

An Approach to Knowledge and Human Limitations

Muhammad Hamidullah

It is inspiring and exciting to recall that the very first word in the very first Divine command, in the very first revelation was اقرأ (Read . . .), and that it was revealed to an *ummi*, (illiterate person). This command was later complemented by the revelation that human knowledge will always remain limited and small compared to all that is knowable in the universe. (وما أوتيتم من العلم إلا قليلاً) Man is urged, however, to continue to seek knowledge. (وقل رب زدني علماً) Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) is a model for us, (أسوة حسنة); so let us see what his attitude was on the subject that concerns us. He has ordered us: "Wisdom is the lost property of the Muslims, he recovers it wheresoever he finds it". (الحكمة ضالة المؤمن أينما وجدها أخذها).

This attitude is inspiring because it shows that there is no untouchability in science and knowledge, and there are no monopolies in matters of knowledge.

We should recall that sciences were developed before Islam and Muslims contributed to several of them. Non-Muslims have also participated and are continuing to participate in the development of knowledge. This fact implies that one cannot eliminate the non-Muslim part in scientific development without demolishing the very foundation of the knowledge. If we keep silent on this point, it would be dishonest to those who have the right to be duly recognized for their work.

The way open to us is the following:

- (a) study the history of each and every individual science and establish what part Muslims have played in it.
- (b) Find out that part of non-Muslim knowledge which should not be left unchallenged, and attempt to refute it for the benefit of the younger generation.

Both are important, and the failure to do so is causing harm to Muslims.

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I take the liberty of adding a personal note: that there is “knowledge” which some of the Muslims would say is **wrong**, while others would declare it **right**. This will continue to be so till the end of the world, since it is in the nature of man—

To illustrate this point, note that photography, to some, is a permitted thing, and to others forbidden; celebration of the birthday of the Prophet (SAAS) is to some an innovation *بدعة* and forbidden, but for others it is an obligatory duty enjoined by the Quran: (واما بنعمة ربك فحدث). I add to the list the Darwinian theory of Evolution.

I conclude by humbly suggesting that the Muslim contributions to the science of law, to astronomy, to medicine, and to botany have been such that Muslims may be justifiably proud. Certainly other researchers would say the same for other sciences such as navigation, mathematics, architecture etc. But I would warn my younger brethren that instead of crying *بدرم سلطان بود* (my father was acting), let them try individually to merit the praise by doing something to promote knowledge so they may say *شاديم که کاری کردیم* (I am happy that I have been able to do something). Such should be our attitude and our motto.