

110419 - Specialties in scientific and technological fields, the ummah's need for them, and guidelines and advice thereon

the question

In light of the fast-paced world in which we live, what the ummah is going through of trials and calamities, what every Muslim hopes for of seeing these calamities lifted from the ummah, for which every Muslim is prepared to strive hard to raise the ummah in status, and as we believe in the importance of specialisation, and we believe that everyone should play a role in striving to help the ummah to advance in various fields, my question is: What are the most important area in regular fields or narrow specialties, that the ummah needs during the upcoming stage, or as a strategic plan for the next twenty years? Are there any books or websites that discuss this issue and lay out a plan for the future?

Detailed answer

There are many issues and guidelines that we need to bear in mind when discussing the branches of knowledge that are essential for the Muslim ummah, including the following:

1. Undoubtedly the Muslim ummah needs its members to be pioneers in both humanities and sciences, and it should not be dependent on other nations in that regard. Islam is the religion of knowledge, and Allah, may He be exalted, began His revelation to His Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) with the word: “Read (Iqra’).” Islam urges people to seek knowledge, highlights the high status that knowledge should have among Muslims, and made the learning of different branches of knowledge a communal obligation upon the Muslim ummah.
2. Our advice is that those who want to specialise in a particular field should already have an inclination towards and aptitude for that field. It is well-known that Muslims, like any other people, vary with regard to what they have an inclination towards, and it is better to encourage each of them to pursue the fields in which they are interested and have an inclination towards,

and not to force them to learn something they are not interested in, let alone force them to do something that they dislike.

This matter was discussed by the leading scholars of Islam, both during the classical period and in modern times. In fact they advised that the child should be allowed to learn that towards which he is inclined from an early age (so that he grows up with it), without waiting until he gets older in order to be directed to pursue that field.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Attention should be paid to the child's situation and the aptitudes that he has towards different fields, and what is available to him. Thus we may conclude that he is created for a particular field, so he should not be forced into something else, so long as it is something that is allowed according to Islamic teachings. If he is forced to do something for which he has no aptitude or inclination, he will never succeed in that field, and he will miss out on the opportunity to work in a field for which he has an aptitude. So if (a father) sees that his son has a clear grasp of a particular field and a clear understanding of it, and what he learns of it sticks in his mind, then these are signs that he likes that field and has an aptitude for it, and he will be able to become well grounded in that field, provided that there are no distractions, and he will become well versed in that matter and become established in that field, and then he will be able to progress with it. But if the father sees the opposite of that in all aspects, and instead the child has an inclination towards horsemanship and everything connected with it, such as riding, archery and spear play, and he has no aptitude for seeking knowledge and was not created for that, then the father should let him learn horsemanship and train in it, for that will be more beneficial for him and for the Muslims.

If the father sees that the child is not interested in that (horsemanship) either, and that he was not created for it, and instead he sees that he is interested in some handicrafts, for which he has an aptitude and inclination, and it is a kind of handicraft that is permissible and useful for people, then he should let him learn it.

All of this comes after teaching him what he needs to know of religious issues, for that is easy for anyone to learn, so that Allah may establish His proof and people will be left with no excuse, and Allah is the source of all blessings.

End quote from *Tuhfat al-Mawdood fi Ahkaam al-Mawlood* (p. 243, 244)

Whoever reflects on the stories of the Companions, and sees how the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) helped them to develop their character, will see how accurate what we have suggested above is, as we can see its application in their lives (may Allah be pleased with them). Some of them were well versed in Islamic jurisprudence, some of them became prominent reciters of the Qur'an, some demonstrated their talents in jihad, and some of them became brilliant poets. Each of them did what he was good at, and contributed to the building of the state. Just as Islam could be defended through debate and presenting proof, it could also be defended by the sword and spear. For each of these fields, there are people among the Companions who excelled in it and achieved great things, but all of them had something in common, namely good knowledge of Islam in general, which did not prevent them from specialising in some field or craft.

3. It is essential to differentiate between men and women when setting out guidelines as to what specialisations are best in various sciences and other fields. Some fields that are suitable for men are not necessarily suitable for women. Fields having to do with heavy industry, political matters and military affairs may not be appropriate for women, but there are some fields that may be appropriate for both men and women, such as education, light industry and medical fields; in the field of medicine there may be a specialty that is not appropriate for men, namely gynaecology or women's health.

It is not permissible for men or women to go against the laws of Allah, may He be exalted, when specialising in a particular field and learning it. They should avoid mixing, travelling to non-Muslim countries, and women travelling alone without a mahram. Other matters that are contrary to Islamic teachings include going to a non-Muslim country to study when this study and this specialty is available in the Muslim world.

4. If the Muslim ummah needs specialists in some essential field, then they should choose the right people to undertake that study, and they should not open the door to everyone. So they should not let a young, single man who is lacking in Islamic knowledge go to non-Muslim countries, because that is more likely to make him fall into temptation and confusion, in which case we would lose him and miss out on the purpose for which he went there, and we would not benefit from him at all.

Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azeez ibn Baaz (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

If it becomes necessary to send some students abroad, because there are no specialised colleges or institutes (in our country), especially in the fields of manufacturing and the like, then I think that a committee of people of knowledge and integrity should be formed to choose the right young men who are sound in terms of religious commitment and morals, who have good knowledge of Islam and are very committed to their religion, and to choose a supervisor for this group, someone who is known to have religious knowledge, be righteous, and be active in da'wah, so that he can accompany this group and call people to Allah in that land. At the same time, he can supervise the students, check on them, watch their conduct, and advise them and show them the right way, and discuss with them what they come across of specious arguments or doubts, and so on.

They should have an orientation or training course before they leave, even if it is short, where they can be alerted to problems and troubles that they may encounter, or specious arguments that they may face, in the country to which they are being sent, and they can be taught about the Islamic teachings on those matters, and the wisdom behind Islamic rulings, as indicated in the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), and the views of the scholars, such as rulings on slavery, polygamy in general, the reason why the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) in particular had several wives, the rulings on divorce, the wisdom behind jihad, both proactive and defensive, and other matters that the enemies of Allah usually raise with the Muslim youth, so that they will be fully prepared to refute any specious arguments with which they are faced.

End quote from Majmoo' Fataawa ash-Shaykh Ibn Baaz (1/386-388)

The scholars of the Standing Committee said:

If the situation is as described, that you want to study a specialisation that is available in your Muslim country, and that studying abroad may lead to a lot of negative consequences with regard to your religious commitment and morality, and may affect your wife and children, then it is not permissible for you to travel for the purpose of this study, because it is not necessary to do so when it is available in your Muslim country.

There are many sound reports from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) which warn against living in non-Muslim countries without any legitimate reason, such as when he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “I disavow any Muslim who lives among the mushrikeen”, and other hadiths. What some Muslims have fallen into of travelling to non-Muslim countries unnecessarily comes under the heading of carelessness which is not permissible when it comes to the religion of Allah. This is the result of giving precedence to this world over the hereafter, and Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“But you prefer the worldly life,

While the Hereafter is better and more enduring”

[al-A'laa 87:16, 17]

“Say, The enjoyment of this world is little, and the Hereafter is better for he who fears Allah. And injustice will not be done to you, [even] as much as a thread [inside a date seed]”

[an-Nisa' 4:77].

And the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever is mainly concerned about the Hereafter, Allah will make him focused and content and will make him feel independent of others, and his worldly affairs will fall into place. But whoever is mainly concerned with this world, Allah will make him distracted and unfocused and will make him fear poverty constantly, and he will get nothing of this world except what is decreed for him.”

Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azeez Aal ash-Shaykh, Shaykh 'Abdullah al-Ghadyaan, Shaykh Saalih al-Fawzaan, Shaykh Bakr Abu Zayd

Fataawa al-Lajnah ad-Daa'imah (26/93-96)

5. Finally, there are many fields of knowledge, and in each field there are many specialties. Medicine has many specialties, and for just one part of the body there may be many specialties. The Muslim ummah needs specialists in all permissible branches of knowledge and skills, including medicine, engineering, physics, chemistry, nuclear and atomic science, military fields, heavy industry, and other branches of knowledge and skills, provided that the right field is chosen and provided that it is done for some legitimate or permissible purpose; people must adhere to Islamic teachings whilst learning the specialty, and they must have sufficient knowledge of Islam.

At present, we do not know of any particular book to refer you to.

We ask Allah, may He be exalted, to help the Muslims to do that which He loves and which pleases Him, and to grant them glory and power.

And Allah knows best.