

## Unlearn

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*Comment from the proprietor of this website: The reason for including this article is to showcase the parallel between Islam vs secularism and the Kuyperian brand of Christianity vs secularism. Young or beginning Kuyperians ask similar questions and confront similar challenges—similar, not exactly the same. Of course, the **way** of expressing yourself differs considerably in the two religions.*

*Quite apart from the parallels, similarities and dissimilarities, it is good for Christian readers of this page to see how Muslims discuss among themselves their way in this world. Most Muslims do **not** share the core vista of **Boko Haram** and their ilk. That term means “non-Islamic education is forbidden.” Classic and contemporary mainstream Islam accept knowledge from whatever source, but then purify, cleanse or sift it through the lens of Islam.*

The Prophet, peace be upon him, used to ask, “O Allah, grant me benefit in what You have taught me, teach me what will benefit me, and increase my knowledge.” [Tirmidhi]

“Whenever Allah wants to favour a person He grants him *Fiqh*(understanding) of *Deen*.” [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

“The best of you in the time of ignorance (*Jihiliyyah*) will be the best of you in Islam, only if you attain the understanding (*Faquhu*).” [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Is every book you read on Islam truly beneficial? Does a class led by a particular scholar help you understand Islamic knowledge better? How practical is it in our context?

Public universities and colleges, driven by corporate-and-profit-driven agendas, often fail to impart knowledge that makes you think about the purpose and reality of life. As Dr. Elijah Dan, a Professor at the University of Toronto says, “University was supposed to teach us about the universe. Today, sadly it educates about everything but universe and creation. It is simply busy producing technocrats to soon join the corporate world slavery.”

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<sup>1</sup>Aver, January 2006, pp. 22-23.

In perplexing times like ours when Muslims mix up their priorities and abuse Islamic knowledge, we are in dire need for luminaries who understand Islam and modern challenges, learn to take beneficial knowledge from everyone, seamlessly integrate the traditional learning with contemporary sources, and make education relevant to our society.

As Imam Zaid Shakir explains, we need balanced seekers of knowledge who can show “that it is possible to combine without conflict, the constructs that have come to be known as *Sufi* and *Salafi*; that it is possible to be deeply committed to the *Sunna* while simultaneously advocating and defending the four juridical schools; and that one can be critical of the formulations of the speculative theologians, while simultaneously respecting the institutional reality built by their followers.”

### **CAN'T TEACH UNTIL I PERFECT MYSELF**

Life is an ever-growing circle of study, practice, and improvement! As Ustadh Khurram Murad states, “We cannot wait to become “purified” and “perfect.” For, at no point in time can one consider oneself to be perfect.” As our personality, faith, and knowledge evolve and reach new heights, so should our concern for the environment and people around us. So there is no such notion in Islam as “I will not invite people to Islam until I am through with learning Islam myself.” When will you ever be through?

### **SECULAR VERSUS ISLAMIC EDUCATION**

According to Dr. Ingrid Mattson, there is no division or dichotomy between secular and Islamic learning. The only type of division in knowledge that we see in Islam is between the

- *Mu'amalat* (the daily affairs & dealings, for e.g. business, relationships ... etc.) and
- *'Ibadaat* (the matters dealing with worship and belief system, for e.g. *Salah*, fasting ... etc.)

If you are a doctor, businessman, engineer, journalist, teacher, etc., you need to know what Islam says about the ethics of your profession. Wholeness is the essence of Islamic education. Even in “worldly” affairs, Muslims are obligated to learn the laws of Allah in the particular field that we are in, in order to live Islam completely!

## **QUANTITY VERSUS QUALITY**

In Islam, training (*Tarbiyyah*) and character development is a life-long process. It's not about quantity, it's about quality. The great companions of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, always made sure to first practice whatever they knew. Abu Darda, may Allah be pleased with him, used to say, “I am not afraid that it will be said to me (on the Day of Judgement): “What have you learnt?” But I am more afraid that it will be said to me: “What have you done with what you have learnt?” How do we plan to use the knowledge that we gain in our lives?

## **UNBRIDGEABLE GAP BETWEEN SCHOLARS AND NON-SCHOLARS**

As Dr. Mattson argues, there is really no difference between a “traditional scholar” and a layperson, because a knowledgeable and pious professional or entrepreneur, in principle, is a scholar as well in a specialized field, since he learns what he needs to know about his profession and applies this knowledge in his everyday life which could be passed on to others who seek it. In our present day and age, we need scholarship that specializes in contemporary disciplines, such as medicine, economics, arts, media, social services, engineering and others, to provide Islamic perspectives and alternatives in these fields.

## **SAHABAS WERE ALL SCHOLARS**

To every Companion of the Prophet, Islamic education and training was a natural process. Moreover, it was an issue and situation based learning, more than an organized theoretical learning. You can count the number of “scholars” among the Companions on your fingers. This did not prevent them from applying Islam to

all aspects of their lives and confidently spreading the pure message of Islam throughout the world. Even the ones who were devoted to learning and recording knowledge did not aim to be “scholars.”

## **ORAL TRADITION VERSUS BOOKS**

In response to a question, “What about the claim of those who say that Islamic knowledge has always been an oral tradition?” Dr. Ingrid replied: “Transmission of knowledge in Islam has always been a dual process. The presence of Islamic books and literacy is a blessing from Allah. But we do need scholars as a source of clarification and motivation. Do not belittle the books! The Prophet encouraged literacy among Muslims. Even the Quran was later preserved in the form of a book.”

## **MADRASAS AND TRADITIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITIES**

A few centuries after the time of *Sahabas* came the idea of official Islamic educational institutes/schools, known as Madrasas. This concept of institution served to organize the Islamic teachings and science and provided a central place where people would go and learn. It also helped tremendously in preservation and further development of Islamic sciences. However, according to Dr. Ingrid Mattson, there were a few major problems with the concept of Madrasas:

- It gave rise to the development of “personalities” of the teachers, who became quite complacent, and at times arrogant due to their status. It also gave rise to factionalism and rivalries between the Madrasas, led by their teachers.
- We also witnessed an increasing exclusion of women from the spheres of knowledge, due to this system of learning. Women were much more involved during the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and a few generations after, as they attended the *Hallaqahs*(study circles) that were open to the public. These women preserved the knowledge and narrated books even to the males and females of the next generation. Therefore, we see that the *Hallaqah* system was much more beneficial for women, in comparison with Madrasas.

- Madrasas also introduced the “*Ijazah*” system, which certified a student to narrate a Hadith or a book to others in the exact same manner as he had heard it from the teacher – the chain going back to the Prophet. While this was an excellent way of ensuring the accuracy in the oral transmission of knowledge, later on it discouraged common people from conveying the message of Islam. Such notion of monopolization of knowledge in our interconnected world of information technology is absurd, if not contrary to the teachings of Islam, to say the least.

### **STICK TO QURAN AND HADITH ONLY**

Some people think that their personal reading of Quran translation and a few Ahadith is enough to pass judgements on complex matters in our community. They discard the valuable collection of wisdom, reflections, and sciences developed by the classical scholars. Such simplistic, literal, and naïve thinking often results in perverted Fatwas that make media headlines. We need the aid of scholars and contemporary sciences to come to a comprehensive solution.

### **LEARNING IN A VACUUM**

Our Islamic education cannot be detached from the problems of our society: it should directly address the concerns of the people. “Our problem, in the Muslim community of North America, is not that we have a lack of Islamic knowledge. We have hundreds of Muslim scholars graduating from Islamic universities around the world and coming to the West every year. Yet there is no change! The real problem is that we have lost the real vision and understanding of the mission of Islam!” explains Imam Khalid Griggs, a North American Muslim leader, activist and scholar. Where are our priorities?

### **CAN'T INTEGRATE CREATIVITY AND FUN WITH ISLAMIC EDUCATION**

There are several new and creative modes of Islamic learning that make Islam much easier and fun to learn. Just because Allah has made Islamic education easy through technology, such as audio/video/CD/DVD programs and lectures, email

newsletters, phone conference calls, e-magazines, articles, PalTalk, video conferencing, and Ipod, doesn't mean they are not effective or beneficial. In many ways these avenues of auditory and visual learning supplement traditional method of learning through books and scholars.

## **SELECTIVE ISLAM**

Some so-called "progressive Muslims" have a hard time digesting certain aspects of Islam or Islamic sources that do not seem "rational" or "compliant" with our modern age. They pick and choose whatever they like. Due to this cut and paste method of learning they fail to see the bigger picture and deny Islamic law any role in our society. This leads to privatization of Islam to the domain of personal worship only.