

### Editorial

#### **“Read! In the name of your Lord Who has created” (Surah al-Alaq 96:1).**

The first blessed verse (āyah) revealed to our beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ began with ‘Iqra’ - Read. The word “*Iqra*” (read or recite) is a command to read or recite. This word refers to speaking particular words, either written or memorized by heart (Al-Allamah Taahir ibn 'Ashoor).

The first verse of Surah al-Alaq (96:1) is of great significance. It did not order us to establish prayer, pay zakāt or comply with the pillars of Islam. It was just the commandment to Read. Hence, the first duty in Islam revealed was to acquire knowledge (‘Read’). To excel in all aspects of Islamic studies, we should acquire knowledge from the Qur’ān, Sunnah, and eminent scholars.

It is a sad state of affairs that, in contemporary times, illiteracy rates in the Muslim world range between 40% among males and 65 % among females, with rural areas lagging behind urban areas by over 10% (ISESCO). It means there are hundreds of millions of illiterates, especially females, who cannot read or write. Another set of statistics showed that over 70% of the 1.2 billion Muslims are illiterate (Yahia Abdul Rahman, 2007). Despite the advancements in technology and the use of social media, “Muslims who know how to read, do not read! We do not educate ourselves” (Yahia Abdul Rahman, 2007). Another set of statistics showed that in the 57 member countries of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), there are an estimated 1,460 universities (UNESCO, SESRTCIC, 2015). That means there is only one university per every 821,918 Muslims. For example, Saudi Arabia has two universities, Turkey has one university, Iran has one university, and Malaysia has one university. These are the only Muslim-majority states ranked in the top 500 ranking universities worldwide (CSIC, 2018). The top 5 universities that have published articles within OIC countries (2004-2006) are all in Turkey and include Hacettepe University, Istanbul University, Ankara University, Gazi University, and the Middle East Technical University. In addition, the University of Iran ranked 7<sup>th</sup>, Cairo University 9<sup>th</sup>, Kuwait University 13<sup>th</sup>, and the University of Malaysia ranked 16<sup>th</sup> (SESRTCIC, 2015). The contribution of Muslim countries to the scientific world and science literature is also insubstantial.

OIC countries have 8.5 scientists, engineers, and technicians per 1,000 people compared to 40.7 of the world average and 139.3 for OECD [Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development] countries. The United States of America has 1.1 million scientists (4,099 per million); Japan has 700,000 (5,095 per million) (Farrukh Saleem, 2005). Forty-six Muslim countries contribute 1.17 % to world science literature compared to 1.66 percent by India and 1.48 percent by Spain (Wikiislam.net).

In terms of the Nobel Prize, only two Muslim men Abdus Salam (Physics-Italy and UK) and Ahmed Zewail (Chemistry, Egyptian-American scientist), won it in Physics and Chemistry. "Over the past 105 years, 1.2 billion Muslims have produced eight Nobel Laureates while a mere 14 million Jews have produced 167 Nobel Laureates”(Wikiislam.net). Publishing and reading books seems to be a lost asset for

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most Muslims. The average number of books published in the Arab world is approximately 30 (0.7%), around 212 in the US and 584 in Europe. As for the Arab world: the average Arab reads 1/2 page per year compared to the average American at 11 books per year and the average British at seven books per year (Yahia Abdul Rahman, 2007).

Unfortunately, these days, many of us want knowledge to fall into our laps or to gain it when it easy and convenient for us. Generally, Muslims on a global scale have lost their reading skills.

It is common among undergraduate Muslim students who depend on notes, lecturers, and PowerPoint presentations rather than attending a local library to undertake further readings. Even as consumers of knowledge, we have become passive and dependent.

We are no longer willing to sacrifice to gain knowledge. We can see many beautiful examples amongst the most knowledgeable Muslims, the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them all), their sacrifices, and their dedication in seeking knowledge. One example is Ibn Abbas رضي الله عنه, who would sit outside the doors of the older Companions in the heat and the wind, waiting patiently to ask them about hadith. When they would come to him, they would say, 'Why didn't you send someone for us?' and he would say, "No, it is more proper that I come to you." Another example is Abu Hurayrah رضي الله عنه, who would divide the night into three portions, one for sleep, one for prayer, and one for studying hadith. Later, scholars would travel for a month to hear a single hadith. Those Companions and scholars of the past did not wait for knowledge to come to them but went out to seek knowledge which is the only path that leads directly to Allah and His Paradise. As the Prophet ﷺ, said,

*Whoever follows a path in order to seek knowledge thereby, Allah will make it easy for him, due to it, to Paradise (Muslim).*

In this hadith, according to Ibn Rajab رحمته الله, a path means to incorporate both the physical way and the non-physical means by which one attains knowledge. This statement includes all acts, such as traveling, walking, driving to attend lectures, meet the scholars to learn from them, as well as reading, studying, memorizing, pondering, and like these. All of these are 'paths' by which one seeks knowledge (Yahia Abdul Rahman, 2011). The majority of commentators on this hadith stated that what is meant by 'knowledge' here is knowledge of the religion, and some asserted that it incorporates other types of knowledge as well. Certainly, knowledge of religion seems to be the most likely knowledge to facilitate us on the path to Paradise. We know from other hadith that seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim, but it does not come without effort. We must sacrifice and struggle to gain knowledge, and when we do this, Allah will make it easy for us to attain that knowledge and follow it to Paradise.

According to Islamic teachings, "literacy is a legitimate duty, moral obligation, message of civilization and social responsibility, which requires all segments of society, including governments, organizations, civil associations, international and professional organizations, and trade unions, to contribute to the process of eradicating illiteracy (Abdulaziz Al-Tuwaijri). In conclusion, as Muslims, we need to be

proactive and increase our capacity to produce, disseminate (through various mediums), and apply knowledge.

Above all, we need to revive the “awakening of knowledge”, to become producers rather than consumers of knowledge.

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