

## CHAPTER FOUR



# Major Features of the Reform of Islamic Thought and the Islamization of Knowledge

## FORMULATION OF THE ISLAMIC ENTERPRISE

Given the Westernization enterprise's failure to bring about the hoped-for renaissance and the noticeable faltering of the movement-based Islamic enterprise in the process of seeking to achieve its aims, there is a clear and urgent need for review and reflection in a renewed attempt to ascertain where the difficulty lies. Reflection upon the overall Islamic vision leads to the conclusion that this vision itself is where the difficulty is most likely to be located and that, as a consequence, it is the place where reform needs to begin.

This being the case, it is essential that we formulate an integrated Islamic project to deal with the crisis, one which focuses its energies on reforming Islamic thought and reinforces efforts to crystallize the Islamization of knowledge. In this way, it is hoped that such a project will be a link in the chain of successive reform endeavors whose aim is to fill in the gaps which have contributed to the growing seriousness and complexity of the crisis. Similarly, it is hoped that its discourse will be capable of persuading its audience that the intellectual crisis is of such seriousness and magnitude that it calls for a group of Muslims to take on the task. Specifically, an academic institution needs to be set up for the sole purpose of working to reform Islamic thought, implement the Islamization of knowledge, and elucidate and study all aspects and dimensions thereof.

We are dedicated to presenting this project to the Ummah as it is a sacred trust which must be fulfilled. It is the task of preparing and presenting the intellectual and methodological foundations needed for the Ummah's forward movement. We have no choice but to do our utmost to follow up on

what has been done thus far, to amend, revise and correct, and to construct an alternative intellectual framework. As a consequence of this we can then refashion the Muslim mind, shaping its structure in accordance with a sound Islamic conceptualization of the cosmos, life and human beings. This reliable monotheistic conceptualization is derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah, reflection on the laws of the universe, a perception of the unity of truth and creation, the rules which govern good stewardship of the earth and its resources, and the conditions required for fulfillment of our role as God's vicegerents on earth. Moreover, it is by means of such a conceptualization that we can nourish the Ummah's movement with the intellectual sustenance which it lacks at present.

At the same time, we need to undertake a thorough, analytical investigation of the movement of Islamic thought from the moment at which the word, "Recite!" was revealed to the Prophet till the present day. Such an investigation will enable us to become familiar with Islamic thought and its components and the various factors which have been raised for discussion. At the same time, it will enable us to observe its positive and negative aspects and the ways in which it was formed and shaped, then to criticize it in a solid manner. We hope to link our movement with this history of thought on one hand and on the other, help the Ummah to transcend the effects of partial, partisan, sectarian, or Orientalist readings of such thought. After all, such readings are insufficient or biased. Their aim is to reveal something which they already assume to be there, or to cite as evidence or documentary proof something which they themselves have put forward as true. Such readings rob them of their claim to objectivity and academic integrity and thereby cancel out most of their potential benefits.

For the Muslim community to emerge from its crisis, it must support the discourse and action of this specialized movement, which has taken the Ummah's intellectual crisis as the focus of its activities and as the starting point for its aims. As Muslims who look forward to a better future, we cannot overlook this collective task, the task of providing the Ummah's movement with the intellectual fuel it needs, and of working to build the movement of thought in the Islamic and world arenas.

## A RESUMPTION OF EARLIER EFFORTS

The starting point for the intellectual crisis in Islamic history might be identified as the question of the caliphate, or leadership of the Ummah, given the confusion in people's understanding of the caliphate's role and nature. This was transformed into a heated debate between reason and revelation. In fact it brought about a split between intellectual and political leaderships which was followed by a series of deviations and divisions. Alternatively, we might see its starting point in the confusion of roles between the worlds of the seen and the unseen. This caused a confusion between fate (as a pillar of faith) and man's will and responsibility for his actions. Yet, wherever we locate the starting point for the crisis and its impact on the Ummah, the fact remains that history has recorded both efforts to confront these confusions, and the Ummah's responses.

Indeed, the present discussion can provide us with a better understanding of the underlying reasons for the efforts which were made to compile and record the Sunnah and establish criteria to protect it from forgery, manipulation and exploitation. It also sheds light on the attempts made by the pious ancestors to lay down rules for understanding and interpretation on both the literal and metaphorical levels in order to define the systematic roles to be played by both authoritative texts and human reason; the compilation and recording of the fundamentals of jurisprudence; rational interpretations of ambiguous, allegorical or seemingly contradictory passages from the Qur'an and the hadith with the aim of refuting alleged contradictions between revelation and reason or among authoritative texts themselves; as well as discussions of human will, human action and the means of rectifying it, and human freedom and choice.

- Imam al-Shāfi'ī, Imam Aḥmad, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Mahdī and others of their generation confronted the difficulty posed by method.
- Al-Ash'arī sought to compile, survey and analyze the sayings of Muslim thinkers and trace each of them back to its source. He also sought to direct the Ummah's energies in the realm of scholastic theology outward toward the non-Muslim world and to present a synopsis of Islamic fundamentals of doctrine which everyone could agree upon.
- Al-Juwaynī attempted to deal with the issue of Islamic political leadership

in a manner which would cause it to cease being a cause of crisis and become a solution instead.

- Al-Ghazālī dealt with the split between theory and application in his book, *Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn*. He confronted the Greek challenge and presented the Islamic alternative in his book, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, and discussed many aspects of the crisis of the Muslim mind by offering solutions and alternatives. He even attempted to present a complete theory of Islamic knowledge.
- Ibn Rushd endeavored to dispel the illusion of a contradiction between Islamic law and wisdom and to formulate a new jurisprudence which, unlike the existing conflict-based jurisprudence, would be capable of creating mutual understanding and harmony.
- Ibn Ḥazm played a prominent role in dealing with a significant number of intellectual and methodological issues.
- In his book entitled *al-Radd ilā al-Amr al-Auwal*, Abū Shāmah called for a return to the methodology which had been prevalent in the early days of Islam in dealing with all issues over which there was disagreement.
- Ibn Taymiyyah attempted to deal with the intellectual crisis and to offer a methodological, epistemological, cultural alternative. He treated the issues of thought, method, logic, jurisprudence and politics and founded a widespread intellectual and cultural reform movement. Whoever examines the legacy left by Ibn Taymiyyah and his disciples will find distinguished treatments of virtually all aspects of these matters.<sup>1</sup>
- Imam al-Shāṭibī made his primary concern the reform of the principles of jurisprudence, which represents the law of Islamic thought. Al-Shāṭibī labored to deliver this field from its focus on the doctrinal questions of scholastic theology which had weighed it down, by breathing new life into it through the introduction of the intents of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-shariʿah*) on a wide scale and in a powerful, effective way. By reforming the study of the fundamentals of jurisprudence, al-Shāṭibī's intention was to reform and rectify Islamic thought itself.
- When Ibn Khaldūn saw how Islamic civilization had halted and even regressed, he initiated the movement to found the social sciences from an Islamic perspective. This aimed at introducing the intellectual content and cultural framework to the social sciences which Islamic society desperately needed if it was going to resume its civilizational evolution on a

solid academic foundation. Had Ibn Khaldūn's intellectual and cultural venture been carried out during his day, the course of history would have been altered. However, Ibn Khaldūn's efforts were not followed up and the Islamic world went into a long hibernation. Instead Ibn Khaldūn's thought was picked up by Westerners, and it significantly contributed to their renaissance.

Subsequently numerous other reform attempts were made. Such attempts differed in their approaches to issues and in their places of origin. However, they all agreed on the Ummah's need for reform and renewal. They include, for example, the work of Shah Walī Allāh al-Dahlawī, Shaykh Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, Imam al-Shawkānī, al-Ālūsī, al-Ṭabāṭibāʾī, al-Sanūsī, and al-Mahdī, followed by al-Afghānī and his school, al-Kawākibī, Ibn ʿĀshūr and Ibn Bādīs. They were followed more recently by the leaders of the modern Islamic movement and their well-known role in Egypt, India and elsewhere, such as Imam Hasan al-Banna, al-Mawdudī, Sayyid Qutb, Malik Bin Nabi, Taqī al-Din al-Nabhani, and others.

Our cause, then, is not a contemporary innovation; rather, it has firm roots in the history of the Ummah with beginnings that date back to the first harbingers of the intellectual crisis. Like any other human phenomenon, thought-related problems begin to emerge with the thought itself. After all, thought does not emerge out of a vacuum, nor does it move toward a vacuum. Rather, it is an interaction between a starting point or a goal, and human reason, between reality, language, time, place and human beings, and between movement, history, and all of life.

Our cause is, essentially, that of civilizational renewal, the revival which the Prophet promised this Ummah. However, it was a promise which was meant to rouse us to action for the sake of renewal, not a promise implying an inevitability the anticipation of which would lead to passivity and dependency. It is the cause which was taken up by ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, al-Shāfiʿī, al-Ghazālī, al-Ashʿarī, Ibn Ḥazm, Ibn Rushd, al-ʿIzz ibn ʿAbd al-Salām, Abū Shāmah, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn al-Qayyim, al-Shāṭibī, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, al-Shawkānī, al-Dahlawī, al-Afghānī, al-Nāʾinī, Muḥammad ʿAbduh, Rashid Rida, Iqbal, al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, al-Mawdudī, al-Nadwi, Ibn Bādīs, Malik Bin Nabi, Shariʿati, Mutahhiri, al-Sadr, al-Nabhani, and all other leaders of reformist Islamic thought, including both earlier

thinkers and later ones.

Each of these reformers and heralds was able to treat whatever was apparent or hidden, major or minor, of the intellectual aspect of the Ummah's difficulties in accordance with his own understanding of the Ummah's problems and the pressures and circumstances associated with his own upbringing and struggle. With the passage of time, the various reformist notions which had emerged led to the development of the two primary renewal and rebuilding enterprises: the modern, movement-based Islamic enterprise which, more than anything else, represents the Islamic political response, and the secular Westernization enterprise representing the drive to imitate and emulate the West.

A given trend of thought may be sound in every way when it first emerges. However, errors and distortions may enter into it at the point when it is heard and received, or in interaction with any element of the reality in which it emerges. After all, the possibility of mental error is simply a manifestation of our humanity. The various reasons for such error are well-known and even intuitive, while the natural, sensory, cultural and human influences on human thought are undeniable. This being the case, early philosophers attempted to establish logic as a means of protecting the mind against errors in its thinking and devised methods to ensure the soundness and integrity of the various phases of inquiry and reflection. Despite these measures, however, human logic itself was not free of error, nor was human method immune to deviation. In fact, attempts continue to this day to correct logic and rectify method in the hope of protecting the human mind from error or, at the least, to minimize the rate at which it occurs. After all, human experience, capabilities and knowledge are relative and limited by nature, as a result of which we stand in need of constant renewal and fresh interpretations.

**THE BASIS AND ORIGIN OF THE ENTERPRISE IS THE QUR'AN, WHILE  
THE SUNNAH IS ITS SOURCE OF INTERPRETIVE GUIDANCE  
(SEE FIGURE 4.1)**

The Qur'an draws attention to numerous thought-related errors, lapses of logic, and failings to which human methods are subject. The Prophet likewise drew attention to such realities. Indeed, he took a significant number of

what might be viewed as systematic precautionary measures whose aim was to protect the Ummah from falling into the clutches of intellectual crisis or committing those errors which would lead to such a fall. Thus, for example, when some individuals found it difficult to understand the concept of fate or predestination (*al-qadar*) as man's responsibility for his actions and his freedom of action and choice, the Prophet vehemently denounced and warned against the method and approach on the basis of which the question of *qadar* had been dealt with. Indeed, he reproached those who dealt with this issue for confusing, on one hand, the realm of the unseen (knowledge of which the Creator has reserved for Himself) with the visible, sensate world whose various unseen aspects are brought to light with the passing of the ages and with man's expanding epistemological capabilities.<sup>2</sup> This way of approaching the issue causes faith in the realm of the unseen to lose its effectiveness and positive impact, and causes man to lose sight of the value of his actions and his sense of responsibility. As a result, people are rendered powerless and unable to choose among the authoritative points of reference related to the worlds of the seen and the unseen respectively, or to identify an authoritative framework which will allow them to criticize, review, adjust and correct their actions.

This fact may be seen clearly in a number of hadiths which deal with the issue of fate or predestination. One such hadith, narrated on the authority of Abū Hurayrah reads,

The Messenger of God once came out and found us arguing over the matter of *qadar*. When he heard what we were saying, he got so angry his cheeks flushed red as a pomegranate. He said, "Is this what you have been commanded to do? Is it for this that I was sent among you? Those of your ancestors who argued over this matter have perished. As for me, I adjure you not to dispute over it."<sup>3</sup>

The Prophet responded in a similar way when he learned that some individuals understood complete reliance upon God (*al-tawakkul*) to mean disregard for earthly causes. When he encountered this mistaken belief, he corrected it, pointing out that proper regard for earthly causes is part of the concept of reliance on God. Hence, to someone who was disregarding earthly causes he said, "Be conscious of them, and trust in God."<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, when some Muslims were about to restrict the concept of wor-

ship to the performance of obligatory and voluntary acts of devotion while excluding mundane activities, the Prophet corrected this understanding and clarified the error it entailed. In doing so, he restored to faith its all-inclusive meaning, saying, “Faith consists of seventy-some or sixty-some branches. The best of these branches is reflected in [utterance of] the words, ‘There is no deity but God,’ while the least of them is reflected in removing something harmful from the road or path. Modesty is also a branch of faith.”<sup>5</sup> Hence the Prophet delineated a holistic framework for worship which protects against both excess and neglect, saying, “Although I am the most God-fearing amongst you and the most conscious of Him, I fast and break my fast, I perform the ritual prayers [at times] and take my rest [at others], and I marry women. And whoever spurns my example, has nothing to do with me.”<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, in order to help people see the importance of the time-space dimension, discern intents and purposes, and distinguish between the relativity and specificity of some rulings and the absoluteness and comprehensiveness of others, he stated, “I had prohibited you to visit graveyards. However, Muhammad was allowed to visit his mother’s grave, so visit them, as they can serve to remind you of the life to come.”<sup>7</sup> Also relevant to this is his statement to ‘Ā’ishah, “If it weren’t for the fact that your people only recently emerged from an age of ignorance [a variant reading has ‘unbelief’ (*kufī*)], I would spend the wealth in the Ka’bah for the sake of God’s cause, I would raze it and rebuild it, and join it with the northern wall.”<sup>8</sup>

In order to reinforce the concept of an authoritative framework within which to operate and the methodology on which one is to deal with it, the Prophet reproached ‘Umar for reading the Torah, saying, “[What need have you of] another book besides the Book of God when I am in your midst? If my brother Moses were still alive, he would have no choice but to follow me.”<sup>9</sup>

When the Prophet was commanded to have the Qur’an written,<sup>10</sup> he employed scribes to record what he said and to put every word in its proper place. At the same time, he prohibited the recording of the Sunnah lest any part of it be confused with the Qur’an, and to prevent people from becoming distracted from the Qur’an by focusing on commentaries and explanations. It is within the context of nurturing cultural sensibilities on the part of Muslims that we can best understand the Hadith, such as the hadiths that speak of the cat, the pigeon, Mount Uhud, and the she-camel, as well as many others.

Similarly, it is in the context of increasing people's awareness of the importance of broadening the range of those actions which are permitted to Muslims, thereby enabling human beings to act productively and engage in independent reasoning, that we can understand the Prophet's prohibition of excessive inquisitiveness. The reason for this is that undue questioning has the potential of leading to conflict and disagreement and narrowing the range of what is permitted [rather than] presenting opinions and broadening the sphere in which independent reasoning is required. It was with these concerns in mind that the Prophet said, "The children of Israel only perished due to their excessive questioning and their disputes over their prophets."<sup>11</sup> The Prophet's command to engage in independent reasoning under his supervision and the training which he provided for this endeavor can be understood in this context, as can hadiths warning of sedition and discord and their damaging impact on the fates of other nations.

It was the Sunnah which provided the foundation for the intellectual framework within which the Companions understood issues. Hence, when the concept of predestination was repeatedly misunderstood during the caliphate of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, he swiftly dealt with the matter and clarified it as much as possible. Commenting on the Companions' digression from a proper understanding of this concept, he stated, "So-and-so (that is, Ibn Abī al-Aṣḡbagh) has forfeited what he was given charge of, and has taken charge of what he was spared" (in order to show the dividing line among the various areas of thought).

The position taken by the Companions on the issue of apostasy and the manner in which it was dealt with by Abū Bakr was indicative of a profound awareness and understanding of human nature and it showed an awareness of the nature of systems and the relationships which exist among their many and varied aspects. When people's understanding of one aspect of a reality is distorted, this constitutes a threat to all other aspects as well. Hence, the confusion which arose among the new Muslims between the era of prophethood and the era of the caliphate, and the distinction which they drew between monetary and bodily religious obligations (*farā'id al-māl* and *farā'id al-badan* respectively) was evidence of their having departed from the wider Muslim community and a destruction of the Ummah's anticipated role as civilization-witness.<sup>12</sup> This being the case, Caliph Abū Bakr consciously rejected this way of thinking. Consequently, he gave no importance to the inadequate jus-

tifications given by the apostates supporting their positions and attitudes.

The Companions took a similar intellectual position with respect to the Muslim's authoritative framework. Thus, they held that they had to preserve the Qur'an just as it was revealed to the Prophet and without any alteration by way of either addition or removal. Accordingly they began, without delay, to memorize it, compile it and commit it to writing. As for the Sunnah (which is an interpretation and explanation of the Qur'an and the teachings of Islam) they did not urge that it be written down. It was initially narrated word-for-word but then passed down in terms of its meaning and how it had been understood. The Companions were strict with respect to the accounts which they deemed acceptable and warned against overemphasis upon the Sunnah lest their attention be distracted from the Qur'an. This would undermine their capacity for reflection on and understanding of Qur'anic verses, and cause people to rely on narratives rather than on the Qur'an itself. The Companions were clear with respect to this approach and adhered to it faithfully. However when Muslims departed from this approach in subsequent generations, the result was that without giving the matter careful thought, people contented themselves with the Sunnah while leaving the Qur'an aside. Thereafter they contented themselves with Islamic jurisprudence<sup>13</sup> while leaving both the Qur'an and the Sunnah aside. As time passed, they then contented themselves with commentaries on the jurisprudence of the earliest scholars, then with footnotes on the commentaries and shaykhs' remarks on them.

The Prophet did not depart from this earthly realm until he had fulfilled his mission and carried out the trust he had been given, completing the religion and bringing the grace for which it was a conduit. Similarly, it was during his lifetime that the Muslim mind was set on the right course, the 'pure path' was set out clearly for believers, and the sound method was made visible. Logic was set aright such that no argument could be raised against God and human beings were made aware of their responsibilities, powers, potentials, and freedom of choice: "Whoever chooses to follow the right path, follows it but for his own good; and whoever goes astray, goes astray but to his own detriment,"<sup>14</sup> and, "If you persevere in doing good, you will but be doing good to yourselves; and if you do evil, it will be [done] to yourselves."<sup>15</sup>

The Prophet laid down principles for renewal and reform in order for the

discerning and upright members of the Ummah to be able to meet the Ummah's needs lest with the passing of time, hearts grow hard, understanding wane, and thought become confused, or the ties that bind believers be broken. He established such principles in order for the Ummah to preserve its ongoing civilizational witness and to maintain the moderation for which it has always been known among the nations in its religion and way of life. In this way, he prepared the way for Islam to prevail over all [false] religions and its law to be manifested as universal and comprehensive, capable of meeting the Ummah's needs in all times and places.

It is within this context that we may properly understand the caliphate, jihad, ijihad, the unity of the Ummah, the principle of commanding what is right and prohibiting what is wrong, as well as rulings pertaining to the monitoring of prices, religious endowments and the like, since each of these pillars and principles clearly serves the goal of renewal and provides the means of preventing crises of the mind and the stagnation of thought.

It is for this reason that viewing the call to deal with the intellectual crisis as a purely modern phenomenon, disregarding its importance or existence altogether, or viewing those who communicate this call as a product of their generation alone, is itself a manifestation of the crisis and glaring proof of its existence.

#### THE MAJOR FEATURES OF THE PROJECT TO REVITALIZE THE THOUGHT OF THE MOVEMENT, AND THE MOVEMENT OF THOUGHT (SEE FIGURE 4.2)

It might be said that in essence, the book entitled, *The Islamization of Knowledge* was a statement of principles and an action plan. However, whereas the principles set forth in the book are clear and fixed, the plan of action is interpretive, and therefore, tentative, in nature. When work on the plan began in 1984 AC/1404 AH, it was still only theoretical. However, since that time it has yielded numerous efforts in a variety of areas. The purpose behind such efforts has been to formulate a refined Islamic discourse whose content is academic/scientific, whose method is clear, whose style is lucid and flowing, and which is capable of both making individual Muslims aware of the intellectual crisis which they face and of presenting the ways in which they can

overcome this crisis. Some efforts, for example, have been aimed at indexing the verses of the Qur'an, while others have focused on the Sunnah; others have been devoted to making the wider Islamic legacy more readily accessible, while still others have focused on Western thought, and so forth.

Regardless of the scope of these efforts, however, they remain in need of study, review and evaluation if we are to ascertain the soundness of the plan, its faithfulness to its principles, and its level of integration. Most of the methods and means proposed in the plan have been put into practice thus far: from seminars, to discussion and research circles, publications and individual and group research projects. All of these likewise need to be evaluated and studied, and their results monitored.

When the IIIT first embarked on the task of dealing with the Ummah's intellectual crisis, it was aware that it would not be able to formulate its program and carry out its plan in a centralized manner, isolated from interactions with Islamic communities. Consequently, given the gravity of the crisis in which the Ummah finds itself and the enormity of the effort required in order to analyze its causes and examine its solutions, the IIIT has opened offices and branches in a number of Muslim and non-Muslim countries in order for them to serve as its sensors and survey outposts. The IIIT can communicate and spread its message from these offices and they also serve as a means by which it can fulfill its mission and formulate its program. Some of these offices have achieved encouraging results, while others have failed to accomplish what we had hoped. We must continue to evaluate the work of these offices in order to guarantee sound progress toward rescuing the Ummah from the present crisis and to carefully and thoroughly plan for the best possible performance on their part.

Hence, there is an intellectual and epistemological content for the work plan, but limited means of carrying it out. Both of these aspects remain in need of evaluation, review, correction and renewal. By virtue of my role in following up the formulation and implementation of the Institute's plan together with the late Isma'īl al-Faruqī, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman and others, I can summarize our cause – in terms of its principles, aims, means, conditions and practical steps – as follows:

### *General Principles*

The general principles of our project are outlined in Part I of the Islamization of Knowledge Series entitled, *Islāmīyat al-Maʿrifah: al-Mabādi' al-ʿĀmmah, Khiṭṭat al-ʿAmal, al-Injāzāt*. This is a valuable resource for anyone who wishes to reform Islamic thought and pursue the Islamization of knowledge. However, there is no harm in reiterating some of these principles to encourage those who desire further clarification and explanation to refer to the earlier work.<sup>16</sup> These principles are:

- 1) Affirmation of the unity of God, since this is the first principle of Islam and the most important of all its governing values.
- 2) The unity of the created realm: The unity of God requires, by logical necessity, the unity of His creation.
- 3) The unity of Truth: There is no inconsistency or disparity between the truths of revelation and the truths of the cosmos.
- 4) The unity of life: This oneness is based upon human beings' role as God's vicegerents on earth, their bearing of this God-given trust, and their patient endurance of the afflictions which this entails.
- 5) The unity of humanity: People are a single creation, and no one is superior to anyone else based on anything but his or her consciousness of God.
- 6) The complementarity of revelation and reason: There is no conflict or contradiction between the givens of the written Revelation and God's cosmic manifestation.
- 7) Comprehensiveness of both means and method: Islam is a religion which is inclusive of all aspects of life.

Within the framework of general principles, emphasis must be placed on certain governing values, namely, the oneness of God in every sense, including the oneness of divinity, and the oneness of the divine attributes; the prosperity of the created universe; and the purification of man as God's vicegerents on earth. It is to these intents that appeal is made and on the basis of which all things are related. For without observing these higher intents of Islamic law, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to perceive the conceptual link which binds the elements of the metaphysical-natural-human dialectic. Moreover, without a perception of this link it will be impossible to construct

a sound epistemological system by means of which we are able to derive the method for defining the relationship between the worlds of the seen and the unseen, and between the Absolute and the relative.

*The Goal (see figures 4.3 & 4.4)*

The fundamental goal which extends into all other goals is the creation of an enlightened Muslim mind capable of fulfilling its role by practising independent reasoning, renewal, and human development and prosperity, as stated in *The Islamization of Knowledge*. In this way, Muslims will be qualified to function as God's vicegerents on earth, to exercise their rights as good stewards of the natural world, and to bear the trust given by their Creator. There are two paths by means of which this goal may be attained:

*First:* By reconstructing Muslims' intellectual scheme based on the Qur'an and its epistemological methodology, on the Sunnah as that which contains a methodology for applying the values of the Qur'an to particular situations, and on the cosmos as the other source of knowledge alongside Revelation.

*Second:* By basing the comprehensive Islamic epistemological and cultural paradigm on what was mentioned under 'First' above.

These two paths require action on the basis of five fundamental focal points, each of which has the potential of generating a set of secondary focal points.

*The First Focal Point: Thought*

The word 'thought' (*fikr*) appears nowhere in the Qur'an as a noun or as a verbal noun (*maṣḍar*). However, it appears twenty times as a verb in the past or present tense. We read, for example, "he reflects and meditates,"<sup>17</sup> "and perhaps they might reflect..."<sup>18</sup>, and "Will you not, then, take thought?"<sup>19</sup> In Arabic, as in other languages, a verb is something which points to an event and to a person. Therefore saying 'he hit' (*da-ra-ba*), the verb 'hit' indicates the event of hitting, as well as a person who did the hitting. Similarly saying 'he thought' (*fak-ka-ra*), alludes to an event of thinking and a person who brings

about this event, the thinker. Thus, when the word ‘thought’ is used in the Qur’an, it is as though God is drawing our attention to the fact that this mental activity is an action which is, by necessity, linked to a person, since it would not be possible for thought to be abstracted from the thinker. Rather, wherever there is thought, there is likewise a thinker. Moreover, thought or thinking must not be something which is of no avail, or upon which no movement or action in this universe is based.

Thought is a characteristic which sets humans apart from all other creatures; hence, the term ‘thought’ is only used to describe the cognitive operations engaged in by humans. In the case of animals, even the phenomena which resemble the human thought process are not referred to as ‘thought’, but rather, as instinctive direction. Even ancient logicians defined humans as ‘talking animals,’ that is, rational beings or thinkers. As for the remaining animals, they have instinctive direction or something similar thereto, which corresponds to thought, the mind, and rational powers.

Muslim scholars have exhibited an interest in explaining and defining thought and demonstrating its true nature and meaning, although contemporary thinkers have neglected it to a large extent. By looking at the nature of thought and which phenomena might be considered manifestations of it, I have found that many Muslim scholars of the 3rd Century AH, during which time Islamic sciences began to crystallize, and the 4th Century AH, during which time these sciences began to be recorded, discussed the subject of thought in great detail. In fact, in some references<sup>20</sup> discussions of thought, its specifications and conditions spanned over a hundred pages or more. However, and as one would expect, Muslim sources differ from one another, while different books have their own ways of dealing with this theme or that. Consequently, sometimes the term ‘thought’ and its definition are found in books on Islamic mysticism, linguistics, philosophy, scholastic theology, and the fundamentals of jurisprudence. In the writings of scholars and in relevant encyclopedias, one will find long treatments of thought, its synonyms, its conditions and its variations.

From my study of these sources I ascertain that ‘thought’ is the name for the process by which an individual’s cognitive and cogitative powers – be they the heart, the spirit or the mind – investigate and reflect in order to derive meanings from known realities, or in order to arrive at judgments or proportions among things.

This meaning of the term ‘thought’ is clarified further by the statement by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, “Know that thought involves bringing forth two pieces of knowledge in the heart in order that from them one might derive a third piece of knowledge.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, thought, in al-Ghazālī’s view, is to prepare two premises so that one might arrive at a conclusion. For example turning the command “Perform the ritual prayers” into a matter for thought requires the premise, “The phrase, ‘Perform the ritual prayers,’ is a command as is the verb, ‘Perform,’ and every command from the Creator is an obligation.” The evidence for the first premise is linguistic, namely, the use of a verb in the imperative mood, while the evidence for the second premise is juristic in nature. A command is something which we are obliged to carry out, hence, it follows that ritual prayer is obligatory, and this is the conclusion, or the third piece of knowledge.

Similarly, if someone does not know whether a given prayer is obligatory or simply an emulation of the Prophet’s example, he might recall the fact that the mid-morning prayer (*ṣalāt al-Duḥā*) was performed by the Prophet on some days, and not on others. The evidence for this premise is historical in nature, based on an investigation of the Prophet’s actions. Things which he did at times and refrained from at other times are viewed as examples for us to follow, not obligations. Hence, the mid-morning prayer is an emulation of the Prophet’s example, this is the third piece of knowledge.

Thus, two or more pieces of knowledge are always adduced in order for us to go from the premises known to what is referred to as the conclusion. This activity is thought. The Qur’an links thought with action, thereby drawing our attention to the fact that indolent, idle thought is an undesirable thing. Thought for its own sake does not lead to any benefit either in this world or in the next, rather, we must think in order to arrive at something. As for thought for its own sake, or thought in the sense of unqualified reflection or wandering in pursuit of fantasies or something not based on factual evidence, it is a kind of imagination, not thought. The ancients had a great deal to say about the distinction between thought and imagination, and between reflection and recollection. However, this is not the place to deal with such issues in detail.

There are two tasks remaining on the discussion of thought. The first is to define the features of Islamic thought and its methods, while the second is to deal with the issues and difficulties of Islamic thought. In undertaking both

tasks, we rely on the Qur'anic epistemological methodology which combines a reading of Revelation with a reading of existence.

*The Second Focal Point: Method<sup>22</sup>*

The universal nature of the crisis requires a universal solution; similarly, it requires that the Islamic solution put forward must be on the level of a universally applicable discourse. Its fundamental point of entry is the epistemological methodology based on the Qur'an, since the Qur'an alone is capable of reshaping the contemporary mind and developing its perceptive faculties in a sound manner.

As for the term 'methodology' (Arabic, *manhajiyah*), we intend by it to mean the controls or criteria for human thought which are derived from an authoritative framework qualified to identify the means for producing, generating and selecting ideas. Such a methodology brings the human mind out of the state of auto-generation of concepts based on selective reflections, notions and inclinations, and forces it to discover an authoritative framework to which reference can be made in the course of following a particular method. Such a framework consists of a summation of laws and principles which have been observed and compiled, then transformed into theories and rules so that the system which provides order for theories becomes an authoritative framework which regulates their movement, ensuring that there be no conflict, contradiction or inconsistency among them. In this way, the circles of ideas, however far they happen to spread, will always return to their common center as though they were bound by an invisible thread.

Hence, methodology is what lends order to concepts and theories, adapting laws in such a way that they are cohesive and mutually consistent. This being the case, methodology has a place in the formulation of a researcher's questions and hypotheses; it is likewise connected to epistemology, which approaches every issue by studying, critiquing and analyzing it, then piecing it together again. Methodology, then, might be said to be the science of identifying the path and the steps needed in the direction of a particular epistemological end. The relevant concepts may be seen as the building blocks upon which the methodology is constructed, while the authoritative framework is the 'organizer' which makes it possible to arrange concepts in relation to another, and which works to shape them and put them to work in a way which achieves their epistemological objectives.

For others there may be numerous possible methods and a variety of methodologies in keeping with the variety of theories which they espouse in relation to knowledge, its classification and the various areas of knowledge. However, the Islamization of knowledge, given the fact that it is based on a combined reading of Revelation and the created universe, works to read both these dimensions of reality based on a single methodology whose authoritative framework is founded upon monotheism, or the unity of truth. Unlike secular epistemologies, the Islamization of knowledge seeks to bring together explanations of written Revelation and the wisdom it conveys, and the purposefulness of the universe and the laws which govern its cause-and-effect relationships. It is here that one may clearly discern the difference between 'method' in the sense of rules of thought and research standards in this or that area, be it partial or universal in focus, and 'methodology and method' as seen from the perspective of the Islamization of knowledge.

As for epistemology and methodology when viewed side by side within the framework of the Islamization of knowledge, there is, as the rhetoricians would say, a link and a divide between them, or as the logicians would put it, both generality and specificity. On the one hand, epistemology stands in need of methodology and depends upon it while on the other, methodology takes its practical form from epistemology, as a result of which they are interdependent and, indeed, inseparable. Epistemology rests on broad-ranging mental activity which encompasses the processes of criticism, analysis and deconstruction. It makes use of all elements, givens, relations and potentials available within the contemporary epistemological framework in order to bring to light whatever social and cultural difficulties exist and to engage in reconstruction in accordance with the laws of the methodology being employed and its associated criteria. However, in order for the Qur'anic epistemological methodology to perform its role in the Islamization of Knowledge, and in order for it to complete the process of combining the reading of Divine Revelation and the reading of the universe – which we consider to be a necessary condition for overcoming the current intellectual and epistemological crisis on both the local and international levels – it must highlight the relationship between God (the realm of the metaphysical), man and nature, thereby delivering knowledge and its associated methods from disregard and denial of, or even neutrality toward, the realm of the unseen. In other words, it must overcome the split between the Divine and the human

and all other positivistic philosophies with their one-sided readings of existence.

This is a task which can only be properly undertaken by those who possess knowledge of the Qur'an, a sufficient familiarity with the sciences, as well as other areas of knowledge. Only then are they able to explore the methodological overlap between the Qur'an, humanity and the cosmos. Any initiative whose epistemological methodology fails to recognize the effect of the unseen on the universe cannot be accepted as an effective logic capable of protecting the mind from error. Nor can any method which does recognize this be derived from any pure and sound source but the Qur'an.

Hence, the Islamization of knowledge is a clearly defined epistemological methodology that constitutes an alternative to materialism and positivism, both of which disregard the Divine and the realm of the unseen. At the same time, it poses an alternative to the type of theology and sacerdotalism which rob man and nature of their proper link to each other.

Given our current awareness of the Islamization of knowledge, we may affirm that the rules governing epistemological production – within the framework and perspective of the Islamization of knowledge – must be based on the following foundations:

*One:* Reconstructing an epistemological vision based on the components and distinguishing features of a sound Islamic conceptualization. The purpose for such a reconstruction is to clarify what may be viewed as the Islamic epistemological system which is able to provide answers to universal human questions and produce needed epistemological models without overlooking any aspect of such questions. In addition, a reconstructed Islamic epistemological vision will enable us to build up an autonomous capacity for the type of epistemological criticism which makes it possible to absorb and transcend both our legacy and the production of our contemporaries in a disciplined, methodical manner. In this way, we can begin to engage in orderly epistemological generation and the type of epistemological interpretation which is not based on persuasion and rhetoric but, rather, on precise epistemological methodology.

*Two:* Reexamining, reshaping, and rebuilding the rules of Islamic methodology in light of the Qur'anic epistemological methodology. Serious damage has been done to this methodology as a result of individual, atomistic readings which look at the Qur'an as separate, disjointed parts rather than as

an integral unit, and which view the cosmos and man in isolation from the Qur'an.

*Three:* Constructing a method for dealing with the Qur'an through the lenses provided by this vision, based on the view of the Qur'an as a source for method, law, knowledge, and the components of the Islamic civilizational and developmental witness. This may require that we rebuild and reformulate the required Qur'anic sciences while bypassing a good deal of the material we have inherited in this area. Arabs have tended to understand the Qur'an in light of the outward features which distinguished the Arab character of the past, which was limited socially and intellectually by comparison with the features that mark the civilizational makeup of today's world. During the time when the rhetorical and linguistic sciences were officially recorded, there was a trend toward atomization and observation of individual words or sentences in their capacity as the micro-units of expression. Hence, the understanding generated by these sciences was understandably viewed as acceptable and sufficient for that period of time. In fact, its rules are still useful and important when placed in their historical content. However, the current phase of history is dominated by the need for a more systematic perception of things and the search for the relationships which govern them in analytical, critical ways which make use of a variety of academic frameworks and link them with multifaceted civilization issues. Hence, there needs to be a reconsideration of the sciences and a search for ways of understanding, serving and reading the text which can be combined with the reading of the universe and a recognition of the interconnection between the created universe and the written Revelation. In this manner, the Qur'anic text can be freed from many types of interpretation, both literal and allegorical, which are based on projections influenced by folkloric myths, in favor of interpretations based on the powerful connection between the text and the causes and occasions of its Revelation.

*Four:* Constructing a method of dealing with the Sunnah based on this methodological vision, given that the Sunnah is likewise viewed as a means of clarifying method, law, knowledge, and the components of the civilizational and developmental witness which the Ummah is called upon to offer. The era of Prophethood and the generation during which the Companions lived depended upon direct contact with, observation and emulation of the Prophet. As the Prophet himself said, "Take your ceremonies and rituals of

worship from me,”<sup>23</sup> and, “Pray as you have seen me pray.”<sup>24</sup> Emulation depends, of course, on the practical actions taken by the Prophet in response to life’s realities. In his conduct, the Prophet fleshed out the Qur’an in real life, as a result of which no problems arose in connection with the Qur’an’s practical application. Rather, the Prophet’s manner of applying the Qur’an and of making its meaning clear, fully closed the gap between the components of the Qur’anic approach to life and the Arab-Islamic reality, together with the mindsets and intellectual and epistemological capabilities of those who experienced this reality, and the social and intellectual conditions and epistemological limits which applied to them. It is for this reason that the Companions who narrated the words and deeds of the Prophet took the greatest of care not to miss even the slightest particular of relevance to the Prophet’s life, since this was the only alternative to awareness of the Prophet’s overarching method of dealing with life’s varied questions. This is why the Sunnah includes such a phenomenally large number of the Prophet’s sayings and actions, and why we have received all of these details enabling us to follow his daily movements, morning and evening, in peacetime and war, in his teaching, judicial decrees, leadership and legal decisions, and humanitarian practices. It is these which reveal his approach to dealing with reality, that is, his Sunnah. In addition, the Sunnah serves to disclose the distinguishing characteristics of the reality with which the Prophet was dealing and in which he lived and moved. For it was a reality which differed significantly, in both its makeup and mentality, from the one in which we ourselves live. Even so, there was a constant emphasis upon the fact that the sole source and origin of legal rulings was the Qur’an and that the sole binding source of clarification of the Qur’an’s meaning was the Sunnah.

The Prophet in his Sunnah thus embodied the link between the Qur’anic method and reality. Consequently, it is difficult to understand many issues [connected with interpretation of the Qur’an and the Sunnah] in isolation from an understanding of the reality in which the Prophet lived. When, for example, he prohibited sculpting and visual representations, declaring that those who engage in such activities will be the most grievously chastised on the Day of Resurrection, this prohibition should not be understood as a prophetic position since it is in conflict with the attitude taken by the prophet Solomon, who used to recruit the jinns to produce whatever statues he wished to have. Nor should it be understood in the framework of the ques-

tions and arguments raised by our contemporaries on this subject. After all, we have no desire, or even inclination, to worship such three-dimensional objects. Hence, why should they be forbidden to us? Nor should the solution be sought in isolated legal decisions which permit one kind of statue and forbid another. Rather, a more systematic position may be arrived at, one to which the Prophet referred in numerous situations, as when he stated, “If your people [O ‘Ā’ishah] had not just recently emerged from a time of unbelief, I would do such-and-such and such-and-such...”<sup>25</sup> Hence, the controversy is settled without being allowed to lead to a discussion of the authority of the Sunnah itself, because in the framework of this epistemological method, the Sunnah is not simply scattered particulars unconnected by any methodological link, but, rather, a set of systematic rules which provide a model that facilitates emulation of the Prophet.

Given this model, it may be said that the Prophet was striving to do away completely with the manufacture and promotion of idols among people for whom idol worship was still a recent memory. For this reason, he could not afford to be lenient in connection with anything which had even the slightest potential of undermining the abstractness of monotheism. Under such circumstances, his uncompromising position was a necessity. We now need to arrive at a method capable of regulating and lending order to such issues, and to view them from an epistemological perspective which places hadiths in the realm of methodology and systematic understanding. For the alternative is to deal with them in the realm of conflicting particulars which are frequently turned by those who disagree with each other into specific statements or legal decisions which communicate opposing messages, as though they were the pronouncements of imams representing different schools of jurisprudence.

During the phase in which the Qur’an was being revealed, the Arabs became familiar with the concept of emulating [the Prophet] based on the details and particulars of his words, deeds and decisions. They took the Prophet as a practical model to be emulated in keeping with the actual conditions of their lives. Through this understanding of the concept of emulation, there emerged the notions of *al-ma’thūr* and *al-manqūl*, that is, what has been passed down from one generation to the next in our textual tradition. Then, in an attempt to alleviate the [potentially regressive] effects of these notions, some thinkers resorted to esoteric, symbolic interpretations as a means of avoiding the necessity of adhering to the literal meaning of transmitted say-

ings. However, the effect of such measures was simply to confuse matters even further. What they should have done was to discern the prophetic, Qur'anic method as a means of lending order to all subordinate details and particulars, clarifying the intents and purposes [of the texts in question] and propagating a universal, intention-based understanding of them.

The contemporary mindset is in constant search of an objective framework which lends order to affairs. In doing so, it seeks to arrive at a full-dimensioned methodology on the basis of which analysis, criticism and interpretation become an objective framework for the intellectual movement in its dealings with cosmic and local issues. With such a methodology, it is possible to penetrate to the intents of the Qur'an in such a way that the Sunnah may be understood without falling back on esoteric interpretations, a static frame of reference which cancels the law of historical evolution, or inadequate attempts at reform which attempt to introduce modifications or past applications which simply reproduce such applications in the present without any essential change, as though they were an expression of the past decked out in new attire and adorned with newfangled terms and titles.

*Five:* Reexamining our Islamic legacy by means of a critical, analytical and epistemological reading which frees us from the three loops which govern the ways in which we relate to our legacy at the present time: (1) total rejection, (2) total acceptance, and (3) selective, arbitrary eclecticism. None of these three loops is capable of achieving continuity with those aspects of this legacy which need to be preserved, nor can it achieve the needed epistemological break with those aspects with which such a break needs to be made.

*Six:* Constructing a method for dealing with the contemporary human heritage in a way which frees the Muslim mind from its current approaches. For such approaches grow out of attempts to approximate and endorse the thought of the Other as a distinctive, separate centrality, followed by comparisons with this same system of thought which have led either to its complete rejection, its unconditional, unquestioning acceptance, or haphazard picking and choosing devoid of any sort of method or methodology.

These six steps, focal points or tasks are what we have referred to variously as the Islamization of knowledge, the monotheistic epistemological method, the Islamization of the social sciences and the humanities, steering the natural sciences in an Islamic direction, and/or the Islamic grounding of the sciences. For the first time, Muslims are faced with a worldwide positivism which is

working to employ knowledge, the sciences and their discoveries and achievements in a manner which severs the relationship between the Creator, the created universe and man, thereby disregarding the world of the unseen and driving a wedge between science and values. Such an endeavor poses conceptualizations of the universe which appear to be diametrically opposed to our Islamic perspective. Such conceptualizations may or may not be as they appear. However, the issue is not for us to reject these conceptualizations, branding them as unbelief; nor is it to choose from among our religious sayings that which happens to be consistent with such conceptualizations so that we can say: This already exists in our tradition. For our basic attitude toward the natural sciences has not been theological or sacerdotal in nature. Nor are we required to emulate others, whose experience in confronting science and its achievements differs from ours. If the Qur'an were theological and sacerdotal in nature, it would only allow for the reading of a single dimension of reality, that is, the metaphysical dimension. However, we have been commanded to approach reality in a different way. We are not waging war on science, since we realize that the Revelation found in the Qur'anic universe, as it were, is likewise the revelation found in the natural universe. Hence, if distortions appear and are attributed to science, our job is to not to abandon science but, rather, to purge it of such distortions. Similarly, if [unsound] interpretations of the revealed text appear, we have no choice but to refute the forgeries of falsifiers and extremist distortions which the ignorant have read into the text. This is the foundation for bringing knowledge and the sciences together and linking them to the Qur'anic epistemological methodology. The abstract positivistic thought which confronted religion in the past was not armed with the contemporary applied sciences, the results of which have led to the establishment of schools of thought which go beyond traditional positivism. Thus, what is required of us is to reclaim science by purging it of loyalties to this or that school of thought and by putting it to use anew based on combined readings of the written Revelation and the created universe.

### *The Third Focal Point: Science and Knowledge*

Among Muslims, the concept of science has always been associated with reading. Before the Qur'an, the Arabs were an unlettered people who had no book, and it was through the Qur'an that they made their first advances

toward science and knowledge. Similarly, the Qur'an was the means by which they gained access to the 'reading' which was revealed with the first words of the Qur'an: "Read in the name of thy Sustainer, who has created – created man out of a germ-cell. Read – for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One, Who has taught the use of the pen – taught man what he did not know!"<sup>26</sup> These verses from the Qur'an contain a number of essential points. First, they contain a command to read, while affirming the link between science and the pen. They make clear that the source of science is God, that the command to read is addressed to human beings whom God created from a germ-cell, and that it is part of human beings' nature not to know until God teaches them. Moreover, the reading which human beings are commended to engage in is a reading in the name of God. This reading proceeds in God's presence until it arrives at a science which can be recorded with the pen and thereby transferred to lines on paper and disseminated among people. The term 'reading' must likewise be recognized as broad enough to include both that which is written in a book and that which is manifested in the created universe; the words of the Qur'an are read, and so are the horizons of the cosmos. These two readings are inseparable, and out of this inseparability there arise sciences and various realms of knowledge, experimentation and experience which serve as the basis for development, prosperity and the civilization of faith. This is the kind of inclusive reading which leads to beneficial science and indispensable knowledge. Hence, if the reading is altered, it loses its epistemological value and its scientific effects. It was clear in the days of the Companions and in the first generation of Islam that the fundamental purpose of reading is to build up a scientific, epistemological mindset and to provide both the authoritative framework required by such a mindset and the scientific model which can, by means of independent reasoning and creativity, generate what people need by way of sciences and fields of learning. Moreover, such sciences are based on texts which, although they contain a limited number of words, are nevertheless capable of encompassing an untold number and variety of events, situations and problems and, indeed, the entire universe.

Those who lived in the early days of Islam also understood that 'science' is that which has been uttered by God and the Prophet. The Islamic sciences are tied to the [revealed] texts, which are absolute and sacred. However, the human beings who deal with such texts are finite creatures. Consequently,

their understanding cannot be described as absolute or sacred. The text is a linguistic vehicle for the words of God, in order that these words might become divine discourse addressed to people in need of insight, understanding, explanation and rules capable of regulating such understanding and explanations. It was within this framework that there emerged what are known as the Islamic sciences. The first of these to emerge were the sciences of intents (*‘ulūm al-maqāṣid*): Qur’anic hermeneutics, hadith, doctrine (or scholastic theology), the sources [of Islamic law], and jurisprudence. These were followed by sciences that dealt with the means by which knowledge is acquired and conveyed (*‘ulūm al-wasā’il*), including linguistics, logic and the like. In the beginning, such sciences were fragmented and were circulated orally and memorized. Efforts at compilation and recording were limited at first to the Sunnah, which was compiled in 99 AH on orders from the Caliph ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, although some recording of the Sunnah had taken place prior to this on a small scale.

As for when recording began on a wide scale, al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Dhahabī dates it to the year 143 AH.<sup>27</sup> Hadith scholars restricted the concept of knowledge (*‘ilm*) to hadith narratives, Qur’anic interpretation and other such sciences which later came to be known as the Islamic textual sciences (*al-‘ulūm al-shar‘īyah* or *al-naqlīyah*). These scholars included within this concept all passages from the Qur’an and the Sunnah which urge us to pursue knowledge (*‘ilm*) and learning (*ta‘allum*) or expound on its virtues and associated rules of etiquette, while excluding everything else.

Scholastic theology and the science of the fundamentals of jurisprudence began to spread and were infiltrated by statements derived from logic (translated from other languages). Hence the concept of *‘ilm* began to take on an additional dimension in the thinking of these scholars. They did not censure those who applied the term *‘ilm* to the various branches of knowledge having to do with a single topic which raises questions, ramifies into branches and has an associated purpose and benefit, including, for example, the disciplines of hadith and Qur’anic exegesis. At the same time, they began to draw a link between the concept of *‘ilm* and the degree of one’s perception or understanding on one hand, and knowledge (*ma‘rifah*), the means by which it is acquired, and the methods by which it is generated on the other. Once this link had been forged, they sometimes referred to the latter (*ma‘rifah*) as *‘ilm*, and at other times did not. Scholastic theologians disagreed sharply over how

to define the concept of *‘ilm*. In fact, Imam al-Rāzī and others rejected the notion of defining the concept to begin with, saying, “It is intuitive, and cannot be defined.” Al-Shawkānī compiled a large selection of definitions of *‘ilm* taken from the writings of later scholars of the fundamentals of jurisprudence. By noting the names of the scholars associated with these definitions and the times during which they lived, one can learn a great deal about the development in their understanding and the observations they made in their use of the term. Most later scholars eventually agreed to define the term *‘ilm* as, “a definitive, fixed perception which conforms to reality based on evidence.”

As for the term *ma‘rifah*, some have held that it is equivalent to *‘ilm*, while others have held that they are different. The reason for this is that *ma‘rifah* may be preceded by ignorance, *‘ilm* cannot. It is for this reason that we may refer to God as ‘Knowing’ with the term *‘ālim*, but not with the term *‘ārif*. In addition, *‘ilm* has to do with attribution, or placing one thing in relation to another, as a result of which the verb *‘alima* can take two direct objects.<sup>28</sup> However this is not true of the verb *‘arafa*, which can only take one direct object, as in the statement *‘araftu zaydan*, “I knew (or recognized) Zayd.”

In spite of this, however, the words *‘ilm* and *ma‘rifah* may sometimes be used interchangeably. Hence, in logic either of them can be used to refer to a comprehensive understanding of conceptualization and rational assent. And it is in this last sense that the words *‘ilm* and *ma‘rifah* are used in the definitions of the recorded sciences.

Al-Jurjānī attempted a brief overview of the most important classifications and divisions of *‘ilm* by his predecessors. According to al-Jurjānī, *‘ilm* is divided into two categories, eternal (*qadīm*) and time-bound (*ḥadīth*). Eternal *‘ilm* is that which has existed for all eternity in the Divine Essence, and which cannot be likened to the time-bound sciences of man. As for time-bound *‘ilm*, it is divided into three sub-categories, intuitive or self-evident, necessary, and deductive.

According to Imam al-Ghazālī, the sciences (*al-‘ulūm*, plural of *‘ilm*) belong to one of two categories: legal, and non-legal. The legal sciences are those whose content has been derived from the prophets and which cannot be arrived at through human reason, experience or hearing. As for the non-legal sciences, they are divided into the categories of praiseworthy, blameworthy, and permissible.

Ibn Taymiyyah categorizes the sciences into three groups: (1) rational sci-

ences, that is those which deal with topics of concern to philosophers such as the sciences of logic, the natural [sciences] and theology. Consequently, such philosophers include both believers [in God] and those who associate partners with Him; (2) confessional sciences, that is those that deal with questions of scholastic theology such as proofs for the existence of the Creator, proofs of prophethood, and proofs of the divine laws, etc.; and (3) Islamic legal sciences, that is those that deal with questions of concern to scholars of the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

Ibn Taymiyyah's disciple Ibn al-Qayyim introduced still other divisions, saying that *'ilm* is the act of transferring an image of the entity known from the objective realm to a person's psyche, and that if the image impressed into the person's psyche conforms to the reality in itself, it may be said to be sound *'ilm*. It often happens that images which are presented to and instilled in the psyche have no true existence; even so, they are believed by the person who has established them in his or her mind to be true *'ilm* when, in fact, they are nothing but suppositions with no reality. Most of what people take to be true sciences are actually of this type. As for those aspects of such sciences which do correspond to objective reality, they may be divided into two types: (1) the type of *'ilm* which brings one's soul to completion, as in the case of the knowledge of God, His names, attributes, actions, books, commands and prohibitions, and (2) the type of *'ilm* which does not contribute to the soul's perfection or completeness. This type includes every type of knowledge which does not bring benefit to the knower nor harm if one is ignorant of it. The Prophet used to pray for God to deliver him from knowledge which brings no benefit. However, most valid, truthful human sciences – such as astronomy, knowledge of the number of celestial bodies and their extent in space and time, knowledge of the number of mountains in the world, their arrangements, their locations, etc. – entail knowledge of things which it would do no harm to be ignorant of. The dignity or worth which attaches to a given type of knowledge is derived from the dignity or worth of the entity known and the urgency of the need which exists for it. No type of knowledge has unconditional worth or dignity but the knowledge of God and what follows from it.

As for those who were known as the 'philosophers of Islam' such as al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā and others who engaged in similar investigations, most of their classifications of *'ilm*, despite differences in certain details, may

be summed up in the affirmation that the sciences belong to two fundamental categories, each of which itself branches into several types. The two fundamental categories of sciences are the theoretical sciences and the practical sciences, each of which comprises three subcategories. The theoretical sciences are divided into mathematics, natural science and theology, while the practical sciences are divided into ethics, home economics and civil administration.

Ibn Khaldūn divided the sciences into two categories. The first category is that of the philosophical and wisdom-related sciences. These are sciences which may be formulated by human beings. Led by their natural mental capacities and perceptive faculties, human beings are able to determine the topics and issues relevant to these sciences, the various aspects of the proofs which can be adduced in their support, and how to instruct others in them. Hence, through inquiry and research, human beings can develop the ability to distinguish error from truth within this realm in their capacity as rational creatures. The second category of sciences identified by Ibn Khaldūn comprises those which deal with Islamic law as established through Revelation and authoritative texts passed down through the Islamic tradition. All such sciences rest upon traditions passed down on the authority of the Prophet. As such, they leave no room for the exercise of human reason except insofar as reason plays a role in tracing subsidiary questions and issues to their roots or origins. The reason for this is that successive, time-bound particulars are not automatically included under universal authoritative textual traditions; rather, such traditions need to be applied to such particulars through the drawing of analogies. Ibn Khaldūn goes on to affirm that all of these Islamic legal sciences find their source in the legislative passages of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, that is, what has been legislated for us by God and the Prophet, and whatever is related thereto by way of sciences which help put such legislation into effect, etc.

Ibn Khaldūn was succeeded by others who essentially held the same view of *ʿilm*, its essence and its related issues. They did not disagree with Ibn Khaldūn on the matter of research, which they saw as being little more than research into the subject of *ʿilm*, its classifications and its premises, in light of which one may discern its position and priority. All of this, moreover, serves as evidence of the fact that *ʿilm* is attributable to a single, isolated reading, namely, the reading of the text alone.

As for the reading of the cosmos and existence, it emerged in some branches of knowledge which gained recognition in light of the principle that, “Whatever is necessary in order for one to fulfill one’s unconditional obligations, and is within the individual’s capacity, is itself obligatory.” Such branches include, for example, astronomy, medicine, mathematics and some geometry and engineering. In addition, certain scholars gained prominence based on specific initiatives and unusual perspectives related to varied fields such as optics, medicine and the like, but which were not transformed into an epistemological system based on a systematic model. In his famed book, *Mawqif al-‘Aql wa al-‘Ilm wa al-‘Ālim min Rabb al-‘Ālamīn wa ‘Ibādīhi al-Mursalīn* (The Attitude of Reason, Science and the Scientist Toward the Sustainer of All the Worlds and His Messengers), Mustafā Sabri uses the term *‘ilm* to refer to that degree of *ma‘rifah* which is not subject to doubt, whether the source of certainty is sensory experience or faith in Divine Revelation. The sources of *ma‘rifah* are Divine Revelation and the created cosmos, while the means by which we access these sources are reason and sensory perception. Hence, whether man arrives at this certainty by means of revelation and the use of reason, or through direct observation and experience by means of sensory perception, all of this for man is a source of the tranquility borne of certainty. However, [if we are speaking of] complete certainty in and of itself, and within the psyche [of the knower], then it makes it difficult to apply the word *‘ilm* as it has been defined by most Muslim scholars to anyone but God. For the *‘ilm* of God is absolutely certain, whereas the *ma‘rifah* possessed by man and their perception of certainties, as well as other things, is influenced not by the certainty of the entity perceived but, rather, by their level of understanding. For if a human being fails to perceive something with complete certainty, this may [still] be referred to as *‘ilm*; whereas if he or she perceives something based on reasonably certain evidence, it is referred to as a supposition (*ẓann*). If, by contrast, he or she perceives something as being true and there is evidence against it, this is ignorance (*jahl*), and if someone affirms with complete certainty that which we have referred to as ignorance, it is compound ignorance.

The concept of *‘ilm* has been significantly influenced in the modern age by the dominant Western civilization and its concepts. Moreover, it is observed that despite the relativism which characterizes Western culture, and despite the fact that this culture derives from Western sources and is marked by

Western aims and concerns, it has, nevertheless, by virtue of its global hegemony, imposed itself on the world.

Influenced by the West's application of the term *ilm* to the natural sciences and what they require by way of experimentation, observation and testing, many have attempted to limit the term exclusively to direct, physical observations, empirically proven phenomena and their methods. It is in keeping with this attempt that UNESCO once defined the term *ilm* as "every known fact which is subject to sensory perception and experimentation." It has been noted by some that the term *ilm* in its broader sense may likewise be applied to any branch of knowledge which is characterized by a method and rules and which operates on the basis of a system. However, whoever desires precision must apply the term to empirical science alone.

Arabic authors continue to employ the term *ilm* with a variety of meanings, thereby reflecting the same inconsistency that Western thinkers do in their use of the term. Consequently, we find from time to time that this concept is raised anew for discussion, which in turn stimulates renewed controversy over its use. However, the situation today is not one of rivalry or conflict. Rather, it is a situation which requires that we be honest with ourselves in order to clarify our vision and the way ahead. No single, isolated reading will be sufficient to extricate humanity from its predicament.

The Islamization of knowledge is able to affirm that this old-new conflict over the concept of *ilm* and over which fields or entities may be referred to with this term, as well as the declared superiority of the empirical sciences and the battle for such superiority, are matters which should be excluded from Muslims' entire experience. For the Muslim experience is based on a combined reading of two sources of knowledge, the written Revelation and the created universe.

Moreover, the knowledge which is derived from these two sources is a knowledge which has been bestowed upon us by the All-Knowing, the All-Aware. It is God who established the unchanging laws on which the universe operates. As for materialistic conceptions of the universe, they disregard the Creator and the purposefulness of creation. As a result of this they view natural phenomena as independently existing events which develop and evolve of their own accord in such a way that they yield new forms without any intervention from a higher Power.

Bringing together the two readings – the reading of the written Reve-

lation and the reading of the universe – confers honor upon all forms of knowledge, since it views them as having been bestowed upon man by their Creator. As such, man can draw upon these forms of knowledge for aid and assistance, while benefiting from them in carrying out the task which God has entrusted to him. Consequently, the Islamization of knowledge acknowledges no conflict between knowledge taken from the written Revelation and that taken from the universe. Nor does it turn these forms of knowledge into competing dualities, each of which attempts to demonstrate its superiority over the other. On the contrary, ‘Islamization’ here means disengaging human scientific achievement from positivistic philosophical premises and re-employing these sciences within a systematic epistemological framework based on Divine Revelation.

The Islamization of knowledge thus means the Islamization of the applied sciences and scientific rules based on an appreciation of the similarity and correspondence between the patterns which reveal themselves in these sciences and their laws, and those that reveal themselves in the cosmos and its laws, then using them to achieve the divine intents. In addition, it concerns itself with the Islamization of the social sciences, which includes the Islamization of the philosophical premises of scientific theories by ridding them of the positivistic dimension which pays no heed to the Creator and denies the world of the unseen. Hence, the Islamization of knowledge strives to reformulate these branches of knowledge and to place them in a cosmic perspective by linking them to the divine purpose for the entire creation. It follows, then, that in this phase, the Islamization of knowledge has no need to affirm the scientific nature of Revelation and the non-scientific nature of other sources of knowledge; nor does it need to do the reverse, by affirming the scientific nature of knowledge that derives from sensory perception and experience and denying the scientific nature of what arises from other sources.

The Islamization of knowledge does not preoccupy itself with stirring up controversy in particular areas of academic research. It attempts to encompass all areas of knowledge in a systematic epistemological formulation by means of which it can deal with the various forms of knowledge, laws and research methods based on the dual reading of the universe and Revelation. Hence, it does not seek simply to put a religious label on human knowledge in order to give it a phony legitimacy or to bolster its own power or prestige in one way or another.

The Islamization of knowledge movement considers the present time to be an advanced phase in which Muslims must transcend the mindset of approximations which prevailed in the last century, as well as the mindset of comparisons which still prevails in some locations. Hence, it is now seeking to undertake a radical review of human knowledge as a whole, be it traditional or contemporary. Such a review will render Islamic thought, with its Qur'anic epistemological methodology, capable of offering the methodological criteria needed to regulate all of human thought by providing it with clear limits, yet without being preoccupied with issues of compromise, moderation or conflict. Humanity is in need of an epistemological methodology which emerges directly from both Revelation and the created universe, and which is capable of providing man with the knowledge he needs in order to carry out the task of being God's vicegerents on earth, to bear the trust he has been given, and to offer the civilizational witness which God has commanded him to.

#### *The Fourth Focal Point: Culture and Civilization*

The Arabic word translated as 'culture' (*thaqāfah*) is derived from the verb *thaqafa*, which conveys the sense of being skillful, clever, understanding and mastering something's content, and undertaking or achieving something. It can also convey the sense of being perspicacious, intelligent, and confident in one's knowledge of what one needs, and refining, modifying, straightening or correcting something which is warped or crooked.

Based on the aforementioned meanings, Nasr Muhammad Arif<sup>29</sup> has summarized the essence and dimensions of the concept of 'culture' as it is used in its original Arabic context:

*One:* The concept of 'culture' in Arabic is not imported from some external source, but arises from the human essence. The word 'culture' refers to the purification, refinement and correction of inborn human nature when it has been warped in some way. It is the process of inducing it to express the meanings which are inherent within it and release its potentials and energies in order to bring forth the types of knowledge which human beings need.

*Two:* The concept of 'culture' in Arabic includes the notion of searching in order to arrive at truth, goodness and justice, and in order to apply those values which will improve human existence by refining and straightening in it whatever is crooked. It is, therefore, a concept which opens the human

mind to all forms of beneficial knowledge and science, yet without introducing those types of knowledge, science or values which corrupt human existence and are inconsistent with the requirements of refinement, education, adjustment and correction.

*Three:* It focuses not on knowledge and sciences in an unrestricted sense but, rather, on the knowledge which human beings need in accordance with their environmental and societal conditions. As Ibn Manzūr notes, “He’s a lad who is quick to understand and clever (*thaqif*), that is, perspicacious and intelligent, by which I mean to say that he knows clearly what he needs.” By linking the concept of culture (*thaqāfah*) to the social context in which a person lives, this statement frees it from criteria or standards which classify cultures on the basis of how they compare with a specific culture which is held up as the norm for all. Such measures of culture are based on a patronizing, self-satisfied attitude and the belief in the right to impose one’s standards on others when dealing with other cultures. As enshrined in its original use in Arabic, the term ‘cultured’ (*muthaqqaf*) refers to anyone who has a clear knowledge of what he needs in his own particular age, time, society and environment. Consequently, the cultured person is one who is powerfully connected to his or her own society and its problems regardless of the quantity of knowledge and information he or she happens to have accumulated. After all, as Malik Bin Nabi remarks, such knowledge and information might embody ideas which are dead, or even deadly.

Hence, what is meant by ‘culture’ is the realization of the nature of society’s issues and problems and what is capable of improving and reforming it. This being the case, the function of the ‘cultured’ individual is to manage life and move society in the direction of empowerment, benefit and the improvement of people’s conditions. Such a person’s role is that of a reformer, or, as [Antonio] Gramsci put it, that of the organic intellectual who is intimately connected to his own social model and its issues. If, on the other hand, we employ the term ‘culture’ to refer to knowledge, customs, values, etc., this may lead to the appearance of groups of intellectuals who may be adherents of another civilizational model which destroys the society in which they live for the sake of applying what they believe to be the Absolute Truth. This is done without understanding the circumstances of their society and what would truly reform it. Alternatively they may be intellectuals who are little more than receptacles for huge accumulations of conflicting knowledge and data.

*Four:* Culture is a continuously evolving process which never comes to an end. As such, it does not mean that a given society has developed the knowledge, sciences and values which place it at the top of the cultural ladder, or that a given society or individual has reached the ultimate goal. Rather, the concepts of refinement and correction mean self-renewal, that is, repeated refinement, self-examination, self-evaluation, and the correction of one's errors.

*Five:* The concept of culture does not entail value judgments which determine the quality of a given culture, that is, whether it is to be termed backward and barbaric, brutal and reactionary, advanced, modern and enlightened, etc. The reason for this is that the starting point for the concepts of refinement, improvement, enhancement, etc. is that all cultures, when judged in light of the values of their own societies and circumstances, are of equal human value.

*Six:* The concept of culture is not restricted or specialized. It is a general concept pertaining to individuals, groups and societies which includes all types of human practices and their varying degrees. It yields meaning on a variety of analytical levels so long as it recognizes the processes of refinement and correction in a sense which applies equally to all cultures everywhere.

Nasr has observed that Ibn Khaldūn's use of the term *ḥaḍārah* (civilization), was consistent with the roots of the European concept. Arab researchers then stopped at the meanings which Ibn Khaldūn had associated with the term, despite the fact that Ibn Khaldūn had not been discussing civilization as a universal, all-inclusive concept which provides an overall framework for human movement and development and which imbues them with specific value-related features. Rather, Ibn Khaldūn's use of the term is consistent with the intellectual edifice which he constructs in *al-Muqaddimah* and his discussion of the evolution of the state and its various phases. It will also be observed here that Ibn Khaldūn was not speaking of the state in its contemporary sense (government). Rather, he was using the term 'state' to refer to what might be termed social contracts, social systems, the process by which power is passed down and transferred, or the succession of ruling families. Consequently, his use of the term 'civilization' was limited solely to the meaning derived from residing in a metropolis rather than in the desert.

The point of ambiguity here arises not from Ibn Khaldūn's use of the

term. Rather, it arises from the fact that Arab researchers had extracted meanings derived from the concept of ‘civilization’, on the basis of which they formed a mental picture which was associated in their minds with particular nuances. They then referred to Ibn Khaldūn or to classic Arabic dictionaries with sole emphasis on the sense of residence in urban areas to the exclusion of all other uses of the word. Their appeal to Ibn Khaldūn was, thus, not for the purpose of searching out the true meaning of the concept by allowing Arabic to speak for itself and listening to all the various significations of its concepts. Rather, it signaled a desire to find an Arabic counterpart to meanings which had become firmly entrenched in their minds, and to justify their own pre-conceived understanding of the concept.

It will be observed that *Lisān al-‘Arab*, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīt*, *Asās al-Balāghah* and other Arabic lexicons list seven meanings for the term *ḥaḍārah*. The first, most general and most frequently used meaning points to the use of *ḥaḍārah* in the sense of *shahīdah*, that is, presence as opposed to absence, and the term *ḥaḍārah*, in the sense of *shahādah*, or ‘witness.’

This is virtually always the first use mentioned in Arabic dictionaries, as though it were the origin of the concept’s use, or a companion to the term *ḥaḍar*. In spite of this, however all of those who went back to the linguistic origin of the term searched for *ḥaḍārah* in the sense of residence in the metropolis, or the opposite of nomadic existence. Even if such researchers encounter the first meaning and make use of it, they are quickly sidetracked in the direction of other meanings of ‘civilization.’ We find one of them, for example, defining *ḥaḍārah* as follows: “The term *ḥaḍārah* is derived from the verb *ḥaḍārah/yaḥḍuru*, meaning to come, or be present. We may say, for example, that so-and-so has come, or presented himself (*ḥaḍārah*) in order to work with others so as to enjoy their companionship and to provide companionship for others. In doing so, he helps to fulfill the conditions necessary for him to experience dignity. Hence, the term *mutaḥaḍḍir*, or ‘civilized’, applies to every society which respects human dignity and embodies this dignity in the transactions among its members. Civilization, *ḥaḍārah*, is likewise a heritage shared by all peoples, ancient and modern. As such, it is a human heritage which is in a process of uninterrupted development, like a sea into which many tributaries are constantly emptying, these tributaries being the many and various national cultures.”

Based on the root *ḥaḍārah* in the sense of witnessing, that is, being present as

opposed to being absent, we may search for the Qur'anic meanings of this concept. We find that the word *ḥaḍāra* in the Qur'an bears the same meaning as *shahida*, to witness, see, attend or be present at. For example, the phrases: "when death approaches (*ḥaḍāra*) any of you...",<sup>30</sup> "and when [other] near of kin and orphans and needy persons are present at (*ḥaḍāra*) the distribution [of inheritance]...",<sup>31</sup> and, "whoever witnesses (*shahida*) this month...",<sup>32</sup> all of which convey the sense of *shahādah*, or presence.

The concept of *shahādah* in the Qur'an has four complementary meanings which unite to convey the meaning of *ḥaḍārah* in Islamic understanding. These meanings cannot be separated from one another; otherwise, their true content is lost. Each of these four meanings makes up part of the structure of the concept of *ḥaḍārah*; however, none of them by itself expresses the concept of *ḥaḍārah* in full. Instead they must all be present simultaneously in a single constellation or system in order to give the concept its complete meaning. These meanings are:<sup>33</sup>

- 1) *Shahādah* in the sense of the affirmation of the divine unity and the acknowledgement of human beings as God's servants, as well as the acknowledgement of God as the Divine and Sovereign. This is the pivot upon which the Islamic creed turns, and the basis for the determination of whether or not human beings are adhering to God's way.
- 2) *Shahādah* in the sense of speaking the truth and treading the path of justice, demonstration and explication, knowledgeable reporting of events, or observation and scrutiny. This meaning may be viewed as one of the portals which leads into the realm of *'ilm*, and one of the means by which *ma'rifah* may be obtained.
- 3) *Shahādah* in the sense of sacrifice, redemption, and offering oneself for the sake of God in order to preserve the Islamic creed and in defense of human beings' liberation from subservience to and the worship of other creatures in order to become servants and worshippers of God alone.
- 4) *Shahādah* as a function or duty of the Ummah: "And thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way, so that you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you."<sup>34</sup>

The meaning of the term *shahādah* applies both to this world and the next, since,

...the duty of *shahādah*, of being present and bearing witness, can only be fulfilled by the Ummah of the middle way, whose autonomous Islamic character refuses to be dissolved into any other entity or to lose the distinguishing features of its personality. Only by retaining its authentic character can the Ummah be a model to be emulated and followed by other nations. The first generation of Muslims realized that bearing witness to other nations requires that this Ummah be a liberated, and liberating, world power which is founded on justice and which applies justice in its dealings with its own citizens as well as others. Such an Ummah is one which protects the right of others to choose and their desire to establish a new society based on emancipation from the worship of creatures in order to worship God alone. Similarly, such a society frees people from the injustice of [man-made] religions in order for them to pursue the justice of Islam, and from the constriction of this earthly life in order to experience the expansiveness of both this life and the life to come.<sup>35</sup>

In keeping with these four meanings, then, ‘civilization’, or *ḥaḍārah* is presence and bearing witness in all senses which give rise to a human model imbued with the values of monotheism and affirmation of God’s sovereignty. This model grows out of a metaphysical dimension coupled with the unity of the One who created the universe, established its laws and patterns, and controls its course. Seen within this framework, human beings’ role and mission is to live as vicegerents of God by populating, developing and improving His earth. They must purify people’s lives of all that is unworthy, empower them to exercise their full rights and prerogatives, benefit from its bounties and deal prudently with the natural resources which have been placed at their disposal. Man must build a relationship of peace with them based on the fact that they, too, are God’s creation which declare His praise, or sources of sustenance which must be preserved and maintained. Similarly, it is imperative that the Ummah establish relations with other human beings throughout the world based on brotherhood, harmony, the love of what is good, and the call for happiness both in this life and the next.

If this is the meaning of the concept of civilization as found in Islamic sources or, rather, in the Qur’an, and if this definition applies to the experience of Islam, then what view should be taken of the human experiences outside the Islamic framework? Does the same definition apply to them as well, despite the fact that they have not believed in Islam? Or are we to view

them as beyond the pale of civilization, as the European perspective views human experiences which differ from its own? In other words, is the aforementioned definition so particularistic that it cannot be applied to the human experiences of others? Moreover, can such a perspective be justified in light of our belief that Islam is the religion for all people and that it encompasses all cosmic phenomena without exception (“Nothing have we neglected in Our decree?”)?<sup>36</sup>

As we have mentioned, the essence of the concept of civilization in Islam is presence and witnessing. This being the case, ‘civilization’ in the aforementioned sense is the civilization of Islam, or Islam’s presence in the universe. However, this does not mean that it is a ‘model of presence’ for all other experiences, religions and schools of thought. Rather, each of these experiences, religions, or ways of thinking has a presence of its own, however close to, or distant from, the Islamic presence it happens to be. Consequently, the concept of civilization in its general sense is simply the nature and type of presence which characterizes any human experience which has been able to formulate a human model for life in all its aspects and dimensions and which seeks to present this model to others in order for them to emulate it and proceed in accordance with its system of thought and values. In doing so, the civilization is acting on the belief that it is the human model which is most worthy of being adopted.

It follows from the foregoing that ‘presence’ (*ḥuḍūr*) represents an advanced stage in the experience of any society, since many human societies are limited to nothing but existence rather than going beyond this to ‘presence.’<sup>37</sup> Consequently, it is not possible to apply the term ‘civilization’ to them, no matter how extensive their intellectual and material production. Here the question arises: What is the difference between ‘presence’ and ‘existence’? How can one ascertain and evaluate the type of presence in this society or that? It might also be asked: Is ‘presence’ always a positive arrangement which is suited to human life? Is the concept of civilization in this sense always a positive characteristic or an advanced stage in human life?

The establishment of any society calls for a network of values, standards, beliefs, ideas and modes of behavior, just as it also requires a set of inventions, tools, institutions, physical structures, arts, means of production and of making a living. These two aspects of a society indicate that it has achieved a type of prosperity and development. In other words, it has been able to populate

and develop the earth and to construct a human model upon it. However, this does not necessarily mean that it has created a civilization, since the mere establishment of prosperity in society means no more than mere existence, as in the cases of the models produced by China, the Mayas, the Incas, the Zulus, etc. The reason for this is that in addition to populousness, development and prosperity, 'presence' requires that a society offer humanity a model to emulate, that is, a pattern of relationships with other human beings, the universe, or the resources therein which God has placed at its disposal. It must present a model which it seeks to spread and to have others emulate, regardless of the content of this model.

Far from projecting any positive value on the concept of civilization, the models just described might actually be negative or destructive, or at the very least, be unsuitable for human life. However, this need not prevent us from applying the term 'civilization' to them provided that they are characterized by the following:

- 1) A doctrinal system which determines the nature of the society's relationship to the metaphysical world and the concept of the divine, be it positive or negative.
- 2) An intellectual and behavioral structure which shapes the pattern of prevailing values, morals and customs.
- 3) Material arrangements which include inventions, machines, institutions, regulations, buildings, arts, and all other material aspects of life.
- 4) A definition of society's relationship with the universe, including its resources and the world of things, as it were, and rules for dealing with these resources and their associated values.
- 5) A means of defining the pattern of relating to other human societies, and the principles and rules guiding this relation, in addition to the approach to persuading them to accept this model and its purpose.

We may then proceed to define and evaluate human experiences and experiments, provided that they have gone beyond mere 'existence' to achieve 'presence'. For example contemporary Western civilization takes a specific attitude toward the metaphysical world and the divine. Similarly, it has an intellectual structure, values, and specified modes of behavior, a material structure with particular distinguishing characteristics, a pattern of relating to

the natural environment and other creatures, as well as a particular pattern of, and aims behind, relating to other non-European societies. Hence, if we want to describe Western civilization and to ascertain its true nature, we have no choice but to study its attitudes toward these various dimensions of existence. Consequently, we will be able to determine what model it is offering to humanity and make a decision as to whether it is fit to emulate or not. The same approach could be applied to any other human experiment as well.

From this it will become clear to us that it is not logically possible for there to be a single civilization with multiple tributaries unless this civilization is so clearly the best human model that all peoples on earth abandon their own inherited traditions and models and adopt it entirely. Similarly, competition or clashes among civilizations is a natural occurrence which is inevitable given the nature of human existence and its givens. After all, difference is a divine law of the universe. As God declares, "And among His wonders is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your languages and colors..."<sup>38</sup> Nor may any given civilization assume automatically that it possesses a superior model for human beings. For the term 'civilization' does not imply a positive value in and of itself or a positive characteristic which can be attributed to objects and ideas. Rather, it is a neutral term whose content differs from one model of presence to another depending on the model's particular components.

Given this point of departure, it is necessary to examine all human knowledge, sciences, methods, concepts and values. It is not logical to claim that the unity of human origins requires unity in human knowledge, sciences, methods and values, since this turns the sciences, concepts and methods of the predominant civilization into universal sciences, concepts and methods. The unity of human origins does not necessitate the unity of human sciences and knowledge, since human beings are not born with such sciences or knowledge. Rather, they acquire them through revelation and their interactions with the environment and society in the realm of time and space, as well as through the accumulation and inheritance of expertise: "And God has brought you forth from your mothers' wombs knowing nothing – but He has endowed you with hearing, and sight, and minds..."<sup>39</sup> Hearing, sight and the mind are the entry points for human knowledge, and it is through these entry points that we should reexamine and evaluate the concepts and methods in circulation among us in light of the model by means of which we hope to

achieve 'presence', and which is being proposed to humanity as a guide and source of inspiration.

This understanding of the concept of civilization gives every human experience its own uniqueness, distinctiveness and special flavor. No human experience may be viewed as superior to any other except on the basis of the model which it offers, the superior model being that which is in harmony with inborn human nature and which, for this reason, finds ready acceptance. It follows that the dominance of a particular human model over all others will not be possible so long as belief in this concept of civilization prevails. Moreover, it is of the utmost importance that there be a reconsideration of the validity and practicality of the sciences, methods and concepts which prevail in our contemporary world. Only in this way can we become properly acquainted with, and evaluate, contemporary civilizations and, based on this evaluation, determine what position Islamic civilization should take toward them.

*The Fifth Focal Point: The Islamic and Human Heritage*

Based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah, Muslims constructed sciences related to their understanding of these texts and what they derived therefrom. Hence, the entire tradition relating to Islamic jurisprudence and its fundamentals, scholastic theology, and Muslim civilization as a whole represent their understanding, interpretation and study of texts. This understanding and interpretation should be factors which serve to advance and edify Muslims in the process of epistemological evolution and continuity. However, some, by imbuing these components of the Islamic legacy with qualities similar to those of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, have turned them at times into factors which hinder and impede. Many students and professors who have dealt with this legacy have been of the belief that it is sufficient to reproduce what they need of it in modern terminology which students will find easy to understand. Indeed, beginning almost as early as the time when the Qur'an and the Sunnah were committed to writing, the bulk of this tradition began to be reproduced in the form of explanations, reports, and footnotes. Then came the era of professors' reminders and synopses – our own era, that is. This phenomenon, however, is a dangerous one which sanctioned the mentality of imitation in the past, and continues to sanction it now.

It is for this reason that there is such a need to restudy and reinterpret our

Islamic legacy and to read it in a critical, analytical, knowledge-oriented manner, in order to free us from the three loops mentioned earlier and which, by and large, govern the ways in which we relate to our legacy at the present time: unconditional rejection, unconditional acceptance, and selective, arbitrary eclecticism. These three loops are incapable of achieving the knowledge-related evolution and continuity which are needed. All of the approaches which were employed of old and which are still being employed turn the Islamic legacy into a hindrance and impediment at the present time, as well as something which robs us of the future. However, through an appeal to the two sources of guidance, the Divine Revelation and the created universe, the re-reading of this tradition based on a sound epistemological methodology can help to free us from the grip of the three aforementioned loops. It will also actuate the authority of the Islamic epistemological system and methodology through an appeal to the two sources of guidance (the divine Revelation and the created universe). An appeal to these points of reference is essential when making judgments on issues relating to the Islamic legacy which may not be important for their own sake but, rather, due to the role they play in clarifying the methodology which determines how the Muslim mind relates to human phenomena and the rest of the created universe in different times. It also shows what such a methodology can reveal to us concerning contemporary phenomena. The reason for this is that the Islamic legacy is not mere thought abstracted from time and place; rather, like all human thought, it is restricted and qualified by virtue of the times and places in which it came into being and the human beings for whose sake it came into being. Since the Islamic legacy takes as its starting point an absolute, inspired text which transcends the limits of place and time, it follows that the proportion of truth which it contains will be greater than that found in thought which is divorced from Revelation. However, this does not grant it the same infallibility with which God has distinguished the Qur'an. Consequently, the Islamic legacy must be put in its proper place. It must be viewed as relative rather than as absolute, since it remains no more than ideas and treatments and explanations of a changing reality. We must seek to achieve specific aims through our understanding and rediscovery of our legacy. Specifically, we must seek to achieve continuity and accumulation, ascertain the method and epistemological models which govern our legacy, and benefit from the ideas and understandings therein which are valid and

useful for our own time and place.

The aforementioned approach likewise applies to the modern human heritage, and particularly the Western heritage. There is a need for a method of dealing with this legacy by means of which the Muslim mind can go beyond its currently prevailing approaches, which are holdovers from the attempts at approximation, comparison, then confrontation which led ultimately to either unconditional rejection or unconditional acceptance. It bears noting here that when the outcome was unconditional acceptance, it would either come about in a spirit of utter abnegation or be accompanied by a haphazard, pick-and-choose approach which was unguided by a disciplined methodology or by an epistemological reading which sought wisdom or sought to pass down authoritative texts in a conscious, purposeful manner. Such an acceptance did not reflect an awareness of the effect of civilizational and cultural differences on human knowledge.

In connection with each of these focal points, efforts need to be made to prepare one or more studies which would constitute a discourse addressed to all members of the Ummah. Such a discourse, would enable us to register an easily measurable achievement, and this in the following three ways: (1) by employing such a discourse to arouse the interest of the Ummah's intelligentsia, (2) by educating and preparing competent staff workers capable of registering genuine accomplishments, and (3) presenting cultural and epistemological material which the Ummah can deal with by means of all available educational and media tools, be they written or audio-visual.

Perhaps the most important ways of achieving the aforementioned are by:

- 1) Surveying, classifying, evaluating and critiquing the studies, research and textbooks which deal with these five focal points.
- 2) Selecting the best and most useful of such studies and textbooks.
- 3) Presenting written summaries of the materials selected.
- 4) Publishing outstanding studies of relevance.
- 5) Holding seminars and discussion groups.
- 6) Convening international seminars and publishing the results of the research presented.
- 7) Presenting lectures on these studies as a means of acquainting more people with them.
- 8) Inviting discussion of such studies through all available channels.

- 9) Observing the progress of the Ummah's interaction with such materials, then conducting ongoing review and evaluation.
- 10) Monitoring reactions and making plans suitable to each case.
- 11) Working to introduce such materials and studies into study methods and educational curricula.
- 12) Engaging in ongoing criticism and discussion of materials presented from an Islamic perspective in order to build up Muslims' critical sense, while excluding materials which are superficial in nature, even if they happen to be described as 'Islamic.'

We must realize, of course, that our job is not to carry out all these tasks ourselves, since this would undoubtedly be beyond our capacity. Rather, we must bring the issue of the Islamization of knowledge to the attention of the Ummah and the educated members thereof, and to make it their issue. As for our role, it may be summed up as follows:

- 1) To crystallize and clarify our cause, detailing its various aspects.
- 2) To present detailed models which will prevent the cause we are seeking to serve from foundering on the rocks of rejection and protect it from neglect due to its ambiguity; from failure due to superficiality; and from ineffectiveness resulting from the cause's having been presented in an overly vague or generalized fashion.
- 3) To monitor, investigate, analyze, interpret, guide, criticize, evaluate and correct.
- 4) To build up staff and support bases in universities and other cultural institutions by intensifying efforts and fostering connections in these contexts.
- 5) To engage in consciousness-raising with respect to various aspects of the plan and means of carrying it out; then present the plan to those with the capacity to execute it, offer them assistance, and observe and correct their work in order for it to fulfill the plan's purposes.

In this way, we take on the role of catalysts in relation to the cause. We assist rather than imposing burdens. We help rather than providing funds. We direct rather than expending our own efforts on details, thereby exhausting our resources. We criticize and evaluate, direct and bring together, and produce fundamental entities in relation to these focal points which ordinary

individuals would not be able to produce. Moreover, it may be helpful to do the following:

- 1) Prepare studied, detailed work papers on each of the aforementioned focal points in order to hold a series of relevant seminars and study courses in every Islamic country in which the IIIT has an office, representative, or cooperating agencies, organizations or individuals. Such seminars could be followed by international seminars for the purpose of achieving a kind of production capable of stimulating greater awareness within the Ummah of the crisis which it faces.
- 2) Publish suitable results in a timely fashion in order to create the needed accumulations in all possible channels.
- 3) Intensify communication with leading academic, intellectual and cultural figures and officials in universities and other educational institutions, and direct their attention to these focal points.
- 4) Establish close ties with university department heads and professors teaching in graduate programs, present ideas, academic initiatives, plans and projects, and invite such individuals to adopt them.
- 5) Contact graduate students and offer suggestions as to possible academic projects of relevance to these focal points.
- 6) Create distinguished social science libraries capable of attracting academic resources in every country.
- 7) Create a significant number of Masters and Ph.D. degree programs relevant to the aforementioned focal points and promote such plans in the appropriate departments.
- 8) Select the research projects necessary to crystallize these focal points, prepare relevant academic plans and work papers, and award suitable grants to those who choose to write on these subjects.

These are the focal points and approaches which we believe are necessary for the renewal of contemporary Islamic discourse in a manner which allows such discourse to contribute to the reform of Islamic thought and the Islamization of knowledge.