

THE PROCESS OF LEARNING ISLAM

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While the number of Muslims is growing by leaps and bounds, the quality is going down as reflected by their practice of Islam, and understanding of the philosophy of Islam. This is because currently no formal process exists for a thorough education for reverted Muslims, or of the "Born again Muslims". They both learn Islam in a hap-hazard, self study manner. Only a few of them learn Quran from A to Z, Fiqh, Hadith, Shariah laws, and very few are fortunate enough to have a living teacher to help them in this journey from the darkness of ignorance, to the light of Islam.

As a result, when confronted with questions about Islam, they give opinions from their own imagination and interpretations. They make decisions in their lives and at home from the norms of society rather than from Al- Furqan (the criterion). They should be reminded what Quran tells us, "It is not befitting for a believing man or a believing woman that when Allah and His messenger have decided an affair (for them) that they should (after that) have a say in their affair, and who so is rebellious to Allah and His messenger, he has gone astray in error manifest (33:36)

The ignorance is not a bliss. Quran asks "Are those equal who have knowledge with those who do not?" (39:9) Of course not.

They are compared to as blind and the seeing many times. Prophet Mohammed (P) compared the seeker of knowledge and the worshiper as the difference between him and the rest of the Muslims.

The three stages of Islamization of self, include: (A) Declaration of Tawhid (Oneness of God) by the tongue. (B) Confirmation of faith by the heart i.e. accepting Islam without any ifs and buts. (C) Expression of faith in pure actions. This is the stage of Ihsan, described by Prophet as the stage " When one worships as if he is able to see God even if one is not able to see Him, but He sees you". This is the stage in which not only lips, but the whole body collectively and all organs individually, submit to the will of Allah. This is the stage when before any act, one asks the questions, What is the Hukim (Injunction) in this matter, or will this action bring the pleasure of Allah or of Shaitan. When one reaches this stage, his hands become that of Allah, he sees from the eyes of Allah, and his tongue praise no one except Allah, and his heart fears no one except Allah. He is transformed from a momin (believer) to a Muslim (one who submits to Allah whole heartedly).

Islam is a gift of Allah to whom He chooses. "They make it a favor unto thee (O Mohammed) that they have surrendered unto him. Say: consider not your surrender a favor unto me, but Allah has confronted favor upon you, in as much as He has lead you into the faith, if you are true to your belief." (49:17)

Entering into Islam whole heartedly involves obeying Allah and His Messenger (P) both, and avoiding the foot steps of Shaitan (Iblis). Most of us are not able to do all three at the same time.

Some of us disregard Sunnah, saying Quran is enough, some place Sunnah above Quran, and some fall into the trap of Shaitan by placing cultural debris over pure Islam.

Quran and Sunnah are equally important. Quran says " Say (O Mohammed to mankind), if you love Allah and follow me (i.e. Mohammed), Allah will love you and forgive your sins. Allah is oft forgiving and merciful" (3:31)

We must avoid extremes as Islam is a religion of moderation. The two extremes among Muslims which are most dangerous are (A) The traditionalists (Taqleedi), They pray regularly, read Quran, fast, go to Hajj many times, but their Irkan are a mechanical, robotic performance devoid of depth of Islamic philosophy. Their obsession is the length of their beard , or trousers, or the color of a woman's socks. They have not come out of the first hundred years of Islam.

For them, the man has not landed on the moon yet. They don't understand the modern scientific development, nor can they communicate with the modern world in their language. They are not fit to give Dawa (invitation to Islam).

(B) The Modern, or Supermarket Muslims.

They are Muslims by name. They have come from secular families, and got educated in missionary schools. They do not pray regularly. Sometimes they come for Friday Prayer, but always come for Eid Prayer as a part of their culture. They pick and chose Islam according to whatever suites their lifestyles. They may try to find a reference to justify their wrongdoing. If they cannot follow certain Sunnah because of their own weakness, they will reject it, saying "it is not in Quran as if they know the whole Quran by heart".

They consider themselves immune to temptation, thus fall prey to the lust and wrong doing. They quote CNN, TIME, gallop polls rather than Quran, Sunnah, or any Imam. When Islam is attacked, they become apologetic immediately. They are the zero's in the billion. We must try to avoid both extremes.

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Each student needs a teacher. Each new Muslim, or born again Muslim, should be given a Muslim mentor to guide them in the study, and teach him all he knows as well as able to guide to other sources and individuals who are knowledgeable, and practicing Muslims. The student does not need to become a slave of a teacher. In the absence of a teacher, he can take Prophet Mohammed (P) as a teacher using his life as a role model. The student should have his own library of Islamic books. He must study these books, especially Quran as seriously as he would have studied secular sciences like physics, medicines, and computers, making notes, and underlying the paragraphs. He should asked questions and be prepared to give answers. It may not be a bad idea that Islamic organizations and mosques, after offering courses in Islam, start taking an exam for optimal competency, and issue a certificate.

The hallmark of knowledge is the ability to teach and then apply the knowledge. Prophet Mohammed (P), has said "the best among you are those who learn Quran and teach it to other Muslims". He also has said when asked who are the learned, he said "Those who practice what they know".