



# Islam's Education Policy and the significance of the Qur'an's First Revelation

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IN THE HISTORY of religions and their scriptures, the majestic Qur'an is the only book whose first word of its first revelation encourages the pursuit of education and knowledge. The first revelation of the Qur'an is as follows;

“Read! In the name of your Lord, who created. Created the human being from clotted blood. Read! For your Lord is Most Generous. Who taught by the pen. Taught the human being what he did not know.” (*Qur'an* 96, 1-5)

It is said, “Read!” However, to read exactly what, this has not been mentioned in the Qur'an. Though, there is a condition attached to this reading and that is, “Read! In the name of your Lord.” The indication given here is to, first of all, acquire the knowledge of your Lord and after that you may acquire any such knowledge in which there is no disobedience to the Lord, whether that particular knowledge is of the Qur'an, hadith, science, trade, law, politics, business or agriculture. In short, any individual who believes in God and the fear of Allah (most high) is present within his heart, whether he acquires any religious knowledge or any worldly knowledge, this knowledge shall take him to Paradise. For, in his heart, he has the fear of Allah (most high) and thus shall not commit or perpetrate any wrongdoing.

Contrary to this, any individual who does not believe in God, no matter whether he acquires any religious knowledge or worldly knowledge, this knowledge shall not benefit him in the hereafter. For, he has no belief in Allah (most high).

The purpose of making this introductory point is to

emphasise that before any Muslim acquires any knowledge, it is essential that he acquires the knowledge of his Lord. Keeping this point in mind, let us proceed and attempt to determine what guidance concerning education the first revelation of the Qur'an has to offer.

Concerning education, in the first revelation twice the command to *read* has been mentioned. Once in the first verse (*Read! In the name of your Lord*) and once in the third verse (*Read! For your Lord is Most Generous*). In addition, in the first revelation twice *teaching* has been mentioned. Once in the fourth verse (*Who taught by the pen*) and once in the fifth verse (*Taught the human being what he did not know*). The most wonderful aspect of this reading and teaching mentioned in this first revelation is that the teacher is Allah (most high) and the ones learning and reading are the noble Prophets (peace be upon them).

Furthermore, in the first revelation the pen, *i.e. writing*, has also been mentioned once (*Who taught by the pen*). The mother of the believers, 'A'isha Siddiqah stated that the first revelation was “Read! In the name of your Lord” and the second revelation was “Nun. By the pen and what they write down.” (*Qur'an* 68, 1).<sup>1</sup> In this verse two oaths have been taken, one by the writing pen and the second by the writing that is written using the pen. The name of this entire chapter has been given as Surat al-Qalam, the chapter of the pen.

With this you will be able to comprehend the importance and greatness of writing and, in reality, writing is superior to reading, since what has been read can be forgotten but what has been written remains preserved. Just as 'Umar ibn al-Khattab

stated, "Preserve knowledge by writing."<sup>2</sup>

Today, computing and technology has revolutionised the world. All data and information has been collected and placed on the internet, only a click of a mouse button away. This is a further developed and sophisticated form of the basic art of writing. In view of this level of importance given to writing, the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), over fourteen hundred years ago, stated, "On the Day of Judgement, the blood of the martyrs will be weighed against the ink of the scholars (*i.e.* the blood that flowed through the veins of a martyr will be placed on one side of the scale of *Mizan*, and the ink from the pen of a scholar will be placed on the other side) and the ink of scholars' pen, in terms of reward, shall be greater and heavier than the blood of the martyrs."<sup>3</sup> Just ponder for a moment: an individual sacrifices his life for the defence of his nation or state and gains the station of martyrdom by spilling the blood of his veins, the ink from the pen of a scholar carries more merit and has a higher rank than his blood! On the outset, it would seem difficult to grasp this notion, therefore, let me give an example that would make it easier to grasp this idea. During the time of Imam al-Bukhari, there were hundreds of people who had become martyrs and by sacrificing their blood, they became worthy of Paradise – may Allah (most high) increase their ranks – but today we do not even know of their names. However, it is the ahadith written with the ink of Imam al-Bukhari's pen that have been continuously guiding the masses for twelve hundred years and will continue to do so until the end of time.

In the first revelation, reading has been commanded twice, teaching has been mentioned twice, writing has been mentioned once and three times scientific education, *i.e.* analysis and study of the physical world, has been encouraged.

Let us observe a few words of a famous scholar of the modern era, Maurice Bucaille, from his book *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science (La Bible, le Coran et la Science)*. He writes, "More than a thousand years before our time, at a period when whimsical doctrines still prevailed, men had a knowledge of the Qur'an. The statements it contains express in simple terms truths of primordial importance which man has taken centuries to discover."<sup>4</sup> Concerning the evolution of the embryo inside the uterus, Maurice Bucaille states, "The Qur'anic description of certain stages in

the development of the embryo corresponds exactly to what we today know about it, and the Qur'an does not contain a single statement that is open to criticism from modern science."<sup>5</sup>

Maurice Bucaille has further commented on the first verses of the first revelation, he writes, "These formations make the egg literally cling to the uterus. This is a discovery of modern times. The act of clinging is described five different times in the Qur'an. Firstly in verses 1 and 2 of sura 96. 'Something which clings' is the translation of the word '*alaq*'. It is the original meaning of the word."<sup>6</sup>

The first stage of a human being's development, '*alaq*' (*i.e.* the clinging clot, clotted blood), is of such a high significance that the entire chapter has been named after it, Surat al-'Alaq (96). There is a need here to ponder over this '*alaq*', this minute clot of blood that is lifeless, that cannot move nor speak, see nor hear, think nor comprehend; within this small blood clot Allah (most high) has placed so much wisdoms that from it a complete human being is created that can move and speak, see and hear, think and comprehend. This first revelation is encouraging the pursuit of scientific research. Just as one clot of blood holds within it the capabilities of a complete human being, similarly, there is a need to ponder over other remarkable things within this universe. Within them too, there lie much wisdoms and hidden secrets that should be investigated.

Another encouragement to pursue scientific education within the first revelation can be found in the very first verse (*Read! In the name of your Lord, who created*), though, the object of this verb is not mentioned, *i.e.* created what? There are numerous views as to the object of this sentence. One of these views is that the object in this sentence is *insan* (the human being), *i.e.* who created the human being. However, the word *insan* has been mentioned in the second verse, so what could be the reason for referring to the human being twice? In my opinion, there is definitely a need for *insan* to be referred to twice, since, the translation of the second verse is 'He created the human being from clotted blood', however, the very first human being, Adam (as), cannot be included in this, because he was not created from a clot of blood, rather, he was directly created from clay. Therefore, in order to include Adam (as) as well as his entire offspring, it can be inferred that the *insan* indicated in the first verse

refers to Adam (as) and the *insan* mentioned in the second verse refers to the children of Adam (as), *i.e.* the rest of humanity. In this manner, the interpretation of these first two verses would be, "Read! In the name of your Lord, who created Adam (as) from clay and created the children of Adam (as) from clotted blood."

On this note, if Maurice Bucaille can say that the creation of a human being from a 'clinging clot' is an encouragement to pursue science, I say that the creation of a human being from clay is also an encouragement to pursue science. Moreover, the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has said, "Ponder over everything, for in everything there are wisdoms."

The third encouragement to pursue scientific education comes in the fifth verse (*Taught the human being what he did not know*). The Qur'anic exegetes have written that the human being who was taught by Allah (most high) refers to Adam (as). A question arises here as to what did Allah (most high) teach Adam (as)? The Qur'an states, "[Allah (most high)] taught Adam the names of all things." (*Qur'an* 2, 31). In other words, Allah (most high) taught Adam (as) the name of every single thing in this physical world, its specialities, its qualities, its benefits and its detriments; and this is exactly science. The Qur'an continues, "Then He arrayed them before the angels and said, 'Tell me the names of these if you are telling the truth.' They said, 'Glory be to You! We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. You are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.'" (*Qur'an* 2, 31-32). It is worth pondering that on one hand there are an uncountable number of angels created from light and on the other hand there is only one human being created from clay. In order to prove the superiority of the human being over the angels, a competition based upon knowledge is taking place and the question being asked is not of doctrine, creed or belief in the oneness of God, since, the angels already possessed the knowledge of doctrine, creed and belief in the oneness of God and that is why they worshipped Him.

The knowledge of monotheism and worship that the angels possessed, Allah (most high) placed that knowledge in the nature and temperament of Adam (as) and following his creation, the first knowledge he was taught was the knowledge of materialistic and physical things of this world. The angels did not

possess this knowledge and they did not require it, for they were created from light. Angels do not need food to eat, houses to live in, clothes to wear and vehicles to travel in. It is the human being who has been created from matter and, therefore, requires all of these things mentioned. It is for this reason that Allah (most high) did not give this knowledge to the angels, rather, granted it to the human being so that he ponders over these things and fulfils his needs. Imam al-Sha'rani in his book *al-Badr al-Munir* relates a hadith that Allah (most high) granted Adam (as) the knowledge of a thousand professions.<sup>7</sup>

It becomes clear from the above analysis that in the first revelation to be revealed of the Qur'an, there is no mention of prayer (*salat*) or fasting (*sawm*), nor of pilgrimage (*hajj*) or charity (*zakat*). If anything has been mentioned then it is firstly Allah (most high) Himself and secondly knowledge and education. Education is something so important that just as it was such a dire need fourteen hundred years ago, it remains a dire need even today. The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Tony Blair, in order to win the election of 1997 used education as the slogan of his campaign saying 'education, education, education'. Even most recently on 3rd November 2006, whilst delivering a speech in Oxford, he said, "Britain must 'stand up for science' by encouraging youngsters to become scientists."

On the same note, I urge the Muslim leaders that it is their duty to encourage Muslim youngsters to become scientists. Tony Blair, has talked about general education three times and once of science, whereas, the majestic Qur'an, over fourteen hundred years ago, just in the first revelation, has talked about general education five times and three times of science. The nation that holds a religious scripture whose first revelation emphasises education eight times, if that nation falls behind other nations in terms of education, then this is a very sad situation. As long as the Muslims occupied themselves in scientific education as well as religious, they remained the super power of the world, and when they turned a blind eye to science, they became disgraced and ignominious. The land of Afghanistan has produced many muftis, preachers and scholars of hadith, however, they have been unable to produce scientists, and as a result they were defeated, since, they could not counter or even match the technology of the Americans. If the people of Afghanistan possessed science and technology, the situation

today would naturally be different.

*Had we not forgotten the lesson of the Qur'an  
Time would not have shown the world, this time*

The Muslims in the world today face oppression and difficulty and it is said that the Muslims are not united and they do not follow Islam and that is why they are a disgraced people. I do differ partly with this statement. Clearly, one reason for this downfall is the one mentioned but it is not the only one. In the early period of Islam, the Muslims remained oppressed for thirteen years in Makka. Figures such as Sumayya, Yasir and Bilal faced all forms of cruelty and barbarity. Is there anyone who can claim that the Muslims were oppressed in Makka because they lacked unity and did not practice Islam?

Definitely not! In reality, to put an end to the oppression and cruelty of that time there was a need for manpower, since, those were the days of the sword and fighting occurred on a one-to-one basis and the Muslims did not have enough manpower, so they remained under oppression and tyranny. However, when the Muslims gained and increased their manpower in Madina, oppressing the Muslims became increasingly difficult.

Readers! In order to put an end to the tyranny and oppression of that time there was a need for manpower, however, to prevent cruelty in this advanced age there is a dire need for science and technology to be pursued. Until the Muslims do not move forward in science and technology, they will continue to be disgraced and dejected. Moreover, the Muslims have fallen so far behind in the race for advancement and prosperity that it is possible that even if all Muslims merely united together, that will still not be the total solution.

By giving an example, let me clarify this point of technology versus unity. If on one side, one million young Muslims are stationed carrying with them new Kalashnikovs and on the other side an old and frail man whose finger is on the trigger of an atomic bomb. If war breaks out between the two, who will win? The divine and wielding power of God is a separate issue; however, His divine practice is that the old man would win and the one million youngsters will be defeated. In short, there is only one way of getting out of oppression and that is to move forward and pursue science and technology

alongside the unity of the nation and the religion of Islam.

According to one survey, from amongst one million individuals in the West, three thousand complete a PhD in a scientific subject. This is equivalent to three people in every thousand. However, in the Muslim world, only one person in a million completes a PhD in a scientific subject. Today in Britain, there are nearly four hundred thousand Muslims, male and female, studying between primary school level and university level. If only one person in a thousand completes a PhD in a scientific subject, then in the next fifteen to twenty years, there will be four hundred Muslims who would have a PhD in a scientific subject. If from amongst these, two or three become successful in developing something new or inventing something new, the image and honour of the Muslims would increase. If after fifteen years, in the United Kingdom, three or four Muslims become scientists every year, then in the next fifty years the era of Muslim success and glory could begin.

In the previous century, six million Jews were murdered and they did not have their own state. However, whilst remaining steadfast on their religion, they progressed in education, business, media, science and technology and today are governing the world. Moreover, in the creation of the state of Israel, a scientist who was a lecturer in chemistry at the University of Manchester played a pivotal and important role.

Chaim Azriel Weizmann was the first President of Israel and remained so until his death in 1952. He was also the founder of a research institute in Israel that later became the Weizmann Institute of Science. Chaim Weizmann was born in 1874 in Russia. He received his Jewish orthodox schooling in childhood and following matriculation he was irked by university quotas restricting Jewish admissions. Thus, he left Russia to study chemistry in Germany and Switzerland. After teaching chemistry at Geneva University for some time, in 1904 he settled in England taking up a science appointment at the University of Manchester. He became a British subject in 1910.

During World War I, the British munitions industry fell short of acetone, a colourless, mobile, flammable liquid and a vital ingredient of cordite used in explosive propellants. Weizmann was able to devise

a process to extract the solvent from maize. His contacts in Manchester society and his supervision of mass production of synthetic acetone for the Allied war effort opened doors for him in British government circles, where he continued to serve as an eloquent spokesman for Zionism. Royalties on his acetone patent granted the Jewish scientist financial security and independence. He worked closely with Lionel Walter Rothschild, 2nd Baron Rothschild, to formulate the draft declaration for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Due to his remarkable work in providing a solution to the problem that was being faced by the British munitions industry, he played a crucial role in the negotiations that led up to the government's Balfour Declaration of 1917, authored by Arther James Balfour, 1st Earl of Balfour, which was an official letter from the British Foreign Office addressed to Lord Rothschild promising the Jews a 'national home' in Palestine, then part of the Ottoman Empire. As a result, when the state of Israel was established, Weizmann became its first President.

Dr Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam is a notable scientist and engineer and the current President of India. He has been given this position due to his remarkable endeavours and achievements in the fields of science and technology and his contribution to his country. India is a country of Hindus, however, due to their capabilities and abilities, its President is a Muslim and Prime Minister a Sikh.

If the Muslims in Great Britain properly utilise their intellect and strength, it is possible that a Muslim can become a future prime minister of this country. If a Muslim can become a lord or a member of parliament, he can surely become a prime minister if he has the necessary abilities and credentials. The population of the Jews in Great Britain is about three hundred thousand; yet, the number of Jewish members of parliament is more than sixty. On the other hand, it is estimated that there are nearly two million Muslims in Great Britain. If the Muslims had the correct proportion of members of parliament, then maybe there would have been not enough votes to militarily attack Iraq.

Some Muslims hold the view that it is against the teachings of Islam to participate in the government or political process of this country. They are requested to study Surat Yusuf of the Qur'an and examine how Yusuf (as) took the responsibility of

the treasury and ministry of finance of a non-Muslim ruler of a non-Muslim state, and the manner, full of wisdom, with which he served Islam is unique and unparalleled.

The story of Yusuf (as) and that of Chaim Weizmann are worthy of close attention. There is not much expected from the state-leaders of the Muslim world. However, there is a ray of hope from the Muslim youth of Europe and America. If they can manage themselves, remain steadfast on the teachings of Islam and progress in religious and worldly sciences, then the fate of the Muslim nation can change. This is not just a mere sentiment of mine; rather, for my satisfaction, there are many examples from history that show that the Muslim youth, both male and female, have played immense roles in confronting tyranny and taking the Muslims out of a state of disgrace.

An example from the Qur'an will suffice here. The tribe of Banu Isra'il were bound in the chains of slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt and were living a life of misery and suffering. When Musa (as) began confronting the disbelief and tyranny of Pharaoh, in the beginning of this struggle who were the people that stood shoulder to shoulder with Musa (as)? It is mentioned in the Qur'an (10, 83) that no one believed in Musa except for a few youthful children of his people out of fear that Pharaoh, and the elders, would persecute them. Later, after witnessing their steadfastness, the remainder of Banu Isra'il believed in Musa (as).

Let us now, ponder over the revolution that our beloved Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) brought to the Arabian peninsula over fourteen hundred years ago.

The initial strugglers in this revolution were also the youthful men and women. There are only two individuals who were older than the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) at the time of accepting Islam. One was Khadija al-Kubra and the other was 'Ubayda ibn Harith. The remaining eighty percent were either teenagers or in their twenties. Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, Sa'd ibn Abi Waqas, Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr, 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, Zubayr ibn al'Awam and Talha *etc.* were all under the age of twenty years when they accepted Islam. 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Awf, Bilal Habshi, Suhayb Rumi, and Sa'id ibn Zayd *etc.* were

all between the age of twenty and thirty years at the time of accepting Islam.

Furthermore, the role of the youthful women is also apparent in this movement. Asma' bint Abi Bakr was sixteen years old when she accepted Islam and she was the one who, despite placing her life in danger, used to take food for her father, Abu Bakr, and the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) whilst they were in the cave of Thawr.

Fatima bint al-Khattab, the sister of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, was twenty five years old when she accepted Islam and she was the one who, despite being repeatedly beaten and injured by 'Umar ibn al-Khattab said to him, "O brother! You can end my life but you cannot take Islam out of my heart." Being impressed by this sheer steadfastness, the twenty six year old 'Umar ibn al-Khattab was made to accept Islam.

#### Ending note

My dear young Muslim brothers and sisters! Deeply love Allah (most high) and your beloved Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), try to follow the path of Islam, progress in all aspects of life and in particular advance in politics, media, science and technology. If any one of you can find the cure for cancer or is successful in generating fuel from anything other than petrol, then I testify that by looking at your unblemished character, the non-Muslim masses will respect you and by looking at your scientific research, non-Muslim governments will also respect you.

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<sup>1</sup> *Tafsir Qurtubi*, Surat al-Qalam (68), in the commentary of verse 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Sunan al-Darimi*, *The Muqaddima*, Chapter 43.

<sup>3</sup> *Kanz al-Ummal*, Hadith 28899.

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Bucaille, *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science*, Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1979, p 207.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p 205.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p 204.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Sha'rani, *al-Badr al-Munir*, Hadith 1507.