

CHAPTER SIX

Islam and the Future

At the end of this study it must be emphasized that reform is of equal importance to the Ummah and humanity alike. It is therefore essential that the attention and efforts of Islamic workers and leaders be directed toward three fundamental matters:

1. the future of the Ummah; i.e. working among Muslim youth;
2. the role of academic institutions in achieving Islamization and clarifying the Islamic perspective toward knowledge, civilization, and the preparation of new generations qualified to carry the eternal message of Islam to all of humankind;
3. guiding the future course of human civilization in fulfillment of the Ummah's responsibility to correct the progress and thought of humankind.

The Future of the Ummah's Character

It is obvious that the thought of the Ummah as it stands at present is in need of reform. It is equally obvious that the psychological makeup of the Ummah as it stands at present is defective. Even if individuals and even entire generations are capable of ingesting new information and ideas, that intake will be superficial and significantly different from the processes involved in true character-building. "The best of you in Islam are the best of you in *jāhiliyyah*, so long as you

acquire an understanding of Islam," said the Prophet. It was for this reason that the free and daring Arabs of the desert, after they converted to Islam, were able to achieve so much in a remarkably short period of time.

The role of the present generation of Muslims is first to understand the nature of the present environment, assess the range of possible activities and available capabilities, and then propose workable and worthwhile ideas. For this to happen it will first be necessary to build exemplary schools for the young in which they may develop strong characters and unshakable faith in the objectives and precepts of Islam.

Any hopes that change will come about in the Ummah lie in the investment to be made in the future, and in the emotional and intellectual preparation of youth to perform their duties for civilization as a whole. If today's generation does its duty and prepares the following generation for the future, then it will have discharged its responsibility successfully. On the other hand, if it supposes itself to have the ability to do the job on its own, it will have missed the point and wasted its energies.

The importance of the role to be played by the present generation is in its formulating sound approaches and suitable means for the proper preparation of future generations. Once we have understood this lesson, it becomes essential that we focus on three major tasks:

1. provide energy and resources for constructive work, and protect the same from depletion;
2. generate sound ideas from an Islamic perspective;
3. direct resources toward translating Islamic vision into material that may be used in the education and upbringing of youth.

What this means to Muslim intellectuals and leaders is that the first priority of the present generation needs to be the renewal of Islamic thought through the articulation of sound Islamic perspectives.

At this beginning stage, the work of building for the future of the Ummah will have to be carried out in the intellectual and educational spheres, as these are the ones from which the required reformational energies may be generated. Under the present circumstances, then, the Ummah should expend on its political and military organization only as much as will ensure that its building and reformation may proceed apace.

The responsibility of the Ummah's leadership at the present time is to explain to parents and teachers the meaning of psychological development, its importance to the Ummah, and the elements required in bringing it about. If this is done, future generations will never suffer from the backwardness and decadence that have beset Muslims over the past several centuries. The future of the Ummah clearly depends upon change taking place in the development of the psychological and intellectual makeup of the coming generations. The more effort we expend in preparing our young for their responsibilities, the closer we come to achieving our goals.

It is the responsibility of the Ummah's thinkers and scholars to concentrate their energies on reform of the Ummah's thought, on clarifying its vision, and on presenting these to the Ummah in such a way that its institutions may derive benefit from them.

It is the responsibility of the Ummah's thinkers and scholars to study the historical development of the Ummah in order to determine what influenced the course that it took, and where it went astray. Only then will the Ummah be able to set out on a new path and produce the kind of ideas that will lead it to a better future.

It is the responsibility of the Ummah's thinkers and scholars to review the foundations of Islamic thought, the vital relationships between its constituent elements, and the roles that these play in generating new ideas for society.

It is the responsibility of the Ummah's thinkers and scholars to return to Islamic thought its originality, integrity, and comprehensiveness. Only in this way can the deviations of the past be avoided. And only if this is done

will the thought of the Ummah become anything more than a mirage.

It is the responsibility of the Ummah's thinkers and scholars to study the *uṣūl* and methodology of Islamic thought so as to develop unique Islamic disciplines not only in the service of the texts of revelation but in the sciences of life and society as well. Certainly Islamic thought is capable of making valuable contributions to education, politics, economics, administration, and communications as well as to the philosophies of the hard and theoretical sciences.

The Ummah's thinkers and scholars need to accept that the responsibility for putting the Ummah back on the track of progress is theirs alone. All others will merely follow in the light of their vision and counsel. Thus, their success in presenting their ideas will determine the success of others in bringing those ideas to fruition.

Another of their responsibilities at this difficult stage in the life of the Ummah is to increase the Islamic consciousness of those who claim allegiance to it. This can come about only if sound methods of character building are employed from an early stage in the educational process. Indeed, the youth are our future and our strength. The Ummah must begin now to prepare the people it needs for tomorrow.

In this undertaking, the educators of the Ummah need to consider the role of parents in bringing up children. Indeed, in these matters nothing compares in importance to the conviction held by mothers and fathers in general about how to raise children. To a great extent, the development of values and character depends upon the relationships between parents and children. Any effort expended in the school or in society which does not win the approval of parents is therefore doomed to certain failure.

Any chance of success, therefore, that thinkers and educators may have will rest entirely on their ability to bring the issue of education and proper upbringing to the attention of parents. When that happens, both the parents and the home will play their part in achieving the desired results. In this basic way, then, the Ummah will be able to

overcome whatever obstacles are placed in the way of its reform and development by any institutions or systems.

Islamization and Academic Institutions

Our discussion of the future will not be complete without mention of the role to be played by Islamic academic institutions in achieving the goals of Islamization and formulation of an informed Islamic perspective. It is obvious that in the final analysis the crisis of the Ummah is in clarifying its values and basic concepts within an established and competent societal structure. It has also become quite obvious that the efforts and sacrifices of the Ummah in the political and military spheres will never do anything to lift it from the depths to which it has already fallen. Rather, the gulf between the Islamic peoples and those of the developed nations continues to widen day by day.

The practical application of Islam's lofty civilizational ideals and its advanced social systems will never be possible unless Islam's epistemological sources and its unique methodology become a part of the Ummah's makeup and, in particular, become ingrained in the education of all Muslims. Thus, the major arena for change, in addition to the family and home environment, will be the Ummah's educational institutions. Clearly, if these institutions are to succeed in their mission to become the instruments of change in our society, they must not continue as poor imitations of the Western institutions they were established to emulate blindly. Nor must our Islamic educational institutions remain in perpetual need of sending its best brains to foreign universities for the purpose of qualifying, or training, or upgrading skills. Instead they must concentrate on providing an intellectual atmosphere that will encourage and ensure the development of truly inquisitive minds, original thinking, and creativity.

It is thus essential that the educational institutions in the Islamic world realize their own importance and change their mentalities by openly ascribing themselves to the Ummah, its resources, religion, thought, and objectives. They must then offer programs that put the resources of the

Ummah to optimum benefit. In this way they will be able to meet the real challenges that stand before them, and to fulfill the true needs of the Ummah of Islam.

It is no longer acceptable for our educational institutions to present no more than literal translations of Western or Eastern sciences and knowledge. Nor is it any longer acceptable for Muslim intellectuals to be satisfied with merely reproducing and rehashing the thought and efforts of others.

The educational institutions of the Islamic world should take as their starting point the universal truths, convictions, and purposes of which the Islamic quintessence is composed. In order to achieve this, these institutions will have to establish academic centers, units, and associations that will strive to formulate and develop Islamic academic methodologies in every branch of knowledge. The Islamization of knowledge needs to begin by developing suitable methodologies in the various branches of knowledge and by preparing general introductions to each. These foundations may then become the framework for Islamically oriented research and *ijtihad* that seeks to guide the upbringing and development of new generations of Muslims.

In order to ensure the success of the efforts to bring about Islamization in the various branches of knowledge it will be necessary to direct the energies of researchers, scholars, teachers, and students toward the new Islamic intellectual framework. The goals, Islamic premises, and propositions that this is to be based on must be articulated, and a new mentality developed. Then the academic heritage of Islam and other nations may be classified. These are the kinds of efforts that represent the only way to realization of the requisite academic ability and maturity.

The opening of academic departments for the Islamic social sciences in certain universities within the Islamic world, such as departments of Islamic economics, Islamic communications, and Islamic civilization, and the opening of research centers such as the centers for Islamic thought and Islamic economics, and the teaching of certain Islamic

social sciences, such as Islamic international relations, Islamic political thought, Islamic political systems, the political development of the Islamic world, and so on, all of these are good and positive steps in the right direction and need to be encouraged in every possible way.

Among the most pressing problems faced by the new Islamic social studies is the shortage of resources. If we look at any center, unit, or department, we will discover that its resources are limited and that it suffers from a lack of qualified personnel.

At this stage it is not enough merely to open a center, or a teaching department, or to teach a new subject without providing qualified specialists and the support they need to carry out their mission. The practice of giving qualified persons the responsibility of teaching the Islamic disciplines or social studies and then burdening them with administrative chores without adequate staff assistance is a practice which must not be continued, especially not at this sensitive stage of the Islamization process. Such scholars need the time to be able to conduct research into their subjects of specialization. Thus, to burden such scholars in such a way is more likely to block progress than to encourage it.

The way to the success of the movement for the Islamization of knowledge and learning is continued, diligent effort. The matter is far more complex than the making of an announcement in the media.

The first step required in the Islamization of knowledge is that Islamic educational institutions undertake the following important tasks:

1. To classify and index the texts of *wahy*, the Qur'an and the Sunnah; to facilitate the understanding of these texts and their purposes for researchers and students; to facilitate access to these texts and the ways to deal with them.
2. To edit, classify, and index the specialized, encyclopedic texts of the intellectual heritage, so as to facilitate the understanding of their content by researchers.

Here, the process of acquainting Muslim students with the classical heritage of Islam is an important part of instilling within them a sense of identity and cultural integrity. Unless this is accomplished, every effort to reform Islamic thought will be a waste of time.

3. Islamic universities and educational institutions need to recruit qualified scholars who combine specializations in the social sciences with sound backgrounds in the Islamic intellectual heritage. By means of their studies and research, they should clarify the desired academic vision and methodology. To begin with, specialized centers of research and graduate departments could be established. Continual efforts could then be made by graduate students and researchers to gradually prepare curricula and textbooks that would replace the imported texts presently used at nearly every level of our educational systems.

The widespread ineptitude which allows the publication and use of unsuitable textbooks indicates the attempt to avoid the responsibilities which would otherwise lead to success. To continue in this manner can only mean more disappointments.

4. Islamic educational institutions need to increase awareness among leaders and educated Muslims in general of the issue of Islamization, its priorities, and the place of those priorities on the agenda of the Ummah as a whole. These institutions need also to open their doors to these people through organizing and sponsoring seminars, conferences, and lectures on the subject of Islamization. Educational institutions will need also to encourage the establishment of academic societies and the publication of academic journals devoted to the subject. Indeed, the time has arrived to transform Islamization from an empty catchword into a well-organized and worldwide movement.

5. Islamic academic institutions must now begin to direct graduate research and programs toward the subjects and issues of Islamization. In this way they will be able to produce the academic manpower needed for the

coming stages. No longer must our universities depend upon the return of people whose minds and attitudes have been transformed into tools of the cultural invasion.

Thus we need to be certain, by means of organized planning and diligent work, that we are fulfilling our responsibility to the Ummah. In this way will we be deserving of Allah's pleasure and His *tawfiq*.

The Future Course of Humanity

If the future of the Ummah of Islam is to depend upon the degree of success it achieves in reforming its methodology, thought, education, and organization, as well as laying the foundations for new Islamic social sciences, then the future of all bewildered and threatened humanity rests on the degree of success achieved by Muslims in presenting a living example of Islamic teachings.

Islam provides humankind with a reason for living, and with an ethical code by which to live. It affords humankind with insight into the *fitrah* and the dimensions of its universal relationships; with the seen and the unseen, the individual, society, and the universe. Islam provides humankind with the foundations for a stable society, progress, security, and world peace.

Islam protects the institution of the family, upholds the principles of justice, self-sufficiency, personal and collective responsibility, freedom of belief and thought, *shūrà*, and the oneness of all humankind in terms of their origins, interests, and destiny. It is this perfect Islamic vision which is capable of treating the ills of modern materialistic society and the dangers it has produced. Certainly, the moral bankruptcy of modern society is no secret to anyone. Under the shadow of materialism, the world is divided into north and south, white and black, rich and poor, overfed and underfed, colonizer and colonized, master and slave. To people today, peace is nothing more than the suppression of their fears about the unleashing of the forces of mass destruction by one or another of the nations, classes, or camps competing for supremacy.

In view of the serious flaws in their societies, the developed nations of the world have never had greater need of Islam. This is because Islam embodies concepts capable of mending those flaws.

These concepts may be summarized in two points:

Islam's Society of Unity

Islamic society stands on the foundations of unity and the concept of brotherhood. As such, it focuses on answering the basic needs of the individual and the interests he/she shares with others in terms of the family, the neighborhood, the nation, and humankind in general. If the materialist powers of the contemporary world stand on the philosophy of confrontation, then the philosophy of Islam, collective security, is the philosophy of tomorrow. Allah says:

O people! Heed your Lord Who created you from a single life and then created from it its mate. Then He scattered from them countless men and women (4:1)

O people! We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and nations in order to know one another. Verily the best among you in the sight of Allah are those who heed Him (49:13)

Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth, and the differences in your tongues and coloring (30:22)

People were no other than a single community, but then they fell to differing (10:19)

Do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, the needy, neighbors who are near and who are not so near, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (4:36)

On that account We prescribed for Banī Isrā'īl that whoever slays another, for other than the crimes of

murder or depravity, will be as one who has slain all of humankind (5:32)

Never forget generosity between yourselves (2:237)

Address people with kindness (2:83)

Allah does not forbid you, with regard to those who neither war against you nor drive you from your homes, from dealing kindly with them and justly (60:8)

If you do retaliate, then retaliate in a manner no worse than the way you were attacked. But if you are patient, things will be best for those who are patient (16:126)

Fight in the cause of Allah against those who fight against you; but do not transgress (2:190)

If they cease, then let there be no hostility except against oppressors (2:193)

Let not your dislike for a people cause you to deal unjustly. Deal justly, for that is closer to *taqwà* (5:8)

When you speak, speak justly, even if a near relative is concerned (6:152)

When you make a decision between people, decide fairly (4:58)

Assist one another in goodness and *taqwà*, but not in wrongdoing and aggression (5:2)

If two parties among the believers fall to fighting among themselves, then make peace between them. But if one should then break the truce against the other, fight the one breaking the truce until it

complies with Allah's ruling. Then if it complies, make peace between them with justice, and be fair; for Allah loves those who are fair. Certainly, the believers are brothers. So make peace between your two brothers and heed Allah so that you may be shown mercy (49:9–10).

Islam's Cultivation of Knowledge

This point is related to the meaning of knowledge and the ways in which academic research is carried out. Materialist thought is essentially based on rational, empirical, and inductive methods so that it proceeds from experience and knowledge of the real world and extracts from these theories about the laws that govern life and the universe. There is no connection between this thought, however, and revelation. The main reason for this has to do with the Western lack of confidence in any of the major religions. This state of affairs arose when it became common knowledge that the texts of Christianity in particular had been tampered with, and filled with a great deal of unreasonable, contradictory, and incredible material.

When we understand the amazing complexity of the social nature of human beings and the number of factors which may come together at any given time to influence human behavior, we realize how badly the social sciences and the unceasing progression of social theories have floundered.

Moreover, as the consequences of mistakes made in these fields are imperceptible over the short run, and as they are nearly impossible to rectify once they have begun to take effect, we may come to have an even greater appreciation for the distinguishing factor in Islamic knowledge. Islamic knowledge agrees with rationalist, materialist knowledge in relation to the *fitrah* and natural laws of the universe. Rather than stop at the point of gathering that knowledge, however, Islamic knowledge passes on to cultivate and refine it, and to prevent its shortcomings from having any sort of negative effects on society.

Thus, the Muslim has access to any number of approaches and convictions revealed through divine *wahy* and dealing with the basic issues of social behavior. It is for this reason that even if a Muslim develops incorrect notions on the subject, *wahy* is there to correct them. So, at one and the same time, Islamic knowledge puts both empirical and inductive knowledge together with the sources of *wahy* so that Muslims may deal and transact as they please, so long as their dealings and transactions leave no ill effects on society. Muslims may thus earn their livings and order their family affairs in accordance with their particular circumstances. So the teachings of Islam should not be understood as shackles and chains, but as beacons and landmarks along the way of life.

Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, injustice, and rebellion (16:90).

These two points, Islam's society of unity and its cultivation of knowledge shall, if the Muslims understand them well, be very important in the world of tomorrow. Human society will no longer be able, in the future, to pay tomorrow for the mistakes it made today. In the decisive battles of history the numbers of dead rarely exceeded a few hundred persons, and nearby nations remained relatively unaffected when their neighbors fell to fighting. Nowadays, however, the whole world is in danger of becoming a battlefield.

When humankind realizes its capacity to destroy itself and the planet on which it lives, then it will realize its need for decisive regulations as prescribed by *wahy* in the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Only by understanding this will humankind save itself from falling into the depths of destruction. Nor will its way out be anything other than unity and the search for common interests.

In order to achieve their goals, Muslims need to understand the mission with which they have been entrusted.

Thus have We made you a middlemost nation to be a witness unto humankind (2:143).

So whosoever does an atom's weight of good shall see it, and whosoever does an atom's weight of evil shall see it (99:7-8).

The responsibility of Muslim scholars and thinkers is all the greater for, if they are able to clarify for others how sound the concepts of Islam really are or establish an exemplary society, they will save not only themselves and their own societies, but humankind and civilization at large. Then they will achieve a society of peace and security, guide the efforts of science and material progress, and establish the *khilāfah* society on earth that Allah commanded.

Islamization is the Issue of the Ummah

The objective of this study was to describe the overall condition of the Ummah and then place it before Muslims so that they may discuss the problems of society and seek the means of relief for individuals, the Ummah, and all of humankind. The most that can be expected from this effort in the direction of achieving these higher goals is that it may help to promote inquiry into Muslim thought and impel the Muslim mind toward objective consideration of the reasons for the Ummah's backwardness.

It is clear that the Ummah is in no real need of resources, opportunities, or values. Rather, what it is lacking is a methodology for sound thinking. Indeed, the problems of the Ummah are clearly connected to confused thinking, obscured social vision, improper and inadequate education, and the decline of its institutions in general. The result is that it is divided and has begun to resemble an enfeebled and cringing slave.

It is hoped that Islamization in general and the Islamization of knowledge in particular become the most important issues on the Ummah's agenda in the coming decades. It may also be hoped that the leadership of our contemporary Islamic movements will not look on Islamization as

in any way depreciative of or detracting from the value of their own efforts. Rather, political action and mobilization without sound ideas or people capable of delivering them is surely wasted.

It is essential to understand this problem as the Ummah's problem, and as a preparatory stage for it to pass through before it can take its rightful place as a leader of world civilization. Thus, the issue is not one of coming to power, or ruling over a locality, or establishing a political party. Thought is an element that works at a more fundamental level, one that qualifies any undertaking or program for producing real results.

It is also essential that the efforts being undertaken in different fields become coordinated so that they complement and support one another. Giving priority to one matter over another, it should be remembered, does not mean that one of those matters should be ignored and forgotten. So, along with whatever political efforts are being made at the present time, academic and intellectual efforts must also be made. In fact, political efforts can be understood as defensive in nature and aimed at allowing the Ummah to develop itself and its resources for the reform of its mental and intellectual strength.

Another matter to clarify is that academic work has its own levels and scope. Among these are the fundamental, or those having to do with methodology, epistemology, philosophy, etc. Among these too are the practical, applied, strategic, and dynamic levels. The problems of the Ummah, it should be emphasized, are related to the more fundamental and complex of these. The success of the practical and applied levels hinge almost entirely on the soundness and depth of the methodological matters at the fundamental level. This may explain why the strategic ideas of 'Abd al Raḥmān al Kawākibī in his book *Umm al Qurā*, which was written nearly a hundred years ago and explained in the clearest possible terms how a contemporary Islamic revival might be brought about, never amounted to anything other than a few localized achievements that changed nothing of real significance to the Ummah as a whole.

Rather, it is hoped that efforts will be increased so that work toward Islamic reformation may be carried out as a challenge at the international level.

Undoubtedly, if this much of the issue has been clarified for the thinkers and scholars of the Ummah, and if they are sincerely determined to pass the message on the Ummah at large, then the matter will catch on and spread like a spark in kindling. The lessons of history in this regard are perfectly clear. Nations possessed of sound ideas and clear thinking are those which burst forth like spring floods with new and greater achievements. But with the passage of a relatively short time, the situation always changes.

The thinkers and scholars of the Ummah must focus their determination and attention first of all on the reform of Muslim thought and the clarification of its vision for the Ummah and its leadership. Thereafter, should it be the will of Allah, the Ummah will take over with the work of building for the future and progressing toward new horizons.

To close: May Allah give us wisdom and guidance, deliver us from the rubble beneath which lie the ruins of the Ummah and humankind, and make us righteous workers who heed the call and follow the best of it.

All praise to Allah, Creator of the Universes!

