

Why All Muslims Should Know the Islamic Worldview

A worldview is a comprehensive view of the world we live in and interact with. The view is not physical, but philosophical. It encompasses all animate and inanimate, physical and metaphysical realities.

A worldview, furthermore, is about seeking, comprehending, embracing and living the truth. The world exists because of, and for, the truth. The truth, therefore, is embodied and manifested in the world, as much in the simplest and smallest as in the grandest and most sophisticated.

A person's worldview represents his most fundamental beliefs and assumptions about the universe he inhabits. It reflects how he would answer all the "big questions" of human existence: fundamental questions about who and what we are, where we came from, why we're here, where we're headed, the meaning and purpose of life, the nature of the afterlife, and what counts as a good life here and now (James Anderson).

As the existential centre of gravity, man more than any other being personifies, demonstrates and, at the same time, hankers for the truth. Hence, a worldview - both as an intellectual inquiry and a pursuit of spiritual certitude - signifies a circumcentre of an ontological triangle, so to speak, whose intersection is formed by the perpendicular bisectors originating from three vertices that represent the world, man and the truth.

The Islamic worldview: definition and main characteristics

It follows that the Islamic worldview is a philosophical view of the world rooted in the Islamic vision of life and reality. It is a fundamental cognitive orientation that provides a comprehensive Islamic framework of concepts and outlooks as regards: the Oneness of Almighty Allah (*tawhid*) and His relationship with the world (Creator-creation relationship), man as the vicegerent on earth (*khalifah*), nature, universe, life as the most consequential form of trust (*amanah*), death, hereafter, prophethood, angels, faith, destiny, epistemology and aesthetics. As such, it is a template, or a mould, where thought and action are cast.

The primary source of the Islamic worldview is the revelation. Harmoniously with reason, it lays down and affects each and every one of its aspects. Man and his intellectual capabilities alone are insufficient for ascertaining and establishing the truth and its worldview, notwithstanding their remarkable capacities. At any point of the journey, man and his relative judgmental prowess and wisdom are bound to show their true colours and fall short of fulfilling the task.

Man and his innermost cerebral strengths along with psychological and emotional alcoves signify but a tiny part of the world. As a concept and physical reality, the world by far outlives, overextends, outstrips and outdistances the realm of man and everything he is able to offer.

In other words, man cannot be the sole source of the truth and its worldview because the truth and the world are larger and more consequential than him. Similarly, man is their target and *raison d'être*. He stands at the receiving end of the processes of revealing the truth and instituting as well as authenticating its worldview.

Being part of the world, giving to and taking from it, and being forever trapped in the dynamics of its vicissitudes, man will never be in a position to fully "view" and comprehend the world. The integrity of his

insights will always be questioned and doubted. Epistemological authority and credibility will not be his forte. Man's shortcomings and outright flaws are positively reflected in his worldviews. They are conceived and patterned in his own image.

The only source of the true and authentic worldview is the Creator, Master and Sustainer of the world and man. He conceived and created them, and constantly supports them in accordance with His absolute Will and Plan. It is on account of this that Almighty Allah's revelations to mankind are sometimes called *huda*, which means the Guidance and Direction, and *furqan*, which means the Criterion for distinguishing between good and bad, and between the truth and falsehood.

It is only when man is properly guided, directed, enlightened and enabled to see and comprehend, that he will be able to fully and sincerely surrender to his Creator and worship Him. To worship Almighty Allah in all his deeds, words and thoughts - that is, to live life according to the Will and Design of the Creator of life, rather than according to the wills, methods and standards of the creation -- is what man has been created for.

That connotes the pinnacle of man's productive terrestrial existence whose commencement and foundation are an inclusive system of thought, ideas, beliefs and attitudes. Indeed, the greatest cultural and civilizational achievements of man start with appropriate ideas and "views" of the world.

Since man is an inquisitive being, and is a traveller, yet stranger, in this world, forming a worldview will always be high on his existential agenda. Such is done consciously or otherwise. Man is created to explore and know. Correspondingly, people are what they think, know and believe.

One thing is certain, every human being has and cherishes a worldview. That is so inasmuch as people act based on thinking, thus setting themselves apart from animals, which act on instinct. To have a

worldview and act accordingly is to be a human. To live without a worldview, and not to care, is an anomaly and denotes the lack of one's humanness. Hence, there are many worldviews worldwide: individual and collective, fractional and wide-ranging, muddled and systematic. They stand for the foundations of all religions, ideologies and structured life systems.

Like spectacles with coloured lenses, worldviews affect what people see and how they see it. Depending on the "colour" of the lenses, some things may be seen more easily, or conversely, they may be de-emphasized or distorted -- indeed, some things may not be seen at all (James Anderson).

Nonetheless, as Almighty Allah is One, the truth, too, is only one. There can be no two or more, nor partial truths. By extension, there is only one true and authentic worldview. That is the worldview that originates from the only extant, real and authentic revelation: the Holy Qur'an, and that personifies and promotes in all of its segments the ultimate truth.

That worldview is the Islamic worldview. Suggesting the source and strength of its legitimacy and purpose, it is sometimes called the Qur'anic worldview. The Islamic worldview is so important for the Muslims that to Prof. Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman, it exemplifies a springboard for a Muslim cultural reform.

The rebirth of the Islamic identity through the Qur'anic worldview is the pre-requisite for any future healthy and viable development of the Muslim world. No Muslim predicament or crisis will be adequately dealt with unless the Muslims develop a worldview that will provide a genuine sense of meaning, purpose and motivation for constructive action and reform (AbdulHamid AbuSulayman).

The goal of the Islamic worldview is to liberate man from the spiritual and psychological fetters of this fleeting world, and to elevate him to

the higher planes of existence where higher orders of things, meaning, purpose and experiences reign.

The Islamic worldview and Islamic 'Aqidah

The Islamic worldview is not to be mistaken for the Islamic 'Aqidah (creed, articles of faith or belief system). Though they are interrelated, the distinction between them is at once significant and subtle. Both are fundamental to the Islamic message, affirming the absolute truth. They stem from the realm of the revelation, and are then received by reason for the purposes of the truth's rationalization and internalization. The results of these synthesized processes are returned again to the purview of the revelation for validation and acceptance.

While the Islamic 'Aqidah emphasizes more the first, or the revelation-reason, segment of the procedure, the Islamic worldview, on the other hand, stresses the second, or the reason-revelation, segment.

In addition, both of them address the totality and unity of the truth and its infinite implications for thought and life. However, whereas the Islamic 'Aqidah accords more emphasis to the metaphysical truths and realities and the spiritual dimensions of the physical ones, the Islamic worldview, alternatively, accentuates the physical realities and truths and the worldly implications of the metaphysical ones.

The Muslims at a crossroads

The Muslims of today stand at a crossroads. Their situation seems to be more difficult and complex than ever before. They have spent the best part of the 20th century adopting and applying virtually all the existing and newly emerging models of social, political, economic and cultural development. However, nothing seemed to genuinely work, as a result of which little authentic civilizational headway was effected.

Nor do the happenings of the early 21st century augur well for the future of the Muslim Ummah (community).

However one looks at the prevalent predicament and malaise, one realizes that at their core resides the crisis of the mind, thought and education. The Muslims are divested of the power and capacity to generate the vital components of civilization on their own. They are persistently kept incapacitated and denied the opportunity to actively participate in the civilization-making processes worldwide.

As a consequence, the Muslims are rendered the utter importers and consumers of civilization, instead of being its producers and exporters as expected from the custodians of the revealed supreme truth. That, however, is not the crux of the matter. Such relates to the importing and consuming of foreign ideas, values, knowledge and worldviews, especially such as are at the diametrically opposite point of what Islam as a universal code of life propagates. The problem is so severe and profound that it tears into the essence of Islam's and Muslims' very being and identity.

If truth be told, the available foreign civilizational alternatives can never genuinely satisfy the Muslim yen and consciousness. They are not utterly compatible even with the weakest and most wayward of the Muslims; such is the impact of the Islamic message on the human mind and soul.

Without doubt, consuming the served alternatives only renders a Muslim emptier and thirstier, due to which he incessantly wants and consumes more. He knows that something is not right, but cannot identify the root cause. The sequence resembles a vicious circle which inexorably leads to a worsening of the situation. Eventually, the whole process that revolved around an ostensible consumption "consumes" a person and gets the better of him, in the end annihilating him completely: spiritually, intellectually and morally.

To the Muslims, therefore, foreign worldviews are like sea-water. The more one drinks, the thirstier he becomes and wants more, until he is eventually killed by it.

Thus, the only way forward for the Muslims and their truly Islamic cultural and civilizational awakening is to abandon and boycott the alien, along with discordant, worldviews, which underpin most of their existential reality, and to embrace the Islamic or Qur'anic worldview instead. In other words, the Muslims are to return to their own selves and be faithful to their primordial identity, culture, traditions and history.

Sometimes it can be heard that some Muslims have decided to boycott certain products by certain countries due to some political and economic reasons. The intentions of the people involved are by all means pure and well-intended, but, ultimately, the exercise yields no, or very little, benefit for the people. That is so because the big picture is never adequately presented and seen, neither by the leaders nor the ordinary people, resulting in the wasting of valuable efforts, time, opportunities and resources.

The core of the Muslim problem is not in consuming and utilizing foreign products, such as cars, phones, planes, air-conditioners, computers, clothing, watches, weaponries, foodstuffs, etc., but in importing and consuming bad (irreconcilable) foreign ideas and values. The problem, rather, lies in importing and consuming foreign epistemology and educational systems which are aimed to perpetuate the latter. It is the latter that should be constantly shunned, rather than seasonally and anarchically boycotting the former, which sometimes yet backfires.

Promoting and teaching the Islamic worldview from a young age

The issue of embracing and living the Islamic worldview that deifies Almighty Allah alone, and forsaking the faulty ones that deify either man, nature or science, should be promoted to the Muslims and

facilitated from a young age. They should be taught that everything they do, experience and come into contact with is based on a worldview and philosophy of life. As Muslims, all their physical, moral, spiritual and intellectual activities and processes ought to be simultaneously consistent, interwoven and permeated with the soul of the Islamic monotheistic (*tawhid* or Allah's Oneness) message and worldview. The external environments which man creates for himself are no more than reflections of his inner spiritual and intellectual states. As the saying goes: "As within, so without".

This verity should meticulously translate itself into a number of aspects of the primary, secondary and university curricula. The subject matter should be dealt with either independently or together with other topics and themes in an integrated manner. It should also be done gradually, so as to continuously suit the capacities of the students and the levels of their readiness.

The objective of education in the Muslim world should not be about producing excellent professionals only, but also good, enlightened and responsible men and women. They are not to be one-dimensional, selfish and greedy specialists and experts, but visionary, holistic, rightly-guided and accountable servants of a higher spiritual and moral order, using their professional lives as a means for achieving such noble purpose.

Once the students are equipped with the Islamic worldview, it will be easy to talk to them and ask them to commit themselves to the Islamic causes and the causes of the Ummah (community), for they will recognise consistency and correlation between the two poles. They will also be on guard when dealing with the foreign traditions and civilizational outputs that contain incompatible-with-Islam substances. They will need no, or very little, persuasion that for the Muslim milieus, such traditions and outputs will need to be aptly purified and Islamized.

Without the knowledge of the Islamic worldview, the Muslim individuals will still be Muslims and will certainly try to excel. However, little will they know that involuntarily and unconsciously, to varying degrees, they may work against the interests of Islam and Muslims. They can do so, for example, by engaging themselves in the fields of science, technology, art, epistemology, education, entertainment, etc., either as students, scholars, professionals, or ordinary citizens, and at the same time by encouraging and promoting the worldviews that inspire and shore up the mentioned fields, but which are partly or completely unacceptable to Islam.

Some of the problematic worldviews that the Muslims, due to their ignorance of the Islamic worldview, may unconsciously subscribe to and promote in a myriad of cultural and civilizational fields are: humanism (emphasizing the value and agency of human beings, affirming that without religion people are capable of leading ethical lives of personal fulfilment, and preferring rationalism and empiricism over the revelation); naturalism (believing that only natural or physical, rather than spiritual or metaphysical, laws and forces operate in the world); rationalism (upholding that reason is the main source and test of all knowledge, not the revelation); secularism (believing that religion should be separated from the affairs of the state and public education); modernism (conflict with tradition and the traditional forms of art, architecture, literature, social organization, daily life, and religious beliefs, values and practices); post-modernism (rejecting objective truths and moral standards, and believing that "reality" is ultimately a human social construction); pluralism (believing that the different world religions represent equally legitimate perspectives on the ultimate reality; they signify different, yet valid, paths to the same goal); materialism (advocating that everything in the universe is matter, without any true spiritual or intellectual existence, and that material success and progress are the highest values in life); liberalism (advocating within the framework of secularism the concepts of freedom - including freedom of, and from, religion - and equality).

Most of those worldviews evolved into intricate ideologies and systems of thought and life, often "upgrading" themselves and borrowing from each other in order to keep pace with the rapid progress and fluctuations of human societies. Modern civilization, which is dominated by Western ideologies and value systems, is firmly anchored in those worldviews. It derives its orientation and identity from some more than others.

There is certainly nothing wrong that the Muslims learn about other worldviews, especially for the sake of exposure, comparative studies, Islamization, diagnosis of the Muslim woes and their potential fixing. That, too, should be integrated into the Muslim curricula. The weaknesses of those worldviews should be scientifically exposed and analysed, in which case the position of the Islamic worldview could inexorably be enhanced and rendered more appealing. Indeed, the truth is ever more perceptible and appreciated when juxtaposed with its antitheses.

The consequences of neglecting the Islamic worldview

Without the Islamic worldview in their hearts, minds and behavioural patterns, the Muslims are surely doomed. No Muslim can be adequately upright and good without it, and no institution, nor life system, in a Muslim micro or macro environment can prosper on Islamic terms without it. Every Muslim, and everything that is preceded by the adjective "Islamic", ought to embody the worldview of the Islamic revealed message, and to translate it into the sphere of thought and practical life.

Having a bona fide Islamic thought and practice without the Islamic worldview is as unfeasible and anomalous as having the Islamic worldview without its ramifications extending to all aspects of everyday life. Undeniably, there is a causal relationship between the Islamic worldview and performance, the former being the cause and the latter the effect. There can be no separation of any kind and

degree between the two orbs. Dissonant relationships are unacceptable either.

Resorting to any anomalous and uncharacteristic practices insofar as the relationship between the Islamic worldview and Islamic performance is concerned, inevitably leads to the creation of the proportionately anomalous and aberrant outcomes. Chief among them are intellectual as well as spiritual impairment, myopia and blindness. The absence of the Islamic worldview means de-spiritualization and alienation.

Only this can explain, for example, why numerous Muslims worship Almighty Allah in mosques, but idolise and exalt something else in the provinces of work, business, politics, art, architecture, education, entertainment and culture. It also explains why many Muslim children are taught about Islam in religious institutions, and perhaps at home, but are exposed and invited to something else totally opposite elsewhere.

As it explains why a great many Muslims build mosques, religious schools and other devout establishments, but at the same time build as many, if not more, "temples" of materialism, consumerism, secularism, modernism and post-modernism in the forms of commercial, entertainment, media, sports, political and cultural institutions and bodies.

It is apparent that for a long time, the Muslims are being fed with poorly explained and misunderstood religious rituals, services and ceremonies, religious literal symbolism and deadening formalism, while concurrently feasting on foreign philosophies and values.

The situation is so prevalent and dire that even the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah and their holy Mosques are not spared. On the contrary, in the name of progress and modernization, they seem to be affected most. Not many people realize, not least those in power, that

the holy lands are increasingly being contaminated with impure ideas and values, and with the "temples" that typify and house them.

No wonder we managed to produce generations after generations of confused, disoriented, misguided, mediocre and lethargic Muslims. Just to be able to perform - mechanically though - the five fundamental acts or pillars of Islam, is perceived as a success. Anything else, such as regularly reading the Holy Qur'an - without really understanding and acting upon its content -, being appropriately dressed as prescribed by the Shari'ah, etc., is regarded as a great bonus.

Hence, a scholar inferred about a Muslim country that all of its citizens were Muslims on paper, but in reality, many of them were hard-core materialists.

The people are simply torn between conflicting ideological gravitational forces. This state of affairs may also explain why the cases of apostasy, especially the clandestine and intellectual types, are on the increase in the Muslim world. They are more dangerous and fatal than the openly announced types, such as those pertaining to words and actions. The former pertains to belief and thought. It is intellectual apostasy, whose traces are noticed every day in circulated newspapers and books, on internet, in radio and TV programs, and in laws legislated to govern people's affairs.

This kind of apostasy is more menacing than openly declared apostasy, for the former works continuously on a wide scale, while at the same time, it cannot be easily resisted in the same manner as the latter, which always makes much fuss, attracts attention, and stirs up public opinion (Yusuf al-Qaradawi).

And we all wonder, in particular our governments and their responsible agencies, why especially our youth are confused, troubled and indifferent. It is like we do not know the causes which, in fact, lie open before us.

Without its inclusive worldview, Islam as a way of life appears as though one-dimensional, excessively ritualistic, formulaic, hollow and unappealing a proposition. As such, effectively promoting and teaching it both to the Muslims and non-Muslims prove such a daunting, often impossible and futile, task.

The case of IIUM

We in the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) are very much concerned about the subjects of the Islamic worldview and Islamization as well as integration of knowledge as an offshoot of the former, so much so that those thrusts constitute the core of the University's vision and mission. Several kulliyah (faculty) and university core courses have been designed to help the University achieve its honourable objectives.

However, since the IIUM approach is not part of a broader Ummatic (collective and international) strategy, succeeding fully will always be hard to come by.

For instance, IIUM alumni do not always find it easy to put across and implement in their work environments what they were taught. Moreover, when the new students enrol in IIUM programs, their overall knowledge of Islam in general and the Islamic worldview in particular leaves much to be desired. Thus, instead of delving into some serious and sophisticated matters from the word go, much time

and energy is spent on the basic, introductory and at most, middling issues all the way through.

Sometimes I look at my students and wonder where a period of about twenty years has been spent - or wasted. About twenty years of the students' precious lives have been entrusted to the established systems, and there they were - with many exceptions of course - knowing and having a good command only of some elementary questions concerning their Islam, which is supposed to shape and dictate the terms of their whole existence.

Hence, I more readily see the students as victims, ascribing no fault to them. The culprits are the prevalent educational, social and even political systems and their protagonists in the Muslim world. Their crime is a serious form of betrayal of youth and a God-given trust.

No one in IIUM lives under the illusion that things will soon dramatically improve and without great sacrifices. The road to the ultimate success is longer and thornier than anyone can imagine. The problem is made yet more complicated, apart from the unprecedented immensity of the Islamization and integration mission, also by the fact that mainly under the sway of external factors, some members of the IIUM community, at times, tend to falter. Seeing that the IIUM vision and mission are beyond what they can grasp and offer, they end up harbouring no guilt or regrets if the University is in the end turned into just another conventional institution of higher learning. To them, there is nothing wrong with that because the entire outside world functions in like manner.