

Islam as a Faith, Identity, Personality and Civilization

Dr. Abdul-Hamid Abu Sulaiman

I have made it clear in the past in my suggestions to Shaikh Hasan ibn Abdillah Al Shaikh (may Allah have mercy upon him) – and I am still reaffirming it – that lack of satisfaction with religious education curriculum in our schools – at that time – was not related to the time specified for the study of religion or to the topics that were being treated. The essence of disagreement is about the material that was being presented to the student, the recommended textbooks, educational and teaching methodologies being employed in teaching these books, and consequently, the kind of scientific and educational training given to teachers of Islamic belief and their social-religious culture and their inefficient performance.

Most of the textbooks are not written in an educative way that approaches the students according to the nature of intellectual, psychological and sentimental stages they pass through; neither are the books capable of achieving educational goals set for them. Many of their contents are about ancient practices, potentialities and ages. They rely upon dry juristic information that scientifically represents intellectual material of little value in people's life. And most importantly, their positive educational impact on building the child's personality, shaping his mind and formulating his convictions and manners is very minimal. This, in many ways, shows the disparity between the example and the reality and between the word and action, in shaping the contemporary Muslim man.

The following example might cast some light on the nature of the problem of religious education in the Ummah's schools generally and in our schools

particularly. A boy or girl in a primary school is given lesson on Zakah. Focus is made on his or her memorization of boring linguistic, jurisprudential and legal definitions of Zakah. He or she is made to memorize Zakah mathematical procedures and proportions of kinds of properties and the minimum amount of animal and agricultural properties on which Zakah is due, among other things that are related to aspects of social and economic life of olden days and whose real meanings cannot be comprehended or understood by a child. This kind of education is not only of little use to this child and easily forgettable – and if he is compelled to have a need for any aspect of it, such a need, in all cases, could be taken care of by the specialists in this field. However, the most dangerous aspect of this kind of education is that the opportunity to impart educational and moral lessons that are direly needed in molding the child and the opportunity to inculcate in him sense of cooperation, participation and sacrifice are wasted, though these are the goals of teaching Zakah to the child in this young age. This kind of psychological, educational and sentimental shaping cannot be by memorizing technical words and terminologies but through practical methods and educational practices that are suitable for intellectual and psychological phases students are passing through. These practical methods should include print and audio-visual materials as well as scenes and field applications. They should include voluntary practical programs that encourage sacrifice and personal and material participation.

It is then – and only through these methodologies – that learning and education can achieve their goals in forming intellectual, psychological and sentimental well-being of the future generations and men and women of tomorrow.

Islamic belief and culture are the foundation upon which education is built. Any deficiency or negligence in them can jeopardize the intellectual, sentimental and behavioral structure of the youth and leaders of tomorrow. Such deficiency and negligence represents nothing but a state of fragmentation and negativism from which the Ummah suffered in the later ages of stagnation and imitation.

The suggestion was – and still is – that courses on Islamic belief and Islamic social culture and educational methodologies must be reviewed in a way that will practically actualize their educational goals in building the personality and social and human identity of the Muslim to enable him play his role as the guardian, the pacesetter, the witness and the leader.

In order to achieve the above, we need to review this curriculum as well as the way it is being taught in the light of the goal and the purpose for which they were formulated so that the youth is given religious, psychological and sentimental upbringing that correlates with the developmental phase he is passing through. The courses must be built upon educational concepts of love, encouragement, conviction and practice.

In this context, it is important to make use of and seek guidance from the Prophetic methods of addressing children and the young ones, which is different from the Qur'anic method of addressing adults. This Prophetic method of address that is based upon educational concepts of love and encouragement is that one that made the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) a successful father, grandfather and educator who never raised his hand to beat a child.

Indeed, the only way of making effective impact in most phases of a child's growth is to adopt the concepts of love, interest, conviction and understanding. No effective impact can definitely be made through memorization, threat and terrorization. For, these latter methods lead the child to negativism and submission, which are the opposite of attributes of strength, honesty and honor that must form parts of a Muslim boy's character when he becomes a man and a Muslim girl's character when she becomes a woman.

This psychological terror and this negativism are reflected in Ummah's backwardness, its deficient performance and its lack of sense of courage and creativity. Therefore, we should put an end to all that could entrench these undesirable traits in our children's minds so that they would not be led to backwardness and deficiency in performance.

Role of higher education in reforming education and reviving Islamic civilization

In order to practically reform the curriculum and its teaching methodology, we need to have a second look at how the religion, Islamic culture and sciences of Islamic education are being taught and how teachers of Islamic studies in particular, and the educated elites of the Ummah, in general, are being trained. Islamic education should be taught and its teachers should be trained upon sound methodical foundations that affirm the unity of divine knowledge, and unity and complementary nature of humanity. Study of religious texts should be accompanied by study of laws and understanding of time and place natures and situations of issues that are being taught, whatever the topic may be. We equally need to research into all aspects of life and specializations in law, education, politics, economy, psychology, sociology and other matters of life and human practices. It is through this sound and

complete Islamic methodology (otherwise known as ‘Islamization of Knowledge’) that the Ummah can have adequate and competent scholars, experts and workers in different aspects of life, especially, those who specialize in Islamic belief and education and deal with the reality of the Ummah’s life and work in proper running of facilities of Islamic education and training of its growing generations upon a basis that is inspired by its conscience and are aware of the Ummah’s hidden energy and sentiment.

I was extremely alarmed when I realized in a meeting with teachers of a department in the faculty of education of one of the Islamic universities that only one of the numerous teachers who teach different curricula on Islamic studies had a methodical training in psychology and child growth. This made me stipulate that Islamic studies and educations should not be allowed to be taught again by teachers who do not have a training in educational psychology and that the teachers who were already teaching Islamic studies should be made to attend special academic program in educational psychology.

The said university also established a diploma course in Islamic studies that should be attended by every teacher who did not have any methodical training in Islamic studies and a diploma program in social studies for any teacher of Islamic studies who did not have any methodical training in social sciences.

Reform of methodology of teaching Islamic studies to students necessitates that the teacher who takes up the responsibility be given suitable and adequate training so that the curriculum can be implemented correctly and as required in order for the desired goal to be attained.

Mere rewriting of textbooks in a more fluent manner or using easier words would not alone achieve the goals desired in reshaping a Muslim who is

capable of rendering effective performance, bearing the message of Islam and carrying out the responsibilities of the successor, the caretaker, the witness and the pacesetter.

The reform must be comprehensive; it must deal with all aspects. The parameter should be actualization of the desired Islamic educational and learning goals; whereby Islamic education is made lovable, impactful and effective in building and shaping Islamic personality.

Therefore, reform of religious studies curriculum should extend beyond the syllabus and textbooks. The reform should cover the curricula, books and methods of training the scientific and educational cadres in the area of Islamic and social studies. It should include reinstatement of the unity of knowledge and comprehensiveness of methodologies of research in same so that we can have a favorable scientific and academic environment that can lead to having cadres in all aspects of sciences, including – most especially – area of educational sciences and having competent teachers who will be able to work productively and efficiently in reforming the personality and identity of a strong and trustworthy Muslim.

It is my hope that educational reform and advancement, and special attention deserved by religious and social studies and their excellence performance and sound principles that can ensure power and trustworthiness will be at the forefront of the efforts being made. That is the habit of the nation that is alive, advanced and is competent to bear the message, the trust and succession on earth. ***“Allah has promised those who have believed among you and done righteous deeds that He will surely grant them succession [to authority] upon the earth just as He granted it to those before them...”*** (An-Nur 24:55)

Equally, I hope that the current relevant education authorities will make evaluation and rectification, taking into consideration the efforts of forces of subjugation, domination and cultural war and their plots and recognizing their goals for waging war against Islam and Muslims. The evaluation and rectification should aim at preventing the enemies from achieving their hostile goals in Muslim countries and their valuables and sacred places. The evaluation and rectification should be focused on reforming the affairs of the Ummah, bringing back its energy, strengthening it and putting it on an excellent position of preparedness so that it can become a civilized partner, competent to bear the message of Islam, which is mercy and guidance for mankind. The evaluation and rectification should not bring more in backwardness of educational curriculum of our children, and its estrangement and decline that only serves the enemy of Islam and Muslims.