

FADEL
INTEGRATED ISLAMIC CURRICULUM
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION¹

Introduction to Religious Education

The primary goal of an Islamic curriculum is to produce committed, practicing Muslims, who love *Allah* and His prophets, who willingly strive to worship *Allah* in the best manner, and who actively try to fulfill their role as vicegerent on earth. Although this goal is to be reflected in every subject, it is in the subject of religious education that every aspect of this goal must be attended to.

The challenge for Islamic schools today is to provide an education that will fit the needs of modern Muslims. There are at least four problematic areas that need to be examined carefully in order to have a suitable religious education curriculum. The areas are secular vs. religious; intellectual vs. behavioral, positive vs. negative and acquiescence vs. critical thinking. Our Religious Education Curriculum takes all of these areas into careful consideration.

Secular vs. Religious

The current trend in Islamic schools is to use the local or national secular curriculum, with an added course or two for religious education and Arabic and/or *Qur'an*. Our approach is to start from the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, building up from Islamic principles for each subject. Where appropriate, excellent and applicable academic material has been injected. One of the results of this has been that much of what is

traditionally found in the religion class, has been moved into other subjects. For example, the history of the prophets, including Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is now primarily located in the History curriculum. Biographies of important Muslims are found in English, and Muslim contributions to science and mathematics are found in those subjects.

The Religious Education curriculum itself was begun by identifying eight major goals. Every goal was then broken down into general objectives. The next step was to identify the *Qur'anic* concepts that will lead to these goals. More than fifteen religious scholars (from every continent) then began developing these almost one hundred concepts according to the definitions and principles inherent in them. They tried to identify the actions that pupils can be asked to do to demonstrate these concepts, and the possible results to themselves and to society at large if these concepts were absorbed into their lives.

The next step in developing this curriculum was to identify appropriate *Qur'anic* *ayat* and sound *hadiths* that help explain each concept. Stories of the *sahaba* or other Muslims that illustrate the concept were also added, as well as material to make the concept relevant to real life. This last step directed us to careful consideration of the area of Intellectual vs. Behavioral.

Intellectual vs. Behavioral:

Traditionally the aim of the religious studies class is to teach the material that Muslims need to know. Every detail of how to pray is memorized, as are the details of

¹ This curriculum is approximately half completed. Much work remains to be done to develop the concept

zakaat and *haj*; every detail of the Prophet Muhammad's life, from the names of his family to the names and dates of his battles is memorized and so on. In order to make sure that the pupils remember this information, it is repeated every year. In the best of the classes, new details are added to the core every year, so that in the sixth year, for example, beside reviewing past lessons on *salat*, they will also learn to memorize prayers for special occasions like *eid*, and funerals.

There are at least three problems with this approach. Firstly, so much repetition means that there isn't time to introduce other important concepts. Secondly, pupils become easily bored, and don't pay attention because they know they will be getting the same material the next year. And thirdly, and most importantly, memorization of information has little relationship to internalization of knowledge leading to proper behavior. The FADEL curriculum therefore stresses understanding **why** *Allah* asks us to do certain things, or to act in certain ways. Memorization is reserved for material that the pupils will need instantaneously, such as *ayat* and *hadiths* on controlling one's anger, and preaching to people in the most gracious manner. Details on paying *zakaat*, performing *haj* and distributing inheritance can be researched and read when the person is actually going to use that information much later as an adult.

The religious education class must be interesting, with a variety of things taught. It must be relevant to the pupils' lives, addressing their immediate needs and concerns, and help them deal with the issues in their lives. It must help them apply what they have learned in class to their daily living. It must direct their attitude toward life. This curriculum aims to develop: honest, steadfast, thinking, and generous Muslims;

Muslims with high self-esteem, courage and creativity to change this world for the better;

Muslims who unselfishly strive to strengthen and unite the *ummah*.

Muslims for whom Islam is the only way of life.

Muslims who will strive to follow Islamic principles in every aspect of their life.

Positive vs Negative:

Children are born in a state of Islam, and their Muslim parents keep them on that path to a greater or lesser degree. When these children enter an Islamic school at an early age, it is safe to assume that they are believers in *Allah*, and that they want to please their parents (at least most of the time). This is the nature of young children. As they reach adolescence they may begin to question what they have been taught, or what they have witnessed or participated in. At this stage, they may have doubts as to the existence of *Allah*, or the existence of a true and unchanging guidance, or the necessity of always doing what *Allah* wants, rather than acquiesce to their self desires. It is necessary to take the different stages of psychological development of the child into consideration when developing a curriculum.

The *Qur'an* is a powerful blend of positive and negative reinforcement. Much of the *Qur'an* is a warning to those who do not believe in *Allah*, and a warning to those who think they can follow their own desires. Directed as it is mainly to adults, the message contains graphic mention of what happens to those who choose a path other than what *Allah* has chosen for us. Adults attending *jumaa* prayer on Friday are also called to account with dire warnings of punishment for wrong deeds. As an adult, man is capable

of independent reasoning, and capable of making errors which will lead him into Hell. As a child, he is not.

The child who errs, is forgiven and taken to heaven if he dies in childhood. He does not need to know at a young age, what punishments he can expect as an adult. Instead, he needs to know of the mercy and love of *Allah* which guarantees him heaven at his age. He needs to be presented with the characteristics of *Allah* which will give him security and assurances as he grows and encounters fearful unknowns. He needs to be aware of the overwhelming number of blessings *Allah* has given to him to help him enjoy and cope with his life. And he needs to understand what *Allah* wants him to do that will result in *Allah* being pleased with him, rather than worry over punishment for mistakes he knows he will commit.

In developing the curriculum, positive aspects of Islam are presented to the younger children, and it is only as they enter adolescence that the punishment and negative concepts are brought to the forefront. This does not mean that punishments and negative concepts are never mentioned, but that the emphasis is on the positive for the younger children.

Acquiescence vs. Critical thinking:

Curriculums throughout the world are being challenged to include critical thinking in their subjects. In 1997, over two thousand educators, representing every continent, attended an International Conference on Creative and Critical Thinking, in Singapore. It was convened by the Singapore Ministry of Education which had discovered that although their pupils ranked number one in the world on mathematics and sciences test

scores, the pupils were unable to apply what they had learned to new or different situations. In other words, they learned that there is little point of memorizing if you cannot apply that learning to real life situations. This is exactly our challenge in the Religious Education of our youth. The FADEL curriculum takes seriously the challenge of helping pupils understand the difference between revealed knowledge, and humanly acquired knowledge, between what the *Qur'an* says that is unarguable, and unchanging, and what scholars over time have said, trying to apply that knowledge to a certain, changing situation. Over and over again in the *Qur'an*, *Allah* asks us to consider, or think about creation, and about the actions of people throughout time. Our challenge is to help the pupils think wisely and thoroughly. They should not meekly acquiesce to whatever they are taught even though it may in reality be reflective of a non Islamic culture. They should be able to question and analyze from where information is coming, and how is it to be applied, according to Islamically derived critical thinking skills.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Goals

1: *To learn to love Allah and His prophets, and to love whatever Allah loves and to dislike whatever Allah dislikes, and willingly behave in a way pleasing to Allah.*

Pupils should find religion a positive, motivating force in their lives.. They should be morally strong, and morally conscientious rather than acting out of fear, or from mindless repetition. This behavioral pattern, introduced during the formative stages of childhood, becomes entrenched as ‘personality’ which is carried through to adulthood. Therefore, the

Religious Education classes should present the subject in an attractive manner, presenting Islam using the best of methods and materials.

2: *To understand the fundamental Islamic beliefs, obligations, injunctions and prohibitions and to gain whatever other knowledge is necessary in order to live an Allah conscious life.*

The first goal emphasizes the desired attitude of the pupils. This second goal emphasizes the importance of knowledge. The pupils must be taught what the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* contain, in order to know how to worship *Allah*. This goal covers the subject matter found in most religion classes, including *Ibadat*, *Aqida*, *Moamilat*, *Adab*, *Akhlaq* and *Sirah* of the Prophet (peace be upon him). However, in order to “strive” or consciously worship *Allah* with the courage of conviction, the student must understand major concepts and themes in the *Qur'an* as well. Pupils must also learn to understand and respect the differences of opinion among Muslim scholars, and understand how to deal with them in a tolerant and non divisive manner.

3: *To learn critical thinking skills, and the proper role of thinking, in terms of wahy and human acquired knowledge.*

Learning to be committed Muslims involves awareness of the different sources of knowledge, and appropriate responses to generate knowledge from these sources.

4: *To involve pupils in actively synthesizing their Islamic beliefs with their actions, to put Islam into practice.*

The first goal emphasizes attitude, the second emphasizes knowledge, the third, critical/reflective thinking, and this goal emphasizes **action**. Pupils should evidence the courage of their conviction, every day and in every way. Not merely content to perform

the required acts of worship, they will look for ways in which they can apply faith in their daily behavior and future activities.

5 *To nurture the Islamic personality through good understanding of oneself and the special qualities Allah has given to each, and one's corresponding obligations to the ummah and humanity at large*

Pupils should have an understanding of themselves, and appreciate the qualities Allah has given them, and then think how to best contribute to humanity . They must have an understanding of the individual, the family, the society and the physical environment in order to know where their help is most needed.

6 *To develop an understanding and appreciation of the creation Allah has put in our care, from knowledge of physical and biological sciences to environmental concerns*

Every Muslim, *Allah's khalifah* on earth, must be knowledgeable about the natural sciences, the human sciences and the art of communication. Although the bulk of this knowledge will be gained in other classes, the interrelatedness of man, knowledge and the universe as part of a Divine pattern of natural law needs to be emphasized in religious education. It is important to understand the ecology of Allah's creation. Muslims must live harmoniously with all of Allah's creation, keeping the balance between use and exploitation.

7 *To understand the characteristics and responsibilities of leadership from enjoining good and forbidding evil on an individual basis, to ruling with compassion as Allah's vicegerent on earth.*

Not only should the pupils appreciate the qualities that Allah has blessed them with, but they must understand what it means to act as Allah's vicegerent. What are the responsibilities and characteristics of this type of leader (*imamah*)?

8: *To understand and appreciate the diversity of human life as it is manifested in various social, ethnic, cultural and religious expressions.*

The student must understand that diversities enrich human experience. Pupils should learn to appreciate the rights given by Allah to people, to free choice in accepting religious commitments without undermining the unity of truth. They should learn the value of and benefit from different gender roles, different occupations, and culturally different ways of doing things.

Most, if not all of our pupils are, or will be, living in a religiously pluralistic society. In order to safeguard their own faith, and realize the importance of sharing that faith with others, they must be familiar with the basic tenets of the faiths of others, and how they agree and differ from true Islam. They should be familiar with the four major Sunni *madhabs* in order to understand that the differences are not major and should not result in divisions among Muslims.

General objectives

- 1.1* To understand the concept of *Tawhid*, and its positive role in one's life
- 1.2 To love whatever *Allah* loves and to dislike whatever *Allah* dislikes
- 1.3 To be aware of the obligations towards *Allah*
- 1.4 To recognize the prophets as true servants of *Allah*, whose examples should be followed

- 1.4 To recognize the Prophet Muhammad as the seal of prophets and the best model for humanity
- 1.5 To make the commands of *Allah* and his prophet the basis of individual and collective action
- 1.6 To purify one's heart of all evil thoughts and intentions, thereby developing self esteem and identity
- 2.1 To familiarize the students with the fundamental Islamic beliefs, obligations, injunctions, and prohibitions
- 2.2 To familiarize pupils with major Islamic concepts of *Allah*-man relationship
- 2.3 To familiarize pupils with Islamic concepts dealing with the relationship of man to man, including the areas of social, economic and political life.
- 2.4 To enable pupils to develop an Islamic personality/identity based on Islamic values & principles
- 2.5 To explain fully the inseparable relation of faith with action
- 2.6 To understand the *Quran* and *Sunnah* sufficiently, thematic analysis as well as *ulum al Qur'an* and *ulum al hadith*, in order to find guidance from these sources
- 2.7 To understand that greater knowledge leads to greater appreciation of *Allah's* blessings and creations
- 2.8 To enable the students to understand the commonality and differences between Islam and other belief systems so as to appreciate the truth and beauty of Islam
- 2.9 To understand the wisdom of worship
- 3.1 To develop knowledge and understanding of what *Wahy* (revelation) is, the importance of total, unreserved acceptance of it, and its place in the total scheme of knowledge.
- 3.2 To develop knowledge and understanding of what acquired knowledge is, and its relationship to *Wahy*, and mankind's relationship to each.
- 3.3 To develop critical thinking skills that can be applied to acquired knowledge. These skills will also be taught in other subjects, such as history, English, science and math.

- 3.4 To develop an understanding of the proper use of critical thinking skills in the area of religious studies.
- 3.5 To develop an appreciation for true Islamic scholarship through the study of persons such as the sahaba, the collectors of *hadiths*, the founders of the major schools of thought, and other major scholars.
- 3.6 To understand how Prophet Muhammad acted in terms of daily living and making common real life decisions such as who to be friends with, how to deal with people who are ridiculing you, etc.
- 4.1 To involve the students in real life activities that will encourage them to be actively involved in putting their faith into action.
- 4.2 To stress the importance of validating their faith by their behavior and actions, through study of appropriate *Quranic* references and *Sunnah* and lives of the *sahaba*.
- 4.3 To develop sense of responsibility
- 4.5 To understand the positive concept of *Qadar*
- 4.6 To emphasize the concept of Reward more than that of Punishment.
- 4.7 To stress the importance of time management, seriousness, and industriousness
- 4.8 To stress the importance of fulfilling obligations
- 4.9 To introduce the concept of cause and effect
- 4.10 To encourage the view that a Muslim is a person of optimism and high aspirations
- 5.1 To understand that *Allah* does not burden a person beyond what he can bear
- 5.2 To understand how *Allah* prepares each person to have a positive role in life
- 5.3 To understand the responsibilities, rewards and punishments in this world and hereafter of each person.
- 5.4 To memorize *ayats*, *surahs* and *hadiths* that will help one to deal well with whatever comes one's way throughout life.
- 5.5 To develop strong, self disciplined Muslims

- 5.6 To understand that different roles are given to different persons but all roles are equally important
- 5.7 To develop an eagerness to do ones best in whatever task one has, from studying, and being a son or daughter, to being *Allah's* vicegerent on earth.
- 5.8 To be willing to participate in the activities of Muslims from all cultural backgrounds
- 5.9 To emphasize the importance of cooperating for the common good, even when it is not progressing in a self satisfying manner.
- 6.1 To understand the relationship between man and earth, according to the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, putting emphasis on protection of the environment, especially plants and animals.
- 6.2 To understand the benefits of accepting this responsibility
- 6.3 To understand the consequences of ignoring or willfully acting against this responsibility.
- 6.4 To understand how man, knowledge and the universe are all part of a Divine pattern of natural law.
- 7.1 To understand the Islamic definition of leadership (*Imamah*) according to *Quran* and *Sunnah*
- 7.2 To understand the different kinds of leadership: of group, of family, of prayer, of thought, of nation, as vicegerent of Allah's earth.
- 7.3 To understand that leadership is a Trust (*Amanah*), entailing responsibilities, limitations, and accountability
- 7.4 To understand that leadership involves compassion, fairness (*Adl*) and attention to the needs of others.
- 7.5 To understand one's rights and duties as a citizen of a country, and as a member of the *Ummah* at large
- 7.6 To develop tolerance and ability to participate effectively in society.
- 8.1 To understand and appreciative the similarities and differences between Muslim cultures.
- 8.2 To understand and appreciate major similarities and minor differences between the four main schools of Islamic thought.

- 8.3 To understand the value of and benefit from different gender roles and different occupations
- 8.4 To understand the basic tenets of different belief systems, in order to appreciate the essential quality of Islam.
- 8.5 To be introduced to some belief systems which have diverged from Islam and to learn how to deal appropriately with the differences.

(*The first number refers to the goal, the second to the objective. Therefore 1.1 is the first objective of the first goal, 2.1 is the first objective of the second goal, and so forth.)