

An Alliance of Knowledge and Power

It is undeniable that a proper education is a key to the Islamization and revival of the present culture and civilization of Muslims. A comprehensive educational vision and plan, coupled with concrete policies and laws and their avid and wise enforcements, account for the most powerful force that can lead to making the idea of a contemporary Islamic civilization a reality. A clever synthesis of knowledge and authority is the best way for taking the idea of modern-day Islamic civilization from the world of abstract ideas to the world of real life challenges and realities.

Indeed, knowledge without its systematic actualization and application is absurd and worthless. Authority, or power, with no support of an adequate and appropriate knowledge and its protagonists, on the other hand, is a hollow and dangerous thing. It is a sham and a farce.

For knowledge to fully play its projected roles of enlightenment, enrichment, guidance, transformation and progress in the society, it needs the unreserved help and support of genuine and honest authority or power, and its protagonists.

In the same vein, for authority and power to play their own projected roles of guidance, administration, protection and development in society, they need the constant help, advice and direction of knowledge and its own protagonists. Knowledge and authority need each other for their bare survival. The existence of one of them in the absence of the other is rather illusory. Such an existence is artificial and ineffective in the extreme.

Certainly, it is owing to this that in Islam one of the chief characteristics of a ruler is that he is pious and knowledgeable. He must hold in high esteem the people of knowledge and wisdom regularly consulting and listening to them. Mutual consultation the Holy Qur'an highlights as a foremost feature of the Muslim community (al-Shura, 38). Even Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) used to consult his companions on worldly matters. The Qur'an explicitly instructed him to do so (Al 'Imran, 159).

Correspondingly, knowledge without its practical application and dimension is strongly repudiated and condemned in Islam. So is faith without deeds to supplement and support it. It is thus true to say that knowledge without deeds and theory without practice is like a barren tree. The Qur'an declares that it is the learned believing men and women who fear God most, i.e., they make up the best category of believers as they exemplify and combine knowledge, faith and practice.

It is important to harmoniously combine true knowledge and its people with genuine and honest authority or power. The wellbeing of the society depends on the appropriateness of their respective services and the health and solidness of the relationships between them. Abdullah b. Mubarak, a leading Muslim scholar of the second Hijrah century, was reported to have said: "There are two types of people, when they are good and righteous the whole community becomes good and righteous, but when they are bad and morally corrupt the whole community becomes bad and morally corrupt. Those two types of people are scholars and rulers".

Thus, it is not the rulers alone who rule and are in charge of the society. Rather, it is the rulers and scholars that are responsible for its administration and leadership. The public is not to be excluded in the process because they are the target and strength of virtually all laws and policies. Public participation in whatever regulated forms and capacities is crucial and reasonable.

Nor is it that scholars alone are the depositories and owners of the most precious commodity, that is, knowledge. They must apply and share it with others so that all can benefit from it. If there is autocracy or tyranny in relation to authority and power, likewise there could also be intellectual autocracy or tyranny if knowledge becomes personal and concealed, or becomes a manipulated and abused matter.

Truly, knowledge and authority stand for two greatest responsibilities or trusts (*amanah*) that a person can take up. They are for a common and not for a personal good or gain. They are more about giving than receiving. The rewards for their fulfilment are immense. Likewise, the penalty for neglecting and betraying them is proportionately immense too. Thus, if a person is not qualified for, or serious towards, them, there is then nothing special in coveting them. They then simply can destroy their pursuers. They can be the main cause of their downfall in both worlds.

Parenthetically, in Islam -- as a matter of fact -- nobody reigns over anybody because the whole authority and power belongs to God alone (al-Baqarah, 107). In the same way, nobody can selfishly claim credit for an amount of knowledge he or she might acquire, because all knowledge belongs to God alone and we are bestowed but with a tiny portion of it (al-Isra', 85).

People are all servants of God. They are God's vicegerents on earth. They are all equal. They are crucial for the fulfilment of the spiritual purpose on earth. They must contribute to their mutual good, something which cannot be done except if people are allowed to freely, honourably and responsibly operate in their diverse capacities and in their diverse societal positions. No capacity or position in society, it stands to reason, is to be viewed as superior or inferior to others, for the interests of the society depends on the performances and productivity of each and every member. If a segment of society malfunctions or breaks down, the whole of

society can be brought to a standstill. Capacities and positions in society are relative. Absolute is only a person's commitment to the cause, regardless of his or her societal rank or position. Hence, it is an Islamic tenet that the best among the people are those who are most God-conscious (al-Hujurat, 13). God does not look at the people's physical appearances, backgrounds and colour of their skin, but at their hearts and deeds. Rulers and scholars, it follows, are no more than the care-takers (*ra'in*) of society, and are the most responsible groups. Just like everyone else, they, too, in their respective capacities serve the society and its people. No position in a society is privileged. It is all about myriad levels and modes of serving within the intricate matrix of social responsibilities and duties.

This viewpoint is further supported by the following words of God in the Qur'an: "Say: "O my Lord! Let my entry be by the Gate of Truth and Honour, and likewise my exit by the Gate of Truth and Honour; and grant me from Your Presence an authority, or a power, (*sultan*) to aid (me)". (al-Isra', 80)

The Prophet (pbuh) also said: "Indeed, Allah curbs with (earthly) authority, or power, (*sultan*) what cannot be curbed by the Qur'an alone".

The scholars of the Qur'an and the Prophet's *Sunnah* unanimously agree that the message of the above mentioned Qur'anic verse and the Prophet's tradition is that in some circumstances the power and influence of the guidance, normative teachings, glad tidings and admonitions of the Qur'an alone -- the ultimate and primary source of knowledge -- is not sufficient for some people to take note of and adhere to them, notwithstanding the aptness of systems, methods, resources, commitment and zeal that might be in place. Due to the lack of an enforcing authority or power (*sultan*), achieving the ultimate goals and aspirations of knowledge -- which must be espoused by, and mirrored in, the vision and mission of society and

its leadership -- is bound to be seriously affected. Thus, the impetus of a genuine power and authority is badly needed. This is especially so when the objectives of knowledge appear to be at odds with the objectives and aspirations of some other active and powerful forces in the society. In this case, it is the duty of the highest societal authority to champion the knowledge calling and its noble purpose and goals. They also have to deal with the negative trends and currents in society which could undermine the interests of knowledge and with it the interests and wellbeing of society as a whole. The Qur'an, as a symbol of knowledge and spiritual power, and the *sultan* as a symbol of worldly power and authority, support and complement each other in man's attainment of his honourable earthly *khilafah* (vicegerency) mission. They are both God's gifts to man which must be handled benevolently, gratefully and responsibly. They are both to be given their respective dues. Neither of them is to operate at the expense of, or in isolation from, the other. The Qur'an and the *sultan* constitute an amalgamated sum total that cannot be separated. Islam is both religion and state; it is both this world and the Hereafter; it is both matter and soul.

The following Qur'anic verse should also be seen in the same light of integrating knowledge as symbolized by the prophets and the revelations sent to them, and authority as symbolized by the idea of "iron" and its many worldly benefits. The integration is an assured path to comprehensive success and happiness on earth: "We sent aforetime our messengers with clear signs and sent down with them the Book and the balance (of right and wrong), that men may stand forth in justice; and We sent down iron, in which is (material for) mighty war, as well as many benefits for mankind, that Allah may test who it is that will help, unseen, Him and His messengers: For Allah is full of strength, exalted in might (and able to enforce His will)". (al-Hadid, 25)