



Shaping Islamic Education to Build Muslim Youth for the Challenges of 21st Century Life

5. Dismantling the Lure of the Secular Liberal Way of Life and System

Our Muslim children live in a world today where they are surrounded by the claims and promises of secular liberal governments and media. They are continuously sold the lie that the secular system and liberal way of life is the path to happiness, empowerment and success and the means to establish a tolerant, just, and fair society as well as ensure stability and prosperity for all. These glittering illusions regarding the secular liberal way of life and system need to be dismantled to our children, to prevent them from being dazzled by the false lures of the corrupt liberal values, enticed into the western liberal lifestyle, and becoming advocates of the secular non-Islamic system.

This requires us to counter the lie that the secular liberal way of life represents the best system for them or mankind, by highlighting the falsehood and flaws of its doctrine and ideas, as well as the multiple problems that its laws and values cause for individuals, societies, and the world.

Firstly therefore, we need to explain that the founding principle of the secular ideology that believes that religion should be detached from life's affairs, and that human beings rather than God should decide how to organize the laws and system of a state is flawed. This is because it did not arise from a deep process of thought regarding the true nature and purpose of life, nor is it based on a sound conclusion as to whether God or man is best suited to define how human beings should live and how the affairs of a society should be ordered. Rather, it was born from a compromise between the Christian clergy and the so-called thinkers of western society due to the oppressive nature of the Church's authority over the people. The truth regarding whether divine law or human law was best to govern human beings was therefore pushed aside for the sake of appeasing the two opposing parties and preventing conflict and bloodshed in the state. A doctrine based upon a reactionary compromise rather than a sound rational judgement based upon a deep reflection on who created this world and therefore has the right to define how it should be organized, should not be the basis of how a state or even an individual's life is ordered. Indeed, the whole system of life, its values and laws which arise from a belief based on compromise rather than the truth will inevitably be flawed and doomed to failure.

Secondly, we need to expose the flaws and problems of dominant secular and liberal ideas which are championed today and which our children are told they need to embrace to be good citizens of their society, such as democracy, the liberal freedoms, nationalism, and gender equality. We need to show them that contradictory to popular belief, such concepts in actuality are not the means to create a just, fair, safe, and harmonious society. This is alongside explaining to them that they contradict the Islamic belief.

(i) Democracy:

The true nature and negative societal impact of *democracy* where human beings rather than God decide the laws of a state and which today is promoted as the savior and solution to many of the ills of a society needs to be explained to our youth. For instance, we need to show them that although democracy claims to be a system which is from the people and for the people, in reality it is a system where legislation and political actions are highly influenced by a wealthy political elite and shaped according to their interests. We see for example, how the taxation system in capitalist secular states benefits the rich rather than the poor, and how capitalist governments bailed out the multibillion dollar banks during the economic crisis, while small businesses and ordinary citizens were left at the mercy of the market or subjected to severe austerity cuts resulting in financial ruin and unemployment.

Furthermore, how can any system based upon laws from the weak, limited and fickle minds of human beings ever be a sound one, nor be superior to the One defined by the Creator of the universe? Rather, man-made laws will always have contradictions, be biased towards one group of people over another, be filled with hypocrisy, and be subject to change where rights and basic moral principles are discarded based on the whims of those in power. We see for example how in western democratic states, the consumption of alcohol which intoxicates the mind and causes huge health and societal problems is legal while drugs which cause a similar effect are prohibited. We also see within democratic states, the imposition of discriminatory laws against Muslims such as khimar, niqab and minaret bans which contradict democratic values such as freedom of belief. And we also see in such states the introduction of counter-extremism and terrorism laws which violate individual privacy, freedom of expression and permit detention without charge, and which have therefore overturned previous rights linked to such matters. Hence democracy is a fickle unpredictable system, where justice is temporary and subjective based on those who rule. This is therefore a dangerous system with regards to safeguarding the rights of individuals, and it lays the doors open for the majority to oppress the minority. In addition, any man-made system will never be able to solve human problems, rather it will approach issues from a trial and error basis. This explains the political economic, healthcare, education, social, and moral crisis afflicting democratic states the world over which democratic governments are clueless of how to resolve.

But most importantly, this democratic system where human beings and their laws are made sovereign over those of the Creator, contradicts Islam, for the Deen states that Allah (swt) is sovereign over all things and He (swt) alone has the right and ability to legislate laws for mankind. He (swt) says,

﴿إِنَّ الْحُكْمَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ أَمَرَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

“Indeed, the Hukm (rule) is only for Allah. He has commanded that you worship none but Him, that is the (true) straight religion, but most men know not.” [Yusuf: 40]

(ii) Liberal Freedoms:

With regards to the liberal freedoms, which promote the idea that individuals should have the right to live their lives according to their own whims and desires, and that right and wrong should be defined according to what brings the individual pleasure or benefit, their contradictions and dangers to society should be explained. For instance, in many western liberal societies, freedom of speech allows individuals to insult the Qur’an and the Prophet (saw) but expressing support for the resistance to occupation in Palestine or Afghanistan could result in a prison sentence under anti-terror laws. We also see that sexual freedoms are promoted in liberal societies which allow individuals the right to have multiple partners out of marriage, while polygamy is prohibited.

Moreover, our children need to understand the multiple social and moral disasters that result from the liberal way of life. For example, the epidemic of drugs, alcohol abuse, bullying, gangs, anti-social behavior, gun-crime and other criminal activity that plagues liberal societies today are caused by liberal values that promote a self-gratifying lifestyle and pursuing ones desires no matter the consequences. Sexual freedoms have encouraged men to view and treat women as their whims dictate, and allowed their exploitation and sexualization in entertainment and advertising, degrading their dignity and contributing to the high levels of violence and sexual harassment against women which afflicts liberal societies East and West. Such liberal freedoms have also spurned a culture of promiscuity and huge levels of teenage pregnancies outside marriage, abortions, sexually transmitted diseases, single mothers and adultery resulting in the breakdown of marriages and families.

Furthermore, freedom of speech has not been restricted to civilized debate or discussions between individuals or accounting those in authority but has permitted

politicians, the media and others to insult, degrade and demonise others and their religious beliefs. This has fueled division and hatred between communities, and often led to violence against minorities as seen in Europe, the US, Canada and many other Western liberal states. And finally, freedom of ownership and the free-market economy, which enables individuals to generate wealth with few restrictions, including engaging in interest-based finance, and allowing the hoarding of wealth and privatization of basic public necessities such as oil, gas and water, has generated mass poverty and unemployment globally, and caused recent and past economic crises. They have crippled economies, burdened them with huge interest-based debts, and favoured the rich over the poor. And they are responsible for the massive inequality in wealth, and crumbling education and healthcare services across the world – all of which has crushed the dreams of many Muslim youth for a good standard of life.

Islam however, rejects such liberal freedoms, for in the Deen, the actions of the believer is based upon the Commands of Allah (swt) and not his or her whims or desires. Allah (swt) says in Surah Al-Furqan,

﴿أَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ أَفَأَنْتَ تَكُونُ عَلَيْهِ وَكِيلاً * أَمْ تَحْسَبُ أَنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ أَوْ يَعْقِلُونَ إِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلاً﴾

“Have you (O Muhammad) seen him who has taken as his ilah (god) his own desire (Hawah)? Would you then be a Wakil (disposer of his affairs) over him? Or do you think that most of them hear or understand? They are only like cattle; nay they are even farther astray from the Path.” [Al-Furqan: 43-44]

(iii) Nationalism:

Nationalism which promotes pride in one’s country and loyalty to one’s nation, even over one’s religious faith is a concept that is heavily promoted to our children today in schools, textbooks, the media and society generally. They are also taught that the implementation of national borders and the organization of people into nation states that look after the national interests of their people regardless of the needs of those from other countries, is the best way of governing the affairs of this world, including in the Muslim lands. We find for example, that celebrations for independence days that mark the end of direct colonial rule in certain Muslim countries or the establishment of an ‘independent nation state’ is highly promoted by schools, colleges, universities and governments in the Muslim world. The authorities therefore try their utmost to instill nationalism and incite patriotic fervor in our Muslim children today.

However, we need to instill within our young how corrupt, dangerous, redundant and un-Islamic the idea of nationalism and patriotism is. For instance, having strong pride in one’s country is an extremely divisive concept which is dangerous for the harmony of any society. It has the potential of breeding racism, hatred and violence towards those of other nationalities. We see this with the rise of far-right ultra-nationalist movements in Europe, the US, India and other states today and the danger their ideas pose to the cohesion and harmony of those societies. Furthermore, nationalism dehumanizes individuals, where they become blind or indifferent to the suffering of those from other nations due to being concerned over their own selfish national interests. We see for example, how nation states have responded to the refugee crisis, or the bloodbath in Syria, or the genocide against the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and other humanitarian crises. Such states have refused to step in to protect the oppressed and persecuted as its not in their ‘national interests’ to do so. Or they have rejected the most vulnerable and helpless people, including children from entering their lands or refused them rights of citizenship, due to being concern about the economic impact on their nation, while ignoring the depth of human misery on their doorsteps. Alongside this, the existence of national borders in the Muslim world has meant that there are lands which are suffering from dire poverty, while neighbouring countries are drowning in wealth; there are lands which are suffering from famine while neighbouring

countries have plentiful food; there are lands suffering from drought, while neighbouring countries have an abundance of fresh water; and there are lands where the people are being occupied or slaughtered, while neighbouring countries have strong armies and immense weaponry to liberate them from their plight but they refuse to do so due to the nationalistic systems implemented by the regimes in their countries which makes them turn a blind eye to the suffering of their own brothers and sisters outside their national borders.

Moreover, nationalism, or pride in one's nation or tribe is a concept that Islam abhors. The Messenger of Allah (saw) said,

«لَيْسَ مِنَّا مَنْ دَعَا إِلَى عَصَبِيَّةٍ وَلَيْسَ مِنَّا مَنْ قَاتَلَ عَلَى عَصَبِيَّةٍ وَلَيْسَ مِنَّا مَنْ مَاتَ عَلَى عَصَبِيَّةٍ»

“The one who calls for ‘asabiyyah (nationalism) or who fights for ‘asabiyyah or who dies for ‘asabiyyah is not one of us.”

On one occasion, a group of disbelievers tried to disunite the Muslims in Madinah who were originally from the Aus and Khazraj tribes. They tried to remind them of their tribal history and the battle of Bu'ath where the two tribes fought against each other. As a result, some Muslims became on the verge of fighting one another. When the Prophet (saw) heard this, he was furious and said,

«يَا مَعْشَرَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ! اللَّهُ اللَّهُ، أَبَدَعُوا الْجَاهِلِيَّةَ وَأَنَا بَيْنَ أَظْهُرِكُمْ بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَاكُمْ اللَّهُ إِلَى الْإِسْلَامِ، وَأَكْرَمَكُمْ بِهِ، وَقَطَعَ بِهِ عَنْكُمْ أَمْرَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ، وَاسْتَنْقَذَكُمْ بِهِ مِنَ الْكُفْرِ، وَأَلَّفَ بِهِ بَيْنَكُمْ؟!»

“O Muslims remember Allah, remember Allah. Will you act as pagans while I am present with you and after Allah has guided you to Islam and honoured you thereby and made a clean break with paganism; delivered you thereby from disbelief; made you friends thereby”.

When the Muslims heard this, they wept and embraced one another. Allah (swt) then revealed the following verse,

﴿وَاَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَى شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ﴾

“O you who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared and die not except in a state of Islam. And hold fast all together by the Rope of Allah and be not divided amongst yourselves; and remember with gratitude God's favour on you for you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace you became brother; and you were on the brink of the pit of fire and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah make His signs clear to you that you may be guided.” [Al-i-Imran: 103]

Therefore in Islam, allegiance is not to one's country but to Allah (swt), meaning that loyalty is to His (swt)'s Commands over all else. Pride is not in one's nation but in one's Deen and great Islamic heritage. And the bond between believers is not based on what land they were born or live in but rather the Islamic Aqeeda alone which obliges Muslims to always protect and help one another against oppression and suffering, no matter how far the distance between them.

(iv) Gender Equality:

The western concept of gender equality is also a secular idea which is intensively promoted to our children, especially to Muslim girls. It is presented as a universal value that all societies, no matter their creed, should adopt and the path to ensuring respect and the wellbeing and empowerment of women as well as fairness between the sexes. However, we need to ensure that our Muslim youth are not fooled by such flowery language because in reality gender equality a flawed and irrational concept that has caused so many problems for women, family life and societies across the world. In addition, it is a concept that the Muslim woman should view as extremely dangerous as it erodes her identity as a Muslimah and

servant to Allah (swt).

“Gender Equality” is not simply the call for women to have the same rights of citizenship as men, such as access to education, employment, the vote, a political voice, justice and equal pay to men. These are only part of what the concept calls for. The idea of gender equality is based on the belief that men and women should have the same rights, roles, opportunities and responsibilities in family life and society. This is the reason why certain Islamic marital and social laws, where there are differences in the rights and duties defined for men and women – such as the Islamic dress, polygamy, male guardianship over women, and inheritance and divorce laws - are labelled by feminists and secularists as oppressive, discriminatory, and disrespectful to women because they are at odds with gender equality.

What our children should understand though is that the concept of gender equality is full of contradictions. For instance, even the word ‘gender’ represents the difference between men and women, while ‘gender equality’ promotes ‘sameness in rights and roles. In addition, gender equality tries to ignore the blatant fact that there are obvious physical distinctions between men and women: pregnancy, childbirth, and suckling being the obvious ones, which will naturally reflect differences in the way men and women organize their family and public lives. This means that true gender equality where there are equal numbers of women in various professions will never exist due to the commitments required of particular jobs which are impractical for many women running a busy household and fulfilling heavy family responsibilities.

Furthermore, the concept of “Gender Equality” has failed to overcome the widespread harassment, violence, exploitation and discrimination (including in pay) that women face within societies that have enshrined numerous gender equality provisions into their laws for decades. This is because simply having equality between men and women in roles and rights is not an automatic guarantee for respect and protection of women. Rather, the good treatment of women depends on the values of that society and the views that they generate towards women. And in capitalist liberal societies, liberal values have degraded the status of women.

But alongside all this, any concept that undermines the appreciation of the differences between men and women can lay the path to injustice. For example, gender-neutral laws that do not recognise the obvious differences between the sexes may result in employers expecting the same commitment at work with respect to time and physical activity of women who are pregnant or have young children. Furthermore, as a consequence of gender equality, many women today are burdened with the strain of being both the breadwinner for the family (traditionally a male role) as well as managing most of the household and child-rearing duties. It also placed pursuing a career above the woman’s traditional role of homemaker, leading to the devaluing of motherhood which has had a detrimental effect on family life and the rights of children. The lack of time spent with children due to both parents working demanding jobs has contributed to the problem of anti-social behaviour amongst the youth and dysfunctional parent-child relationships.

Most importantly though, “Gender Equality” is not a concept contained within Islam because in Islam, the man or the woman do not define their rights, roles and duties based upon their own desires and interests but upon the Commands of Allah (swt). The Muslim man and woman understand that although they may like to adopt a certain right or role that Allah (swt) has given to the other sex, they accept that He (swt) as the Creator of mankind knows best. Allah (swt) says,

﴿وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَى اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ

ضَلَالًا مُبِينًا﴾

“It is not (fitting) for a believer, man or woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter that they should have any option in their decision. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he has indeed strayed in a plain error.”
[Ahzab: 36]

Furthermore, Allah (swt) does not prescribe laws based on equalizing the rights and responsibilities of men and women, but rather in accordance to what is best for the human being and for society and family life overall. Therefore, in certain areas of life, the rules and roles are the same for men and women and in some issues they are different, based on creating harmony in marriage, family life and society. One right or role is not above another but all are essential for the effective functioning of communities. Allah (swt) says,

﴿وَلَا تَتَمَنَّوْا مَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهِ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ لِّلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا وَلِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَسَبْنَ وَاسْأَلُوا اللَّهَ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا﴾

“And wish not for the things in which Allah has made some of you to excel others. For men there is allotted from what they have earned (and likewise) from women there is allotted for what they have earned. (Envy not one another) but ask Allah of His bounty. Lo! Allah is ever Knower of all things.” [An-Nisa: 32]

And finally, unlike secular history, Islam never embraced the view that gave rise to ‘gender equality’ in the west: that the intellect and worth of men was superior to women. Rather it defined both genders the same in their human nature and status, as well as prescribing them the same political, economic, judicial, and educational rights of citizenship. The Prophet (saw) said,

«إِنَّمَا النِّسَاءُ شَقَائِقُ الرِّجَالِ»

“Assuredly, women are the twin halves of men.”

Engaging in this discussion with our children, regarding the true reality and fall-out of the secular liberal way of life and system, will Insha Allah dismantle its lure and dazzle in their eyes and prevent them from embracing and supporting its values and ideas. They should be able to see clearly that this system has not created the fair, just, tolerant, respectful, safe and harmonious society claimed by those who advocate it but rather generated a mountain of problems for humanity. By appreciating this point, our youth will Insha Allah recognize the vital need to have an alternative system to organize the affairs of mankind; a system that truly understands the nature and needs of the human being, and is based on the laws from the One Who is unlimited in His Knowledge and All-Aware of every matter, the Creator of the Universe. And that alternative system is Islam.

﴿وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَعْمَالُهُمْ كَسَرَابٍ بِقِيعَةٍ يَحْسَبُهُ الظَّمَانُ مَاءً حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَهُ لَمْ يَجِدْهُ شَيْئًا﴾

“As for those who disbelieve, their deeds are like the mirage in a desert, which the thirsty man deems to be water; until when he comes to it he finds it to be nothing...”
[An-Nur: 39]

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