

# Special Article

## AbdulHamid AbuSulayman

### Civilizational Education for Transformation

Abdelaziz Berghout

#### VALORIZING ABUSULAYMAN'S INTELLECTUAL JOURNEY

**P**rofessor Emeritus Dato' Dr. AbdulHamid Ahmad AbuSulayman (1936–2021) was born in the city of Mecca, a sacred place in the history of Islam and civilization. Raised in the sociocultural and historical-religious Meccan environment, AbuSulayman showed a sense of *ummatic* consciousness and civilizational depth as early as his school days in the period 1942–1955. At an early age, he developed the habits of reading and inquisitiveness. These habits escalated in his intellectual journey to produce the sharp critical and analytical mind and personality of AbuSulayman as we came to know it later on. On one occasion, AbuSulayman mentioned that he read the book of “the Fall of Al-Andalus,” by Muhamed Abdullah A'nan, in his very young days. Imagine reading such a book and being conscious of the deep crisis of the Islamic civilization from an early age. Such exposures undoubtedly accelerated his intellectual maturation process.

By the same token, one may mention his early encounter and attachment with the ambiance of the house of God. Seeing the Muslim pilgrims pouring into the scared place yearly from all different countries and cultures left indelible impacts on his personality, educational upbringing, and intellectual journey. He used to observe the unwanted and dismaying characters and deeds of many Muslims in the compound of the scared place. He mentioned that, based on his upbringing in Mecca, he was confused

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ABDELAZIZ BERGHOUT Department of Fundamental Knowledge and Interdisciplinary Studies, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, is Dean of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization of the International Islamic University of Malaysia.

by the decline of Muslims from the pride and level of civilization of the early years of Islam to the current position of weakness and decline. (Abu-Sulayman, 2003, p. 11). This reality opened his mind to the deep crisis of the Islamic personality and civilization, he saw those negative behaviors he had observed as mere symptoms of a deeper intellectual, cultural, and educational crisis, as articulated in his writings later on.

I believe, and trust, that AbuSulayman, who first saw the world from the lenses of the scared place as well as the civilizational *ummatic* consciousness, would definitely, as we have seen it in his intellectual and professional careers, become a witness, advocator, and contributor to the movement of intellectual reform of the Ummah. He went on to obtain the degrees of bachelor of arts in commerce, in 1959, and master of arts in political science, in 1963, from Cairo University. He obtained his doctor of philosophy degree in international relations from the University of Pennsylvania in 1973.

Living and being exposed to multidiverse cultures in the Islamic and Western worlds had provided him with a rare opportunity to fathom both the Islamic and Western epistemologies, philosophies, methodologies, and applications of knowledge. This exposure helped him develop the capabilities of integration and multidisciplinary. Looking at his background and career shows his immersion in Islamic thought and heritage, Islamic education and civilization, comparative economics, social and political sciences, international relations, Western knowledge and philosophy, and global thoughts and movements. All this made him an integrated mind par excellence.

## ABUSULAYMAN AND HIS WAY OF THINKING

To further draw the bigger picture of AbuSulayman's integrated approach to education and intellectual reform, it is worth highlighting the focus of some of his books.

Among others, *Crisis in the Muslim Mind* (2004a) provides a deep analysis of the Islamic intellectual crisis as manifested in the history, civilization, culture, and sociopolitical context of the Ummah resulting in intellectual inertia and dichotomy between the political and fiqhi enterprises. This split becomes one of persisting landmarks of decline hitherto. In a nutshell, the book is focused on dealing with the intellectual, epistemological, methodological, and cultural crises that paved the way for the decline of Islamic civilization, education (p. 20), sciences, political balance, and culture. This seminal book proposed many important steps toward rejuvenating the dynamism of the Muslim mind and civilization; among

others, building the sciences of *Istikhlaf and Umran*, intellectual reform, Islamization of knowledge, educational transformation, and the rejuvenation of Islamic worldview. Having said that, one may argue that within the integrated framework of AbuSulayman's thought, the book functions as the impetus and framework for a new intellectual and epistemological reform that will give birth to an integrated education of the Muslim mind and Ummah. This is the type of education that is based on sound intellectuality, epistemology, and ethicality.

AbuSulayman's *Towards an Islamic Theory of International Relations: New Directions for Islamic Methodology and Thought* (1993) provides an important attempt to build the Islamic theory of international relations on the basis of Islamic epistemology, methodology, and sources of knowledge. The Islamic value system made the basis of international relations reflecting on what had happened in the history of Islamic and what has been contributed by the contemporary Western social sciences. The book introduces an integrated framework and lays down the foundations of an Islamic theory of international relational-based human values, human nature, and humans' common civilizational interests. The late Ismail al-Faruqi, in his introduction to this work, clearly stated that for AbuSulayman to come up with an integrated approach to world order or the Islamic theory of international relations, he had to consult the sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and develop a methodology for dealing with the Islamic foundations of the subject matter. As described on the book's back cover, "In doing so, [AbuSulayman] examines the methodology developed by the early generations of Muslim scholars and finds it limited by its legalistic approach. Thus, much of the value of his work lies in its discussion of methodology and in the social sciences in general, by means of methodology developed from a purely Islamic perspective."

Early in his approach to intellectual reform, AbuSulayman realised the importance of an Islamic worldview in any epistemological and educational reform of the Ummah. To him, it's the Islamic worldview (2009, p. 111), that provides the vision, foundations, principles, values, and the balanced method of dealing with issues of life. As Islamic worldview provides an interpretation and answers to issues pertaining to God, man, life, and universes, it solves major problem of man in the world. An Islamic worldview was once the main guide of Islamic civilization and society. The Islamic worldview, argues AbuSulayman, provides a set of dynamic values such as trustworthiness, mercy, empathy, humbleness,

justice (2009, p. 213), respect, honor, equality, freedom truthfulness, balance, love, brotherhood, and cooperation for common good. It is this value system and ethical moral orientation that makes the Islamic worldview necessary for the development not only of epistemology but also Islamic education as the tool for personality building and transformation.

Hence, Islamic education is a process of translating the Islamic worldview and value system into the human personality, leading to self- and social development. AbuSulayman vehemently argues that the worldview is the basic structure for renewal. It provides a vision of world security for the Muslim world and the rest of the world, based on Quranic concepts of unity, justice, simplicity, freedom, responsibility, teleology, morality, shura, Sunnan of Allah, security, human association, and cosmic aesthetics (2009, pp. 5–6).

AbuSulayman realized early in his intellectual journey that reform of Muslim personality might not be achieved only through intellectual, epistemological, and methodological reconstruction of the Ummah if it is not supported by strong systematic soul and heart revamping. His book *The Crisis of the Will and Conscience: The Absent Dimension in the Ummah's Reform Project* (AbuSulayman, 2004b) makes it imperative to address the crisis of will and conscience in the Muslim soul and heart that resulted in psychosocial, emotional-spiritual, and moral-ethical deficiency of the Muslim personality and to discrepancies between thought and action and understanding and application. AbuSulayman observed that the ways of education of children and adults alike in the Islamic world were lacking the core values and the proper approaches. There is a lacuna between the education of the Quran and the Prophet Sunnah and the current practices of educating in our families and in almost all our educational institutions.

One of the deep reasons for the failure of the civilizational reform of the Ummah might be traced to education and its approaches in dealing with the soul, heart, character, will, conscience, mind, and senses of the learners and Muslims in general. The entire system of education overlooks the dimension of will, emotion, and conscience (2004b, p. 17), resulting in deformation of the soul and personality. It is clear that he argues for the centrality of the dimensions of will, soul, and emotions in the Muslim personality that are grounded in touching the heart, mind, and body.

AbuSulayman vehemently protested against the absence of the psychological-emotional aspect in educational discourse (2004b, p. 117) of the child and the Muslim in the reform project. Hence, it is important to take it into consideration based on human nature and the foundational principles and values of the Qur'an and Sunnah related to approaches of education of children (2004b, p. 196) and adults. According to him, this missing element shows disequilibrium in building the balanced character of the vicegerent of Allah (Khalifah on Earth) and integrated Islamic personality.

The real reform must commence with building the psycho-emotional aspect of the child and family leading to resilient will, conscience, abilities, and skills that can make the required transformation necessary for the renewal of the Ummah as a whole. To this end, AbuSulayman clarifies that in order to achieve our goals, we have to enhance the methodological and cultural tools necessary for educational reform, starting from empowering the family to assume a dynamic role. Once the family plays its educative role in building the child's psychology, will, and emotional strength, this will pave the way for enhancing other aspects such as understanding of the economic, political, and social.

*Islamisation: Reforming Contemporary Knowledge* (1994) deals with the question of reform from a deeper perspective stressing the importance of contemporary originality through rebuilding the capabilities of creative *ijtihad*. Issues of knowledge, revelation, reason, sources of knowledge such as Qur'an, Sunnah, *ijma'*, *qiyas*, and others are very much in the fore. The concept of education, revelation, and values are also deliberated from both Islamic and Western perspectives. The book also refers to some application of Islamic approach of Islamization to the social sciences, especially political science.

## EDUCATION AND TRANSFORMATION

AbuSulyman projects an Islamic education not only for the transfer of information and knowledge to learners and society but mainly to transform the traits and qualities of mind, heart, soul, and character. As such, emotional, spiritual, moral, psychological education must be integrated with intellectual, methodological, epistemological, and social education. This will ensure that Muslim children and youth are given the quality of education that builds the mind, heart, soul, and personality in an integrated

manner stressing the importance of action and impact on individuals and society as well. This is the only way for Islamic education to play a pivotal role in the renewal of the Ummah and in the intellectual rejuvenation of the Muslim mind.

Based on the general framework of AbuSulayman, it is evident that the crisis in the Muslim mind and intellectual lacuna of the Ummah has culminated in neglecting this psycho-emotional aspect for long in the reform projects. As time passes by and cultural life enters declining stages, the issues of will and conscience become one of the deep reasons for the imbalances in the educational system and approach to personality building in the Islamic world. This situation prevents education from having its transformative and educative impact on our lives. Therefore, AbuSulayman is a strong advocate of wholesome value-based education that is centered not only on intellectual, mental, and epistemological considerations but also the soul, emotional, psychological, and spiritual aspects of individuals. He is looking for a balance that provides the right formula for a desired change leading to strong personality intellectually, mentally, psychologically emotionally, spiritually, socially, culturally, and physically. This is the quality of education he is projecting for the Muslim world in order to regain its lost balance and efficacy.

It is worth noting that AbuSulayman was lucky enough to have had the chance to combine theory with practice in his intellectual journey. Besides his academic attainment and career, he was also the Rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) for almost ten years (1988–1999). Having such a rare opportunity to manage a university and put some of his ideas of intellectual reform and Islamization of knowledge in a real context was another landmark in his life and journey. To him the experiment of IIUM is very special and valued added, as it provided substantive evidence of the possibility of integration of revealed knowledge and human sciences as we well as addressed the epistemological and methodological issues of the Ummah from scientific and academic perspectives.

In his brief work *Revitalizing Higher Education in the Muslim World: A Case Study of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)* (2007), AbuSulayman explained clearly how reforming higher education is paramount to the whole process of civilizational renewal of the Ummah. It is nurturing scholars, mujtahids, and qualified researchers in all disciplines, especially the revealed knowledge and human and social sciences that makes a difference in producing, disseminating, and applying Islamic knowledge and solutions to current situations of the Islamic world. Higher

education must be able to achieve the real integration of knowledge and implement the Islamic value system into all disciplines. The universities must play their roles not only in cultivating and sustaining the market and society with graduates but nurturing the well-rounded and responsible vicegerent of God who can make a difference. The quality graduates that AbuSulayman projects are more of integrated minds and living souls, people of aspiration, ummatic responsibility, global outlook, and creativity, and problem solvers imbued with Islamic values and ethics.

Throughout the course of his ten-year tenure as IIUM Rector, AbuSulayman made tremendous efforts to enhance the integration of Islamic revealed knowledge and human sciences and the Islamization of disciplines. The activities of Islamization of knowledge were devised in all areas of the academic programs, the cocurricular activities, the administrative core, and the overall institutional culture. The Islamic code of ethics and values, the spiritual, emotional, psychological, intellectual, and mental development of students and staff, becomes part and parcel of the educational system developing inside IIUM, leaving an impact on students and staff from countries throughout the Islamic world. The graduates of IIUM should become ambassadors of integration of knowledge and value-based education that will be the global brand of contemporary integrated Islamic education.

On another instance, and in accordance with the general framework of AbuSulayman, the idea of education was also articulated into other areas. First, the level of lower, preschool, primary, and secondary education. He made tremendous efforts to establish a model internationally integrated school that would later become later the International Islamic School as part and parcel of the project of the International Islamic University Malaysia. In this school, academic programs, cocurricular, and related developmental and social activities are all integrated and value based. The aim of the school is to strengthen not only the cognitive aspects of learners but also the spiritual, psychological, emotional, and moral aspects.

Second, at the family and parenting levels, AbuSulayman emphasizes the need for parenting and family management. The emotional and psychological education (2009, p. 271) and formation of children in family as well as in schools is crucial for any balanced development of the Muslim personality.

To this end, AbuSulayman contributed a few important works dedicated to the education of children and family. For example, *Parent-Child Relations: A Guide to Raising Children*, authored jointly with Hisham

Al-talib and Omar Al-talib (2013b). This is an important guide on parenting from a comprehensive perspective, stressing the Islamic values and teachings along with contemporary expertise in this important area. It is a life guide full of wisdom and parenting tips necessary for parents and Islamic families today. What is special about the guide is the integrated approach and the multidimensional approach and information gathered to provide a model guide. The approach to the book reflects the overall framework of intellectual reform based on Islamic faith, sources, a value system and parenting style enshrined in the Quran and Prophetic Sunnah and practice.

AbuSulayman also gave special attention to marital discord and ways of overcoming conflicts on the basis of love and tranquility. In his work *Marital Discord: Recapturing the Full Islamic Spirit of Human Dignity* (2008), he introduced the Islamic principles and approaches to dealing with such discontentment in the family. Following his general framework, he explained the Quranic values and principles on family conflict management. Based on the values of mercy, kindness, love, tranquility, inner peace, mutual consultation, and dialogue, parents and family members create a culture of problem-solving, leading to a more conducive environment of managing conflict and creating value therein. According to AbuSulayman, understanding the nature of women, concepts of human dignity, roles of parents, objectives of marriage, values of family, Islamic techniques of family conflict resolution, and the practices of the prophet are instrumental in dealing with all types of discords and aspiring toward cohesive and harmonious family relations.

In addition, AbuSulayman published *Builders Island* (2013a) and *Treasures of the Builders Island: An Educative Story on Religious, Political and Social Education for Children and Adults* (2006). The book is told in a story style but yet is deep and rich in its educative messages and principles. It is intended to present an intellectual discussion of the principles, concepts, and universal Islamic civilizational vision of contemporary humans. It translates many Islamic Quranic concepts and principles of life and civilization into values featuring the educational model (2004a) of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his Mercy to all Mankind personality. A brief account of the major historical development of the Islamic Ummah and its civilization are also articulated in a beautiful storytelling style. The aim of the book is to educate and promote behavior and mindset change toward positivity, efficacy, and value-driven action and deeds.



## THE IMPERATIVE OF INTEGRATED AND VALUE-DRIVEN EDUCATION

To reiterate what has been elaborated in the preceding discussions, one may stress that AbuSulayman has clearly explained the model of integrated intellectual reform of the Islamic Ummah. In his approach the following aspects are important:

- The root cause of the crisis of the Ummah lays in the Muslim mind with intellectual, methodological, epistemological, and philosophical complications that need systematic interventions. In this regard, the projects of intellectual reform and Islamization of knowledge are crucial.
- The manifestation of the crises of the Ummah is multifaceted, including the sociopolitical, cultural, historical, educational, and civilizational.
- The approach to the crisis must be multidimensional and integrative in nature. Integrating revealed knowledge and human and social sciences (2009, p. 294) in dealing with the crisis is vital for a comprehensive articulation and treatment.
- The Islamic epistemology and sources of knowledge need to be integrated into the system of analysis and treatment of the issues.
- Islamic education must address the question of Muslim personality building from a comprehensive perspective, including the mental, intellectual, psychological, spiritual, moral, physical, and social. It is only in this way that Islamic education may have the desired impact and outcomes.
- Islamic education must take into account the human nature, the patterns and laws of God, Quranic worldview, Prophetic practices, contribution of current social and human sciences, and the Islamic value system with emphasis on maqasid al-shari'ah.
- The Ummah must focus on regaining the competencies and skills of contemporary originality and creative *ijtihad* as preconditional for civilizational renewal and cultural dynamism.
- The Ummah must enhance the civilizational values of goodness, mercy, compassion, justice, equality, trustworthiness, integrity, respect, and human dignity as the foundational values for a new culture of renewal.
- Islamic educational institutions must enhance creative thinking and problem solving, critical and analytical thinking skills, parenting and family management, value driven, and servant leadership skills for bringing up the generation of renewal.
- For the intellectual reform and civilizational renewal to take place, the sciences of civilization must be prioritized in the agenda of the Islamic institutions and society at large.
- The reformed Islamic mind must be able to provide solutions to issues and challenges facing Muslims and human society today. A reformed mind shall be able to set the *mizan* and standards of differentiating between what is relevant and what is not and what is to be taken from the Western knowledge or Islamic heritage and what is to be left. The reformed mind will be able to pass judgments and critically assess knowledge and actions based on the Islamic worldview, Islamic maqasid and values system, and Islamic integrated methodology.

- It is the depth of the change in psychology, conscience, and the emotional world that will condition the future bringing up of a balanced generation adhering to the civilizational worldview of Islam and the general patterns of human association and civilization.

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