

# Intellectual Discourse

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# *Intellectual Discourse*

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## Transliteration Table: Consonants

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
ب	b		ط	ṭ
ت	t		ظ	ẓ
ث	th		ع	‘
ج	j		غ	gh
ح	ḥ		ف	f
خ	kh		ق	q
د	d		ك	k
ذ	dh		ل	l
ر	r		م	m
ز	z		ن	n
س	s		ه	h
ش	sh		و	w
ص	ṣ		ء	’
ض	ḍ		ي	y

## Transliteration Table: Vowels and Diphthongs

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
اَ	a		اَ، اِيَّ	an
اُ	u		اُو	un
اِ	i		اِي	in
اَ، اِ، اِيَّ	ā		اُو	aw
اُو	ū		اِيَّ	ay
اِي	ī		اُو	uww, ū (in final position)
			اِيَّ	iyy, ī (in final position)

*Source: ROTAS Transliteration Kit: <http://rotas.iium.edu.my>*



# Learning Beneficial Worldly Knowledge: Between Islamic and Boko Harām Perspectives

**Hassan Suleimān\***

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**Mohd. Afandi Bin Awang Hamat\*\*\*\***

**Abstract:** Islamic civilisation once led the world to develop worldly knowledge, producing significant advancements in medicine, mathematics, and astronomy. Scholars viewed these knowledge domains as complementary to religious knowledge, with the latter holding superior status. However, in recent times, some Muslim communities have distanced themselves from temporal knowledge, wrongly perceiving it as alien to Islam. Insurgent groups like Boko Harām in Northern Nigeria and neighbouring countries, including Niger, Chad, northern Cameroon, and Mali have weaponised this misconception. Boko Harām’s ideology rejects worldly education, equating it with an anti-Islamic agenda, leading to violent campaigns against educational

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institutions. This article addresses the misunderstanding that beneficial worldly knowledge contradicts Islamic teachings, highlighting its importance as an Islamic obligation. It explores how this misconception has contributed to violence and stagnation, such as in Boko Harām's attacks, and analyses Islamic primary sources, the Qur'ān, the ḥadīth, and scholarly commentaries, to clarify the stance on acquiring such knowledge. The analysis includes an examination of key prophetic traditions that highlight the importance of pursuing worldly knowledge that contributes to societal welfare. The findings reveal that Islām not only permits but encourages the pursuit of beneficial worldly knowledge, which is considered *fard kifāyah*—a collective obligation upon the Muslim community. The article emphasises that education aligned with Islamic values is key to societal progress. It criticises extremist group like Boko Harām for misinterpreting Islam and calls for a return to valuing both religious and beneficial worldly knowledge to advance Muslim communities.

**Keywords:** Beneficial worldly knowledge, Islamic perspective, religious knowledge, Boko Harām movement, Muslim scholars

**Abstrak:** Tamadun Islam pernah memimpin dunia dalam mengembangkan ilmu duniawi dan menghasilkan kemajuan yang signifikan dalam bidang perubatan, matematik, dan astronomi. Bidang-bidang ilmu ini dianggap sebagai pelengkap kepada ilmu agama, dengan ilmu agama menduduki status yang lebih tinggi. Walau bagaimanapun, pada masa kini, terdapat beberapa Masyarakat Islam yang telah menjauhkan diri daripada ilmu duniawi, dengan salah anggap bahawa ia asing kepada Islam. Kumpulan pemberontak seperti Boko Harām di Nigeria Utara dan negara-negara jiran, termasuk Niger, Chad, utara Cameroon, dan Mali telah memeralatkan salah tanggapan ini. Ideologi Boko Harām menolak pendidikan duniawi, menyamakannya dengan agenda anti-Islam, yang membawa kepada kempen keganasan terhadap institusi pendidikan. Masalah utama adalah salah faham bahawa ilmu duniawi yang bermanfaat bertentangan dengan ajaran Islam. Artikel ini membincangkan bagaimana kepercayaan ini menyumbang kepada keganasan dan kemunduran, seperti serangan Boko Haram, dengan merujuk kepada al-Quran, ḥadīth, dan ulasan ulama untuk menjelaskan pendirian Islam tentang ilmu duniawi. Analisis ini merangkumi pemeriksaan tradisi-prophetik utama yang menekankan kepentingan mengejar ilmu duniawi yang menyumbang kepada kesejahteraan masyarakat. Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa Islam bukan sahaja membenarkan tetapi juga menggalakkan usaha untuk memperoleh ilmu duniawi yang bermanfaat, yang dianggap sebagai *fard kifāyah* — kewajipan kolektif kepada Masyarakat Islam. Artikel ini menegaskan bahawa pendidikan duniawi yang selaras dengan nilai Islam adalah penting untuk kemajuan masyarakat. Ia mengkritik kumpulan ekstremis seperti Boko Harām kerana



salah tafsir ajaran Islam dan menyeru pemulihan tradisi Islam yang menghargai ilmu agama dan duniawi untuk kemajuan masyarakat Islam.

**Kata kunci:** Ilmu duniawi yang bermanfaat, perspektif Islam, ilmu agama, gerakan Boko Harām, ulama Muslim.

## Introduction

The religion of Islam comprehends people's interests both in this world and in the hereafter. Therefore, the knowledge deemed necessary to be studied in Islam is not only religious knowledge but also worldly knowledge. It is so because worldly knowledge, such as medicine, Mathematics, and Economics, among others, is also needed and offers significant benefits to humanity. From an Islamic perspective, the position of worldly knowledge is similar to that of the religious sciences.

In the past, the Muslim community showed significant achievements in worldly and religious knowledge. Many important personalities in science emerged from within Islamic civilisation and became central authorities in many fields of knowledge for centuries. At the same time, other parts of the world were left behind in science. During that time, religious and non-religious scholars had no controversies or disputes. If there was, then it was minimal and related to certain theological controversies, not because of common hostility between these two categories of knowledge. Likewise, there is no dualism in both kinds of knowledge. Both knowledge is seen by Muslims as integrated (Huda et al., 2016: p. 5) and not dichotomised into religious and non-religious poles since religious sciences are also useful for this worldly life, while natural and social phenomena become the objects of worldly knowledge with a metaphysical dimension. In the past, it was not uncommon to find religious scholars, such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, showing interest in general knowledge, thus becoming an expert in geometry and medicine (Riswanto & Wan Abdullah, 2021) and writing commentaries on Ibn Sīnā's medical Book *al-Qānūn fī al-Ṭibb* (Griffel, 2007). The commentaries of al-Rāzī were criticised by 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī, a contemporary scholar who mastered medicine and several other branches of sciences (Stern, 1962). Al-Baghdādī, though better known as a medical scientist, has written books in the fields of ḥadīth and fiqh (Bonadeo, 2019). Many scientists then usually understood basic

religious knowledge since studying Islamic religion in early education was the norm in Muslim society.

Conversely, several early religious scholars wrote about medicine based on the traditions of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.), popularly known as *Ṭibb al-Nabawī*, to show that there is a prophetic endorsement of this branch of knowledge. Even though they had no medical background, their awareness of and borrowing from Graeco-Arabic medicine was, to some extent, reflected in their work on the Prophet's medicine, especially in the tenth and eleventh centuries (Yusoff & Ab Razak, 2020). The exchange of knowledge in these two great fields was typical in the past. However, the influence of the modern Western worldview of science and knowledge, in addition to the factor of internal decline within Muslim society, has triggered uncertainty about the status of worldly knowledge in the minds of some Muslims today.

This article aims to examine Islamic views regarding worldly knowledge by discussing its primary sources (Qur'ān, ḥadīth, and scholars' views) and relate them with the attitude of the Boko Harām movement in Nigeria and its neighbouring countries towards worldly knowledge.

### **Beneficial Worldly Knowledge: Concept and Components**

Islamic educationists and scholars often approach the concepts of knowledge with distinct perspectives rooted in Islamic epistemology, which emphasises a holistic integration of spiritual and worldly knowledge. From an Islamic perspective, all knowledge originates from Allāh, and distinctions like “worldly knowledge,” “general knowledge,” and “temporal knowledge” are understood based on the centrality of divine revelation (al-Attas, 1980). Islamic scholars argue that there is no inherent separation between religious and worldly knowledge but rather an integrated framework that guides the believer toward divine understanding.

### **Worldly Knowledge**

In Islamic thought, worldly knowledge (*‘ilm al-dunyā*) refers to material and practical knowledge that helps individuals navigate daily life. Unlike the dichotomy between worldly and religious knowledge seen in Western thought, Islamic scholars, such as Al-Ghazālī (1058–1111), in *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm ad-Dīn*, do not view worldly knowledge as separate

from spiritual concerns. Instead, worldly pursuits should be balanced with religious obligations (Ghazali, 1997). Additionally, worldly knowledge is deemed valuable when aligned with Islamic ethics and used for the benefit of humanity and in the service of Allāh (Nasr, 2010). The Qur’ān and ḥadīth advocate for the pursuit of both practical and spiritual knowledge while cautioning against its misuse if it detracts from spiritual truth or Allāh’s commands (Iqbal, 2013).

### **Temporal Knowledge**

Temporal knowledge, often used interchangeably with worldly knowledge, pertains specifically to time-bound, material affairs, in contrast to eternal, spiritual matters (Al-Attas, 1980). This form of knowledge relates to disciplines like engineering, medicine, and agriculture, focusing on empirical, observable phenomena. While temporal knowledge is adaptable and can evolve with new evidence or societal needs, it remains essential for societal well-being and human advancement (Popper, 2005; Sardar, 1985).

Islam does not oppose temporal knowledge. Islamic teachings encourage pursuing such knowledge if it aligns with religious and ethical values. Islamic scholars, including Al-Ghazālī, emphasise the importance of harmonising temporal knowledge with spiritual principles, ensuring that material progress does not lead to moral or ethical decline (Iqbal, 2013).

This article addresses these concepts and highlights that Islamic epistemology promotes a holistic approach to knowledge. The Islamic understanding of *‘Ilm* does not uphold a rigid division between sacred and worldly knowledge. Instead, all knowledge—religious or worldly—contributes to understanding and fulfilling Allāh’s will (Nasr, 2010). While modern terms such as “temporal” and “worldly” may imply a distinction in Western discourse, Islamic thought integrates both material and spiritual knowledge within a unified framework (Sardar, 1985).

Throughout this article, the terms “worldly knowledge,” “temporal knowledge,” and “general knowledge” are used to refer to beneficial non-religious knowledge. It is emphasised that Islam encourages pursuing such knowledge if it promotes human well-being and aligns with the ethical principles derived from Islamic teachings.

## Islamic Perspective on Beneficial Worldly Knowledge: The Permissibility and Importance of Acquiring Beneficial Worldly Knowledge

Undoubtedly, the study of worldly knowledge is Islamically essential and encouraged, and the divine texts that point to the encouragement of Shari'ah to learn worldly knowledge that is beneficial for ummah are countless. Allāh, for example, says in the Qur'ān: "Make ready for them all thou can of (armed) force and steeds of war, that thereby you may dismay the enemy of Allāh and your enemy" (al-Anfāl: 60). This verse denotes an instruction to Muslims to prepare all mental and physical strength to the greatest extent possible, including all types of arms and weapons to help fight enemies. Thus, it comprises all kinds of industries in which various weapons and machines are produced, including cannons, machine guns, rifles, aeroplanes, land and sea boats, forts, castles, trenches, and defence equipment. According to another opinion, it also refers to policies or actions adopted by Muslims in defending themselves and confronting the evil of their enemies, as well as to learning archery and courage and organising governance (Ibn al-Sa'dī, 2000).

Additionally, the Prophet p.b.u.h. once said in his tradition narrated by Muslims: "Prepare to meet them with as much strength as you can afford. Beware, strength consists in archery. Beware, strength consists in archery. Beware, strength consists in archery" (Muslim, 2007, p. 251; Vol. 5, ḥadīth no. 4946). It can be understood that the strength that needs to be prepared includes various things useful for defence mechanisms, such as armoured fighting vehicles. The previous verse of the Qur'ān, in which Allāh mentions "the steeds of war, that thereby you may dismay the enemy of Allāh and your enemy," highlighted such. In Islamic law, legal provisions cannot be separated from its *'illah* (legal cause), the existence and non-existence, and the *'illah* mentioned here are present in the military equipment of that century to combat or intimidate the enemies. Therefore, if there is something more effective in confronting the enemies, such as modern artillery, warships, and aircraft, then it is essential to strive to own them. Even if they are not available to be purchased and used except through manufacturing them with our industry, then it becomes obligatory, as the legal maxim says, «*mā lā yatim al-Wājib illa bihī fa huwa Wājib*» (should an obligation not be

fulfilled except by a matter, then the matter becomes an obligation) (Ibn al-Sa‘dī, 2000).

Accordingly, al-Shanqīṭī (1426H) explains that Western civilisation has undeniably achieved developments that have never been reached by other civilisations before, generating beneficial and detrimental products. The condition of the Islamic world today, which is lagging and defeated by Western civilisation, points to their weak state, a situation that can be considered a rebellion against the law of Allāh. The reason is that Allāh has commanded the Muslims to be strong in various fields and become leaders in this worldly life (al-Anfāl: 60). In contrast, weakness, dependence, and the absence of equipment and strength denotes weak adherence to the command of Allāh as He said, “So beware of those who go against His command” (Sūrah al-Nūr: 63). The above messages of the Qur’ān show that there are two main commands given by Allāh, namely: to prepare with strength and to thrive forward, together with adhering to spiritual ethics (al-Shanqīṭī, 1426H).

### **The Importance of Worldly Knowledge**

It is permissible, and there is no harm for a Muslim to preoccupy himself with worldly knowledge that benefits the community, even when he learns or acquires it to benefit himself in this worldly life. Beneficial knowledge, directly related to religion or not, is generally noble. The sources or channel of knowledge (*asbāb al-‘ilm*) as understood by the Muslim scholars is not only the revelation (the Qur’ān and ḥadīth) that came through the Prophet p.b.u.h., which can be categorised under accurate report (*khabar ṣādiq*). Other than revelation, accurate report also acknowledges widely accepted reports (*mutawātir*), or “report that is established upon the tongues of people of whom reason cannot conceive that they would purpose together on a lie” (al-Attas, 1988, p. 66). In addition to accurate reports, there are two other channels of knowledge, namely the senses (*al-ḥiss*: sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch) and reason (*al-‘aql*) (Ramli, 2020). Therefore, the doors of knowledge are limited to purely religious matters and other matters related to nature and human beings.

Importantly, religious knowledge is far more critical. Therefore, one should acquire it alongside other beneficial worldly knowledge as much as possible. By so doing, one will be among those the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) said: “Whoever Allāh wants good for him, Allāh will make

him understand about the religion” (Al-Bukhārī, 1997, p. 98; Vol. 1, ḥadīth no. 71; Muslim, 2007, p. 254-255; Vol. 5, ḥadīth no. 4956).

Suppose a person learns his religion diligently and simultaneously acquires knowledge such as medicine or manufacturing; this will benefit him and humanity. In this regard, scholars asserted that learning beneficial worldly knowledge, which brings advantages for the benefit of the ummah, is considered among the communal obligations (*farḍ al-kifāyah*) that the Muslim community must discharge. Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyah (1428H) said:

Among those, the people needed a group that specialised in agriculture, the weaving industry, and manufacturing. With that, the leader has the right to obligate them to do so with the appropriate wages, as the public interest is only fulfilled by doing so. That is why a group of the companions of Imam Aḥmad and al-Shāfi‘ī said that learning these industries is an obligation at the community level to meet the sufficiency of the people’s needs; these include the obligation of washing and shrouding the deceased body, as well as the various types of public and private services in which the interest of ummah is not held upright except with fulfilment of such communal obligations. (p. 337)

He further continues:

Even the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) sometimes performed specific duties by himself, and sometimes, he delegated some of them far and unreachable to others. The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) portrayed so when he appointed ‘Attāb ibn Asīd to care for affairs in Makkah. For Ṭāif, he sent ‘Uthmān ibn Abī al-‘Āṣi al-Thaqafī, while for the people of ‘Uraynah it was Khālīd ibn Sa‘īd al-‘Āṣi. He delegated ‘Alī and Mu‘ādz ibn Jabal and Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī to Yaman. Hence, as he sent others to lead some wars, which he did not join, he also sent several officers for amwāl al-zakāt, collecting them from those who met the necessary wealth criteria and distributing them to those who deserved it. They went back to Madīnah, only the whip with them. They did not come with any money except they knew where the right place to put it. (p. 337)

Despite the various opinions of scholars regarding the communal obligation to acquire worldly knowledge that benefits the ummah, Muslims need to discern between beneficial and harmful knowledge.

They should also distinguish between Western civilisation's positive and negative aspects, and the benefits and potential harms of its materialistic and organisational strength to safeguard themselves from its detrimental effects. All these contradicting outcomes result from its moral degeneration and rebellion against the law of Allah, which is the main reason underlying the detrimental side of Western civilisation. Once humankind disconnects itself from the Creator, who grants them the sights, guides them from darkness to enlightenment, and protects them from the oddities of their acts that dazzle their minds, nothing will be left beneficial for them in this world.

The study of worldly knowledge is important as it can offer numerous insights. Nature and its elements, including human beings, serve as signs pointing to the existence and oneness of Allah. Nature can be likened to a "Great Book" that, when "read," can bring one closer to the Creator (Zarkasyi, 2018). Understanding nature is intended to lead to the recognition of the proper place of its various elements, ultimately facilitating the recognition of the place of Allah in the order of existence, thereby aligning with the Islamic definition of knowledge (al-Attas, 2018, pp. 13-19).

### **Boko Haram's Perspective on Beneficial Worldly Knowledge**

#### *The Boko Harām Movement and Their Ideology: A Brief Background*

The Boko Harām insurgency started in Borno State, northeast of Nigeria, in 2009. In the Hausa language, "Boko Harām" refers to the rejection of Western education. So, the word "Boko Harām" translates literally to "Western education is prohibited." The name follows the movement's perception of the pervasive economic disparities between those in power and the general citizens, which led to utter destitution amid abundance. The movement concluded that the government's imposition of Western education was to blame for their hopelessness and that it should be replaced with something more appropriate. They believed that because Sharia law would be just and transparent, it would be a superior alternative to democracy (Pham, 2012). The movement's specific, overt emphasis on education is noteworthy. It exists "to an unusual degree among peer movements," despite some analysts' claims that "Boko" in the Hausa language refers to more than just Western education for Boko Harām. Instead, they claim that it more broadly refers to "people who operate within Western-style frameworks and institutions" or "Westernised people" (Thurston, 2018).



However, it is essential to note that the “Boko Harām movement” officially names itself “Jamā’ah Ahlu al-Sunnah li al-Da‘wah wa al-Jihād,” which means “Association of the People of Sunnah for Da‘wah and Jihād,” (Arabic: جماعة أهل السنة للدعوة والجهاد). Therefore, it does not think that its movement is “Boko Harām” (Western education is forbidden). However, since its fundamental doctrine is the prohibition of worldly education, the Nigerian government has given it the term “Boko Harām” movement.

Establishing who founded the Boko Harām movement is difficult because different researchers have provided conflicting accounts. However, one likely acceptable assertion is that Muḥammad Yūsuf became the leader in 1997 after Lawan Abūbakr left for further studies in Saudi Arabia (Omale, 2017). However, Boko Haram’s ideology was unknown to the community in 1997; their concept emerged only in 2009.

Undoubtedly, Muḥammad Yūsuf’s indoctrination of his followers with his ideology or philosophy is the main reason for popularising the «Boko Harām» movement. According to Omale (2017) and Aworawo (2017), Muḥammad Yūsuf was detained in 1998 and 2005 due to allegations that he radicalised his adherents through his sermons and disrupted peace and order. In Borno State in 2009, the group went on rampage and set fire to police stations and government buildings in revenge for police crackdown on some of its members for disobeying the order to wear helmets. The police slew Muḥammad Yūsuf after being taken into custody in July 2009 (Cook, 2018). Since then, the “Boko Harām” movement’s evil deeds have made Northeastern Nigeria a grisly scene.

#### *Violent Phase of Boko Harām in Nigeria*

Boko Harām launched its terrorist assaults through kidnapping, the senseless murder of unarmed civilians, and the bombing of mosques, churches, and schools, which exposed their claim to be a group of the People of Sunnah for Da‘wah and Jihād. In 2014, Boko Harām kidnapped 276 Chibok government secondary schoolgirls. As a result, abduction methods have continued unabatedly, primarily targeting young men, women, and girls. Young boys were radicalised and recruited into combat forces, while young girls were indirectly forced into marriage with Boko Harām militants. According to a report, Boko Harām has



killed over 20,000 civilians since 2009, including an unknown number of women and children (United Nations, 2015).

According to the education authorities in Nigeria, 338 schools in the States of Borno, Adamāwa, and Yobe were destroyed or damaged between 2012 and 2014. In 2015, Michael Olukoya, national president of the Nigerian Union of Teachers, claimed that 600 teachers had perished at the hands of Boko Harām militants (Nneka, 2015).

It is imperative to note that attacks on school facilities scared away many parents from sending their children to school and thereby exacerbated the problem of out-of-school children existing in the northeast of Nigeria. Continued Boko Harām attacks led to varying degrees of physical and mental health problems. Some of those who survived the explosion of the bombs may spend the rest of their lives with physical disabilities. In contrast, others will have to deal with the psychological anguish brought by seeing the atrocities committed by the Boko Harām rebels (Nneka, 2015).

### **Boko Harām’s Perspective and Justification for Rejecting Worldly Knowledge**

Muḥammad Yūsuf, the leader of the Boko Harām movement, is said to have drawn inspiration from the divisive Islamic preacher Muḥammad Marwa, better known as Maitatsine, who forbade reading any books but the Qur’ān. In a 2009 interview, Muḥammad bin Yūsuf expressed his opposition to not only Western education but also to the theory of evolution, the idea that the Earth is spherical rather than flat, and the notion that rain is produced by “evaporation caused by the sun” rather than being directly created and sent down by Allāh, as stated in some Qur’ānic verses (Nneka, 2015).

From this vantage point, we can infer that some Western theories and several other concerns that are superficially or substantially in conflict with the glorious Qur’ān and the teachings of the Prophet p.b.u.h. are the fundamental causes of Boko Harām’s total rejection of worldly knowledge.

One might, however, concur with it that any theory or body of knowledge clearly in conflict with the Qur’ān or the authentic Prophetic Sunnah is to be discarded in Islam. Allāh explicitly stated in the Qur’ān: «Follow, (O Muslims), what has been revealed to you from your Lord,

and do not follow other than Him any allies.» [al-Aṣṣāf 7:3] And Allāh added [al-Nisā 4:65], «Swear by your Lord that they will not be true believers until they seek your arbitration in all matters on which they disagree among themselves, and then find not the least vexation in their hearts over what you have decided and accept it in willing submission.» However, this does not justify Boko Harām prohibiting the beneficial parts of worldly knowledge that are acceptable and permissible to be acquired in Islam. Prophet Muḥammad p.b.u.h. provided several examples during his life, demonstrating how important it is for Muslims to acquire and use beneficial worldly knowledge and skills to meet their diverse requirements.

Boko Harām is highly skilled at employing technologies in all its operations. Modern knowledge undoubtedly brought about these technologies that it rejects entirely or asserts as prohibited in Islam. Its ideology is obviously in conflict with this practice. Therefore, the Boko Harām insurgents have embraced this erroneous ideology to the extent of taking arms against society to acquire worldly knowledge and attend Western education. In the following discussion, this study clarifies how Islam propagates beneficial worldly knowledge from an Islamic point of view by highlighting some practical examples mentioned in the Qurʾān and the Prophet's Ḥadīth.

### **Comparison and Clarification**

It is pertinent for Muslims to uphold their spiritual tradition and divine etiquette in obedience to Allāh while benefiting from these worldly treasures and strengths. Thus, Islam emphasised maintaining its divine teachings and spiritual etiquette without abandoning worldly development in all fields. Even if that progress is the product of the human mind, produced by the unbelieving and libertine minds, as was the leader of humanity, our Prophet p.b.u.h. has shown us the way through his actions and doings.

Historically, when combined forces besieged the Muslim army in the Battle of Khandaq, the military siege laid a tremendous historical record in Qurʾānic verse:

“[Remember] when they came at you from above you and from below you, and when eyes shifted [in fear], and hearts reached the throats, and you assumed about Allāh [various]

assumptions. There, the believers were tested and shaken with a severe shaking.” [al-Aḥzāb: 10-11]

Noteworthy, when this military siege happened, Salmān al-Fārisī said to the Prophet p.b.u.h., “In Persia, whenever we were surrounded, we would dig a trench to protect ourselves” (al-Tabari, 1997, p. 8). Military trenches are among the strategies of war, and the mind that first came up with this idea was from Persian people who were Zoroastrians or “fire worshippers.” Interestingly, the Prophet p.b.u.h. at the time did not consider that military plan which originated from the infidels as nasty and filthy. Instead, he took the idea and used it in his worldly affairs.

Similarly, when the enemy wanted to kill him, he was forced to leave his homeland and migrate to Madīnah, where all the people were at war against him; he and his companion were coerced to stay in a cave to run from the polytheists (*mushrikīn*), as portrayed by Allāh: “When they were in the cave, he told his companion, “Do not grieve; indeed, Allāh is with us.” (al-Tawbah: 40).

Henceforth, the Prophet p.b.u.h. met an infidel named ‘Abdullah ibn al-Arqaṭ al-Du’alī, who knew about all the roads and paths between Makkah and Madīnah. He took the Prophet p.b.u.h. to the side of the sea and brought him through an unusual path until they safely reached Madinah (Ibn Hishām, 1990; al-Tabari, 1988). The Prophet p.b.u.h. provided a clear example for us for not regarding his infidelity as a barrier to benefiting from his knowledge and expertise. The Prophet p.b.u.h. is the most pleased servant of Allāh, and he held steadfast to the divine manner and spiritual discipline in the light of the religious teaching.

Likewise, the Prophet p.b.u.h. had once been concerned with prohibiting intercourse for a breastfeeding mother (*ghīlah*). The Arabs believed that having sexual intercourse with a wife who is breastfeeding would bring harm to the mother and the child as well. However, he changed his mind after hearing from the Persians and the Romans that they used to do it without any harm to their children, and he took their experience into account (Muslim, 2007, pp. 87-88; Vol. 4, ḥadīth no. 3564).

Islam is a religion of knowledge in every field of life and a religion of strength, not stagnation or rigidity, but rather striving, strength, jihad,

and advancement. Islam leads human life and enlightens them through its teaching and illumination to bring goodness in both aspects of life, in this world and the hereafter. Allāh the Almighty has enjoined the relationships of people in this world and the hereafter; He explained to them what would bring happiness in this worldly life and how to have an eternal happy life after death. Thus, every Muslim should know that the religion of Islam is a religion that urges people to strive and progress in life while maintaining obedience and worship (*'ubudiyyah*) to Him. Because this universe has a creator who created it, and He is the King of justice, He does not leave people in vain. He commands and forbids them, and there is no means except to obey His orders and follow His paths, and verily His rules and laws for humanity are nothing except the best of this world and the hereafter. Allāh says: “And the word of your Lord has been fulfilled in truth and justice” (al-An‘ām: 115). This verse verifies the truthfulness of His revelation, by which all His rules are of justice, and everything that He legislates for humanity is the best-governing human conduct (al-Shanqīṭī, 1426H).

Likewise, al-Bukhārī (1997, p. 88; Vol. 3, ḥadīth no. 1913) and Muslim (2007, p. 144; Vol. 3, ḥadīth no. 2511) narrated from Ibn ‘Umar that the Prophet p.b.u.h. has said: “We are an illiterate nation; we neither write nor know calculation. The month is like this and this, i.e. sometimes of 29 days and sometimes of 30 days.” The ḥadīth implies that the ummah of the Prophet p.b.u.h. does not need to resort to writing or astronomical calculations to know the times of their worship, as with other nations. According to Ibn al-Battal, the ḥadīth implies that Muslims are not required to master sciences such as Mathematics or Astronomy to decide times for their religious activities such as fasting (al-Aynī, 1427H). Simple and clear natural indications are sufficient for that religious purpose and are not less valid than elaborate calculations produced by experts in Arithmetic and Astronomy. He then quoted Ibn Taymiyyah, who argues that what the Prophet means in the above narration is that Islam does not enjoin its followers to write or calculate as in the case of *ahl al-kitāb* (People of the Book) because their specific times and periods for fasting are only known through calculation and writing, and because their religion is closely related to their holy book in a way that without that book and the ability to utilise it they would not have known their religion.

It is important to address that the Prophet's saying does not indicate the prohibition of learning sciences and calculations. According to Ibn Taymiyah, "illiteracy" in the ḥadīth does not imply ignorance. It is not blameworthy – as some people think – that Sharī'ah does not prohibit learning the sciences and arithmetic or other beneficial worldly knowledge. The above Prophet's saying, "We are an illiterate nation," cannot be seen as a command (*talab*) from the Prophet because the Arabs were already illiterate before the emergence of Islam as indicated in the Qur'ānic verses Al-Jumuah: 2; and Āli 'Imrān: 20. The Prophet's saying also does not imply that they must remain in that condition (illiterate), even though they may continue practising specific rulings in Sharī'ah based on that ḥadīth. There is no indication in the ḥadīth that writing and calculation are forbidden, and the ḥadīth may be understood as mere information (*ikhbār*). Illiteracy is a shortcoming and not a quality of perfection. Therefore, the ḥadīth will be better understood as an excuse for the illiteracy of the Arabs and as an indication that their condition is forgivable rather than furnishing that state with praise (Ibn Taimiyyah, 2005).

The Prophet's saying above does not mean that the Arabs cannot read and count. Some of the companions of the Prophet, such as Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali, Zayd, and Mu'awiyah, can read and write, and the Prophet assigned them the task of writing. They also knew how to calculate the dates and calendar, as mentioned in the Qur'ān, "so that you may know the number of years and account [of time]" (Sūrah Yūnus verse 5 and Sūrah al-Isrā' verse 12). However, most of the Arabs at that time could not read and write, nor did they have advanced mathematical knowledge, which is usually found in developed societies. Therefore, some of those who could read and do arithmetic are generally considered part of the illiterate Arab society.

The word *ummī* (unlettered or illiterate) comes from the same root as *ummah* (nation). It refers to someone not distinguished from others by knowing how to read or write. It is like the word *āmmī*, which describes a regular person (one of the *āmmah* or masses) who is not distinguished from them by having knowledge they do not have. It is also said that the word *ummī* is connected to the word *umm* (mother) because one has learned no more than what his mother taught him. The distinction which takes a person out of the regular situation in society into a group of people with specialised knowledge may be a virtue – like the case of

those who read the Qur'ān and understand its meaning – if he uses that knowledge for good causes that deserve praise. The one who neglects or uses it for evil purposes is condemned.

The word *ummī* has two meanings. The first meaning is illiterate, as mentioned earlier, and the second meaning is not having a scripture like the one possessed by Ahl al-Kitāb, namely the Jews and the Christians (al-Faruqi, 2005). Both meanings are plausible for the term *ummī* for the Arabs. The Prophet p.b.u.h. was sent to the Arabs, through whom his message was conveyed to all the other nations because it was sent in their tongue. They were mostly illiterate and had no specialty of knowledge or scripture, although, naturally, they were more ready to learn than other nations. They were like a plowed field ready to be sown, but no one was to do the task. They had no scripture revealed from Allāh for them to read, as the People of the Book had, or any inductive-analytical sciences like the Sabians (one of a group mentioned in the Qur'ān as entitled to Muslim religious toleration along with Jews and Christians and usually identified with the Mandaeans or the Elkesaites) and others had. Writing existed among them but to a minimal extent. They had some knowledge of the type that is acquired by instinct but which does not make an individual distinct from any other unlettered person; for example, knowing of the Creator, and they held good, noble characteristics and ethics, and they had some knowledge of astronomy, genealogy, and poetry. So, they deserved to be called unlettered in all senses of the word, as Allāh Almighty said concerning them: “He is Who sent among the unlettered ones a Messenger (Muḥammad) from among themselves” [al-Jumu'ah 62: 2] and “And say to those who were given the Scripture (Jews and Christians) and to those who are illiterates (Arab pagans): Do you (also) submit yourselves (to Allāh in Islam)?” [Āli 'Imrān 3: 20].

The unlettered or illiterate were described as opposite to the People of the Book, for the *kitābi* (one of the People of the Book) is something other than the *ummī* (unlettered). When the Prophet was sent among them, it became obligatory for them to follow the book he brought, ponder its meanings, understand it, and act upon it. Allāh has made this book as an explanation for all things, and their Prophets taught them everything, even the etiquette of defecation. After that, they became people of books and people of knowledge. Indeed, they became the most knowledgeable of people and the best of them in beneficial knowledge.

Thus, the feature of shortcomings and inadequacy due to illiteracy, which is the lack of knowledge and writing, ceased from them as they gained knowledge of the book and wisdom. They inherited the book, as Allāh said in *Sūrat al-Jumu'ah* 62:2 about them.

They were an unlettered nation in every sense of the word, but when He taught them the book and al-Hikmah, Allāh said concerning them:

Then We gave the book (the Qur'ān) as an inheritance to such of Our slaves whom We chose (the followers of Muḥammad). Then of them are some who wrong their ownelves, and of them are some who follow a middle course, and of them are some who are, by Allāh's Leave, foremost in good deeds (Fātir 35:32).

And this is a blessed Book (the Qur'ān) which We have sent down, so follow it and fear Allāh (i.e. do not disobey His Orders), that you may receive mercy (i.e. saved from the torment of Hell). Lest you (pagan Arabs) should say: "The Book was sent down only to two sects before us (the Jews and the Christians), and for our part, we were unaware of what they studied." Or lest you (pagan Arabs) should say: "If only the Book had been sent down to us, we would surely, have been better guided than they (Jews and Christians)" (al-An'ām 6:155-157).

Moreover, Allāh answered the prayer of *al-Khalīl* (Ibrāhīm) for them when He Almighty said:

Our Lord! Send amongst them a Messenger of their own (and indeed Allāh answered their invocation by sending Muḥammad), who shall recite unto them Your Verses and instruct them in the book (this Qur'ān) and al-Hikmah (full knowledge of the Islamic laws and jurisprudence or wisdom or Prophethood) ([al-Baqarah 2:129).

Certainly, did Allāh confer [great] favour upon the believers when He sent among them a Messenger from themselves, reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom, although they had been before in manifest error (Āli 'Imrān 3:164).

So, there are different kinds of illiteracy, which are ḥarām, *makrūh*, and kinds which are shortcomings and avoiding them is better. A person who does not know how to read al-Fātiḥah or any part of the Qur'ān is called



by the jurists in their discussion on daily prayer as *ummī* (unlettered), the opposite of whom is a *qārī* (one who reads or recites). They say that it is improper for an *ummī* to lead a *qārī* in prayer. However, it is permissible for an *ummī* to lead another *ummī* in prayer. They discuss other issues of the same nature (Ibn Taimiyyah, 2005, Vol. 25). What they mean by *ummī* here is that he cannot read what is necessary (for worshipping), regardless of whether he can write and calculate.

This illiteracy also includes neglecting what is obligatory, for which a man will be punished if he can learn but does not. There is also the kind of illiteracy that is blameworthy, such as that which Allāh described in the case of the People of the Book when He said, “And there are among them (Jews) unlettered people, who know not the Book, but they trust upon false desires and they but guess” (al-Baqarah 2:78). The verse describes one who does not understand the word of Allāh or act upon it; all he does is recite it. Al-Hasan al-Basri said: “The Qur’ān was revealed to be acted upon, so recitation implies acting upon it” (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1985, p. 137).

The *ummī*, in this sense, may read the letters of the Qur’ān, but he does not understand it. When he speaks about knowledge, he speaks superficially, based on conjecture. This type of *ummī* also deserves to be blamed, just as Allāh condemned him for his lack of knowledge in obligatory matters, whether it is *farḍ ‘ayn* (obligatory on everyone) or *farḍ kifāyah* (obligatory on the community but not on everyone). There is also the kind of ‘illiteracy’ which is better, such as the one who only reads a part of the Qur’ān and only understands some parts of it. He does not understand except for matters related to him and does not know about Sharī‘ah except for what is made obligatory for him. Such a person is also called *ummī* (illiterate), and others who are bestowed with knowledge about Qur’ān and practising it are better than him.

These matters which distinguish a person are virtues. If a person fails to attain them, he misses out on something that is obligatory either on him as an individual (*farḍ ‘ayn*) or obligatory on the community (*farḍ kifāyah*) or *mustahabb* (recommended). These attributes of perfection and virtue may be attributed to Allāh and His Prophets in general terms. Allāh is All-Knowing and All-Wise, and He combines knowledge and beneficial speech in all He wants, tells, and wills. A similar thing is true of His Prophets and our Prophet, the leader of the knowledgeable and wise people.



Several conditions for the distinctive features are meant to attain virtues. Sometimes, one can do without them and use alternative means, such as writing and calculation, and not attaining them is not blameworthy. If a person does not have these abilities, knowing that virtue cannot be achieved without them, then not having them is a sign of imperfection. If a person acquires them and uses them to perfect himself – like the one who learns how to read and then uses that to read the Qur’ān and read helpful books or write other things that will benefit people – then this is a virtue in his case. However, if he uses it for purposes that will harm himself or other people – like the one who reads misguided books or writes things that will harm people, like forging the writing of rulers, judges, and witnesses – then this will be bad for him and will be a sin and imperfection. As a result, it is preferable to avoid learning or acquiring knowledge in such a way that one harms himself or his community. We need to attain perfect knowledge with reasonable means. Allāh said about His Prophet p.b.u.h., “Those who follow the Messenger, the Prophet who can neither read nor write (i.e., Muḥammad) whom they find written with them in the Tawrat (Torah) and the Injil (Gospel)...” (al-A’rāf 7:157).

The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) being unlettered does not mean he lacked knowledge or the ability to recite by heart, for he is the leader of all imāms. Instead, what it meant was that he was not able to write or read anything that was written, as Allāh said of him, “Neither did you (O Muḥammad) read any book before it (this Qur’ān) nor did you write any book (whatsoever) with your right hand...” (al-‘Ankabūt 29:48).

Not knowing how to write yet managing to attain its utmost objectives (from writing) is his greatest virtue and greatest miracle (*mu’jizah*) since Allāh has taught the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) without any intermediating book is a *mu’jizah* for him. It was only when the element of falsification and alteration started to happen that the Prophet taught his ummah about al-Kitāb and al-Ḥikmah without the need to write them (the revelations) down for himself. Meanwhile, most of his great companions, the four caliphs and others write them out of need since they were not given any revelation as the Prophet did. So, their literacy became a means of perfection for themselves. In contrast, for others who do not write, it is considered lacking or imperfect, as virtue from the revelations could not be accomplished without writing. Back to the

discussion about the Prophet's saying about illiteracy, Ibn Taymiyah (2005, Vol. 25) says:

Thus it becomes crystal clear that the "illiteracy" mentioned here is a characteristic which is praiseworthy in several senses: firstly in terms of dispensing with writing and calculations in favour of something clearer and more apparent, namely, (sighting) the new moon, and secondly, in the sense that writing and astronomical calculation here may involve error or mistake, and thirdly, for resorting to them (writing and astronomical calculation) require many efforts and thus distancing from other beneficial things, since they are meant for other purpose and not intended for the writing and calculation itself (p. 166-174).

### Conclusion

To conclude, we notify here that the scholars have classified the obligation of learning beneficial knowledge for ummah as a communal obligation, which is commanded upon the community and made sufficient if a group of people performs that. The Qur'ān commands the Muslims to prepare themselves as best they can to become strong and not be overrun by other nations. It must be done in every required field and not only related to purely religious matters. Likewise, the Prophet p.b.u.h. showed several examples of beneficial worldly knowledge and skills necessary for Muslims to learn and use to fulfil their various needs.

As a result, it is apparent that Allah SWT is the source of all beneficial knowledge. His Revelation is the ultimate source of knowledge for humans, providing insight into both transcendent truths and tangible realities. Thus, Islamic scholars have classified knowledge into four types: theoretical and practical, personal and acquired, Religious and intellectual, and individual and communal obligations. Any worldly knowledge that the ummah needs and on which its survival depends—such as medicine, agriculture, manufacturing, etc.—is considered a *farḍ kifāyah*. If the seeker's goal and intentions are to serve and benefit the Muslim ummah and humanity in general, support it, elevate its status, and make it self-sufficient from disbelieved nations.

Finally, neutralising the young generation's beliefs (*aqīdah*) is essential. Ideology continues to be the primary source of support for Boko Harām's supporters because it is a significant factor in the

recruitment process. In many ways, ideological conflicts are more crucial than physical ones, and when an ideology is overthrown, an insurgency withers and dies.

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5. A short running title of not more than 40 characters should also be included.
6. Headings and sub-headings of different sections should be clearly indicated.
7. References should be alphabetically ordered. Some examples are given below:

### **Book**

In-text citations:

Al-Faruqi & al-Faruqi (1986)

Reference:

Al-Faruqi, I. R., & al-Faruqi, L. L. (1986). *The cultural atlas of Islam*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

## **Chapter in a Book**

In-text:

Alias (2009)

Reference:

Alias, A. (2009). Human nature. In N. M. Noor (Ed.), *Human nature from an Islamic perspective: A guide to teaching and learning* (pp.79-117). Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press.

## **Journal Article**

In-text:

Chapra (2002)

Reference:

Chapra, M. U. (2002). Islam and the international debt problem. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 10, 214-232.

## **The Qur'ān**

In-text:

(i) direct quotation, write as 30:36

(ii) indirect quotation, write as Qur'ān, 30:36

Reference:

*The glorious Qur'ān*. Translation and commentary by A. Yusuf Ali (1977). US: American Trust Publications.

## **Ḥadīth**

In-text:

(i) Al-Bukhārī, 88:204 (where 88 is the book number, 204 is the ḥadīth number)

(ii) Ibn Hanbal, vol. 1, p. 1

Reference:

(i) Al-Bukhārī, M. (1981). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.

(ii) Ibn Ḥanbal, A. (1982). *Musnad Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*. Istanbul: Cagri Yayinlari.

## **The Bible**

In-text:

Matthew 12:31-32

Reference:

*The new Oxford annotated Bible*. (2007). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Transliteration of Arabic words should follow the style indicated in ROTAS Transliteration Kit as detailed on its website ([http://rotas.iium.edu.my/?Table\\_of\\_Transliteration](http://rotas.iium.edu.my/?Table_of_Transliteration)), which is a slight modification of ALA-LC (Library of Congress and the American Library Association) transliteration scheme. Transliteration of Persian, Urdu, Turkish and other scripts should follow ALA-LC scheme.

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