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Book Review

Islam as Education

Pedagogies of Pilgrimage, Prophecy, and Jihad

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BOOK REVIEW: *ISLAM AS EDUCATION, PEDAGOGIES OF PILGRIMAGE, PROPHECY, AND JIHAD*

Salih Yucel*

Ghiloni, Aaron J. *Islam as Education: Pedagogies of Pilgrimage, Prophecy, and Jihad*. Lenham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2019, pp. 210, AUD 110, 978-1-9787-0759-7.

The pedagogy of education is important to understand how knowledge is attained. Many valuable ideas are lost as a result of not presenting information through the right methods, in a timely manner and by the right people. *Islam as Education, Pedagogies of Pilgrimage, Prophecy, and Jihad* presents universal morals of education using different historical, philosophical, educational and spiritual expressions and metaphors to create curiosity in the reader's mind.

Aaron J. Ghiloni did not merely write a book, but crystallises a unique methodology of intellectual writing, particularly for non-Muslim scholars and educators who study and write about Islam. He contextualises love of education according to our time by marrying knowledge and love. Ghiloni focuses on “*faqri fakhri*” (my poverty is my pride), which was a “motto” of *Ashab al-Suffa*, the People of Bench, in Prophet Muhammad's mosque in Medina. This motto is important in today's context as it can minimise scholarship egoism. Such egoism can be a trap in modern day scholarship, where knowledge for the purpose of fame can be the underlying intent as egoism is wrapped with knowledge then presented to people. Self is the rider and knowledge is the horse for achieving worldly aims. The message that can be deduced from Ghiloni's scholarly work is that knowledge and the heart should be the master, while the self is the rider.

Through “Islam and education” a scholar and educator can discover the ‘self’ and build a moral educational identity. Ghiloni masters the philosophy of leading Muslim philosophers and some Western scholars by injecting the universal values of education without neglecting traditional scholars' ways of thought in Islam as well as the foundation of Western pedagogy. He successfully builds bridges between East and West in comparing the scholarly works of education in Islam with some Greek philosophers and Western scholarship. The educational philosophy of John Dewey (1859–1952), who characterised education, and John Renard, who portrays Muslim spirituality as “divine pedagogy,” are two examples.

The book conveys a message that, no matter a scholar's genius, one should think and say, “I do not know, God knows best.” Also, Ghiloni asserts an excellent teacher is humble and

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serves humanity via education, without expecting a reward. The book reminds scholars to be like soil, which everyone steps on, but is the source for most of the products that humankind needs.

I found Ghiloni is like a bee, which collects pollen from every flower. He sought the wisdom of educational pedagogy in the East and West, then collected it from anywhere he could find it. His book does not neglect the heart, while also addressing the mind.

The first chapter of the book attracts the reader through the pedagogy of human love with the story of “Laila and Majnun,” a semi-historical Persian story, and the “Conference of the Birds,” in which the author Fakhruddin Attar (d. 1220) uses symbolism and allusions as driving components of the poems. The chapter discusses that love of knowledge, along with curiosity, can lead to Divine love. Ghiloni summarises it in the phrase, “The lover is [the] knower” (p. 8).

Chapter two analyses the correlation between *ilim* (knowledge) and *adab* (ethics) from philosophical, ethical and rational perspectives and discusses how *adab* is essential for civilisational knowledge. The author’s approach to education is a combination of heart and mind, rationality and religion, which are contrary to the secular Western approach to science and knowledge. In *Islam as Education, Pedagogies of Pilgrimage, Prophecy, and Jihad*, science is not divorced from religion but used as a tool to understand the relation between the universe and religion. Furthermore, Ghiloni argues that Islamic education is not monolithic but pluralistic.

Chapter three revolves around Isma’il al-Faruqi’s (1921-1986) statement, “To study the cosmos is to study revelation.” Ghiloni does not neglect Western scholars’ criticism and Orientalists’ depiction of the traditionalist educational approach of Islam (pp. 36-39). Educated Muslims are not schooled in Islamic sacred text only but also in secular sciences. The author tries to create balance between the two camps – Orientalists and traditional Muslim scholars – regarding changing or not changing.

The introduction to Part II makes the distance shorter between contemporary Chicago and historical Nishapur for gaining knowledge. It also establishes bridges between great theologian, philosopher and mystic al-Ghazali’s (d. 1111) philosophy and Dewey’s preeminent educational philosophy.

Chapter four mainly examines the *rihla* tradition in Islamic history, which signifies a journey in pursuit of learning. It discusses the *adab* of seeking of knowledge. It highlights the destination of the seeker of every type of beneficial knowledge is not a place but a master scholar. He quotes from al-Ghazali who indicates “The Ka’ba circumambulates around the traveller for knowledge rather than the traveller around the Ka’ba” (p. 65). The places of seeking knowledge were Mecca, Medina, Kufa, Baghdad, Bukhara and Nishapur like today’s London, Boston, Paris, Tokyo, New York and Berlin. The reader imagines themselves as a traveller with those who sought knowledge. Just as studying at an Ivy League university is a source of pride in today’s context, chapter four shows that travelling to gain knowledge under leading scholars was an honour in the classical period of the Muslim world. The author

correlates between teaching and spiritual life by stating, "... if the spiritual life is like a journey, journeys teach of spiritual life" (p. 63).

Chapter five summarises scholars' role in defending knowledge in Western terms as "... bore the scars of intellectual gladiatorship" (p. 78). The greater jihad of scholars is to strive for knowledge, even if it is a lifetime risk of being martyred. He quotes from Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 1350), "by confronting others with evidence and clear proofs" (p. 86). The chapter analyses Dewey's life during the two world wars and how he strived for democracy and education. The chapter revolves around the philosophy that protecting knowledge is more important than protecting the land from enemies.

Chapter six prepares a teacher or student pedagogically for hardship and suffering by giving the example of *Ashab al-Suffa* (People of Bench), which comprised poor residents in the dormitory next to the Prophet's mosque. They were not indebted to anyone because of having a very simple life. Ghiloni outlines the chapter in two words as "*faqri fakhri*" (my poverty is my pride). Similarly, the author analyses how Dewey left a mark on education.

The conclusion explores three education-oriented discourses, which provide practical tools for realising the Quranic ethic of religious pluralism (p. 145). A learner is a seeker of wisdom and wherever they find it, they can get it. The "final chapter is not so much a conclusion but a consequence," Ghiloni says (p. 156).

It can be said the author paves the way for building bridges between the educational philosophy of Islam and enlightened philosophy of the West akin to a canal between two seas. This book also engages East and West via knowledge and wisdom.

I imagine Ghiloni considered himself to be a student who was presenting his homework through a time tunnel to the many great scholars of the East and West, past and present in an Ivy League university's hall. He loved what he was presenting. His statement, "Islam does not just want you as a friend; Islam wants you as a student" (p. 157) illustrates lifelong learning. However, Ghiloni uses translations of some primary Arabic sources. If primary Arabic sources could have been used, it would have greatly enriched the book.

Overall, *Islam as Education: Pedagogies of Pilgrimage, Prophecy, and Jihad* sheds light on the discipline of educational pedagogy by injecting wisdom into a universal language of teaching. The book can be a handbook for any teacher or educator who believes in educational values. This book can trigger more research in the field of educational pedagogy.

I will finish with the reminder Ghiloni provides throughout the book: "God knows best."