

CHAPTER FOUR

Requirements for Establishing the Islamic Civilizational Sciences

In this chapter we shall consider some of the more important elements, as well as the steps and stages, required for the establishment of Islamic civilizational sciences. When we speak of sciences here, we refer to all human knowledge and learning, including those sciences that deal with human society (i.e., the social sciences and the humanities), the sciences of technology, and the natural and applied sciences.

Earlier in this volume, it was mentioned that the classical Islamic discipline of *uṣūl al fiqh* contained the foundations for serious academic inquiry into the various aspects of life. These early foundations also included the precursors of academic inquiry into the social sciences. Unfortunately, the general principles relating to *ijtihād* in the classical *uṣūl al fiqh* studies were never allowed to develop significantly. This was also true for rational inquiry into the issues and conditions of humanity from the Shari'ah perspective. Thus none of these early indications or promises ever materialized in the form of methodological foundations or well-defined academic disciplines that used rational inquiry to study various aspects of life, especially the field of social studies. It should be obvious, then, that there is no point in relying on the collection of legalistic rulings and judgments from the classical discipline of *fiqh*,

or even on its general principles, as the intellectual and academic basis for solutions and alternatives, for that discipline never provided the Muslim mind with the capacity to initiate or renew, or with the rational and intellectual tools needed to deal with the realities and responsibilities of social life.

This statement is meant to underscore the previously mentioned need to seek new foundations in Islamic methodology for the social sciences and the humanities, and for the natural sciences and technology as well. In this way, the sciences of revelation will complement these sciences and provide humanity with knowledge guided by revelation on the one hand, and by reason, intellect, and the laws of nature on the other.

In this study, we shall attempt to take a few steps toward establishing the existence of viable sources of derivation for the social sciences in Islamic thought. In addition, we shall study the matter of a preliminary work plan for the Islamization of these sciences.

Classifying Islamic Texts

Without easy access to the revealed texts, it is inconceivable that either the Islamization of knowledge or the Islamization of the social sciences will occur. Such access needs to be accurate and yet simple enough so that any Muslim scholar can deal with it. It was also explained earlier that the issue of providing access to the revealed texts requires not only rearranging the subjects, but also ridding them of all obscurities.

But classifying the texts of revelation, and especially the texts of the Sunnah, requires that the methodology for dealing with them be presented in a new way, so that scholars and educated Muslims may bypass the technicalities and academic niceties that have historically characterized studies of the Sunnah. Only in this way will scholars and generalists benefit from the wealth of material contained in those texts.

In order that the texts be understood and applied properly, it is essential that lexical and historical studies be

undertaken to place each one in its respective context. Only in this way will the student or researcher fully understand the texts' higher purposes, underlying principles, and basic concepts. A proper interpretation of the texts is impossible without first clearing away the influence of circumstances existing at the time and place of their revelation or, in the case of Sunnah texts, articulation. By such an academic preparation, such texts may become living representations of unambiguous meaning and significance. Likewise, it is important that this academic groundwork be undertaken in the most reliable and authentic manner possible, so that commentary on the text is never mistaken for the text itself, and so that matters of less-than-certain authenticity may not be confused for the unmistakably authentic. Thus, by means of an established academic methodology, the meanings and contexts of each text will become clear. Moreover, texts for which such clarification is not altogether possible may be left to be understood in the light of the greater perspective of the *sīrah*, the history of the first Islamic period, and the general principles and higher purposes of Islam.

Moreover, it is essential that these ordered and authenticated texts issue from reliable institutions of learning or research, or from qualified and trusted scholars. It will also be necessary for scholars and researchers to adopt a positive attitude toward such studies and compilations and then study and criticize them in a constructive manner. Likewise, Muslim academic circles must give this task the priority required to ensure that the work is completed. In this way, they will do Islamic thought a great service. It is also essential that modern information technology be used to collect and classify the revealed texts. Another project would be to index the contents of all major texts of the classical heritage (*turāth*). This would allow Muslims to become acquainted with the work and experiences of their ancestors and to derive benefit from the fruit of their intellectual labors.

At the present time, the International Institute of Islamic Thought considers this issue to be among its priorities and

is therefore engaged in its promotion. It is hoped that all Muslim individuals, organizations, and academic specialists will work together for the successful conclusion of this undertaking.

A Comprehensive Civilizational Outlook

As Muslims prepare to shoulder a more serious role in the social sciences, they should realize that they are not beginning from scratch. On the contrary, Muslims have made valuable contributions to the history of civilization. Nevertheless, as other communities make enormous strides in this area, Muslims have begun to view the foot race for preeminence in the civilization of the modern world as a challenge to Islam.

Since becoming aware of this challenge, Muslims have begun to learn about the efforts of others in this area of endeavor. In addition, they have begun to establish relations with the hope of obtaining that which they have missed. Unfortunately, however, not very much has been accomplished, and the gulf dividing them from other communities continues to grow wider, despite all the efforts and money spent by Muslims.

It is quite obvious that greater efforts to translate the science and literature of other communities, or to increase the number of students sent to their universities, will not change this unfortunate situation. Moreover, the reasons for this sorry state of affairs may be traced to the Muslim mentality of imitation, its methodology of taking only half measures, and the evaporation of its religious fervor and psychological self-esteem.

It should also be noted that what is needed for the establishment of a sound relationship between Islamic and Western thought is the provision of comprehensive studies to the Muslim mind and Muslim student. These studies should focus on contemporary thought and civilization, their history, values, objectives, and their complementary relationships. In this way, our intellectuals will be able to free themselves from either drowning or becoming dissolved in the sea of Western thought. They will also be enabled to

deal independently with the issues of that thought. The end result will be that Islamic thought will benefit from the experiences of other nations without having to sacrifice its own foundations or distinguishing features.

It is also important to distinguish between being overwhelmed by the thought and culture of others and selecting and adopting what is truly beneficial from that thought and culture. When a careful and attentive selection is being made, questions of faith, identity, intentions, and principles cannot be bargained or trifled with. Rather, the matter is merely one of choosing the most beneficial means available and then using them in a way that will be of the most value to the Ummah. Such a form of borrowing may thus be termed a studied and ordered breakthrough. This is also the foundation for successful grafting between civilizations. The Prophet used this technique when he dealt with the People of the Book. He also directed his companions and Muslim society to use the same method. The West used it in its early encounters with Islam and Islamic civilization during the latter's golden age. Borrowing from the Muslim world did not change the identity, beliefs, or fundamental orientation of the West. On the contrary, the West fought every Islamic influence of a religious or doctrinal nature and used every possible means of propaganda and censorship. Quite often, for example, it fabricated falsehoods about Islam, the Prophet, and major Muslim personalities.

It is for this reason that a sound and comprehensive understanding of contemporary society is essential for any sort of cross-cultural exchange. Indeed, such an understanding makes it possible to benefit from the learning and technology of others without having to sacrifice one's values, principles, identity, and beliefs in the process. Therefore, great care should be taken in regard to mistaking imitation for exchange. This process of borrowing must be done on the basis of the equality of both parties, not one being the leader and the other the follower.

This is the mission that the International Institute of Islamic Thought has undertaken. By providing Muslims with comprehensive studies of Western social sciences and

civilization, as opposed to mere translations, the Institute is seeking to enable the Muslim mind to deal correctly with Western civilization. In fact, the Institute hopes to publish a comprehensive work on the beginnings and objectives, the historical progression and accomplishments, and the strengths and weaknesses of Western civilization. Such a work will fill a gap that has existed for far too long in contemporary Islamic thought. Indeed, the Institute welcomes the cooperation of all Muslim scholars and thinkers in making a success of this important project.

Premises of the Social Sciences

The purpose of the social sciences and the humanities is to conduct methodical inquiry into three realms:

- (1) the natures and relationships of beings and the universe,
- (2) the reality and the potential of society and of the challenges it faces, and
- (3) the systems, concepts, policies, and alternatives necessary to the life of society.

Given all of this, however, what is the connection between the objectives of revelation as articulated by Islam and the various fields and disciplines in the social sciences?

The way to make this connection is to classify the premises of the social sciences alongside the corresponding fundamentals of Islam in order to define their framework and clarify their objectives and purposes. If this is not done, the resulting studies will consist of no more than statistics, charts, and analyses that draw their inspiration from sources other than Islam and revelation.

There are two kinds of desired Islamic premises as regards the social sciences. The first are general premises having to do with the general principles of Islam. These premises define the major values and priorities of life in Islam, Islamic systems, and the Islamic personality. The second kind is that of vital academic work which includes:

- (1) the premises and foundations of every science and discipline, including the social sciences;

- (2) the nature, reality, potential, and relations of each discipline;
- (3) the purposes, values, orientations, and Islamic methodological guidelines for each discipline;
- (4) discussion of each academic field in the light of these principles and values; and
- (5) the landmarks of knowledge and the major issues which clarify the Islamic view of that knowledge as distinguished from the non-Islamic vision and objectives, and the effects that these have on society under different circumstances.

Even though these premises may be traced to the revealed texts, they will nonetheless be derivations obtained through *ijtihad* and will thereby represent rational inquiry and the Islamic response to various civilizational challenges. As such they will represent examples of free and creative Islamic thinking that is open to discussion, criticism, and correction. Undoubtedly, as the Islamic contribution gradually grows stronger, these premises will mature and be absorbed into the mainstream of knowledge. In this manner, the Islamic contribution to the social sciences and all branches of knowledge will increase. Likewise, the Islamic treatment of these subjects will become distinct in terms of its outlook and contributions.

It is important for us to understand that Muslims must bring about the requisite civilizational and methodological changes in Islamic thought and thus release it from its particularist and theoretical confines as well as from the effects of its long battle with the political leadership. Muslims must also develop a sound and comprehensive methodology for their thought so that they may reopen the door to *ijtihad* and overcome the sort of mentality bred by *taqlid*. If Muslims cannot succeed in such undertakings, the Ummah's current deplorable situation will not change. Moreover, the efforts of contemporary Islamic movements and organizations will come to nothing, as happened with their predecessors.

Our study of contemporary Islamic movements that have sprung up in deserts clarifies that the reason for their initial

success was that they began in an environment closely resembling that of the Prophet's time. It is obvious that Islamic movements characterized by imitation, particularism, and a merely historical and descriptive understanding of Islam, its institutions, and its civilizational foundations will never flourish away from a remote desert. The failure of these movements was inevitable, even if some did succeed in coming to power at local or national levels, for they were totally unprepared to deal with the challenges of modern society. Thus, before they suffered either military or political loss, they had lost on the battleground of thought and culture.

In this way, one Islamic movement followed another, each one as culturally and intellectually unqualified as the next to effect any sort of positive change in Muslim society, to renew and reform it, or even to save it from the forces threatening its existence. Perhaps a study of their leaders (i.e., al Sanūsī in Libya, al Mahdī in Sudan, Shah Walī Allah in India, and Muhammad ibn 'Abd al Wahhāb in Arabia) would shed more light on this analysis.

In order for an Islamic movement to succeed in the modern Islamic world, it must first seek to reform the methodology of Islamic thought and the way it looks at civilization in general. Only in this way will the efforts and jihad of the Ummah rise above the oft-heard emotional and sentimental appeals that do nothing to produce the changes in thought and culture needed to combat contemporary challenges, to clarify the Ummah's identity and personality, or to recast its approaches and social institutions in an Islamic mold.

Unless changes are made in methodology, no constructive efforts can take place, and no undertaking will amount to anything. In fact, such efforts represent a steady drain of valuable resources, while the gulf between the Ummah and the rest of the world grows even wider. The Ummah stands to witness the continued forfeiture of territory, wastage of resources, loss of allegiance, and the befalling of even more disasters unless it begins to address properly the real issues confronting it.

The importance of reforming Muslim thought and methodology should now be quite clear. It is equally important that we realize that our suffering will increase and that time is not on our side, despite the wealth of our religion, our history, and our lands, as long as our thought, our psychological make-up, and our culture remain deformed and disabled.

It is our responsibility to look at ourselves critically and to face up to our own shortcomings. This is not easy, but rather bitter and painful. However, if we are to be honest with ourselves, overcome our emotionalism, and put aside our inflated estimations of our abilities, accomplishments, and selves, such an undertaking cannot be avoided. Only if we do this will we be able to benefit from the lessons of the past and put them to use for the future.

To expand on our treatment of Islamic methodology, it is now appropriate to discuss some of the premises that distinguish the Islamic perspective from contemporary perspectives on civilization. Indeed, on the basis of these premises, one might begin to hope that one day the Ummah will make important original contributions to humanity.

The inclusiveness of the Islamic concepts of human nature and *fitrah* is what makes the Islamic perspective so complete. This perspective, in addition to providing a proper and unique basis for study, research, and analysis in the social sciences and humanities, also promises to make positive contributions to humanity. Our discussion of these premises will concentrate on the following topics:

- the dimensions of human existence in Islam: a collective singularity and a comprehensive plurality;
- The purpose of existence and the reason for order in the universe; and
- The impartiality of truth and the reality of human nature and social relations.

**The Dimensions of Human Existence in Islam:
A Collective Singularity and Comprehensive Plurality**

Human existence, viewed from the Islamic perspective, is distinguished by its comprehensive plurality within a

unified human singularity. This outlook represents a very important methodological assumption with far-reaching consequences for the study of behavior, human nature, and the Muslim personality in particular.

To a great extent, religions and ideologies are either limited to, or simply focus on, a single aspect of human existence. Thus, to varying degrees, all other aspects are ignored. So, in spite of the successes and achievements of these religions and ideologies, the people who subscribe to them remain, both individually and collectively, confused and subject to inner conflicts.

Western materialism, at the level of the individual, focuses on the senses and on pleasures and desires. Then, in spite of all that Western civilization has accomplished in terms of physical comfort and pleasure, the individual finds him/herself enveloped by psychological maladies; and society finds itself subject to the negative effects of these maladies as they multiply and become more acute.

Likewise, materialist totalitarian Marxism concentrates almost exclusively on material and economic concerns. Thus, it has taken as its highest objectives production and the freeing of humankind from material needs. Yet, in spite of that, the individual in the Marxist system is no less prone to the psychological maladies that beset his/her Western European counterparts. Thus, both ideologies have failed miserably to provide the individual and society as a whole with a sense of well-being and security.

The religions of the far East which belittle the desires and needs of humankind in ways even more severe than the doctrines of self-denial and abstinence taught by Christianity have also failed to solve the problems of backwardness and hopelessness that confront their followers individually and collectively. It was the lack of faith in these religions that led whole populations, like the people of China, to seek deliverance in materialist ideologies and totalitarianism. Thus, the shortcomings in these religions should be obvious to anyone who pauses to consider them. Nor should it surprise anyone if people turn and run from these religions and from the emptiness they represent.

But Islam, as articulated by the indisputable texts of revelation, is distinguished by the way in which it deals with the nature, being and needs of humankind. Islam acknowledges that humans have natural desires, aspirations, and longings. Indeed, these are considered by Islam to be favors which Allah has bestowed upon humankind. Thus, if they are put to proper and constructive uses, they will afford pleasure and satisfaction as well as beauty and renewal of strength and life.

Islam also acknowledges that humans have material and economic needs and considers these to be a means of living, fulfillment, innovation, and establishing an order of truth, justice, and well being for all members of society. Thus, Islam refuses to relegate humankind to the level of mere matter, for it refuses to suppose that humankind is no more than the stirrings of the spirit. Rather, Islam sees humankind as both matter and spirit, body and soul, with an earthly existence and a heavenly goal. Thus, every deed or material achievement in human life is, from the Islamic perspective, an outward form, or a material expression designed to achieve a spiritual objective that gives meaning to existence.

As Islam sees it, a human is a material being with desires and longings, and with the need to work in order to survive. At the same time, however, a human being is a soul with a higher spiritual purpose that causes it to strive in the ways of goodness and reform. It is for this reason that every sort of worship or act of remembrance and devotion prescribed by Islam is really very simple to perform. In addition, these acts bring to those who perform them benefits of both a spiritual and a material nature. Cleanliness, for example, comes of *wuḍū'*, orderliness comes of *ṣalāh*, patience and forbearance come of *ṣawm*, generosity comes of *zakah*, and equality comes of *ḥajj*. The objective in every instance is to prepare the soul to perform good deeds, to honor trusts, to bear the responsibilities of *khilāfah*, and to do good on earth through reform and civilization. Consider the following verses of the Qur'an:

And Allah forbids all shameful deeds, reprehensible actions, and rebellion: He advises you so that you may take these matters to heart (16:90).

Have you seen the one who denies the final Judgment? That is the one who turns away the orphan and does not encourage the feeding of the poor (107:1–3).

If anyone does a righteous deed it enures to the benefit of his/her own soul; If he/she does evil, it works against it [his/her own soul] (45:15).

He who created life and death, that He may try which of you are better in deed (67:2).

Then anyone who has done an atom's weight of good, shall see it. And anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil, shall see it (99:7–8).

The Prophet of Allah said:

A kind word is charity.

In your sexual satisfaction there is charity.

A person was sentenced to the eternal Fire for mistreating a cat, while another person was thanked by Allah and forgiven for giving water to a dog on a hot day.

The Islamic perception of the human being is that as the facets of his/her existence, needs, and personality multiply, he or she is, at the same time, a single and complete entity endowed with both material and spiritual aspects that are as agreeable as they are inseparable. There can be no felicity or balance for a human being in this world if any one of these aspects is ignored or put to incorrect use.

By means of this perception, the menial and limited life of a human being in this world takes on a whole new dimension. Life is to be followed by life, and death is not the end of one's existence. Life was given to humans for a purpose, and in life situations humans are free to exercise their own will. Then, the eternity that follows this life will be the result of the nature of one's life in this world. In other words, one's position in the next life will depend on the kind of life one led in this world. Only this perception of human life reflects the reality of its composition and destination as well as its *fitrah*. Therefore, unless one achieves more than the mere satisfaction of one's physical needs and desires in this life, one will never achieve psychological and emotional balance, stability, or security. On the contrary, one would resemble an animal who would stoop to any depravity in order to survive a life that is destined to end anyway. Such an animal knows nothing of where it came from, or why, or where it is going, or how. All it knows is that it came, and that it is going. Its limited understanding, however, is unable to determine with any sort of certainty the objective toward which it must head, or the purpose for which it was placed on this earth.

The individual in this world, when faced with worldly calamities, changes, and trials is incapable of finding true happiness in life unless he/she recognizes that there is another dimension to it, one which corrects and puts everything right. Otherwise, what kind of life would it be? An animal's life would clearly be better for, after all, an animal has no understanding and would therefore never miss things like justice or fairness if they were to be withheld from it.

Thus, the Islamic concept of the afterlife is an important one for the way in which it contributes to the mental balance and felicity of the individual. A correct Muslim life, owing to its singularity, comprehensiveness, and belief in the afterlife, will lead to contentment, felicity, and security. The effort one expends in the course of it will never be allowed to go to waste: not the patience, not the thanksgiving, and not the trust in Allah's justice and wisdom. These

are the provisions a Muslim takes with him/her on the journey of life. And thus the self rests satisfied and appreciative because its worldly life includes aspects of both the mundane and the sublime.

It is not difficult to imagine, then, what confusion and difficulty will beset the Muslim personality, and society as a whole, if the individual Muslim's perception of the after-world is adversely affected. Certainly, the issue of the afterlife is not a secondary one. On the contrary, its prominence is such that it deeply affects both Muslim society and the individual.

From the Islamic perspective of the human being as a unified singularity, no conflict is seen to exist between the individual and the societal aspects of life. Rather, both are manifestations of a single being and its needs and both have, as material and spiritual realities, their own dimensions and ramifications. Human society, in both physical and theoretical terms, is composed of individuals. Likewise, the individual can neither exist or survive without society. Human life is therefore a combination of these two dimensions, and the Islamic concept of human life is therefore not one of conflict. Another result of this logic is that Islam is antithetical to all forms of oppression, tyranny, injustice and corruption.

What needs to be noted in the matter of how Islam confronts corruption is its distinguishing between what is unambiguously laid down as divine commandment and what is no more than opinion, or interpretation, or *ijtihad*. Matters of interpretation, then, return finally for the consideration of the Ummah or, more specifically, those entrusted with the responsibility of solving the Ummah's political and legislative problems (*ahl al ḥall wa al 'aql*). So these are matters in which no decision can be correct unless it has received the approval of the Ummah through the process of *shūrā*.

The Purpose of Existence and the Reason for Order in the Universe

We have previously discussed the topic of approaches, including the purpose of existence, as a component and a basic assumption of the sort of Islamic methodology that guides all forms of research and academic endeavor through the various branches of knowledge. It is this component, in fact, which protects Islamically oriented academic inquiry from deception, ignorance, and inadvertent deviation. In this way, academic inquiry undertaken from an Islamic perspective may proceed, with the insight provided by the *fitrah*, toward the establishment of a universal order of goodness, reform, and civilization in which there is no room for corruption, deviation, perversion, superstition, or *kufr*.

O Our Lord! Surely You have not created this in vain!
(3:191)

The Impartiality of Truth and the Reality of Human Nature and Social Relations

Islamic thought, with its approaches and concepts springing from belief in Allah and His oneness, includes a very basic assumption in the way it looks into any field of knowledge. This general and basic assumption is that truth and reality, right and wrong, and good and evil are in fact neutral realities which must be understood in the light of both the nature which Allah has created in humankind and the revelations which He has sent to guide them. From this standpoint, the Muslim mind is a scientific one which seeks knowledge on its own terms and according to its own objective rules, rather than on the basis of whim or presupposed notions. For this reason the efforts of the Muslim mind will not be wasted and will not go astray.

If the Truth had been in accord with their desires,
truly the heavens and the earth and all beings
therein would have been corrupted (23:71).

And who is more astray than one who follows his own desires, devoid of guidance from Allah? (28:50).

So have you ever seen anyone [like one] who takes as his god his own vain desire? (45:23).

If the contemporary materialistic mind is forced in its study of the hard sciences and technology to be objective, that same mind will be transformed into a refractory devil when loosed upon the social sciences and humanities. Then, in the name of scientific inquiry it rationalizes all manner of aberrations. It is for this reason that we witness a never-ending succession of "schools" in the social sciences, each with its own theories and prognostications. In the meantime, however, society remains in a state of confusion, unable to find relief from the problems that beset it.

Materialist studies in the social sciences completely ignore the element of revelation. Instead of viewing this as one of its major weaknesses, materialist scholarship in the social sciences claims that its field is complex and incomprehensible to non specialists. Social sciences which rely solely on human reason, however, will inevitably go astray. This is because, on its own, the human mind is incapable of understanding the complete objective truth about, and the higher purposes of, the human experience.

The Western intellectual heritage that ignored and mistrusted revelation as a source of knowledge came about as the result of deliberate distortions to the concepts of religion and prophethood. One of the only Western schools of thought to reflect the *fitrah* and to attempt to understand its concepts in a truthful and objective manner was the school of natural law. This school, however, never progressed for the reason that it had no connection to true and unaltered revelation. The Western concept of religion was badly distorted when the revelational sources available to them were interpreted in ways that contributed greatly to superstition and unscientific beliefs, not to mention social injustice.

Academic research in the social sciences from an Islamic perspective should confidently and objectively inquire into life, the universe, nature, and everything else. In so doing, it will need to proceed in the light of the teachings, objectives and values of revelation. Only in this way will it not lose its way, or fall victim to its own inclinations.

In view of the preceding, it should not be surprising that Western scholarship in the social sciences has not been able to achieve anything like what it has achieved in the hard sciences and technology. Nor is it anything to marvel over that its successes in technology have been paralleled by failures in its institutions at the levels of society, the family, and the individual.

The objectivity of truth and reality is a living and dynamic concept in which relations are regulated by the *fitrah*, the natural laws of the universe, and values that distinguish between right and wrong. This concept is one that ignores the sophistry of diseased minds that cry out in the name of knowledge and free inquiry, and then attempt to belittle society's most basic standards of decency. Such minds do not balk at defending even the most disgusting perversions, and presenting them in such a way that they appear to be the rule rather than the exception. Such thought and blind methodology will never result in other than perversion, corruption, and deviation that further tear the fabric of society and destroy its family structure. If this is allowed to continue in Western society, it will lose all the values it acquired from revelation (through Christianity) and Islamic civilization (chiefly at the time of the Crusades).

Among the factors distinguishing Islamically oriented social studies from the non-Islamic is that Islamic social studies must always be mindful of its objectives and higher purposes. This is the guarantee that they will not stray from the truth, or from what is right, or that they will produce utter depravity in the name of academic freedom. Thus, whatever is unjust, oppressive, or overweening will remain unjust, oppressive, and overweening in spite of the academic terminology in which these may be disguised, or the terms of the arguments in which they are presented.