

*Wholeness and Holiness
in Education*

An Islamic Perspective

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and
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in
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ZAHRA AL ZEERA

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An Islamic Perspective

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IIIT Books-In-Brief Series

The IIIT Books-In-Brief Series is a valuable collection of the Institute's key publications written in condensed form designed to give readers a core understanding of the main contents of the original. Produced in a short, easy to read, time-saving format, these companion synopses offer a close, carefully written overview of the larger publication and it is hoped will stimulate readers into further exploration of the original.

Education has been suffering from unidimensionality at all levels for a long time in schools and universities in the East and the West. Thus being scientific and rational is the key to success in schooling and in life in general; the human being is regarded as mind and body only as reflected in the education system; and finally intellectuality and rationality are reinforced and encouraged, whereas spirituality and intuition are downplayed and ignored. The ultimate goal of life is being reduced to achieving worldly and material objectives whilst the goal of purifying the soul to attain the ultimate truth and the hereafter is being ignored both in education and in life generally.

This book is an attempt to restore wholeness and holiness to education, using transformative learning and teaching methods. It also proposes other paradigms that lead to the Islamic theory of knowledge as a first step in producing Islamic knowledge based on the holistic-spiritual paradigm and emerging from Islamic epistemology. An attempt has been made to present epistemology from an educational rather than a philosophical point of view. Having been a teacher for a long time in school and at university, I much prefer to address philosophical issues at a practical level, allowing students to examine the roots of the knowledge that they are acquiring and the knowledge that they are producing later in graduate schools and as researchers. Fragmentation of knowledge and therefore of the self exists in all circles consciously and/or subconsciously.

Philosophical questions are an essential part that exists within us from an early age. If they are not addressed at that early age, then we are planting the seeds of fragmentation. So education has to be rooted in philosophical issues and students should be aware of that philosophical base to be able to see the roots of what they are learning. Without such awareness, what students learn does not exceed their academic record and celebration of their graduation. The transformation perspective is proposed in this book as a means of creating Islamic knowledge. A knowledge that is meaningful to Muslim students and scholars, because transformation lies at the basis of meaningful action. Transformation has been proved to be an irreversible flow upwards in the scale of being.

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AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

My aim in writing this book is to encourage Muslim students in North America and Europe to reflect on their personal experiences, to find the golden thread in their lives, to acknowledge it and utilize it in their personal and professional lives. I want to encourage becoming whole, and acknowledging the Sacred that is inside everyone, and making it part of daily living. The moment of realizing the Sacred and acknowledging it will be a turning point in their lives, and inevitably their study will take an Islamic turn. No matter what they are studying – science, technology, sociology, psychology, or astronomy – when they start analyzing theories in those fields from an Islamic perspective, the spiritual and the sacred permeate naturally and profoundly.

The work focuses on methods used for the production of knowledge that are suitable for Islamic societies and Islamic culture. The choice of research methods and strategies becomes a question relating to the issue of what counts as valid social science, to be answered with reference to the criteria of what counts as valid scientific knowledge. In addition to issues related to knowledge production, the work is concerned with methods of knowledge acquisition and transformation from teaching and learning. A review of literature on both the conventional and alternative paradigms, is given, and it prepares the ground for the holistic-spiritual paradigm. For both paradigms, issues are discussed at three levels: ontological, epistemological, and methodological. The emphasis of the discussion is on the philosophical issues underpinning research methodology. I also aim to shed some light on two major theoretical perspectives that have dominated the social sciences, that is, positivism and constructivism/interpretivism, the latter also called the naturalistic paradigm, providing critical reflection on the inappropriateness of both paradigms for the production of Islamic knowledge.

My argument is based on the assumption that reality, from an Islamic point of view, is one; that reality consists of all the apparent opposites that, in fact, complement each other. Denying one side of reality, the subjective or objective, causes a split in one's consciousness and hence in our ability to perceive the whole and the one. One needs a balance

between the intellectual and spiritual sides of one's being, leading to wholeness and holiness. I further explain the limitations of both paradigms with respect to encompassing metaphysical issues and concepts such as the world of the unseen, God, the Day of Judgment, and the hereafter. The holistic-spiritual paradigm is rooted in such metaphysical concepts.

Wholeness, unity, harmony, and balance are important concepts not only in the development of Islamic programs and educational systems, but also in all situations, from the microcosm to the macrocosm, from the self to the universe. Polarization and contradictions are inherent in all life. Negative and positive forces interrelate continually to maintain living beings and to contribute to their evolution, growth, and development. Awareness of the principles of wholeness, unity, multiplicity, and the relationship between them helps one develop understanding, openness, tolerance, and integrity. This awareness helps people to operate on a wider base of knowledge by which they can see above and beyond the information provided by the senses. It also helps individuals to experience and realize unity through the very multiplicity of the self, nature, and the universe. In this way, individuals can learn that God created contradictions not to be fought against, but as the means to discover and understand the subtle intelligence of the One and the many at various levels and different dimensions. People can then realize the forces of growth and evolution and work with these forces instead of against them.

PART I: REFLECTIONS ON PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Chapter One

The Spiritual and Intellectual Journey

When I first decided to include a chapter on my personal experiences in this book, I divided the chapter into two sections: (1) the intellectual journey; and (2) the spiritual journey. The decision to include my experiences as part of this book was not an easy one; neither was the process of going through the pain of reconstructing many years of varied experiences. However, because the ideas for this book originated in my personal, educational and professional life, it is essential for me to include these experiences to show the roots of the intellectual and spiritual development of my work. The seeds for this book lie in my

doctoral thesis. Reflection on these experiences also shows how the study can be considered a link between the past and the future and between the individual and the society.

My Islamic identity was challenged at the University of Toronto. I could not have experienced this reality if I had not gone through a spiritual and intellectual crisis as I was doing my doctoral degree. I realized later that the endless hours that I spent in the libraries, looking for and reading all kinds of books, were in fact not so much a search for references, but for my Islamic and holistic identity. I understood that I was trying to legitimize my whole being: mind, soul, and body. In the search for my identity, I was forced to answer difficult questions. At one point, I felt that I had to choose between my two sides, the spiritual or the intellectual. The choice was a brutal one, which could result in the separation of the mind and the soul. I realized at that point that the situation was out of my control and beyond my ability to solve. I took refuge in God and begged for His help. By continual reflection, contemplation, and constant prayers to God Almighty to clarify things for me, I survived that intellectual and spiritual crisis and realized that oneness and unity in self and knowledge was what I should be seeking for the rest of my life. Only then did I have a sense of wholeness again.

When reflecting on and narrating my personal stories, I learned how to construct and reconstruct past experiences in the light of new knowledge. I realized that we human beings make meaning out of our experiences, and that is such an essential part of being human. We live through many experiences, but if we do not reflect on them and reconstruct their meaning (and we usually do not), they by-pass our consciousness and are stored in the subconscious until an event triggers them and brings them back to life. So reflection on personal experiences has always helped me to understand and value the stories on my journey as important and worthwhile in my spiritual and intellectual development.

Chapter Two

Spirituality: Woman's Best-Kept Secret

What follows is a reflection on spirituality from a woman's perspective. Some readers might wonder why woman's spirituality in particular and not spirituality in general? The answer is simple. A quick review

of what has been written on Islamic spirituality will show that men do most of the writing and that reflects the male perspective on spirituality. Note the aim of writing on woman's spirituality is not to advance any feminine ideology nor to undermine what is written on the subject by male authors. On the contrary, the aim is simply to develop an alternative paradigm that helps in producing Islamic knowledge which is whole and takes into consideration the wholeness of life, the subjective and the objective, the male and the female, the *yin* and the *yang*.

Knowledge according to Islamic epistemology is not restricted to the intellect only, for certain dimensions of knowledge are realized by the soul. We have to remember that we are discussing the issue of wholeness in Islamic education and epistemology. This means that both intellectuality and spirituality must be included. Both spirituality and psychology deal with issues related to the inner aspects of one's being; although there are differences between *al-nafs* and *al-rūh*, at certain levels they are related.

In my quest to understand woman's spirituality from an Islamic perspective, I came across three Eastern sources that helped me to analyze my ideas of what I call 'practical spirituality.' These three sources were (1) Rābi'ah's mystical journey; (2) al-Ghazālī's theory of virtue; and (3) the Chinese concept of the fundamental forces of *yin* and *yang*. Rābi'ah was an inspiration for my ideas of practical spirituality.

Spirituality is one of the most profound ways of intuitive knowing. It is a silent yet powerful way of knowing. Facts and numbers cannot prove intuition, unlike reasoning and rationality. It is either felt internally or it is not. Woman, because of the innate qualities that God gave her, is more prepared to admit and accept her intuitive feelings and knowing. That of course does not mean that men do not experience spiritual development. They do, but it is different and perceived also differently.

Al-Ghazālī (1058-1111), a twelfth century Muslim scholar, deals with mystical virtues as essentially based on the Islamic religious tradition. "In his view these mystical virtues are nothing but the interpretation of the hidden meanings of the divine commandments." Practical spirituality is the implementation of the Divine Commandments at two levels, this world and the hereafter. The religious virtues are what constitute virtuous and moral human beings that can live their lives according to the moral code of that religion as well as attaining the

means for the hereafter. Being aware of religious and mystical virtues, woman can achieve higher levels of spirituality at the earlier stages of her life.

This world for Muslims is only a temporary world, a transit to the hereafter. However, it is in this world that we humans have to do the good deeds to see the results in the hereafter. So when woman's goal is beyond the physical and the visible and her aspirations are beyond the material gain, she has nothing to lose. Her need is for God's love, God's knowledge, and God's blessings. That is why I believe that spirituality is the Muslim woman's best-kept secret. Her love for God, her prayers, and meditation or contemplation are private. Privacy is a characteristic of the Muslim woman. She keeps her problems with others to herself. She complains to God and prays to God to help her. She neither goes public nor seeks the advice of psychotherapists. She goes directly to God, asks guidance, help, and endurance. Those private moments are the most intense spiritual moments that woman can experience. Being soft and open and accepting her vulnerability and weakness, woman bursts into tears and cries while communicating with God. She does not shy away from her weakness. It is in those moments of her soul meeting with God that new meanings of life are realized. She understands and accepts. She *knows* it is right because she knows that God is touching her soul.

PART II: REVIEW AND CRITIQUE

Chapter Three

Conventional and Alternative Paradigms

A paradigm is a model which we, as humans, use to understand the world. The aim of the chapter is to shed light and literature review on existing paradigms to prepare the ground for the holistic-spiritual one: positivism as the dominant paradigm, the interpretive/constructivist paradigm, and debate between quantitative and qualitative research methods. For both paradigms, issues are discussed at three levels: ontological, epistemological, and methodological:

1. The ontological question is what is the nature of reality?
2. The epistemological question is what is the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and the known?
3. The methodological question is, how can the knower go about obtaining the desired knowledge and understanding?

The emphasis of the discussion is on the philosophical issues underpinning research methodology. To reiterate, attempt is made to shed some light on two major theoretical perspectives that have dominated the social sciences, that is, positivism and constructivism/interpretivism, the latter also called the naturalistic paradigm.

The dominant paradigm that has guided educational and psychological research for many decades is positivism. Positivism is based on the rationalistic, empiricist philosophy that originated with Francis Bacon, John Locke, and Auguste Comte. The underlying assumptions of positivism include the belief that the social world can be studied in the same way as the natural world, that there is a method for studying the social world that is value-free, and that explanations of causal nature can be provided.

The ideas developed by Guba and Lincoln (1985) on paradigms are examined. According to them positivism rests on five assumptions. Generally, scientific inquirers tend to view the world, and consequently any phenomenon with which they deal, as discoverable, controllable, and fragmentable into discrete, independent atoms. By atomizing the problem, scientists investigate and control the variables under certain conditions, and manipulate specific ones so as to control some and randomize others. By doing so, constraints are imposed upon the antecedent conditions and outputs. Naturalistic inquirers make the opposite assumption of multiple realities that are interrelated and inseparable. Phenomena are considered to diverge, not to converge into a single truth as in a scientific inquiry.

Each paradigm is based on assumptions about the inquirer–participant relationship. The scientific paradigm assumes that no relationship exists between the investigator and the subject of inquiry. The inquirer believes it is possible to keep a reasonable distance from the phenomena. Constructivist/naturalistic inquirers, however, base their approach on their first assumption about interacting multiple realities, consider their own interaction among these realities, and view the interaction between researchers and subjects as extremely important.

The paradigms are founded on differing assumptions about the nature of truth. Scientific inquirers assume that the nature of reality is singular and that reality can be segmented and controlled. Consequently, inquirers force conditions for convergence and look for similarities. Obviously their concern is to generalize and develop universal rules to

constitute theories, which are to be imposed on natural and social settings. Naturalistic scientists rely heavily, for collecting the data and understanding the situation, on the interaction between themselves and their participants, which is a basis for ‘thick’ and rich descriptions. Generalization is not usually the concern of the naturalistic inquirers because their focus is on differences, uniqueness, and idiosyncrasies, rather than on similarities. Naturalistic inquiry thus leads to the development of a specific, non-universal knowledge base which focuses on the understanding of particular cases.

The Debate Between Qualitative Vs. Quantitative Methods

Philosophers of science and methodologists have been engaged in a long-standing epistemological and methodological debate about how best to conduct research. This debate has centered on the relative value of two fundamentally different and competing inquiry paradigms that have been discussed above: positivism, which uses quantitative and experimental methods to *test* hypothetical deductive generalizations, versus interpretive/constructive inquiry, using qualitative and hermeneutic approaches to *understand* inductively and holistically human experiences in context-specific settings. I focus on major issues of the debate, such as subjectivity, objectivity, value-free, value-bound, and limitations of research statistical designs and then examine the subjectivity-objectivity dilemma, an issue which has been considered a major focal point of the methodological and epistemological debate.

Dialogue and dialectic are major concepts in the constructivist paradigm and qualitative methodology; therefore, the researcher has to find ways of being fair and objective without being detached and indifferent. Distance does not guarantee objectivity; it merely guarantees distance. Guba and Lincoln suggest ‘fairness’ as a substitute criterion. Patton suggests the concept of neutrality as a substitute for subjectivity: the neutral researcher enters the field with no axe to grind, no theory to prove, and no predetermined results to support. Rather, the researcher’s commitment should be to the principles of the constructivist paradigm, its assumption of understanding wholeness, and the multiple realities of the situation under study.

The credibility of qualitative research has always been questioned, since, according to positivists, such investigations violate all criteria of ‘scientific research’ such as objectivity, validity, reliability, replicability, and generalization. Issues of validity and reliability have been extensively discussed by qualitative methodologists. I present also the criteria

proposed by Guba and Lincoln to validate qualitative research methods. Theirs were among the early attempts to discuss the credibility of the alternative methods.

Chapter Four

Critical Reflection on Existing Paradigms

An attempt is made to provide critical reflection on positivism and constructivism and the inappropriateness of both paradigms for the production of Islamic knowledge. All existing paradigms are fragmented and reductionist and have ‘either/or’ qualities. None of the paradigms, even alternative paradigms such as the naturalistic paradigm and critical theory, has the capacity for dealing with both contraries at the same time: absolute and relative, objective and subjective, fixed and temporal, and so on. My argument is based on the assumption that reality, from an Islamic point of view, is one; that reality consists of all the apparent opposites that, in fact, complement each other. Denying one side of reality, the subjective or objective, causes a split in one’s consciousness and hence in our ability to perceive the whole and the one. One needs a balance between the intellectual and spiritual sides of one’s being, leading to wholeness and holiness. I further explain the limitations of both paradigms with respect to encompassing metaphysical issues and concepts such as the world of the unseen, God, the Day of Judgment, and the hereafter. The holistic-spiritual paradigm is rooted in such metaphysical concepts.

Teaching and learning have always been among the most important concepts in Islam. The word knowledge (*‘ilm*) is repeated in the Qur’an many times. Learning and acquiring knowledge are considered a form of worship (*‘ibādah*). Learning may be defined as the making of a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience. It guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action. What we perceive or fail to perceive and what we learn or fail to learn are strongly influenced by our value system, which is integrated in our personality and our thinking, as well as our frame of reference. It is our belief system that structures the way in which we perceive, interpret, and understand our experiences. To make meaning is to make sense of an experience. When we use our interpretation to guide decision-making or action, then making meaning becomes learning. Learning can be pleasant or unpleasant, and that depends on the material being taught and the methods used to convey that teaching.

In the present time most studies and theories have emerged from research based on the positivist or interpretivist paradigm. In positivism, most theories of the education of sociology and psychology are fragmented, unidimensional, unconnected, and meaningless. They are based on experimental statistical designs. So the learner either acquires those theories of learning as they are and builds her or his knowledge accordingly with all the shortcomings of these theories, or, on rare occasions, develops a reflective and critical view, and is able to analyze them and modify them where possible, or reject them outright. However, in the case of interpretivism, although the theories produced are more meaningful and more integrated, they are limited from a transcendental point of view. The interpretive/constructivist paradigm is unable to encompass life in its wholeness. It is based on the belief system that “realities are ungoverned by any natural laws and truth is defined as the most informed and sophisticated constructions on which there is consensus among qualified critics.” So reality, according to this view, is marginalized and fragmented to what is seen, felt, and perceived by people. There does not exist a ‘given’ reality which one strives to understand and attain. Reality from an Islamic perspective has a transcendental and metaphysical dimension. Multiplicity, which is a major component in constructivism, is only a manifestation of the ultimate truth from an Islamic perspective, which has yet to be sought and understood by human beings. This dimension is ignored by constructivists.

A holistic perspective would encompass both the objective world, which is absolute, permanent, fixed, and metaphysical, and the subjective world, which is relative, temporary, flexible, and material. A person with such a perspective will agree that neither positivism nor interpretivism is suitable as a paradigm and belief system. As a Muslim educator, I believe that neither of the paradigms is appropriate for producing knowledge that is relevant to Islamic society and Muslim communities around the world.

Academics and intellectuals have been struggling with issues of ethics and morality in the academic arena for decades. Debates about facts and values, objectivity and subjectivity, religion and science were invading universities even more than before. The latest and strongest reaction that I have come across is what is called by Banaie and Haque the ‘equegeneric principle.’ In their book they claim to have refuted all possible ideas and concepts of the methods of finding the truth. The writers reject all ‘isms’: positivism, relativism, and mysticism. The

secular worldview as well as the religious worldview are rejected as unsuitable means for establishing a value system for society. Indeed, rationality, solid objectivity, facts, cause and effect are the focus of the 'equegeneric principle.' We are back to square one of unidimensionality and reductionism.

The authors have forgotten that we as human beings are limited, and that we make meaning out of our own daily simple and complex experiences and that we have to discipline our minds and souls as we understand the world around us. Moreover, they forget that human beings are multidimensional in their faculties and that we have to use different inquiry methods to understand intellectual and spiritual experiences. We use our minds to understand certain things, yet we use our hearts and our souls to understand and make sense of other issues. Therefore, any methodology used by Muslim scholars ought to be a holistic method in the true sense of wholeness. Islam considers knowledge in its totality and these two perspectives have been illustrated by John Sahadat.

First, as it pertains to the phenomenal world and the scientific method of investigation; second, as it pertains to the metaphenomenal (that is, the Divine and His Revelation to humanity) and the Islamic method of acceptance based on faith and verification, devotion and experience. Knowledge is not only 'cosmoanthropocentric' as is science, but also 'cosmotheathropocentric,' which is inclusive of the three fundamental frames of reference: the cosmos, God, and humankind. This is the tri-dimensional foundation of Islamic education.

When a person adopts positivism as a philosophy or as an academic base for her/his intellectual activities and exercises, that base becomes a belief system. That belief system rules all her or his daily activities as well as relationships at home and at work. The rigid 'scientific' reductionist training colors all of that person's life and activity. When that scientist starts studying any phenomena, she or he starts applying what was learned in methodology courses. She or he starts manipulating the phenomena, controlling the variables, separating the phenomena from the environment and then cuts the complex system into pieces so as to be able to control it and study it thoroughly. Most importantly, positivists separate themselves from the phenomena under study so as to maintain objectivity. Once a raw mind is trained in these scientific rituals, it will treat everything and everybody in the same way. After so many years of such rigorous scientific training, we, as researchers,

can vividly see the damage that it has done to the mind that adopts this approach.

PART III: ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE

Chapter Five

The Islamic Worldview: The One and the Many

The Islamic worldview, is religious, philosophical, and rational. It is a worldview of *tawḥīd*, of monism, regarding God as the Absolute Reality and the Source of Being. *Tawḥīd* is the essence of Islam, it is the act of affirming God to be the One, Absolute, Eternal, and Transcendent Creator.

Since *tawḥīd* is the essence of Islam, it is discussed in detail, for the concept runs through this book as a river runs through the valleys and plains and brings life to the lands nearby. The ‘dialectics of *tawḥīd*’ is the basis of this book, uniting ideas and giving life to them. The concept of the ‘dialectics of *tawḥīd*’ – its differing and apparently opposed manifestations – might cause unease for some because of the paradoxical meaning that it carries. *Tawḥīd* means oneness and unity, whereas dialectics means opposing ideas and conflict. However, for me it is another way of understanding the ‘One and the many.’ Dialectics is embedded in *tawḥīd* naturally, as is explained: simply it is the dialectical path that leads to *tawḥīd*.

The Islamic worldview is not purely a religious one. The uniqueness of Islam is in this profound and challenging belief in both the material and the religious worlds. Muslims should live this life and enjoy God’s gifts in moderation, yet believe in the hereafter and consider this life as a purposeful journey that should be cultivated from knowledge and good deeds. The knowledge and good deeds are to take them higher on the ladder of humanity and perfection, to bring them closer to God and therefore to eternal life. This blend of the two extremes is what Islam is about: a combination of religious and material life.

The focus of Islamic religion, philosophy, and epistemology is on the development of the human being. Purification of the soul by the moral and ethical teachings of the Qur’an and sharpening of the mind by reasoning and reflection on God’s creation, the universe, and the self are the ultimate goals of Islamic teachings and practice.

Do they never ponder among themselves? Truly Allah has not created the heavens and the earth and all that is in between except with a clear design and a definite plan in time. (The Qur'an, 30:8)

The purpose of developing the inner power of human beings by reinforcing good and eradicating evil is prescribed in Islam because human beings are considered to hold a high position in God's creation. And the purpose of humankind on earth is to reach the highest level of perfection from knowledge of the self, the universe, and God – Who is the Ultimate Truth – and by actions which should be rooted in morality and ethics. Humankind holds the highest and most noble position on earth.

Perfection, from an Islamic point of view, is associated with knowledge and action. This knowledge, however, is not for its own sake. It is mainly the right path for understanding the self, the universe, and ultimately God, and for bringing one close to Him.

The majority of Muslims still believe in God, the Prophets, the Sacred Text, the angels, the Day of Judgment, and the hereafter. In most Muslim countries nowadays, one can notice the split and discord between the political and economic systems and the social system. It is the struggle between the center and the periphery. The conflict is between the government, the educated elite, and financially powerful people, and the rest of society, the ordinary people.

Most educational, social and economic systems, on the one hand, have been based on a Western, secular worldview, resulting in the imposition of Western education and technology with all the culture that comes with them. The rest of society, on the other hand, still has some resemblance to early Muslim societies. Communities, and family life based on legal and normal marriages, are still the foundation of Muslim societies. Respect for elderly people, parents, and teachers is still the spirit in those societies. Spirituality, piety, temperance, modesty, chastity, and self-sacrifice have not vanished completely.

The education system in Muslim societies is imported and imposed from outside. This is especially true of higher education, which is a complete transplantation of a Western system, with all its materialistic and secular characteristics, into the body of Islamic societies with all their religious, spiritual, and traditional identity. The mismatch between the Islamic, religious foundation of society and the secular,

modern, Westernized education system, which is built on that foundation, will no doubt cause fractures and cracks in that building. Eventually it will collapse, causing severe damage which will last for a long time before that society starts to recover.

According to Ibn Khaldūn, excessive materialistic development leads to the inevitable corruption and fall of societies and individuals. For Islam, materialistic fulfillment should be practiced in moderation to satisfy the basic needs of human beings and enable them to continue their journey of transformation to higher levels. The corruption of most Islamic countries and individual Muslims is due partly to the modernization programs launched in Islamic societies. Economic development and materialistic growth are the main features of these programs. The fourteenth-century ideas of Ibn Khaldūn are strikingly relevant:

In this type of culture the typical individual has become profoundly materialistic and luxury-oriented. His thinking and reasoning [the distinct human traits according to Ibn Khaldūn] are more and more preoccupied with the satisfaction of his own pressing materialistic [animalistic] greed. With the spread of this tendency in all social classes and categories of population, a growing individualistic egoism is bound to be born. And with it society/civilization's social solidarity is seriously undermined.

A sharp contrast exists between the secular, materially oriented worldview and the religious Islamic worldview. According to Islam, life does not end in this world. It is only the material body that perishes; the spirit continues its journey in the other world. It is in the other world that the actions and knowledge of human beings are judged and evaluated. Life is a purposeful journey whose ultimate goal is the unity of God's knowledge. So, the ultimate goal is the realization of the essence of existence through knowledge of the self that leads to realizing the essence in God's knowledge, which is the Ultimate Truth. To reach that goal, people first have to realize the essence of their being.

Self-awareness

From an Islamic perspective, perfection corresponds to an awareness of the soul, which is situated at the center of each person. Realizing that there is a higher significance to life than the mere satisfaction of basic material needs, individuals are motivated to aim for that higher goal. When spirituality becomes the center of one's being and the material the periphery, individuals evolve gradually and dialectically

and move away from the multiplicity of the worldly to the unity of the Divine Principle. Self-awareness in all religions is associated with the knowledge of the soul. However, the soul is a mysterious phenomenon that does not yield its secrets, even to the ancient wisdom.

The journey starts from the inner self to reach the Ultimate, the One. If the self's transformation can be described in terms of a journey from imperfection to perfection, or from forgetfulness to remembrance and mindfulness, it can also be understood as a passage from dispersion to unity. The self is a single reality with multiple faculties and dimensions. The oneness lies in the direction of the divine/human spirit, while its multiplicity pertains to the body with its many parts and functions.

Chapter Six

The Holistic-Spiritual Paradigm

A sound holistic system is possible only when it is built on the firm psychological nature of the human being. According to the Islamic school of thought, people are God's vicegerents on earth and have the potential of being higher than the angels.

Islam sees humankind as the vicegerency of God on earth and the projection, as it were, of the vertical dimension and the horizontal plane. Gifted with intelligence in the true sense of the term, humans alone of all creatures are capable of knowing the reality, of which they themselves are a manifestation, and, in the light of this knowledge, of rising above their own earthly and contingent selfhood.

The holistic-spiritual paradigm proposes a holistic, comprehensive, and integrated paradigm that can encompass the wholeness of Islamic thought. One of the objectives of the book is to present and establish the underlying principles of an holistic-spiritual paradigm which will lay the cornerstone for Islamic theories. The proposed holistic-spiritual paradigm includes six principles that aim at developing

1. Islamic spiritual psychology and the unity of the self;
2. Islamic epistemology and the unity of knowledge;
3. Islamic ontology and metaphysics and the unity of the cosmic order;
4. Islamic eschatology and the unity of life;

5. Islamic sociology and the unity of the community;
6. Islamic methodology of *tawḥīd* and the ultimate unity.

The common theme in all the principles of the holistic-spiritual paradigm is the dialectics of *tawḥīd*. The holistic-spiritual paradigm as a holistic, integrated paradigm is divine, spiritual, religious, eternal, constant, absolute, and ideal. On the other hand, it is human, material, rational, temporary, mutable, and relative. These two opposites are intimately interwoven by *tawḥīd*.

Acquiring knowledge, thinking, reflection, and contemplation are only one dimension of the development of human beings. The knowledge acquired should be translated into something more concrete that can be utilized to serve humanity. Thus action is the other dimension of the Islamic school of thought; contemplation and action are two inter-related principles in Islam. Both knowledge and action should lead to the attainment of the ultimate goal, which is the perfection of human beings, which leads to the realization of the Divine Principle of Unity. The path that leads from the acquiring of knowledge to the execution of action is ethics and morality. Al-Ghazālī's theory of ethics describes in detail the moral issues of knowledge and action.

In brief, the holistic-spiritual paradigm is all-encompassing, developmental, purposeful, and integrated. It is based on the Qur'anic worldview and derives its principles from the Sacred Text. Thus all the principles of the holistic-spiritual paradigm lead to the realization of the Unity of the Divine Principle. Spiritual psychology integrates body, mind, and soul as one unified whole. Because Islamic epistemology is holistic, it addresses the worldly and the scientific as well as the religious and spiritual aspects of knowledge. In addition, Islamic ontology and metaphysics address the wholeness of the cosmos and the natural order, and deal with nature and universal laws both scientifically and spiritually. Moreover, Islamic eschatology deals with issues of the hereafter and the here-and-now. This draws students to think of both worlds, but to remember that this world is the means to be cultivated for the end, the hereafter. Furthermore, the Islamic methodology of *tawḥīd* helps Muslim students to understand the controversial issues of life and education. It also helps their dialectical and critical thinking, which is considered to be the highest stage of adult development. Finally, Islamic sociology deals with social and community issues, for it is considered to be the duty of every individual to participate in, develop, and improve societal life.

Chapter Seven

Islamic Epistemology: Gateway to Knowledge

Islamic epistemology is presented in this chapter from an educational point of view, rather than a philosophical or theoretical perspective. The intention is to make Islamic epistemology accessible to Muslim students and scholars of all university faculties.

In the *Book of Knowledge*, (*Kitāb al-ʿIlm*, Book 1 of the Revival of the Religious Sciences – *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*), al-Ghazālī explains that the knowledge that leads us, as human beings, safely to the hereafter is the only praiseworthy knowledge. He goes on to divide knowledge into the religious (*ʿulūm sharʿiyyah*) and the rational (*ʿulūm ʿaqliyyah*). The latter refers to knowledge attained solely by the human intellect, and the former, the knowledge received from the prophets. He states in his *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* that although both religious and rational knowledge is important for achieving purification of the mind and the soul, the ultimate aim of knowledge, however, is purification of the soul. An important aspect of al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge is his theory of virtue, which he classified under religious sciences; it was discussed in Chapter 2.

Islamic epistemology embodies wholeness and holiness for it embraces both the religious and material as one whole. It is holy because of the religious component, especially the theory of virtue, containing all of the virtues that can transform any knowledge to holiness. In his quest for truth, al-Ghazālī emphasized that the criterion for any knowledge is its usefulness in leading human beings to those moral states that facilitate the attainment of ultimate happiness. So ethics provides the link between knowledge and action, between the philosophical and the practical. Knowledge can be dangerous if it is not associated with ethics. For example, genetic engineering is a dangerous piece of knowledge that, if stripped of ethics and morality, could lead to disastrous results.

The Holistic View of Knowledge

Islamic epistemology is deeply rooted in religion and spirituality. Such an epistemology takes into consideration the fact that there is a real world, in which we live, and an ideal world, for which we strive. Therefore, any attempt to introduce a theory of knowledge into Islamic societies which does not take into account religion and spirituality side

by side with the scientific, material, and rational will be one-dimensional and will not fulfill the needs of Muslim students. Islam is not only a religion; it is a complete way of life. A human being, from an Islamic point of view, possesses a body, mind, and soul. Islamic epistemology, therefore, takes into account this fact and builds its theories accordingly. A purely materialistic and rationalistic epistemology which takes only mind and matter into account and which draws its experiences from the senses is not suitable for Muslims simply because it does not address an important part of their being – and does not teach them how to deal with it. An idealistic epistemology, which considers only a person’s soul and inner being, will not suit Muslims either because it will neglect the mind, intellect, body, and the material dimension of life. Thus, neither a pure material nor a pure idealistic epistemology is appropriate for the Muslim world.

Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), the tenth-century Muslim philosopher, in his theory of knowledge “distinguishes between a ‘potential intellect’ in human beings and an ‘active intellect’ outside human beings, through the influence and guidance of which the former develops and matures.” So the potential intellect in human beings tries to understand, analyze, and rationalize, while God will shed some light on human beings’ intellect to help them to understand and find answers to their questions.

Realizing the importance of all sciences – what he identified as ‘rational sciences’ and ‘religious sciences’ – al-Ghazālī established a firm foundation, from his epistemology, on which to build Islamic education. Knowledge of sciences dealing with things that God has made is regarded by al-Ghazālī as a necessary prelude to the knowledge of God Himself. Al-Ghazālī in his book, *Mizān al-ʿAmal* (1964), states:

If the soul has not been exercised in the sciences dealing with fact and demonstration, it will acquire mental phantasms, which will be mistaken by it to be truth descending upon it...Many Sufis remain stuck for years in such figments of imagination, but they certainly would have been saved from these, had they first followed the path of scientific study and acquired by laborious learning as much at the demonstrative sciences as human power could encompass.

Umaruddin in *The Ethical Philosophy of al-Ghazzali* (1962) explains that knowledge, according to al-Ghazālī, has two aspects: formal and existential. The formal is innate and is the knowledge of the form in

which the various objects of experience and intuition are understood. It is the knowledge of self-evident principles. It is not based on experience; it is a priori. Existential knowledge is acquired and is the knowledge of objects and events attained from experience and intuition. Existential knowledge is of two kinds: phenomenal and spiritual. The former is the knowledge of the material world, whereas the latter is knowledge of spiritual realities, such as God, the soul, and angels. According to al-Ghazālī, knowledge of spiritual realities is the highest form of knowledge and depends on intuition. Intellect and knowledge develop with age from practical and intuitive experiences.

An awareness of such a classification of knowledge and its components of both the physical and the metaphysical helps students and educators to acquire knowledge that enables them to develop holistically – both intellectually and spiritually.

Wholeness and Holiness in Islamic Education

In this section I shed some light on the relationship between the three dimensions of Islamic education: the human being, the cosmos, and God. However, the focus is on human beings and the cosmos: human beings as the seekers of knowledge and the cosmos as the means of discovering that knowledge. The discussion starts with human beings as the center of this world and God's vicegerents on earth.

The focus is on how we as human beings relate to our inner selves and how we develop that relationship. The questions that I am trying to answer are these: What is an inner relationship? Why do I need to connect and relate to myself? How do I connect and relate to myself? How does that fit into Islamic epistemology? I explain why I am using human beings as the starting point and not God nor the cosmos.

Secondly, I explain our relationship to the cosmos and why I choose to deal with it at this point as a second element in the holistic-spiritual paradigm. Questions regarding the cosmos – *what, why, and how* – are discussed and related to nature and the cosmos. What is the importance of all this to our understanding of ourselves, the other, nature, and God? Can reflection on nature as physical and material phenomena relate us to God (the invisible and non-physical), to reach and understand the metaphysical, God, angels, and the other world? Can it be the medium that transforms the physical into the metaphysical, the concrete into the abstract?

Finally, I discuss the importance of knowing God and building a relationship with Him. What does it mean to know God and to build a relationship with Him? Why do we have to know God and to understand Him? What are the means by which we can know God? Can we know God through our minds only? Or our intuition only? How can we develop these concepts in our daily lives and our education?

PART IV: TRANSFORMATION THROUGH EDUCATION

Chapter Eight

Transformative Research

Methods: An Islamic Perspective

What follows is an attempt to deal with methodological issues from the perspective of research and knowledge production. It is important at this point to emphasize the concept of transformative inquiry and its ability to produce Islamic knowledge. The potential, however, is not solely in the inquiry method. It is the integration of transformative inquiry and the holistic-spiritual paradigm that allows for the production of Islamic science. Transformative inquiry, if used within the holistic-spiritual paradigm, can reduce the fragmentation of knowledge and self and produce holistic Islamic knowledge. My concern, as mentioned before, is twofold: (1) the production of holistic Islamic knowledge that is suitable for the Muslim community in North America and Europe; (2) the connection of students to their souls and their inner selves by transformative inquiry methods and dialectical thinking. By doing so, I hope that Muslim academicians and scholars will contribute to the faded Islamic civilization and the world's literature a knowledge that is both whole and holy. Wholeness can be achieved by producing holistic knowledge, and holiness by connecting to our inner selves and acknowledging the sacred inside us.

The concept of transformation is not a novel one; what is new is the reclaiming of the role of the sacred and the spiritual in research and inquiry. There appears to be a current need and opportunity within the scholarly domain to explore the spiritual dimension of one's life and work. It is, no doubt, an inquiry that is fraught with difficulties, complexities, and confusion.

Transformation is stressed in this chapter because it indicates a change

in kind rather than degree. Transformation is defined by Williams as “a process of human development. It has as its undergirding thought process, the theory of dissipative structures and shifts in kind rather than degree...a difference that makes a difference a difference.” So transformation indicates inclusive change or a reconstruction. Transformation occurs when the system is open and has dissipative structures (Prigogine), where elements, ideas, thoughts, and feelings flow freely, consciously and unconsciously. The theory of dissipative structures “is relevant to everyday life-people. It offers a scientific model of transformation at every level.”

Dissipative Structures and Transformation

The theory of dissipative structures won the 1977 Nobel prize in chemistry for a Belgian physical chemist, Ilya Prigogine. It explains the “irreversible processes” in nature – the movement toward higher and higher orders of life. Ferguson explains how the concept of dissipative structures can be seen in human society. The greater the instability and variation of the society, the more interactions occur. We are transformed through interaction with the environment and the situation we are studying. If the research methods we are using are open and allow for free and powerful interaction between the researcher and participants or the researcher and situation she or he is studying, then transfer of energy is possible and transformation is more likely to happen.

The fourth way of change suggested by Ferguson is the paradigm change.

The paradigm change-transformation is the fourth dimension of change. The new perspective, the insight that allows the information to come together in a new form of structure. Paradigm change refines and integrates. Paradigm change attempts to heal the delusion of either-or, of this-or-that.

Thus transformation within dissipative structures happens holistically and dialectically. It embraces the individual and society. It touches the individual and the collective consciousness.

Positivism as a Closed System

Being familiar with both positivism and constructivism, we are now able to proceed to examine both paradigms from the transformative perspective. First, I shall start with the positivist paradigm as a closed system. All of the limitations imposed by the paradigm on the researcher and consequently by the research on the problem, the data, and

design prevent the positivist paradigm and research methods from being an open and transformative system. A controlled and manipulative system allows energy to flow hierarchically and in one direction only; this consciously blocks all other directions and prevents a natural flow of energy.

Thus transformation is prevented. As a matter of fact, the situation, the problem, the data, and the design are all controlled consciously so that transformation does not occur. Since it disturbs the design, violates the roles and regulations of the predesigned model, and causes dependent and independent variables to interact, the researcher loses control over the study. So transformation is not acknowledged under the positivist paradigm because it causes instability and disturbance to the variables and to the design of the study.

The Constructivist Paradigm as an Open System

Interpretive, naturalistic research methods are rooted in the constructivist paradigm. A thorough examination of the underlying assumptions of the constructivist paradigm and the knowledge produced by interpretive research methods and action research will reveal for the reader some transformational qualities that are inherent in such methods. The constructivist paradigm and interpretive research methods can be described cautiously as open systems that possess dissipative structures that are subjective, dialectic, and interactive. These characteristics allow for the free flow of energy in all directions. However, constructivism is too open and allows for a flow of energy in all directions with no restriction nor guidance, which might produce harmful and dangerous knowledge.

Wholeness, Relationships, and Transformation

Two important concepts that allow a system to be open or closed and that can embrace the rest of the qualities in both paradigms are the concepts of wholeness and relationships. Open systems accept a flow of energy in all directions and at all levels by the interaction between the inquirer (researcher) and the inquired into (the situation). A flow of conversation and open interviews promotes transformation. The fact that in the constructivist paradigm realities are multiple and that researchers are willing to listen to other realities and other opinions facilitates personal transformation.

Subjectivity in constructivism encourages open systems that allow for free interaction. “The knower and the known are interactive and

inseparable.” In the constructivist paradigm there are no causal linkages nor cause-and-effect laws. Instead “all entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping,” so that it is impossible to distinguish the known from the knower. In open systems, control and manipulation are exercised less than in closed systems, for there is no hierarchy. In open systems the elements interact dialectically and human constructs are understood dialectically.

Holistic-Spiritual Paradigm and Transformative Inquiry

Although the constructivist paradigm and interpretive research methods promote transformation at certain levels, the holistic-spiritual paradigm and transformational research methods have the capacity for more comprehensive and more coherent transformation. A holistic worldview must, in the end, draw all these levels – the personal, the social, and the spiritual – into one coherent whole. The Divine Principles of wholeness and complementarity play a crucial role in creating coherence and integration between dichotomies, at the levels of both the macrocosm and the microcosm.

The Islamic worldview transcends the dichotomy between mind and body, or between inner and outer. The creative dialogue between mind and matter is the physical basis of all creativity in the universe, including human creativity. The self experiences no dichotomy between the inner world of the mind and the outer world of matter because each gives rise to the other.

The transformational worldview transcends the dichotomy between the individual and the relationship by showing us that people can only be the individuals they are within a context. I am my relationships: my relationships to the subselves within my own self, my relationships to others, and my relationships to the world at large.

To sum up, transformation in any field and at any level is possible only with an open system and dissipative structures. In this chapter, the positivist paradigm, experimental research methods, and statistical designs are regarded as closed systems that prevent transformation consciously or subconsciously. On the other hand, the constructivist paradigm and interpretive inquiry and research methods are considered too-open systems, which are not appropriate for the production of Islamic knowledge. Finally, the holistic-spiritual paradigm and transformative inquiry and research methods are considered open systems that promote and encourage transformation because of the concept of wholeness that underpins the above-mentioned paradigm.

In the following section I shall present four research methods that have the potential to be part of transformative inquiry, mainly because of the openness of the methods.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is defined as “the systematic investigation of subjectivity.” Langeveld explains the aim of phenomenology as being the study of the world as it appears to us in and through consciousness. The value of a phenomenological study is measured in terms of its power to let us come to the understanding of ourselves and the understanding of the lives of those for whom we bear pedagogical responsibility. The phenomenologist views human behavior – what people say and do – as a product of how people experience and define their world.

Phenomenology can act as a two-edged sword. On the one hand, an open system of inquiry can be considered mind- and soul-liberating because of its openness to accommodate different views from all participants in the study. The problem is in the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm that is relativist, in which reality is socially constructed: that is to say, there is no belief in an objective reality ‘out there.’

From an Islamic perspective, reality is holistic and one, and from the wholeness emerges the absolute and the relative, the permanent and the temporal, the good and the evil. Therefore, realities should be interpreted in the light of the Islamic essence of *tawhīd*. That is to say, socially constructed realities have to be understood with reference to what ‘ought to be’ and not to the ‘is.’

Heuristic Research

Heuristic research is another type of inquiry that I categorize as an open system and that has the potential for the transformation of both the research and the researcher. I focus in this section on the approach used by Moustakas in *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology and Applications* (1990). The nature and underlying assumptions of heuristic research are such that they engage the researcher in an intense relationship so that transformation is only a natural process of such an inquiry.

Heuristic inquiry is a method that has the potential for engaging researchers in soul searching and the discovery of the inner self. The ultimate aim, however, is the transformation of a divided mind, body, and soul into a whole person who accepts her/his intellectual as well as

her/his spiritual experiences as one unified whole. Moustakas suggests six stages through which a researcher passes to accomplish a heuristic research: (1) identifying the focus of inquiry; (2) self-dialogue; (3) tacit-knowing; (4) intuition; (5) in-dwelling; and (6) focusing. Then he identifies the phases of heuristic research: (1) initial engagement; (2) immersion; (3) inculcation; (4) illumination; (5) explication; and (6) creative synthesis.

What makes any research Islamic or non-Islamic, however, is not only the research method, but also the paradigm that leads the interpretation. No interpretation can be called Islamic if it is not rooted in the Islamic, holistic paradigm with the Divine Principles of the One and the Absolute at its center.

Hermeneutics

Any inquiry regarded from an Islamic perspective ought to be multidimensional and multileveled. No issue, no matter how small, is one-dimensional. Accordingly, a multidimensional problem cannot be understood and analyzed if multidimensional methods are not used. Researchers have to be open and flexible to operate within different inquiry methods so as to be able to capture the complexity of the phenomena under study. Both phenomenology and heuristic inquiry deal with personal, subjective experiences of the participants or the phenomena under study. “Hermeneutics itself is a very old type of text study that was originally confined to theological documents. The word simply means ‘interpretation.’ Over time, the strategies of hermeneutics have undergone various reformation.” Hermeneutics is much older than phenomenology, essentially a form of exegesis. It was developed for the examination of biblical texts. It is defined in dictionaries as “the art and science of interpretation.” “Martin Heidegger and then Paul Ricouer masterfully appropriated hermeneutics for the social sciences by suggesting that human actions can be understood and interpreted, the same way a written text appears to the reader.”

Narrative and Autobiography

Narrative inquiry is another complementary method in the multi-method approach to research that gained momentum in the 1980s and 1990s. Like several other qualitative research methods, narrative inquiry has the potential to create holistic knowledge if it is rooted in a

holistic paradigm. However, if narrative is rooted in one-dimensional paradigms like the interpretivist/constructivist, where the nature of reality is relative and there is no absolute, objective reality, or if it is guided by idealists/positivists, where the nature of reality is absolute and singular, even if applied to temporary situations and daily life, then the knowledge produced will be one-dimensional and will not contribute to the production of holistic knowledge. Since reality is both relative and absolute, this-worldly and other-worldly, subjective and objective, it is only common sense that the methodologies employed must be of sufficient power and sophistication to understand and interpret these complexities. No one methodology has yet been discovered that is able to do so. Therefore multiple methods for the present time may construe a trustworthy approach to use.

Narrative inquiry, if practiced within an holistic-spiritual paradigm, can illuminate the soul and awaken the inner self because of its inherent qualities of intimacy and courage. Such an inquiry entails the difficult task of entering one's own soul and subconscious. Yet doing so gives us the courage to create and reconstruct our personal experiences, to go beyond the pain and the hurt, and transform the pain into higher qualities of acceptance, understanding, and submission to God's will. Narrative inquiry can be the first step on the long spiritual journey, where we are in continual dialogue with our inner self, God, and the 'other.'

Chapter Nine

Transformative Learning

Methods For Holistic Education

Holistic methods that are congruent with holistic principles for education are proposed in this chapter. Based on the profundity of Islamic teaching and the high position granted to human beings, these methods propose a holistic development of human abilities, physical, intellectual, and spiritual. Developing students' abilities holistically enhances their integrity and empowers them to face the challenges of life. The development is gradual, yet directed and purposeful, with steps leading to higher and yet higher levels of perfection. Material development and material gains are considered only as the basic requirement for human

and societal development. Thus the holistic methods cater to all aspects of individual and societal improvement. The three methods proposed for such a development are (1) dialectical thinking; (2) reflection and meditation; (3) conversation and dialogue.

The first approach is dialectical thinking that will help students to develop their intellectual abilities, and thus establish intellectual connectedness. Simply put, it will establish the body–mind connection. In their educational experience, many Muslim students in the West feel a spiritual vacuum that needs to be addressed properly to fulfill the need of wholeness. Students are disconnected from their inner selves and from their rich Islamic heritage. We all know that knowing the self leads to knowing God. To reconnect students with their selves, several methods are described.

Second, reflection and meditation are proposed as practical methods for connecting students with their experiences and their inner selves. Spiritual connectedness can be achieved by this step where body, mind, and soul are unified, and the individual feels that she or he is a whole person. It must be mentioned that no clear-cut division exists between the various faculties; the categorization here is to clarify the ideas of connectedness.

The third approach to unifying people with their inner selves and their surroundings is to promote understanding with the ‘other’ and others with hermeneutic methods as well as with conversation. In this way, communication and dialogue are established between individuals in society, between parents and children, between teachers and students, and so on. This helps students to unify the polarization in the community and encourages communications at the university among colleagues from other religions and other nationalities. In the process, a connection is established between the whole person and the unified society.

Dialectical Thinking

Dialectical thinking is discussed here at two levels: (1) as a method for transformation; (2) as the highest stage of faith development. The questions in this book are embedded in dialectics and interpreted by dialectical analysis. Issues of social and personal development can be best presented, understood, analyzed and interpreted by using dialectical theories. Most Western literature on dialectics deals with this issue from a philosophical or psychological perspective; in the East, there is

the philosophical and theological perspective in Islamic literature. This book attempts to synthesize dialectical theories of development and proposes dialectical thinking as a method that, if practiced within the holistic-spiritual paradigm, can lead to the path of *tawhīd*. This dialectics will be referred to as ‘the dialectics of *tawhīd*.’ I am aware that the very term ‘dialectics of *tawhīd*’ may appear contradictory but what is meant here is the dialectics that leads to *tawhīd* and unity instead of wars and arguments.

Dialectical thinking is a powerful tool for both intellectual and spiritual development if used within the holistic-spiritual paradigm. It can promote an Islamic holistic knowledge and contribute to building healthy minds and souls capable of surviving the aggression of the modern age.

Awakening of the Soul

The second method in holistic education is geared toward developing students’ spirituality and inner power by daily ritual prayers, meditation, and reflection. Such approaches touch the inner depth of the soul and the mind. The awakening of the soul leads to self-realization and thus realization of the unity of the Divine Principle.

Ritual Prayers

The path of transformation begins within. By renewing ourselves in daily prayers and meditation, we discover a deep source of inner peace which creates a deeper peace around us.

The fostering of prayers in a holistic education is important because this helps students to attain self-connectedness by using methods which they know – such as Islamic rites – but which have been practiced so mechanically that their inner, spiritual meaning has been lost.

Reflection

Reflection on God’s creation, the cosmos, and the universe is a method that is related to praying. In this context, it connects students with their inner selves and their personal experiences.

They know the outward of this world’s life, but of the hereafter they are heedless. Do they not reflect within themselves? Allah did not create the heavens and the earth and what is in between them but with truth, and [for] an appointed term. And surely most of the people are deniers of the meeting with their Lord. (The Qur’an, 30:7-8)

The purpose of reflection is twofold. First, it enhances students' spirituality by connecting them to their inner being so as to understand and know themselves and discover their inner potential, all of which will become apparent in their education and their lives. Second, reflection helps students to transcend their knowledge of themselves, bringing them to the knowledge of the unity of the Natural and the Divine Principle helping them to go beyond realization and experience oneness, the concept of *tawhīd*, the ultimate goal of Islam. Reflection and meditation are intimately related, so they can be used interchangeably. The importance of reflection lies in its unifying nature that connects the person to her or his experience and then transcends that experience to higher levels. This chapter has demonstrated how human beings evolve gradually from self-realization to the realization of the unity of God's knowledge. Islam is a developmental school of thought that eventually transcends the material to attain the spiritual.

The Art of Conversation: Connecting to the 'Other'

Disconnection with oneself and one's inner being surely causes separation from other people and society in general. The spiritual and intellectual disconnectedness in Muslim communities at all levels fragments people's experiences and alienates them from their inner being and from society. People who are not taught how to communicate with themselves are not able to communicate with others naturally and intelligently. The depth of our conversations reveals the degree of our connectedness to our inner powers. The superficial talk that prevails in society indicates a high level of disconnectedness.

The following section presents a means of developing community connectedness in Muslim society. Its aim is to improve communication and dialogue between individuals and Muslim communities inside and outside the university. Using the art of conversation as a method to develop students' abilities can have a therapeutic effect on both the individual and society. Students will be taught how to converse and express their views without being caught up in their prejudices. Conversation can be relaxing, loose, and enjoyable, or it can be challenging and require techniques for presenting ideas. So, developing students' conversational abilities under the supervision of a dialectical teacher trains students in the principles of discussion, presenting ideas, arguing, agreeing, disagreeing, and debating. Lack of dialogical skills can, unintentionally, cause severe problems. Dialogue, like any other skill, requires understanding and practice.

Dialogue as a Means of Connection

Dialogue and conversation are used interchangeably in this section to refer to the ability to exchange ideas and views verbally. Dialogue is a commonplace method proposed in the context of wholeness and unity of self, knowledge, and community. Dialogue is one of the powerful modes of communicating and building relationships. It needs neither advanced technology and expensive equipment nor complicated techniques. Dialogue is an art in itself. Some people are conversationalists by nature. Learning how to listen and empathize with others is the first step. The next step is to be open to what the other wants to say, and enter into the thoughts and feelings of the other person. However, it is the sincerity and personal character of the people engaged in the conversation that determine its quality and depth. Home, school, and university are ideal places for developing a person's manners and ability to converse and to listen.

At universities the situation is such that students are either overloaded with assignments, or they are distracted with the trivialities of modern life so that they hardly have time for real dialogue or intellectual or spiritual conversation. The pace of life neither allows nor leads one to appreciate a few hours of reflection or conversation. Students at university often do not have much opportunity to engage in intelligent conversation. They do not develop this God-given gift of speech as a discourse. So schools and universities should be the obvious places to help students develop the art and skill of conversation.

In brief, this chapter has proposed three methods of developing and promoting holistic education. These are considered options complementary to the existing methods of teaching at universities in order to heal the friction caused by fragmented education systems. Thus the common theme throughout these three holistic methods is connectedness and unity. First, connection with the mind can be gained by developing dialectical thinking. Second, connection with the inner self can be regained by using spiritual methods such as daily ritual prayers, meditation, and reflection. This leads to self-knowledge and new personal experiences which, in turn, lead to connection with God, nature, and the universe as a silent type of connection.

Third, connection between the individual and society can be created by communication and conversation. Dialogue and conversation help to open channels for communication between different groups. In

addition, conversation with oneself builds a bridge between opposing ideas. This is an active, not a silent type of self-connection.

It is hoped that Muslim students in North America and Europe utilize the unique opportunity that they enjoy of having the best of both worlds. They have an Islamic background and Western research facilities that allow them the freedom to pursue research and to develop knowledge that is based on Islamic epistemology and that represents the Islamic holistic paradigm. Other methods of research and learning are proposed to our graduate and undergraduate students to help them acquire qualities of wholeness and holiness so that they can contribute to the development of Islamic sacred science.

The Author

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IIIT Books-In-Brief Series is a valuable collection of the Institute's key publications written in condensed form to give readers a core understanding of the main contents of the original.

Critically examining the western, secular approach to formal education the author contests the value of an education system focusing solely on the intellectual and physical aspects of human development. The methodological aim and structure of this approach are compared to those of Islam which Al Zeera notes gives credence to the importance of spiritual and religious factors, as well as scholarly ones, with the overall objective of forming a whole and holy human being who, instead of resisting the paradoxes of life, uses their interrelatedness as a means of personal and societal development. One interesting factor examined within the broader framework of the study is the area of female spirituality, an element, which the author argues, is vastly under-represented in prevalent Islamic literature.

This study is a holistic view of knowledge and a sociological discussion adopting an unconventional approach of using the author's own personal experiences as the basis for debate and analysis. We are invited to enter the world of understanding and observation to experience for ourselves an unusual approach to dialectical thinking.

