

society. The moral value of schooling rests with the development of a comprehensive view of the world (its sacred & profane realities), and commitment to expertise shaped in a context of faith & piety. Failure to overcome alien influences has in the past subverted traditions of faith & piety. **A duality of Kufir & Iman developed.** Ultimately the subversion of authentic Muslim values has led to distortions of character & intellect.

Schooling & the Quranic Framework

If the Islamization of Knowledge amounts to a new vision of schooling, the Quran could be viewed as a curricular framework for schooling experiences. The contents of a curriculum can be general or specific, and broad or prescriptive. Thus the Quran is not dissimilar to a curriculum. It contains a plan that places an individual in relationship to the divine. It is used by Muslims as source of legal, scientific, and moral knowledge. By analogy, the Quran is specific & prescriptive. It includes strategies for living a pious life.

It is dangerous to think that the moral & the academic are disconnected & unrelated to one another. In schools the academic so commands center stage that the moral can get lost in the shadows. **Academic purposes have moral import;** moral standards guide even the most clearly academic activities. Student-teacher relationships are utterly moral; they are also a critical piece in the puzzle of effective instruction. Classrooms are value-laden environments for learning.

When we discuss lofty aims of education in teacher preparation programs we talk about citizenship, lifelong learning, and quality of life. Yet somewhere the constant barrage of “go to school, get good grades, get a good job” always creeps into the picture. What does the persistence of this phraseology indicate about the underlying assumptions that school leaders, teachers, parents and students believe when it comes to the ominous question of “why do I need to know this?” Are our school systems generating a culture that is antithetical to **quality** learning.

Zahra Al Zeera, a modern female scholar also contributes to this discussion in improving Muslim education. Among her suggestions is the recognition of intuitive knowledge alongside reason & rationality. She argues that spirituality & intuition are parallel & one leads to another. The recognition & nurturing of intuition may help to increase the spiritual growth of students in ways that logic, reason & quantitative efforts cannot.

She makes another contribution in the recommendation of transformative research methods for student inquiry. This methodology has two concerns: the discovery of knowledge within a holistic Islamic context (how knowledge is interrelated with its context & its Creator). Secondly the connection of the students to their souls & their own inner transformation from gaining knowledge & connecting with what is sacred. Such learning promotes dialectical thinking, reflection/meditation & conversation /dialogue. **Most educational institutions diminish human beings to the mind only, and ignore the soul.** By so doing, they create unbalanced human beings that have advanced intellectual abilities, yet spiritually are poor & weak.

If we do not have “moral academics” then we can become like that “great” society whose bookstores/libraries have that runaway bestseller “Dummies” series. They didn’t teach all the right things at school so what do we have...It started, with DOS/Windows for Dummies. It went on to Word for Dummies. The series no longer confines itself to obvious technical fields like the Windows OS. With the help of the Dummies books, we can become “functional” in many aspects of our lives. Stroll through a bookstore, you will find these guides: Dating for Dummies. Then there is Sex for Dummies (how come our parents didn’t need this). There is also A Guide to Pregnancy for Idiots. After pregnancy, of course, there may be a few extra pounds to shed. That is when you can use Weight Loss for Dummies. You’ll want to make sure to have a look at Parenting for Dummies. The pressures of life mean you’ll need Stress Management for Dummies. Should life take a toll on your marriage, there’s Rekindling Romance for Dummies (not making that up!) If that doesn’t work, there’s Divorce for Dummies. Should you start questioning this entire enterprise, there’s Philosophy for Dummies. Islam for Dummies?

Good teachers are passionate about their subjects & students. They demand more & get more. They know that what students learn with pleasure, they never forget. They know how to use textbook facts – be it Algebra/English/Biology – to inspire critical & independent thinking. Every child starts out as an intellectual explorer. They are instigators of thought rather than providers of information. It is the rare teacher who can demonstrate that knowing why – an idea – is more important than learning what – a fact.

Uncommon teachers keep the goals of teaching in mind. They ask themselves: what effect will we have on our students in ten or twenty years? A science teacher knows that only a small fraction of them may become scientists. An English teacher knows that

only a few, if any, will become professors of literature. But they believe that science or art, if properly taught, will remain a source of pleasure in their lives. Uncommon teachers believe in the fundamental importance of what they teach, no matter what the current fads are and how uninterested some students may appear. They strive to earn their wings everyday, year after year.

Good teachers do **not** “teach to the test.” Testing is one tool among many to assess student progress. Teaching only with the purpose of helping students **pass certain tests is a folly**, a delusional approach to education that degrades the profession. Good teachers (one reason why they are so rare) know that critical & independent thinking are traits that require the long view & infinite patience to nurture. They are able to strike a balance between the conflicting demands of short-term assessment & long-term creativity.

There is, of course, **no** best way to teach. If we study star teachers, we find that each is distinctive in their own way. What is common among them, however, **is that they have an intuitive understanding of their students that, when combined with their passion for the subject, enable them to sow the seeds of wonder in them**, the source of all insights & discoveries. Perhaps the most encouraging fact to emerge from recent studies is that committed teachers can evolve in their profession as they master the subtleties of their art. Most great teachers are made, **not** born.

The single most important factor determining whether students succeed in school is **not** the colour of their skin or their parents’ status or their parents’ income; **it is the quality of their teacher.**

“O my Lord! Increase me in **knowledge.**” (20:114) Why the need for such a supplication? Education is an ornament in prosperity & a refuge in adversity. There is **no** verse in the Quran with modern day humanity’s “prayer” : “O my Lord! Increase me in **wealth.**” A parent can only hope & pray that their child is **LUCKY** to meet the right & righteous teacher. Teachers can only pray, and pray hard, that the parents play their correct & proper role.

Education/knowledge is true wealth. It gives one angelic wings with which one flies closer to the throne of God. A place the angels cannot visit.

During the ebb, I wrote a line upon the sand; committing to it all that is in my soul & mind; I returned at the tide to read it; to ponder upon it; I found nothing upon the shore but my ignorance.

Let us arrive at the shore of God to find our Book filled with Pure knowledge. Let Adam (p), the first one who articulated knowledge, be proud of us...

**Good teachers make good schools...
They are the reasons why students flourish**

Education

...cannot take place in a moral vacuum

Good teachers know that learning occurs when they treat students **not** as empty vessels but as self-creators seeking expert help. They believe in the awesome power of shaping minds. Students are diamonds in the rough. They have a certain need, an insight, a capacity, an unformed thought. **If they are lucky to meet a teacher who can respond with a skill, a technique, a body of knowledge, a habit of mind, a sense of humor, learning grows by leaps & bounds.**

The educational process has been the subject of much comment by academics & writers. Their observations range from praise to cynicism, **mostly the latter.** Education is an easy target for criticism because its stated aims are often so nobly ambitious that they have little chance of being realized. It should give us pause that so many people who have made their mark in the world of ideas, who have been acknowledged leaders & innovators, have held formal education & educational institutions in low regard. The Islamization of Knowledge refers to a needed **re-integration**, at both theoretical & practical levels, of contemporary knowledge & Islamic thinking; that is, an Islamic conception of the universe. Islamic schooling would result in empowering the intellect by overcoming contemporary conflicts between divine & natural laws. Students should use the intellect to interact with the world in a virtuous way. As such, **intellect should incorporate the transaction between divine & natural realities in order to inject meaning & value into schooling.** Islamic students are to be encouraged to interpret & reinterpret scientific phenomena because of their moral obligation to correct ignorance, and thereby to discover the many layers of **God’s Intelligence.**

“O my Lord! Increase me in Knowledge.”

Muhammad (p) the last Messenger of God gave us three educational lighthouses to guide us. His constant prayer: “God! Grant me knowledge of the ultimate knowledge of things!” gives us our focus. “The virtue of knowledge is more beloved with Allah than the virtue of worship,” makes us creative beings rather than ritualistic animals. The third drives us: “Seek knowledge be it even unto China.” The goal of all educational curricula, including Islamic, is to plant the seeds of a true religious & spiritual awakening. One reaches the mystery of the soul by studying physical matter, thus comprehending the unknown through the known. Knowledge is the life of the mind & practical experiments lead to intellectual conclusions, to spiritual feelings & finally to the fountainhead of knowledge, God.

In the annals of human history, we cannot find another spiritual man who laid such a deep emphasis on education as did Muhammad (p). As the Supreme Head of the first Islamic State, he decreed education as incumbent on all people, male & female. Talk of compulsory education is not an innovation of modernists. Muhammad (p) declared it compulsory immediately after the establishment of the City State of Madina. It was in the second year of the establishment of the Madinistic Regime that his Law regarding Compulsory Education began to be implemented with all the vigour & force possible for a nascent state. And like a practical realist he also warns his people to **save themselves from ‘knowledge which is of no use’**. He asked us to separate the kernel from the husk & to distinguish the substance from the shadow. Look at the breath of the vision of this great Revolutionary. He orders to take the good from everywhere & further counsels that **knowledge is the lost wealth of a believer & commands to acquire it whatever its source**. So long as the Muslims kept up this breadth of vision they were the torchbearers of light & learning & were considered the norm to judge the various grades of cultures & civilizations of the world.

The UN’s Global Outlook states: Education; a means for achieving the interrelated

goals of health, higher productivity, more rapid GDP growth & the broader goal of social integration, including participation in cultural & political affairs. However...Character building. Morality. Ethics. Nowhere to be found. The standard of living equals the quality of life. Nations must **not** prize test scores above critical thinking & literacy. We must fear those who **cannot** think. Non-thinking civilizations (this click & cut-and-paste generation qualifies) become totalitarian wastelands. A Global wasteland is in the making based upon this “diabolical intelligence.”

Islamic education, primary goal: the building of character, the transformation & guidance of a person’s inner & outer life. The Quran, for Muslims, is the ultimate source of knowledge & education. Its purpose is to awaken in people the higher consciousness of their manifold relations with God and the universe. The Quran sees in the humble bee a recipient of Divine inspiration & constantly calls upon the reader to observe the perpetual change of the winds, the alternation of day & night, the clouds, the starry heavens, and the planets swimming through infinite space. This is the Quranic perspective of education. This is where Islamic education begins.

It is where Secularism ends. This dangerous, mind-altering “educational” drug that infects all schools. It declares it immaterial whether or not God exists, for He has very little to do with the formulation of our epistemological, ethical, aesthetic & signifying systems. There is surely no compulsion for people to accept the truth. **But it is certainly a blot upon the human intellect when people are not even interested in finding out what the truth is.** Islam teaches that God has given us the faculty of reason & therefore expects us to reason things out objectively & systematically for ourselves. To reflect & to question & to advance.

We are unique creatures, set apart by God as His deputy to govern over all the creatures in this world; set apart from all other animals by the faculty of reason. The Prophet (p): **“God has not created anything better than reason or anything more perfect or more beautiful than reason.”** Together with this faculty to discriminate & discern, we are given the freedom to choose for ourselves a way of life worthy of our position as God’s representative. Our existence in this world & the creation of the entire universe are not mere accidents or products of a fortuitous nature. This universe, every atom of it, manifests & points us to the realization of a Loving/Merciful/Powerful Creator. Every single soul knows, knows for sure that it cannot create itself.

Therefore it is our duty to know our Master. Sense-perception elaborated by understanding: knowledge. This is what true education is all about.

Is this “religious” education? No. Is this “philosophy?” No. Philosophy made & moulds the modern Western educational system: the spirit of “free” inquiry; with components – it suspects all authority. Its function is to trace the uncritical assumptions of human thought to their hiding places; in this pursuit it often ends in denial, or the frank admission of the incapacity of pure reason to reach the ultimate reality. **The essence of religion is faith; and faith, like the bird, sees its trackless way unattended by intellect.** The one, focused on the eternal, the other on the temporal, the present. Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason reveals the limitations of human reason & reduces the whole work of the rationalists to a heap of ruins. A sure education to the “educators.”

Use intellectual & pragmatic tests to judge the benefits of these two parallel systems. The first, as a critical evaluation, without any presuppositions or bias, generally with a view to discover short & long term benefits. The pragmatic test judges it by its fruit. The former is applied by the philosopher, the latter by the Prophet.

There is another dimension; the Western system **neglects** the pupils’ identity formation, particularly the spiritual part. What it elevates is “national” education. Education based upon the state’s demands rather than the pupil’s individual needs. Building members of the nation-state, drilling the concept of national identity into them. **Successful it is, in attaining the twin goals of profit & practical progress.** It prizes test scores above critical thinking & literacy. It celebrates rote vocational training & the singular, amoral skill of making money. **It churns out stunted human products.** Current exams produce students who are just literate & numerate enough to perform basic functions & service jobs. They reward those who obey the rules, memorize the formulas & pay deference to authority. Rebels, artists, independent thinkers – those who march to the beat of their own drum – are weeded out.

We must abandon completely the naive faith that school automatically liberates the mind & serves the cause of human progress; in fact, we know that it may serve **any** cause. It may serve tyranny as well as truth, war as well as peace, death as well as life . . . whether it is good or evil depends, not on the laws of learning, but on the conception of life & civilization that gives it substance & direction. In the course of history, education has served

every purpose and doctrine contrived by man. If it is to serve the cause of human freedom, it must be explicitly designed for that purpose.

Islam aims at bringing up an Islamic personality, through the process of encouraging the student to obtain knowledge: the essentials of God, the universe, the community & the human being; the relationship between them.

Muslim states fail; adding Islamic lessons to the academic curriculum does **not** “Islamize” teaching. They fail to distinguish between Islamic education & Islamic teaching. So whatever system of education prevails in the contemporary Muslim world must be observed through a Muslim, rather than Islamic, frame. Much of what is only Muslim practice should **not** be depicted as Islamic, ideologically.

Credits, grades & positions can never substitute character & purposefulness in life. The real purpose of education is to enable a person/student to follow the Divine Guidance, by creating the real spirit of Islam. **In automatic extension, in logical outcome of the purposeful education grow human respect & dignity.**

Restructure our curriculum. NOW. Or we will continue to wail and cry of our current predicament. And seek solace in “our glorious past.” If there is any competition of wailing and crying the Muslims would be the first-prize winners. The students need to be properly led. It is sickening to hear the leaders of Islamic nations, organizations/communities articulately call for unity while they are in disarray. Can they come together & let Islamic thought be shaped into action. To show why Islam’s wisdom walks with ease & never fades. Educated information is power. The capacity to think is the only bulwark against any authority that seeks to impose mindless obedience. There is a huge difference, as Socrates understood, between teaching people what to think & teaching them how to think.

The aim of Islamic schooling is to reconnect pious & worldly experiences: to blend them into a harmonious relationship. Harmony can be achieved by examining and testing modern & traditional knowledge in order to discover how both can be applied theoretically & practically. The use of knowledge should realize its primary focus, that of portraying an Islamic vision of

God has **not** created anything better than Reason

Prophet Muhammad (p)

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