensional foundation of Islamic education. It is comprehensive and all-inclusive of the fundamental constituents of reality.

Islamic apologists who argue that Islam has always worked in harmony with science do not mean modern science, but *al-'ilm* in its traditional sense. Islam has always given top priority to knowledge and learning as a fundamental means to a deepening and transforming sense of the presence of God. A glance at the very starting point of Islam shows how this religion expresses its knowledge of God, for example, in the *shahada: La ilaha illa Allah.* This is knowledge at the metaphenomenal level that God is one; and either by statements in the Qur'an or by simple deduction from this major premise, the phenomenal world and all within it is His creation and is contingent upon Him. From the Qur'an and the Hadith, we know that unity (*al-tawhid*) is fundamental to Islam. It is knowledge of the exclusive unity and divinity of God "the Divine Essence, Names and Qualities (*al-dhat, al-asma* and *al-sifat*) as well as of the Divine Effects (*athar*) and Acts (*af'al*) embracing God's creation."[19] Islam does not use faith or religion as an excuse against science and technology. This Islamic tradition has always encouraged intellectual pursuit, but always with the caution to keep priorities in order. Islam

must be given credit for producing one of the most progressive scientific traditions in the premodern era, after having adopted the science of the Graeco-Alexandrian, Persian, and Indian civilizations and making it its own. Moreover, Al-Farghani's and Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's works in astronomy, Al-Biruni's in geography, al-Razi's and Ibn Sina's in medicine and pharmacology, the optical works by Ibn al-Haytham, and the mathematical studies by Ghiyath al-Din Jamshid Kashani are landmark accomplishments in the history of ideas and science in general, specifically among Muslim thinkers.[20] As Nasr points out, the sciences which Muslims developed have never posed a challenge to Islam as modern science has. He writes:

> Something of great importance separates modern science from its traditional antecedents, a "something" which lies at the heart of the profound problems inherent in the confrontation between Islam and modern science today. . . . No amount of denying that the problem exists and of proclaiming in loud slogans the "scientific" character of Islam will prevent the spread of the kind [modern] of science— based on the forgetting of God—from corroding the citadel of the Islamic faith.[21]

There is no question that there are distinguished scientists who carry out their investigation of the natural world without any sense of the Divine; on the other hand, there are scientists who do have a deep sense of awe and wonder for nature as well as a deep sense of the Divine presence. The divine or the sacred "character of knowledge is thus not innate to modern science *qua* modern science."[22] Whereas modern science is fundamentally cosmoanthropocentric, and whereas its main tools of investigation into the nature of things are the human senses and reason with the emphasis on empirical and mathematical exactitude, Islamic science (while not denying the place of the senses and reason) has its ultimate origin in the *nous* or *intellectus* whose very essence is divine and thus supersedes human reason and the rational process itself. If, for example, X postulates the following proposition: Zinc combined with sulfuric acid gives a reaction of zinc sulfate and hydrogen ($Zn + H_2SO_4 = ZnSO_4 + H_2$), and if Y challenges this proposition, he can simply enter X's laboratory to verify the latter's truth claims. All such propositions have the following characteristics: demonstrability, repeatability, clarity, predictability, certainty, and universality. The burden of verification rests upon natural laws, experimentations, and empirical and rational exactitude. Islamic science tells us about a higher category of reality, God Himself, the *sine qua non* of all that exists and Who is ontologically prior to all. This is the challenge of Islam to all humanity: There is no god, but God, the *alpha* and the *omega*. Those who question or doubt this article of faith also have no recourse but to enter the laboratory of Islam to seek

verification of its truth claim. Just as scientific truths must be verified in a scientific milieu, so too must religious truth claims be verified in a religious milieu. The creed, code of ethics, and mode of worship in Islam, as well as the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the Shari'ah, comprise the Islamic "laboratory" for the "experience" of Islamic truth claims which, unlike scientific truth claims, are not restricted to the limitations of human senses and reason. It is truth of a higher order which does not contradict scientific truths, but which gives ultimate meaning and direction to them for the well-being of humanity.

Man as vicegerent on earth is endowed with the intellect, which is fixed in his primordial nature and which gives him the capability to attain knowledge. The seat of the intellect is the heart, not the head, "and reason is no more than its reflection on the mental plane." The intellect is of divine nature. It is the only source of valid knowledge; thus, all science must be in reference to it and must be confirmed by it. Every aspect of knowledge, even that of "the anatomy of a gnat is legitimate if it does not remain limited to the perceptions of human reason but becomes illuminated by the light of the intellect (al-'aql)."[23] No science is acceptable to Islam if it tries to give an exposition of the universe as though it were a category of reality that is independent of its absolute cause. The universe is the effect of God's creative act. The effect can only be properly understood in relation to its cause. This is the Islamic position with regard to science and to education in general.[24] According to the general consensus, the light of Islam will illumine the world more effectively if Muslims are properly educated.

Encountering the Challenges

Traditional Islamic education clashes with the modern school of thought. The traditional system seeks to cultivate a well-integrated, balanced personality, grounded in the commandments of God and committed to obedience. It is a system of education that attempts to examine all phenomena in light of the creative powers of God—God is at the center of all activities. In the modern system, God is not necessarily excluded from the intellectual pursuit, nor is He necessarily included. Man, however, tries to explain away the universe and events of daily life in terms of human reason and human skills; he asserts that he is the measure of all things. Moreover, he is even given to believe that he has the potential and the ability to shape his world without divine intervention. It is not surprising, therefore, that this attitude has shaken the very foundations of traditional value systems, and it is characteristic of the Western milieu. When Islam encounters such a milieu it feels threatened at its very roots, and Muslims are tempted to either fall victim to an open, liberal education that is highly secular, or to withdraw and seek a creative process of

growth and development within their own traditional system of education wherever this is possible. While the modern, Western system of education places God outside the intellectual process of investigation, emphasizing human reason and carefully devised methodologies, the traditional Muslim system of education places God at the center of all activities, with Nature and Man contingent upon Him. The value system that Islam transmits to its youth is challenged and contradicted by the "modern" system of education. There can be no doubt that the modern system is, to a great extent, shaped by modern science and technology and by the rapid rise of industrialization, which in effect has molded the interests, attitudes, ambitions, and values of Western youth.

Muslims in the West, therefore, are in a dilemma. Being exposed to the Western milieu, Muslim youth can easily assume, without proper guidance, that their own traditional system of values which they inherited from their glorious past "is totally irrelevant to their modern needs." There can be absolutely no doubt that this is one of the central problems that Muslim educators face today.[25] A reasonable and calculated approach to this problem is required. Husain and Ashraf contend that modern science and technology cannot be rejected outright at this stage in our historical development. They argue:

> One cannot ask the community to go back to the days of isolation, nor would such a policy work if Muslims have to live in organized societies and free themselves from the oppressive burden of poverty and material backwardness. They must acquire the secrets which have led elsewhere to miraculous transformations.[26]

A note of caution is necessary. Whereas these two Muslim thinkers are sympathetic to science and technology and its potential value, they strike a cautious note of advice to Muslim youth, which is that they must protect and preserve their own values—by no means should their Islamic values be lost in the process of acquiring a modern, Western education. Materialism is only a veneer of real progress. Real progress is inclusive of the spiritual dimension of Man, of fundamental ethical and moral values, and of a brotherly concern for others. Though material progress has answered many of our questions and fulfilled many of our needs, human beings are still deeply dissatisfied because it has not been able to satisfy the perennial quest of the human soul. Presently, the West finds itself in a paradoxical situation. Though it has produced so much through science and technology, it still suffers from a deficiency which neither science, technology, nor any aspect of liberal education can satisfy. The basis of our anguish, loneliness, and despair is an existential vacuum—our hearts are restless and will never find peace until they find repose in God. The antidote to this paradox is a reinstatement of God in our educational system, the corollary to which is a revival of an ethical and moral/civil code

that is reminiscent of our ethical, monotheistic tradition, which prophets throughout the ages have preserved and transmitted. Knowledge without morals and values may still be powerful, but it definitely is not virtuous. The expression that "knowledge is virtue" means that knowledge has the power to create and to make good. The challenge for Muslim educators is to harmonize the modern pursuit of knowledge, in all its areas, with religious education. This, however, is not an easy task, as Husain and Ashraf explain:

> Such an integration cannot arrive until Muslims themselves have so mastered the diverse fields of knowledge as to be able to produce books imbued with their own beliefs and ideals and assumptions. The present transition in which modern knowledge and religious education form an imperfect blend in our syllabuses has to be allowed to continue for some time. But its imperfections notwithstanding, this blend will have long-range effects in the right direction.[27]

The responsibility is placed on the shoulders of Muslim practitioners themselves to approach the problem from its very roots. Despite the difficulties involved, Muslim thinkers are quite optimistic for the future.

Conclusion

It should not be assumed that the Islamic system of education is antagonistic to change, progress, or modernization, if these do not mean giving up or compromising primordial, revealed values. All activities, educational and otherwise, must revolve around primordial values, keeping in focus that the word of God is perfect "in truth and justice" (6:115). Education is a universal enterprise administered by the state and various religious organizations. In non-Islamic states where Muslim minorities do not have the financial and moral support to establish their system of education, Muslims are forced to compromise. To the great credit of Muslims, and particularly disadvantaged Muslims, such difficulty has not dampened their enthusiasm for a comprehensive system of education. To say that Islamic education is a cultivation of the *whole* person is to emphasize that the spiritual dimension/faculty is fundamental, though often forgotten or deliberately omitted in Western education. To say that Islamic education is a preparation for life is to emphasize that life means much more than empirical existence; it is inclusive of nontemporal existence in the postresurrection.

It can never be over-emphasized that Muslim education is committed to the total, comprehensive development of the whole person. It is no surprise then that the temporality and nontemporality of Muslim education are analogous to two sides of the same coin. It is a preparation for life here and in the hereafter. Education for Muslims is much more than

a solitary intellectual exercise—it is a physical, moral, social, and spiritual enterprise for the apprehension and comprehension of truth, and for the application of those virtues that will foster harmonious relationships with God, with others, and with nature, thereby promoting a free and just society for all. If this sounds utopian to some, it definitely is not to Muslims, because they have the blueprint for it in the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the Shari'ah. The ideals of the Islamic system of education are a constant challenge to Western liberal education and to the conscience of mankind.

Notes

1. Milton Mayer, "To Know and to Do," in Arthur A. Cohen (ed.), *Humanistic Education and Western Civilization* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1964), p. 208.

2. In the Western world, there are many who take the word *jihad* as meaning licence for Muslims to wage war. If this were the case, then there would be an inherent contradiction in the term *Islam* itself and in the whole tradition. *Islam* is peace, seeking neither division nor war but the return of mankind from its diverse ways of corruption and polytheism to the confession of One God, whose unity and divinity are exclusive, and Who has neither partners nor associates. The aim of *jihad* is not, as many Westerners have come to believe, war for the conversion of nonbelievers by force. The Qur'an declares: "Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but not in hostilities. Lo! Allah loveth not aggressors" (2:190). And again, "There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error. And he who rejecteth false deities and believeth in Allah hath grasped a firm handhold which will never break. Allah is Hearer and Knower" (2:256). It is clear that there should be no violence in religion. In giving sanction to *jihad,* Islam specifies its main objectives which are, briefly stated, to protect the faith, one's family, oneself, and one's country (4:75) and to protect and defend helpless and oppressed believers (8:72). "Thus, war is not renewed or perpetuated except against a tyrant who insists on acts of tyranny, compelling people to abandon their religion. Persecution, forced conversion, and the deprivation of religious freedom are more distasteful to God than the taking of life"; from 'Abd al-Rahaman 'Azzam, *The Eternal Message of Muhammed* (Toronto: The New American Library of Canada, 1964), p. 130; see also 2:190–193 and 2:216–217. For a more detailed study of *jihad*, see Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Medieval and Modern Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), pp. 9–79.

3. Syed Ali Ashraf, *New Horizons in Muslim Education* (Chippenham: Hodder & Stroughton, 1985), p. 5.

4. Syed Sajjad Husain and Syed Ali Ashraf, *Crisis in Muslim Education* (Kent: Hodder & Stoughton, 1979), p. ix.

5. Ibid.

6. Kenneth Cragg and R. Marston Speight, *The House of Islam* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1988), p. 125.

7. Husain and Ashraf, *Crisis in Muslim Education*, p. 39.

8. Ibid., p. 40.

9. Quoted by Ashraf in his *New Horizons in Muslim Education*, p. 4 (italics added). This quotation is also featured on the inside of the front cover of *Muslim Education Quarterly*.

10. Husain and Ashraf, *Crisis in Muslim Education*, p. 36.

11. According to the Sufi tradition "*the names,*" in the text of 2:31, are in reference to the attributes of Allah. Others interpret it to mean the names of creatures and even plants. (All references to the Holy Qur'an are in accordance with the translation by Muhammed Marmaduke Pickthall, n.d.)

12. For a detailed study of the human being in Islam, see Annemarie Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 178–215.

13. Husain and Ashraf, *Crisis in Muslim Education*, p. 37.

14.   Ibid., p. 38.

15.   Ibid.

16.   It is no surprise, therefore, that Islam places great value on the centrality of the family unit. The unique roles of the mother and the father, as well as their combined role in caring for children and in keeping the family intact, takes priority over individual and spousal rights. The functional family is the backbone to the cultivation of character, faith and the *ummah*. In Western societies, more than anywhere else, the basic family unit is threatened at its very core. Where the family is dysfunctional the results are disastrous, as Ted Byfield points out in his article "Today's family is proving incapable: We are failing at the task of raising the next generation," *The Financial Post*, July 22, 1995. Byfield examines the situation in Canada and the United States and finds that whereas women could replace men in various capacities of service, no one can really replace women in their maternal capacity. As parents rival each other and as the family becomes more and more dysfunctional, the responsibility for raising children is transferred to the schools, daycare centers, social workers, and others. Byfield quotes Zoe Deen, an American social commentator, who wrote the following in the *New Oxford Review*:

> We women forgot our place in the universe. We, the most self-absorbed generation ever to walk the planet, forgot that we were but a bead on the chain of generations. We sold our inheritance, our culture, our values and our children for a mess of pottage.

> Suicide rates among teenagers in the United States increased from 3.6 per 100,000 in 1960 to 11.3 in 1990. Children are killing their peers and even older people. Violent youth crime rates increased in the United States from 137 per 100,000 in 1965 to 430.6 in 1990. In Canada the divorce rate increased 15-fold since the 1950's, and the statistics for the children of divorced parents do not paint a good picture. Children of divorced parents are two-to-three times more likely to suffer from emotional problems, to get into difficulty with the law, to indulge in drugs, to become pregnant as teens, or to quit school. They are more likely to be brought up in poverty, and the prospects of having a steady job or a healthy/stable marriage as adults are not encouraging. For the sake of *conscience, society*, and *God*, Islam believes that children must be properly protected and nurtured into adulthood.

17.   Syyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam and Modern Science" in Salem Azzam (ed.), *Islam and Contemporary Society* (London: Longman, 1982), pp. 177–190.

18.   Ibid., p. 178.

19.   Ibid., pp. 178–179.

20.   Ibid., p. 179. For a more detailed study of outstanding philosophical and scientific achievements of Muslims in the premodern period of civilization, see W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Surveys: The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1972), pp. 30–43; and for an extensive study of Islam's contributions to Europe, see Sir Thomas Arnold and Alfred Guillaume (eds.), *The Legacy of Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 108–397.

21.   Nasr, *Islam and Contemporary Society*, p. 179.

22.   Ibid., p. 180.

23.   Ibid., p. 181.

24.   It is interesting to recall the words of a Muslim who advocated a British system of education when he stated that Muslims had nothing to be afraid of, if they adopted that new form of education but simultaneously held on to their faith, "because Islam is not irrational superstition; it is a rational religion which can march hand in hand with the growth of human knowledge. Any fear to the contrary betrays lack of faith in the truth of Islam." See Wm. Theodore de Bary (ed.), *Sources of Indian Tradition*, Vol. II (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 192. Adapted from a letter to Mawlawi Tasadduk, in *Sir Syed ke chand nadir khutut.*

25.   Husain and Ashraf, *Crisis in Muslim Education*, p. 57.

26.   Ibid.

27.   Ibid., p. 58.