

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

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ABSTRACT

The concept and movement of Islamization of Knowledge (IOK) was integral to the heart and mind of AbdulHamid AbuSulayman until his last moments (18 August 2021). IOK stands for the creation of new thought as explained by AbuSulayman in the second, re-edited and expanded 1989 edition of the book entitled '*Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Workplan*' first published by Ismail Raji al Faruqi in 1982. In this new edition of 1989, AbuSulayman contended that IOK is an intellectual, epistemological, and methodological movement. The basic contention of both Ismail Faruqi and AbuSulayman was that the decline of the Ummah was caused due to the decline in Islamic thought and Islamic methodology. The revival of the Ummah and Islamic civilization would depend on the production of a new thought based on a clear epistemology, methodology, and *ijtihadic* framework. AbuSulayman further argued that there is a link between epistemology and *ijtihad*. For him, it was necessary to address all the problems of the Ummah, based on a genuine epistemology and concentrated and comprehensive *ijtihadic* framework. Therefore, IOK for him, was a movement for the creation of comprehensive and all-inclusive Islamic thought based on Islamic Revealed Knowledge. The inclusion of Islamic Revealed Knowledge raised some epistemological and *ijtihadic* issues which were addressed by AbuSulayman in his writings in the context of epistemology and

ijtihad. AbuSulayman argued that no relevant framework for Islamization of modern Western disciplines and the development of Islamic thought could be developed without developing an authentic epistemological and *ijtihadic* framework. So, the relationship between epistemology and *ijtihad* for Islamization of Knowledge needs to be discovered properly. Hence, this paper aims to analyse his views based on content analysis and determine the true nature of the relationship between epistemology and *ijtihad*. This paper will follow critical and analytical methods to explore, examine, and present the required framework in the light of the views of AbdulHamid AbuSulayman by focusing on the nature of the relationship between epistemology and *ijtihad*.

Keywords: AbdulHamid AbuSulayman, epistemology, *ijtihad*, Islamization

Introduction

The contemporary scholars have always argued that the Islamization of Knowledge [IOK] movement must be 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, **it was contended that as a prerequisite, the Islamic Revealed Knowledge** to which the authors call True, Authentic, and Universal Knowledge [TAUK] **must be reinstated as an integral part of the epistemological and *ijtihadic* framework.** This was why Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman gave a new name Kulliyyah 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.

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 asked, on one side, for 'a comprehensive and deep analytical examination of every facet of the Ummah' (AbdulHamid, 2016: 5), and on the other, emphasized for the study of the realities of history and material development (AbdulHamid, 2016: 5), along with social and political systems. He rejected isolationist and protectionist approaches. Hence, instead of promoting 'the revival of reason and rationality' as suggested by reformists and liberalists, he advocated the provision of *ijtihad* which puts emphasis on both epistemology and methodology 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 'renew, 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' as 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 *ijthadic* framework for ushering a mission for change and development of the Ummah through the development of methodology and epistemology, creation of new knowledge and reformulation of the educational system.

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. 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. **The knowledge of the metaphysical truth constitutes genuinely the fundamental and first principle of epistemology. For a factual and truthful epistemology, there is a need for a solid foundation of knowledge as opposed to philosophical speculation and metaphysical conjecture.** There is no sound and genuine epistemological framework which can be erected based on false worldviews. **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. Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman was fully convinced about it. Hence, as an epistemological requirement and condition, he placed the Islamic Revealed Knowledge at the beginning of any epistemological exercise.** This paper, hence, aims to investigate and analyse the epistemological views of Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman with special reference to ijtiḥād. For this, it has adopted a qualitative method of content analysis along with critical and creative approaches using for data his writings.

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 Islamic 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. They must know it 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 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 Revelation indicates his epistemological and *ijtihadic* concerns. His emphasis on ‘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). This constitutes the necessity of *ijtihadic* framework as well. 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 peoples 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 provides a sense of purposefulness and motivation, the world 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 and method 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 Views 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 needs to benefit from the Islamic Revealed Knowledge. **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).

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. **Fifthly**, 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 metaphysics. **Sixthly**, it is the epistemological and metaphysical 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, metaphysics and ijihad 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.

In addition, he said, it is the epistemological framework, in which the revelation occupies central position, that would shape the way in which people think and 'understand themselves, the meaning, purpose, and end of their existence, and their relationships to themselves, to others, to the world, and to the universe in all its dimensions' (AbdulHamid 2011: 3). Hence, he asserted, it is important for us to realize the First Principle of Epistemology to which attention must be given. It is the primacy of Islamic Revelation in which 'lies the spiritual foundation and the intellectual, psychological, and emotional impetus needed' to recover the truthful and realistic methodological framework as well (AbdulHamid, 2011: 4). It is the revelation, he categorically asserts, which grants purpose, motivation, and passion. He says we derive from the revelation 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). In this way Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman stands totally different from modernists, reformists, liberalist, and progressive Muslim intellectuals in terms of themes and objectives.

Seventhly, 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.** Like most Muslim scholars of revivalist tradition Dr Abdul Hamid AbuSulayman has perceived that “a life dedicated to the pursuit of sensual pleasures, or of power and wealth clouds reasoning faculties, distorts thinking and prevents judgement, which amounts to a real loss of freedom, a fall from the status of being truly human” (Nejatullah, 2011: 21). **Eightly**, they emphasized the necessity of true, authentic, and universal worldview. A worldview which is drawn from TAUUK and not based on speculation and conjecture. He rejected speculative methods for the understanding of worldview and depended on Islamic Revealed Knowledge.

Quite contrary to the position of other scholars from modernist and liberal tradition, Dr Abdul Hamid AbuSulayman focused on the importance of revelation. Hence, he raised the issue of centrality of Revelation whereas Fazlur Raman raised the issue of centrality of human reason. His work *Islam and Modernity* 1984 manifests his main concern of rational approach. This was not the concern of Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman. **Ninethly, We do not find any sign of the**

influence of modernity or liberal and progressive perspectives and the so-called achievements of other civilizations on him. He was genuinely impressed and guided by the reading of the Quran in time space context.

Therefore, he did not demonstrate any sense of inferiority complex. His concern was with the intellectual backwardness of traditional Muslim scholars. He wanted to know 'the reasons for the Ummah's decline and fall'. He was equally concerned with the imitative role of Muslim reformists, modernists, and liberalists. Despite the claim of modernists for the centrality of reason he did not find any new thought or framework in the writings of Muslim reformists, modernists, and liberalists different from modern Western scholars. Hence, he forcefully commented against them. He said: "Some of those who claim to be reformers are in fact the Ummah's enemies, for they promote these foreign ideologies by all the means at their disposal" (AbdulHamid, 2016: 3).

TENTH, He considered reformists, modernists, and liberalists as imitators of the West who suggested the borrowing, adoption, and assimilation of the Western ideologies such as liberalism, pragmatism, individualism, totalitarianism, secularism, atheism, capitalism, or Marxism (AbdulHamid, 2016: 3) instead of and rather than creating their own models and theories based on Islamic worldview and teachings of Islam. Hence, he cautioned the Ummah: "It is imperative that the Ummah understand the reasons why the solutions proposed by others will not work" (AbdulHamid, 2016: 4). He concluded: "In every case, however, imitation led to greater and more widespread infirmity and decline" (AbdulHamid, 2016: 6).

According to him, the imitative approach adopted by reformists, modernist, and liberalists failed to renew the Ummah's strength. These scholars caused emptiness and loss of vision and encouraged 'the import of foreign technical knowledge and experience' (AbdulHamid, 2016: 7) instead of true and authentic knowledge and wisdom. **Eleventh**, 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 concluded, all liberal and modernist reform movements in the Muslim world based on 'the principle of foreign imitation' failed as these 'attempts at reform were no more successful' (AbdulHamid, 2016: 8). **TWELTH They did not acknowledge the due place of 'the values, principles and beliefs which form the foundation of Islam'. They did not speak of these matters.** Whenever they speak they raise nonIslamic and nonhuman issues. Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman commented and said, they always 'speak of Islam they speak fatalism and tyranny, political absolutism, intellectual and psychological shortcomings, the excesses of the slave trade, and the degradation of women' (AbdulHamid, 2016: 29). **Thirteenth** Against this background Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman stands for a comprehensive and overall change in accordance with the worldview of Islam based on a vibrant epistemology, methodology and *ijtihadic* framework. **Fourteenth**, 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). **Fifteenth** Hence, he wanted to create among the members of the Ummah a new consciousness of *ijtihad*, epistemology, and methodology so that the Ummah can make genuine and efforts and original contributions to make life and society in this world best. He spent his entire life to change the mind set of Muslims, their personality, thought and heart (AbdulHamid, 2016: 11). Thus, he adopted the path of education and inspired everyone for the creation of new knowledge.

He argued it is imperative for Muslims to ‘understand the intellectual and cultural dimensions’ of our time and develop their own strategy for the forward move based on our own sources of energy and dynamism. He emphasized the Ummah’s political and intellectual leadership through the process of Islamized knowledge and system of education must be capable to introduce required change in the mindset of people and living. **He emphaticcally asserted the new**

emerging leadership, both intellectual and political, **Sixteenth** must come forward and be capable of demonstrating originality and creativity to present new solutions based on the proper understanding of the worldview of Islam, epistemology, and *ijtihad*. So that this leadership can guide the Ummah to confront the emerging challenges and take it to the advanced stage of development. He wanted the Ummah to develop a dream of progress, honour, capability, and salvation. For this, he suggested several avenues, ways, means, and methods of thinking and studies. He spent all his life to bring the desired change in the Muslim world. **Seventeenth** He gave a call for courageous action: [1] “The Ummah’s intellectual and social leadership must search for an authentic Islamic alternative solution, strive to discern its elements” (AbdulHamid, 2016: 13) **which cannot be made possible without critical and creative endeavours.** [2] He said repeatedly: **The Ummah requires positive 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). The intellectuals of the Ummah, hence, require [4]. “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 require ‘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] this process of comprehension, the link between revelation and reason based on *ijtihad* must be appropriately established. [7] The mind must be guided by means of the revelation'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. [11] He suggested we must apply the values and principles of Islam in society and organizations, in specific situations and circumstances (AbdulHamid, 2016: 29).

He argued for all this, the methodology of Islamic thought must change. Intellectuals should rectify its shortcomings and improve it because the actual problems of Muslims are not caused by the values,

objectives, and purposes of Islam but rather ‘the way that Muslims think, perceive, and reason (AbdulHamid, 2016: 29). This implies the need of a proper epistemology, the reform of methodology, thought and the Muslim mind, and a sound *ijtihadic* framework. [12] How Muslims apply the values and principles of Islam in society and institutions, governmental and non-governmental agencies is a crucial issue. How to explain the higher purposes of the *Shariah* in contemporary times and implement them. Which part of the *Shariah* is universal and which part is subject to new interpretation. Procedures, policies, approaches, and practical measures are all very much linked to the epistemological and *ijtihadic* dimensions. **He concluded: “the Ummah’s crisis is essentially one of thought rather than of belief, one of method and not of meaning...one of means and not of ends” (AbdulHamid, 2016: 30).** In other words, it is the problem of lack of proper epistemology and *ijtihad*.

Quite contrary to Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman’s concern, the reformers and liberalists put much emphasis on foreign and alien issues and solutions: “They used modern theories and methodologies developed by scholars in the humanities, social sciences, and natural to shed new light on pre-modern sacred sources. They placed reason and revelation on equal footing, and at times even privileged rationality over religious scriptures in addressing the unprecedented challenges of modern Muslims” (Khairudin, 2021: 30). “These reformers envisioned complementary roles for reason and revelations”. They regarded *ijtihad* as the legal opinions of the Ulama (Khairudin, 2021: 31), whereas Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman considered *ijtihad* as the methodology of the Islamic thought.

[13] He wanted to see the Ummah, capable of demonstrating the ability to create 'new ideas, to update its institutions, and to produce the planning, means, and policies essential to further progress at the civilizational level' (AbdulHamid, 2016: 31). [14] Hence, according to him all branches of knowledge such as economics, educational, political, communication, or administrative sciences, human and social sciences and natural sciences must be enriched and developed based on Islamic worldview, principles, and approaches (AbdulHamid, 2016: 32). [15] For this purpose, he said we need to improve the traditional methodology so that we can be competent enough to deal with social sciences taking into consideration, on one hand, social realities and on the other, the objectives, principles, and values of Islam. He further argued and claimed that this is the only option which is left for the Ummah. Without developing the epistemology and methodology the Ummah cannot be able to cope with the challenges of change and development. The intellectuals of the Ummah ought to focus in social sciences on 'issues related to politics, government, social organization, and the general nature of the group and society' (AbdulHamid, 2016: 35). So that we can 'meet the challenges presented by changing conditions' (AbdulHamid, 2016: 36), instead of concentrating on some of the pure religious and legal aspects of society and institutions. In this process of developmental studies, the normative texts of Islam, the Quran and Sunnah, must be used 'as a guide to its [the Ummah's] actions and deliberations in the domains of its social and civilizational organization and development' (AbdulHamid, 2016: 37).

He further stated our ways of thinking must have relevance to our present challenges and conditions, real social and political dimensions. He emphasized for practical and reliable expressions of Islam's social or political dynamics for concrete actions (AbdulHamid, 2016: 41). **The intellectuals of the Ummah must be capable of reaching out to find out 'the true causes of the problems confronting society' representing the total picture or the truth of the situation and leading society out of problems. Only in this way we can go beyond the limited legalistic particulars 'reflecting the true spirit of the *Shariah* and its higher purposes' and prescribe realistic solutions (AbdulHamid, 2016: 41).** The Ummah must be directed to resolve its problems leading the community towards development. Thus, all-important questions related to the essence of its existence must be addressed successfully based on Islamic paradigm of life and society (AbdulHamid, 2016: 43). He always kept himself within the boundary line of Islam, its fundamental teachings following all necessary principles and values. He never went out of the framework of Islam. It is this boundary line which constitutes the framework of *ijtihad*. All these aspects of his thought distinguish him from all other liberal, modern, and progressive lines of thinking.

[16] He always reminded the intellectuals of the Ummah that they must work, think, and act within the Islamic framework. He emphasized that the contemporary intellectuals of the Ummah must be reflective of Islamic holistic and comprehensive approach free from mere descriptive, traditional, legalistic, and literalist approaches. They should focus on both the individual and society. It is imperative for them to combine the individual

concerns and the needs of society. [17] The concern of their intellectual efforts should reflect their serious interest in the affairs of society. Individuals and society both should be the attention of all intellectual and ijthadic attempts. (AbdulHamid, 2016: 43). [18] All this requires a proper guidance and training of the intellectuals and a commitment to Islamic teachings and principles, as well as the proper, comprehensive, and effective educational and cultural training and programs. Hence, he dedicated himself to implementing his ideas through education. He argued the essence of Islamic thought and education must be capable of transforming individuals into critical, comparative, and creative beings (AbdulHamid, 2016: 44) along with spiritual and moral excellence. The Ummah should progress and develop both socially and organizationally. How to turn the passive Ummah into the forward looking, growth and action-oriented, making it capable to face the changing realities. His main concern was: [19] How 'to deal with varying circumstances and situations while maintaining the same basic principles stemming from a single divine source?' 'How the contemporary intellectuals need to address the emerging challenges (AbdulHamid, 2016: 45) while remaining within the framework of Islam'?

[20] The most important dimensions suggested by Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman related to the epistemological and *ijthadic* frameworks are related to "the issues of time and place in the composition of society, and the concept of revelation as a source of knowledge complementing both reason and nature so that humanity can fulfil its role of doing good on earth" (AbdulHamid, 2016: 52). He invited Muslim intellectuals to be

realistic with the heritage and contemporary conditions. He asserted in all situations we need to adopt analytical and critical approaches. This will help us to benefit from Islam to solve contemporary problems and to relate it to the actualities of contemporary life and society. We should know with certainty what are the essentials for our thinking process and inquiry in our studies and research. It is also important for us to understand what are the unique aspects of the thinking process which have been used in our times (AbdulHamid, 2016: 54). It is therefore imperative for us to collect, classify, and use them properly in our intellectual pursuits. We must be sure what aspects of the thinking process are clearly sound. What is the proper framework for thinking, understanding, observing, and making judgements? What is our source of strength? How can we be positive in our thinking and studies? Throughout this process, Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman reminded us, we should remember one important thing: In the past we were able to make great achievements due to adherence to Islam and Islamic mode of thinking and methodology. “Islam and Islam alone, allowed the Ummah to establish its civilization and culture all over the world” (AbdulHamid, 2016: 57). It is through Islam alone that “the Ummah may continue to develop and reach out toward new horizons. Only by thinking in this way can the Ummah regain its strength and its pioneering and reformative energies” (AbdulHamid, 2016: 57).

The intellectuals of the Ummah must stop thinking in terms of imitation, assimilation, adoption, and borrowing. They should demonstrate critical and creative approaches. They must develop “an original and

integral Islamic approach that rejects imitation” (AbdulHamid, 2016: 58). They must develop truly Islamic concepts, objectives, and values. The Ummah must guarantee for this purpose an environment of “independent Islamic intellectual inquiry nourished by Islamic social sciences that are distinguished by their sources and their unique premises and approaches” (AbdulHamid, 2016: 58). He explained “What all this ultimately means is that an original and systematic intellectual vision must emerge, one that will not suffer adversely from the achievements of others but will, on the contrary, both welcome and accommodate them after weighing them against the standards of its own unique perspective” (AbdulHamid, 2016: 58).

He wanted the Islamic vision, and the forces of Islamic originality should become clear and remain dominant to such extent that they should guide all the process of creativity. It is thus imperative for the Ummah to make great achievements based on Islamic thought for the betterment of the Ummah and humanity in general. Hence, it is necessary to remember throughout the intellectual activities that the role of Islam and its contributions, its ways of thought, civilization, and reform cannot be forgotten and neglected (AbdulHamid, 2016: 59). He reminded: The Ummah need ‘to regain original and uncontaminated vision of Islam and rechart the course of action’. He raised a fundamental question: How do we regain our vision and strength and thus correct our course? He answered: We must, at any cost, take a step forward renewing our vision, reforming our methodology, and developing the sources of our strength. We need to rely ‘on the knowledge and wisdom

of revelation and the soundness of human reason.’ He concluded: Despite all the factors of decay, Islam the only Islam is refuge for the Ummah (AbdulHamid, 2016: 60).

The Relationship Between Epistemology and Ijtihad

Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman ardently reminded about the role of the Ummah. He said: the Ummah has been charged to perform the duties of vicegerency [khalifah] and civilizational reform. It must be done ‘in the light of the noble principles of Islam’. There is no alternative for anyone except Islam. Through Islam one can guarantee some meaningful reform to modern civilization because it is Islam which alone offers a ‘comprehensive view of life and the universe, (AbdulHamid, 2016: 61) a true, authentic, and universal view of life and the world. If we are determined to understand the goals of life, there is no other ideology or religion other than Islam which can elaborate, based on knowledge, and supported by empirical and historical evidence, true, authentic, and universal goals of life. The purpose of life is related to both seen and unseen dimensions but “The world of the unseen is known only to Allah” (AbdulHamid, 2016: 61).

It is Allah SWT Who gives mankind the knowledge of life and its goals, explains to them its meaning and the role. At a higher level the goal of life is to establish truth and maintain justice on earth and keep it free from corruption. If man and humanity both fail to establish truth and justice, there would be corruption on earth as we see today (AbdulHamid, 2016: 61). **In this way Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman assigned the proper place to Islam. His**

emphasis on placing Islam in its proper ethical fundamental place reflects one of his important concerns and contributions and distinguishes him from other modern and liberal Muslim scholars. He diverts the attention of scholars to the real ethical themes presented in the Quran which are relevant for us for cultural and civilizational development.

For him *wahy* is the source of knowledge, basis of epistemology and framework for *ijtihad*. Where there is no *wahy* there is no epistemology, no *ijtihad*, no new knowledge, no development. He genuinely argues that it is through only *wahy* we get both knowledge and guidance for our life and society without which there is no possibility of development, the cultural and civilizational. He regards this understanding as the truth which has been conveyed to humanity through a chain of Messengers [pbut]. They always taught and guided humanity based on knowledge to make them understand the true meaning and purpose of life and society. According to Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman, this is one of the important principles of epistemology and *ijtihad* which helps mankind to comprehend the true and proper role and places of things (AbdulHamid 2016: 65).

Man is expected to search for truth and follow it. He has been gifted by Allah SWT with the faculties of sense-perception and reason. Hence, he is under obligation to exercise them to understand, distinguish and compare insights, and they are the means of carrying out responsibilities in the seen world. With the help of faculties and based on knowledge man is capable to know with certainty and authenticity the true and realistic nature of relationship with life, the universe, and other creatures. Without knowledge-based reason “there would be

no humans, no comprehension, no appreciation, and no responsibility” (AbdulHamid, 2016: 66). **It is not reason but knowledge-based reason that is capable of distinguishing between true *wahy* and false, between misleading lies, fabrications, and myths. According to Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman, it is through the knowledge-based reason that man ‘encompasses the knowledge of both the seen and the unseen world’ (AbdulHamid 2016: 66). It is the reason which is guided by the revealed knowledge and makes man capable and realize the purpose of creation and to fulfil the role of vicegerency (AbdulHamid, 2016: 66). The reason must be rightly guided to comprehend the truth and reality of things. Unguided reason has proven throughout the history of mankind that it has always taken man away from truth and reality leaving him on the mercy of speculation and conjecture. The mind of man which 'derives its strength, stability, and uprightness from its understanding of *wahy*, is capable to lead man to the Right Path as designated by Allah SWT as being Right (AbdulHamid, 2016: 66).** Dr.

AbdulHamid AbuSulayman argues:

The Muslim mind is a believing, rightly guided, and confident mind. It is not arrogant, it does not abandon certainty for conjecture, or light for darkness, or guidance for error. It is a capable mind, completely absorbed in its role as *khalifah*. It does not waste its time and efforts on conjecture or on matters which serve no useful purpose. In accordance with this unambiguous outlook, the Muslim mind will not debate matters of the unseen, nor will it ignore the role of reason in understanding and interpreting the articulations and purposes of *wahy* and putting them into practice. According to this Islamic outlook, the role of reason cannot be ignored in understanding nature and events, or in building systems, or bearing responsibilities (AbdulHamid 2016: 66-67).

Concluding Remarks

The thrust of contemporary Islamic thought is nothing except to see the Ummah and its people as a developed community with high and truly human standards of living, education, and health. According to Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman it cannot be achieved without reforming the existing educational system in the Muslim world. This reform must be done based on a new epistemology following a new framework of *ijtihad* expanding its scope to the entire intellectual and scholarly works. It is this reason that Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman always reminded his readers that all intellectual activities and excretions must be done within the framework of the Islamic revelation, epistemology, and *ijtihad*. According to him, it is the Islamic revelation that plays in both epistemology and *ijtihad* the fundamental and foundational role without which there is no reform, no revival, no development, and no role for the Ummah. Hence, scholars like Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman emphasize on the production of new knowledge based on *ijtihadic* endeavors.

He established an integral link between epistemology and *ijtihad* and outlined his epistemological framework in which the Islamic revelation occupies the central position. It is followed by universal values, principles, purposes, morals, laws, and guidelines that help to construct social and political dimensions and guarantees development. He remarked that mere the application of tools and techniques are not sufficient to produce a dynamic thought that would help for action and realization, they need true, authentic, and universal worldview, vision of life and society as well without which there is no spiritual motivation. Due to the importance of revelation and universal truths about life and society, Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman continuously and frequently reminded the Muslim

intellectuals and scholars of the application of Islamic perspective in their intellectual and scholarly works. He demonstrated his clear vision and did everything necessary for its implementation during his ten years tenure as rector in International Islamic University Malaysia. He always encourages academics for critical and creative endeavours based on Islamic epistemology and ijihad. He motivated them to figure out with clarity what is in truth and reality is important, able to distinguish between what is fundamental and absolute and what is subject to change. He asked them to engender among Muslim masses the confidence in Islam, Islamic values, objectives, and purposes of it. He was convinced beyond doubt that our survival and wellbeing depend on them. We must apply the values and principles of Islam in society and organization, in specific situations and general circumstances. May Allah SWT accept his remarkable efforts and grant him excellent reward in the Hereafter in Jnnatul Firdaus.

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