

# **The Nature of the Relationship between Epistemology and Ijtihad in the Writings of AbdulHamid AbuSulayman: An Analysis**

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## **Introduction**

**According to the contemporary scholars IOK movement is always viewed as an epistemological, methodological, *ijtihadic*, and civilizational necessity.**

**It was also asserted that the Islamic Ummah is capable of reconstructing human knowledge and civilization.**

**For this purpose, as a prerequisite it was contended that, the Islamic Revealed Knowledge must be reinstated as an integral part of the epistemological and *ijtihadic* framework.**

**This was why Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman gave a new name Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences [KIRKHS], to the new**

Kulliyyah which he wanted to establish in IIUM as the second Rector in the year 1990.

Not only this, but he also suggested and convinced the academic staff who were teaching courses such as *Ulum al Quran* and *Ulum al Hadith* to replace them with a new title as the *Revelation as the Source of Knowledge*.

For Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman the Quran and Sunnah are the main sources of knowledge.

Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman did not develop his thought based on the frameworks of modernity and liberalism, not even so-called reformist framework.

For him, the Quran and the Sunnah provided the best mode of thinking and method of *ijtihad*.

His notion of *ijtihad*, seems to be the proposed epistemology through which the Ummah can contribute, towards the development of new knowledge.

He rejected isolationist and protectionist approaches and did not promote 'the revival of reason and rationality' as suggested by reformists and liberalists.

He advocated the provision of *ijtihad* and puts emphasis on epistemology, methodology, and *ijtihad* for the revival of Islam as the worldview, its teachings as the source for culture, and civilization.

This was the reason he criticized all other traditions and suggested reform of Muslim mind instead of thought and advocated for 'renewal and revival' of Islam as culture and civilization.

For this purpose, he wanted to explain the vitality of the Islamic 'way of life, thought, and institutions' which had been developed in the past.

Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman's views are not scattered around certain issues. His views are focus-oriented.

He wanted to create an epistemological and methodological consciousness based on an *ijtihadic* framework for ushering a mission for change and development of the Ummah through the development of epistemology, methodology and application of *ijtihad* for the creation of new knowledge and reformulation of the educational system.

In fact, the Quran was revealed to mankind to impart Knowledge which was not possible for mankind to acquire despite their powerful faculties, especially the knowledge of the metaphysical truth.

According to him, the knowledge of the metaphysical truth constitutes genuinely the fundamental and first principle of epistemology.

For a factual and truthful epistemology, he argued, there is a need for a solid foundation of knowledge as opposed to philosophical speculation and metaphysical conjecture.

He forcefully asserted there is no sound and genuine epistemological framework which can be erected based on false worldviews.

He was convinced we cannot construct the building of culture and civilization without knowing the Truth and Reality of life, society, and the world.

It is the Quran – the Book of Knowledge and Guidance - which makes several claims as being the only Source for True, Authentic, and Universal Knowledge [TAUK] of life, society, and the world and their Creator.

The Quran provides hundreds of empirical, historical and rational evidence for its claims.

The Quran totally discarded speculation, conjecture, doubt, and guesswork as the source of true, authentic, and universal knowledge of the metaphysical truth and reality.

Hence Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman was fully confident about it. This was the reason, as an epistemological requirement and condition, he placed the Islamic Revealed Knowledge at the beginning of any epistemological exercise.

### **Epistemological Questions**

In the writings of Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman we find numerous references to the production of new knowledge and the use of Islamic Revealed Knowledge as the fundamental prerequisite.

Hence, before he embarks on other issues of the production of new thought Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman raises a fundamental epistemological question. He argues that there is an important question that is related with every individual and every community.

Everyone must know exactly and truthfully: 'who we are, what is the meaning and purpose of our existence, and what moves us to action in the world (AbdulHamid, 2011: xiii).

He maintains the conscious understanding that the purpose of life is that is the very important pillar which keeps seekers of knowledge and truth within the proper boundary.

He, therefore, contended there is a need for conscious awareness of it which would guarantee 'the building of a healthy human civilization, in which life's true meaning and its sublime, God-given purpose are lived' (AbdulHamid, 2011: xiii).

He claims that in this regard we do not find any other source other than the Quran and Sunnah which can furnish us with True, Authentic, and Universal Knowledge [TAUK]. Hence, he genuinely stated that an objective, unbiased, inductive, and disciplined approach drawn from the texts and higher

intents of them, the wisdom embodied in their application is the only way to study and understand the reality – social and physical.

**His emphasis on the Islamic Reveled Knowledge indicates his epistemological and *ijtihadic* concerns.**

He said: “the application of these texts higher intents, concepts, values, and principles in a concrete, realistic, scientific manner seems to be logical and genuine that would guarantee and yield proper perspectives, insights, guidance, and wisdom” (AbdulHamid, 2011: xix).

**He emphatically stated: ‘It is not enough for people to have a tool in their hand if they are unaware of the purpose for which they have it’ (AbdulHamid, 2011: xxi).**

He cautions and asserts that nothing will change unless people develop an appropriate epistemology and *ijtihadic* framework that can guide them to a genuine path of culture and civilization, grants them a correct and true purpose of their existence, reasonable sense of the meaning of life, noble motives for a positive, constructive action (AbdulHamid, 2011: xxi).

In other words, without a genuine and true epistemology and *ijtihadic* approach, which provide a sense of purposefulness and motivation, the intellectual world of scholarship would not move in the right direction.

He said: “Machines and tools, threats and exhortations, no matter how abundant or well-stated, will be of no use” to the well-being of peoples (AbdulHamid, 2011: xxi).

He alerts the Muslim Ummah and contends despite the tens of thousands of Muslim intellectuals and scholars who have earned higher degrees as skilled professionals and are involved in academic research and various branches of disciplines with their current knowledge, tools, and technical skills ‘have done nothing to change’ the direction of the world from material success to spiritual and moral excellence (AbdulHamid, 2011: xxi).

**We need a genuine epistemology and *ijtihadic* strategy, not an integrated one but an original one that can first make a change in ourselves and then change around us.**

**It is the right kind of knowledge of the metaphysical truth that can grant us the right kind of vision, mission, purpose, and spiritual motivation.**

**He, therefore, reminded: “He who has no vision, purpose, or aim will never get anywhere no matter how abundant his store of information, tools, or mechanisms” (AbdulHamid, 2011: xxii).**

### **Epistemological and Ijtihadic Features in the Writings of Abusulayman**

**As the First** Principle of Epistemology, Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman argues that at the very outset, everyone who intends to study and understand anything of this world, physical or metaphysical, needs to benefit from the Islamic Revealed Knowledge and its framework.

**Secondly**, according to him, it is imperative for every researcher to steep deep in the Quranic teachings, guidelines, values, and principles. These are the sources of motivation and action and would guide the whole process of epistemological search for the creation of new knowledge (AbdulHamid, 2011: xxii).

**Thirdly**, furthermore, for Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman, it will also help us to counter the negative influences and counter-influences that affect our thinking process.

**Fourthly**, it will help us to be able to recognize and ‘arrive at clarity, understanding, and sound applications’ of those principles which have been granted to us through revelation (AbdulHamid, 2011: xxii).

**Fifthly**, as per the understanding of Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman our ways of thinking, understanding, and observing certain things or phenomena, physical or social, all are moulded and remoulded by epistemological and metaphysical frameworks.

**Sixth**, if frameworks are right our thinking and thought process would follow a right direction otherwise we will lose correct direction. Our thinking and understanding must be shaped by the frameworks of a right and truthful epistemology and *ijtihad*.

**Seventh**, it is the epistemological and *ijtihadic* frameworks, he asserted, which determine and govern the whole process of right kind of thinking and understanding with its related principles, concepts, and values as well as the goals and higher aims. It should be noted, Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman claims the lack of awareness of the frameworks of a genuine and truthful epistemology and *ijtihad* causes the loss of vitality of thinking and understanding. In other words, according to Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman lack of sound reasons and correct awareness would cause us to lose the RIGHT way of thinking and understanding.

It is the Islamic Revealed Knowledge, he categorically asserts, which grants purpose, motivation, and passion. He says we derive from Islamic Revealed Knowledge a positive, dynamic perspective that fosters the spirit of realization and affirmation of some noble goals, as it also grants us the required motivation to work for human welfare by using all available and appropriate means and stops us from being arrogant using power for domination and hegemonic negative purposes (AbdulHamid, 2011: 6-9).

**Eighth**, unlike the reformist, modernist, and liberalist Muslim intellectuals, Dr AbdulHamid AbuSulayman did not raise the question of the central role of reason and rationality or assimilation and adoption. **His concern was making Islamic Revealed Knowledge the foundation of all studies, disciplines, and sciences.**

**Nineth**, the application of mere technical knowledge and superficial experience did not help the Ummah to face the actual epistemological and methodological challenges with

which the Ummah is still engaged. According to him, it further consolidated the imitative approach. Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman commented: “This in turn, brought a new dimension to imitation” which still dominates (2016: 7).

**Thus, he raised his concern for the central role of Islam in the life of the Ummah and the need for the development of Islamic thought, culture, the implementation of the *Shariah* as the code of entire life, the regeneration of the energy of Muslim youth in accordance with Islam and its practicability through the project of Islamization of Knowledge and proper education of people in general and Muslim youths in particular.**

**According to Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman all prescriptions and solutions recommended and emphasized by reformers and liberal Muslims further weakened the Muslim Ummah and paved the way for complete domination of the Western powers (AbdulHamid 2016: 9).**

**He made a genuine but harsh comment: “Over the centuries, the Islamic world has remained, owing to its adherence to the principle of imitating whatever is foreign, a sick and fractured entity” (AbdulHamid, 2016: 10).**

## The Relationship Between Epistemology and *Ijtihad*

**Finally**, we also see in his writings a call for some conscious and courages *ijtihadic* considerations:

**[1]** “The Ummah’s intellectual and social leadership must search for an authentic Islamic alternative solution, strive to discern its elements” of its own not integrated ones (AbdulHamid, 2016: 13) which cannot be made possible without critical and creative endeavours.

**[2]** He said repeatedly: The Ummah requires positive and original action based on Islamic values and intellectual and psychological make up (AbdulHamid, 2016: 17).

**[3]** He commented that this entails a thorough and comprehensive understanding of Islam’s objectives and higher purposes (AbdulHamid, 2016: 18).

**[4].** The intellectuals of the Ummah, hence, require “an academic and intellectual approach based on knowledge of the laws of nature and experience. In addition, they need to be based on the perspective of Islamic thought, principles, purposes, values, and teachings (AbdulHamid, 2016: 18).

[5] He constantly said, the Muslim intellectuals also need 'a complete understanding of, and concentration on, the higher purposes of the *Shari'ah* and its general principles, values, and fundamental teachings'. According to Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulaiman, all the above-mentioned requirements are the basic conditions and starting points for any attempt to understand and further development of social and human phenomena, institutions, organizations, and the regulations (AbdulHamid 2016: 19).

[6] In this process of comprehension, the link between Islamic Revealed Knowledge and reason based on *ijtihad* must be appropriately established.

[7] The mind set of Muslims must be guided by means of the Islamic Revealed Knowledge's objectives, its comprehensive and universal outlook, and its living and civilizational values (AbdulHamid, 2016: 20).

[8] He suggested that Ummah's intellectuals, writers, concerned social and political leaders should outline a sound strategy with enough courage for the analysis of human intellectual legacy and must be able to create and develop their own but new thought based on *ijtihad* (AbdulHamid, 2016: 27).

[9] They must figure out with clarity "what is really important, distinguish between what is fundamental and absolute and what is temporary and limited" (AbdulHamid, 2016: 27).

**[10]** They must engender among Muslim masses the confidence about Islamic values, objectives, and purposes of Islam. These are the ingredients of our intellectual energy without which our survival and wellbeing do not seem to be practical.