



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
CENTER FOR
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Muslim Education Webinar on Essential Knowledge

PROCEEDINGS

24 November 2021





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About the Proceedings

These proceedings are based on the Muslim Education webinar on Essential Knowledge held on 24 November 2021 via Zoom from 9 AM to 12 NN. Bringing to the fore the classic Islamic knowledge tradition, it specifically highlights discourse on the Islamic concept of knowledge and the primacy of seeking knowledge in Islam. It further elaborates on the classic Islamic sciences and the modalities of Islamic education.

The webinar was organized by the Islamic Studies Program of UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies. Asst. Prof. Nefertari A. Arsad, PhD served as Project Leader and Editor, while Ms. Camille Lucille A. Bello and Dr. Cheery D. Orozco took on the tasks of documenting and writing these proceedings. Ms. Arlene A. Tarroja transcribed the webinar. Apart from standard copyediting, some repetitive phrasings in the Open Forum were deleted, while others were added to remove ambiguity or supply clarity. The latter are included in brackets.

Overview and Presentation of Resource Speakers

Assistant Professor, Nefertari Al-Raschid-Arsad, PhD

*Institute of Islamic Studies, University of the Philippines Diliman
Project Leader, UP CIDS Islamic Studies Program*

Assistant Professor Nefertari A. Arsad, Project Leader of the UP Center for Integrative Studies Islamic Studies Program (UP CIDS–ISP), formally opened the Muslim education webinar, “Essential Knowledge.” She gave a brief overview of UP CIDS, emphasizing that it is the “policy research arm of the University of the Philippines System that has been providing informed insights on various fields and policy implications to governance in the Philippines.” The Islamic Studies Program commenced in 2018 and is designed to provide research and discourse on Islamic civilizational thought and contemporary applications and issues.

Asst. Prof. Arsad went on to discuss the goal of the webinar: to inquire into the foundations of education in the Muslim world, specifically covering Islamic epistemology and the classical Islamic curriculum.

She concluded her overview by introducing Ms. Nur-aine T. Lim, resource speaker on Islamic epistemology. Ms. Lim has a Masters in Development Management degree from the Asian Institute of Management, where she conducted a management research report on an Innovative Primary Education Model for Muslim Mindanao. She has two bachelor’s degrees—a Bachelor of Arts in Islamic Studies from Preston University, Ajman, United Arab Emirates, and a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration majoring in Marketing and MIS from the American University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. Currently, Ms.

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Lim is the Chairman of the Board of Directors and President of Al-Husna Foundation Incorporated, a Zamboanga City-based organization focused on social and educational programs. Ms. Lim is simultaneously directing Al-Husna's ARISE or Arabic and Islamic Education Program.

Islamic Epistemology: Theory of Knowledge in Islam

Ms. Nur-ainee Lim

President, Al Husna Foundation, Zamboanga City

The first resource speaker, Ms. Nur-ainee Lim, tackled the topic of Islamic epistemology, or the theory of knowledge of Islam. She gave a discussion on the nature of knowledge according to the Qur'an and Sunnah (traditions, sayings, practices of the Prophet Muhammad),¹ as well as its hierarchy, sources, and purpose.

Ms. Lim first defined epistemology: it is a “branch of philosophy that deals with questions concerning the nature, scope, and sources of knowledge” (Kvinge 2019, 10). Moreover, it is the study of knowledge acquisition.

She went on to discuss the nature of knowledge in Islam, emphasizing that the first ayah or verse revealed in the Qur'an (The Pen/*al-Qalam* 68:1)² started with the Arabic word, *iqra*, the imperative form of “read.” Reading is the first requisite to learning, and it “opens doors of our hearts, minds, and vision on how we perceive the world around us.” Ms. Lim further explained: “Out of all the words, Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) (Most High) purposefully chose the word, *iqra*. It is a command; an imperative. It is not just an inspiration, but also something that should draw us into action because it is a direct command from no less than the Creator. Islam is the religion of knowledge.

1 It is the model for how a Muslim should act, speak, behave, etc.

2 In the Qur'an, as in the Bible, the name of the chapter or surah is given first, followed by the verse number (*ayat*).

Looking at history, one sees that the European “dark ages” were the ages of enlightenment for Muslims. Those were the years of discovery, of invention. In Islam, knowledge comes before action. Even in the Qur’an, it says, “You have to know what it means to say the *kalima*, you have to know what it means to say, ‘*La ilaha illa Allah*’” (There is no God but Allah) (Those Ranged in Ranks/ *As-Saffat* 37:35; Muhammad 47:19). Knowledge by itself makes one a generous person. It transforms an individual to use it either by making him a better person or encouraging others to seek knowledge.

Ms. Lim the cited most relevant and commonly cited Qur’anic verses to further elaborate on Islamic knowledge.

Allah will exalt in degree those of you who believe, and those who have been granted knowledge (She Who Disputes/al-Mujaadilah 58:11).

Allah commanded His Messenger to seek more of it. Allah says: “and say: ‘My Lord! Increase me in knowledge.’” (Ta-Ha 20:114)

Say: “Are those who know equal to those who know not?” It is only men of understanding who will remember. (The Troops/ al-Zumar 39:9)

Ms. Lim also quoted passages from the hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), which is part of the Sunnah.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “When Allah wishes good for a person, He makes him understand the religion.” (Narrated by Anas bin Malik, Sahih al-Bukhari 69; Book 3, Hadith 11)

The Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “The best of you is the one who learns the Qur’an and teaches it.” (Narrated by Uthman, Sahih al-Bukhari 5027, Book 66, Hadith 49)

Whoever treads a path seeking knowledge, Allah will make easy for him the path to Paradise. (Narrated by Abu Hurairah, Jami` at-Tirmidhi 2646, Book 41, Hadith 2)³

The first verse emphasizes that knowledge raises Muslims in Allah's (subhanahu wa ta'ala) sight—the more you know, the more Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) will be able to put you in certain places of influence where you can touch more lives and make a difference. The second verse speaks about how Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) commanded the Prophet Muhammad (*salla-llahu alaihi wa sallam*, "Peace and blessings be upon him") to seek more knowledge. There is always more to learn, and that in itself is humbling because a seeker of knowledge will instill an attitude of humility; he (or she) can appreciate the variety and the vastness of Allah's knowledge that He gives to whom He wills. The third quoted verse is a question from Allah, emphasizing that knowledge increases and differentiates individuals in a good way. The moment individuals acquire knowledge, it should be transformational, or it might not be beneficial.

Ms. Lim also included three hadiths that speak about knowledge in Islam. According to her, when a person excels not just in the Qur'an, hadith, and Sunnah but also in applying them and encouraging others to see the beauty of Islam in their character, Allah has granted good for that person. In the other hadiths (second and third quoted above), the prophet Muhammad (*salla-llahu alaihi wa sallam*) also says that it is an obligation to go beyond just learning by becoming a source and facilitating others' learning.

Ms. Lim proceeded with her lecture by showing Bloom's Taxonomy (n.d) on the hierarchy of knowledge, which is used as a framework for the [government's] madrasah curriculum and which could be applied to Islamic epistemology. According to her, learning the Qur'an starts with memorizing or remembering, and is to be followed by *tafsir*, where one

3 The hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad are contained in various collections, such as those of Sahih al-Bukhari or Jami' at-Tirmidhi. "Narrated by" signifies that the person concerned first heard it from the Prophet, and passed it on to later generations until it became part of a collection like al-Bukhari's, which was first completed in 846 CE. Sahih al-Bukhari 5027 refers to the 5027th hadith in this collection, and it is found in Book 66, and is numbered 49 within that book.

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is required to understand the Qur'an's meaning. Then, the application takes place when these verses are applied in real life—just as the *sahabah* (Companions of the Prophet),⁴ whom the Prophet Muhammad (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) mentioned, used to memorize ten verses at a time because they wanted to apply them. Afterwards, they evaluated its implications (checking if it was positive or negative). The last aspect of knowledge acquisition is to create, which is done when doing *darwah* (teaching, preaching, missionary work), which facilitates learning. It is done in ways that would fit the audience and modern times.

As the foundations of Islamic epistemology; the Qur'an is the primary fount of knowledge and the Sunnah is its practical interpretation (or even manifestation). Moreover, Shari'ah law⁵ governs the day-to-day life of Muslims. According to Ms. Lim, Muslims need all three, and most importantly, guidance from Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) in order to live.

There are two types of knowledge. One is personally obligatory knowledge called *fard ayn*, which is incumbent on all Muslims. Accordingly, the bare minimum is to know how to pray, the five pillars of Islam, what makes one a Muslim, and the difference between Muslims and non-Muslims. The other type of knowledge is called *fard kifaya*, or communally obligatory knowledge. She explained that as long as people exhibit *fard kifaya*, not everyone has to do it. Ms. Lim expressed that this foundation of Islamic epistemology needs to be underpinned first by the basics of Islam (being a Muslim): its purpose, how to act, and how to make life meaningful on top of being a service to the community.

4 The Companions of the Prophet referred to the individuals who had a close relationship with the Prophet during his lifetime. They were among the first converts to Islam, saw how he lived, heard what he said, stayed with him through his ordeals and conflicts against the Meccans, and helped him govern the fledgling Muslim community in Medina and Mecca. As Companions, they had some semblance of authority over the early Muslim society.

5 Although the phrase, "Shari'ah law," is common, it must be said that the shari'ah encompasses more than the law (or what Muslims call *fiqh*, jurisprudence). Shari'ah signifies the law in its broadest sense (the day-to-day life of Muslims), and thus covers religious ritual, civil transactions, and other aspects that is not equated or associated with law.

A tree diagram was presented about the purpose of knowledge, which consists of *tahwid* (oneness of God), the essence of Qur'an, Sunnah, *ijma* (the consensus of the scholars) and practical knowledge. Ms. Lim expressed that tawhid should be at the root of pursuing knowledge, and that people have to know who they serve and the reasons to keep them grounded. Moreover, she explained that Sunnah guides people on how to act and apply it in daily life.

Ms. Lim discussed several action points for Muslims. The first is recognizing that seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim. She pointed out that “even the hadith says that you have to seek knowledge from cradle to grave.” The second action point is acknowledging that seeking knowledge is a constant journey, and that there is the need for knowledge to truly live. She likens this action point to a popular saying, “We cannot live without water.” Consequently, Muslims have to maximize their time, as life is too short. In addition, Muslims have to return and reflect on their journey in learning about Islam. The third action point is to keep learning every day without exceptions and limits. The next is to acquire expertise where one should “get out of your comfort zone and learn something new.” Another is to give importance to the knowledge of this world and hereafter, and lastly, to start today and be guided by the principles of Islamic epistemology.

Ms. Lim concluded her presentation with the quote, “The price of ignorance is wasted time, effort, and opportunity. The price of knowledge is *jannah* or paradise.” She ended her speech by expressing her gratitude to Dr. Arsad who invited her as a speaker.

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The Classical Islamic Curriculum

Assistant Professor, Nefertari Al-Raschid-Arsad, PhD

Project Leader, UP CIDS – Institute of Islamic Studies

Dr. Arsad discussed various traditions of acquiring knowledge. Drawing on the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and religious scholars, Dr. Arsad highlighted the importance of correct intentions and constancy in seeking knowledge. Muslims ought to seek sacred knowledge to know Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) before pursuing beneficial knowledge. Next, Dr. Arsad also pointed out the importance of constant remembrance and reflection. She asserted that reflection is what "a Muslim must do— reflection on many things, reflection on the signs of God, reflection on the verses of the Qur'an, reflection on the sayings of the Prophet, and reflection on the different prayers and supplications that we are asked to do everyday." Lastly, Dr. Arsad pointed out the importance of having the esteem for knowledge and for those who possess it. Dr. Arsad elaborated on this principle by providing an example: Muslims in the Philippines, who sought knowledge from their gurus, teachers, and parents, placed them in high esteem. Therefore, in order to learn, one has to give service to those who have knowledge.

Dr. Arsad shared a passage from the book of Imam al-Ghazali,⁶ *Ayyuh al-walad* (Advice to a Son)(2004, 7). She claims that the passage "succinctly speaks about correct intentions and what is beneficial knowledge primarily to Muslims."

6 Imam Al-Ghazzali (1058–1111 C.E.) was born Zaynuddin abu Hamid bin Muhammad al-Ghazali in Khorasan, Persia. He was both a religious scholar and a Sufi, who produced classical works on Islamic philosophical thought and epistemology.

O child, how many a night did you spend awake in the pursuit of knowledge and studying books, depriving yourself of sleep? I am unaware of your motivation for it. If it was to attain worldly fame, or to acquire the vanities of the world and achieve rank and position in it, or to boast in vainglorious competition with peers and the like, then woe to you and again, woe to you. However, if your intention was to keep alive the Law of the Prophet (Shari'ah) and to refine your character and to break the desires of the lower self that entices to evil, then hail to you and again hail to you!

Dr. Arsad affirmed that the primary sources of knowledge are the Qur'an and the Sunnah, while secondary sources are the teachings of the leaders of religious knowledge. Among these learned Muslims, she mentioned the *mujtahids*⁷ who proposed and founded the four schools of jurisprudence recognized in the Muslim world: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali. Also included among the learned are the compilers of the hadith, and the religious scholars who provided commentaries on the classical works. Another secondary source of knowledge is consultation with the learned and "the people of remembrance" (The Bee/*An-Nahl* 16:43), who know vastly about Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) and are blessed with wisdom. Finally, the signs of God in creation are also important sources of knowledge. She implored one "to observe and reflect on nature and see how God's power manifests, and from these manifestations, it is expected that we have some learnings and wisdom if not in good character, if not in a manifestation of knowledge and the sciences, then knowledge of the world and the workings of nature."

To further highlight the importance of putting knowledge into practice, Dr. Arsad shared several sayings from Imam al-Ghazzali's *Advice to a Son*.

A man who reads a hundred details of knowledge and studies them, and does not act upon this knowledge, it will not benefit him, unless he puts it into practice. (2004, 4)

7 Encyclopedia.com (n.d.) defines a mujtahid as "someone erudite about Islam, a specialist of religious law, qualified to pronounce an opinion on the law and to interpret it."

If you pursued the acquisition of knowledge for a hundred years and compiled a thousand books, you would still not be ready to receive the Mercy of Allah the Exalted unless you acted upon it. (5)

O child, knowledge without practicing is insane and practice without knowledge is impossible. (8)

Dr. Arsad proceeded to discuss the importance of the benefits of knowledge to others. Accordingly, the Prophet Muhammad (salla-llahu alaihi wa sallam) stated,

When the son of Adam dies, his works come to an end except for three: a continuing charity, knowledge of which use is made, and a righteous child who prays for him. (Narrated by Abu Hurairah, Sahih Muslim 1631, Book 25, Hadith 20)

The most generous of you after me will be a man who acquires knowledge and spreads it. (Narrated by Anas bin Malik, Mishkat al-Masabih 259, Book 2, Hadith 56)

...All creatures pray for the one who teaches goodness, even the fish in the water (Narrated by Abu Umamah, Riyad as-Salihin 1387, Book 12, Hadith 12)

On the effects of sacred knowledge, Dr. Arsad shared passages from the *Book of Assistance* of Imam Abdallah al-Haddad, a scholar from Hadramaut, Yemen:

Know that hastening to acts of goodness, being careful with acts of worship and persevering in obedience, constitute the way of the Prophets and Saints, both at the beginning and end of their affair, for they are the creatures with the most knowledge of God, and it is therefore not surprising that they are the most worshipful, obedient, and fearful of Him (Mighty and Majestic is He!). The attentiveness of a servant is equal to his love for his Lord. Love is consequent upon knowledge: in as much as God's servant grows more knowledgeable of

Him, so also shall he love Him more and worship Him more abundantly. (al-Haddad 1989, 35)

Moreover, she attributed another saying from Imam al-Haddad that knowledge has three rights upon oneself: “One is to seek it, the second is to practice it and the third is to benefit others with it either through teaching or through using it that would benefit others.”

Accordingly, there are modalities of seeking knowledge in the Islamic world. One is mentorship, which is the close and personal interaction with a religious scholar called *shaykh*. A shaykh is known for, and must have, a pious character, quality of scholarship, and age. Dr. Arsad shared that many students in the early ages of Islam (the classical times) would travel to seek a shaykh who would suit one’s purposes for a particular science, and to make sure he was pious, learned, and of sufficient age. One could obtain the following from a shaykh: (1) *riwayah*, or learning from one who has sanad, learning from an established chain of scholarship on the given science; (2) *dirayah*, correct understanding; and (3) *ijazah*, the authority to teach a given science once one has passed the standards of scholarship.

Another modality of seeking knowledge is instruction in mosques. In the Philippines, mosques are usually put up where a community of Muslims could worship and serve as a gathering place. They usually initiate classes on the essentials of Islam which include learning the Qur’an and basic Arabic. Additionally, the more familiar modality is the madrasah system. In classical times, learning commenced in military fortresses, libraries, hospitals, and even beside resting places or graves of scholars.

The classical Islamic curriculum consists of core sciences: *tawhid* (monotheism), *Ulum al-Qur’an* (science of the Qur’an), hadith (Sayings of the Prophet), *seerah* (biography of the Prophet), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), and the Arabic language. Dr. Arsad made mention of Cesar Adib Majul, who elaborated on these sciences in his paper, “The Education of the Muslims in the Philippines.”

The literal meaning of *tawhid* is to establish the uniqueness (and oneness) of Allah. An expression of monotheism, this science

allows people to know the Creator, the Prophets, and their respective attributes. In tawhid, one also knows about the aspects of the Unseen. Tawhid incorporates various nonscriptural ways to defend these tenets from those who do not believe the Islamic textual sources. Furthermore, Tawhid includes the purification of the self. Dr. Arsad explained that “the self was created to worship God and not anything else, and so, we also recognize that there is something in our nature that entices us away from this worship and thus we have to keep purifying ourselves to truly be a servant.”

Ulum al-Qur’an, or Sciences of the Qur’an, encompasses the interpretation of the Qur’an, the circumstances and the contexts within which revelations arrived, and its proper recitation, among others.

Hadith, or Sayings of the Prophet, is the science through which one learns both the message of the prophetic narration, as well as the matters concerning the chain of narration. Recalling Ms. Lim’s points in her earlier presentation, Dr. Arsad mentioned that there was a strict method for compiling the prophetic narration to ensure the authenticity of hadiths. To do this, scholars undertake a stringent verification process, determining the strength of the narration, examining the character of the narrators, and tracing back the chain of narrations to Prophet Muhammad (salla-llahu alaihi wa sallam).

Seerah is the science pertaining to the life of Prophet Muhammad (salla-llahu alaihi wa sallam). As his biography, it includes the *mawlid*, which centers on his birth, and the *shamail*, which centers on his physical attributes.

Fiqh, or jurisprudence, literally means “understanding of the religion.” It is the science through which one learns the rulings of the Shari’ah that relate to physical acts derived from detailed textual sources. These acts concern purification, prayer, etc. It also incorporates the reasoning behind scholarly opinions. Dr. Arsad expressed that this is a very vast field covering the four schools of jurisprudence, namely, Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i and Hanbali. Accordingly, the Philippines predominantly adheres to the Shafi’i school of jurisprudence.

Arabic language learning encompasses three sciences. *Nahwu* (grammar) refers to the states of the ends of each Arabic word and what may or may not affect them. Secondly, *sarf* (morphology) focuses on structures and forms of Arabic words and how these changes affect their meaning. Finally, *balaghah* (rhetoric) teaches how to identify well-constructed sentence compositions and how to write and speak in a manner that best conveys ideas.

Dr. Arsad explained that the aforementioned are the core sciences of the classical Islamic curriculum, while other sciences are considered auxiliary ones. However, rational sciences (those that enable Muslims to live and conduct their material and civil affairs) are still considered sciences that lead towards sacred knowledge. She stated that “Muslims do study beneficial knowledge and knowledge of other sciences that will enable us to pursue, seek our livelihood or do other things that are not directly within the sacred sphere. However, it should be beneficial, and it should not entice us away from worship.”

Dr. Arsad ended her presentation by acknowledging the prior speaker. Afterwards, she called to move the program to the open forum.

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Open Forum

Moderator: Mr. Noor M. Umug

University Researcher II, UP Institute of Islamic Studies

What is the relevance of Islamic epistemology on science?

NUR-AINEE LIM: We have to take the lead from the Qur'an itself as the Qur'an has signs and science, wherein it mentioned the formation of the fetus in the womb, scientific discovery in terms of geology, biology, or how our organs are formed. So, it is supposed to prove that with every discovery, truly Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) exists. Islam encourages discovery, intellectual discourse, and it actually encourages us to look within ourselves because [knowledge helps prove] that Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) is the source of all knowledge. Thus, there is no compartmentalization but the Qur'an itself, Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala), challenges us even to go as high up in the heavens as you can, but you will never go farther than Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) would allow it. So it starts and ends with Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala). When we look at it this way, in the history of knowledge in medicine, engineering, and technologies, Muslims were at the forefront and dominated, including the political atmosphere. Knowledge in all fields is highly encouraged, if not even deemed necessary; as we mentioned, it's fard kifaya.

DR. NEFERTARI ARSAD: I would like to make a brief comment on the natural sciences and all the sciences that have emerged, which maybe many of us thought emerged only during the rise of Western civilization. From further examination, many of the sciences indeed came from Islamic civilization. The skewing (orientation) is different because when a Muslim studies, the underpinning or philosophy is

different because of a different worldview, which is God-centric, and this philosophy permeates our studies. Thus, in Islam, all these sciences that developed were all driven towards worship and towards benefiting mankind. In a secular civilization, there may be a denial or separation from the divine. Therefore, the philosophy of education would be different. It would certainly not be God-centric or worship-centric. At the time when secular sciences emerged, the center of the universe was really humanity; it became human-centric and in that sense, everything, including the study of the sciences and the development of the technology, was harnessed to serve mankind's purpose.

How can we incorporate the classical Islamic curriculum into the present madrasah education system?

DR. NEFERTARI ARSAD: In the traditional madrasah, the classical curriculum is already in place, but it would depend on each school how they implement the classical Islamic curriculum. Are they covering all topics? Do they have the capacity to cover these topics? This depends on whatever curriculum from whatever school teachers have been trained in. These are the standard sciences of the Islamic Studies curriculum. However, if we are speaking about the mainstreaming program of the Department of Education, there are only two subjects in the ALIVE program. This is the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education that are prevalent in public schools outside BARMM. In BARMM, they would be crafting their own curriculum. For those private madaris who wish to or who have applied for government accreditation, they have incorporated DepEd subjects into the madrasah curriculum.

Are there similarities or differences between aqidah and tawhid?

DR. NEFERTARI ARSAD: Aqidah is part of tawhid. Tawhid is the study of the attributes of Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) and how we worship him.

NUR-AINEE LIM: Aqidah comes from the Arabic root word, *aqada*, which means "a rope." The Qur'an is asking us to hold on to the rope of Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala). So aqidah is more of the

general system of affirming tawhid. Part of the aqidah is the study of heresiology. Heresiology tells you the different sects of not just Islam but also the religions that you can affirm, which is the *sirat-ul mustaqin* (the saved sect or the right path). Tawhid is the belief in the oneness of Allah, the affirmation of the pillars of Islam, the pillars of *iman* (faith and intention), and also the rejection of *shirk* (associating others with Allah). Aqidah generally covers what it takes to have pure monotheism. So when you have that pure knowledge to just believe in one God, how to serve Him, how to worship Him, how He has sent his guidance, and how to interpret it in the form of the Qur'an and how to make it into action in the form of the Sunnah, then that will make your foundation and belief unshakable. Sometimes, the classical scholars actually use the word, Sunnah instead of tawhid, so everything is related. It's just the matter of how you put it in context and which part of Islamic sciences you're dealing with at that particular moment.

How does epistemology as a contemporary Islamic tool serve as a means to conduct research of the tangible world?

NUR-AINEE LIM: It actually plays a key role. When a brother a while ago mentioned that we cannot compartmentalize knowledge, there's no such thing as secular and Islamic when it comes to defining knowledge because all knowledge comes from Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala). And in the Qur'an, there is an ayah (verse) that says, "Afalaa yatadabbaruunal Qur'an," or "Are you not going to reflect deeply, are you not going to reflect upon the Qur'an?" (Muhammad 47:24).⁸ It tells us not just about the *dunyarwi* (material or worldly) stuff that we see. It also tells us to reflect within ourselves and to look around because those are signs [of Allah's creation]. So, our reality can be seen not just in the five senses or what we can prove with our personal knowledge. When we perceive reality, it cannot just be external. It has to be in sync with what we see and what we believe in. When we discover the reality of abstract or concrete [material] around us, it should always go back to Who in the first place created

8 Muhammad is the title of the chapter in the Qur'an.

it. That is why the difference between a believer and a nonbeliever is gratefulness. The term *kufur* or *kafir* means “ungrateful.” It doesn’t technically mean disbelief. You have these signs and reality speak of the Creator; however, you cannot acknowledge it. So, if we are to discover the reality of the physical, the material, the abstract, as a Muslim, it always has to go back [Allah]. *Subhanallah* (Glory be to Allah). This is because of the perfection of the Creator. Thus, with every discovery, it must make our fundamentals even firmer.

What is the position on holiness, whole and integrated education and wholesomeness aspects of knowledge? What are your thoughts on holistic and integrated education?

DR. NEFERTARI ARSAD: I think it is also how we view our conception of education. For example, in the Philippines, we inadvertently follow a Western-secular or liberal-democratic education. If Muslims in the Philippines would be able to develop an education that’s truly Islamic, we would give primary importance to sacred knowledge because, after all, our primary purpose is to worship God on earth and to dispense our function as *khalifa* or trustee or vice-regent.⁹ If this is our primary purpose on earth, how then could we craft a curriculum or an educational system that would allow us to dispense with these primary functions? So definitely, while an Islamic education would give primary importance to sacred knowledge, it should also give space to the rational sciences by which we could administer justly on Earth as his trustees.

NUR-AINEE LIM: I do want to share about a phenomenon that the Philippines is going through right now: *isas-sahwahal-Islamiyyah*, or “Islamic awakening.” I’ve seen this with my own eyes. Many of them were my students, and now, they’ve moved on. We have professionals like doctors, cardiologists or neurosurgeons, who right now are studying advanced Arabic Islamic Studies. These professionals are at the top of their fields, and have children who started early on with holistic learning. We have to realize how important is this. It is what our children and the new generation

9 This is the etymology of the English word, “caliphate.”

need to keep the peace, be productive citizens, and revolutionize not just this country but also the whole world. It starts with that pressure which we can apply collectively to show everyone the beauty of Islam, so that our leaders and our government would also give due importance to research and application in all agencies and the like. Even if we know the importance, we also have to lobby for it, so others would see the need for holistic learning. The reason why we cannot separate a Muslim child from his identity is that not doing so will benefit not just for the family but the entire country, which can have more peace and justice.

This Islamic awakening is catching fire in a good way. I remember just two weeks ago; my doctor friend showed me an Arabic exam that she was doing, and she had reached an advanced Arabic level. She was my student for basic Qur'an a few years ago, and now, most of her fellow doctors, her friends, are also into this [learning Arabic]. So, I hope, *insha' Allah* (if Allah wills it) for enlightenment that we can get from holistic learning. Being at the forefront of the fields of different expertise and having a firm belief in Islam is the best combination.

By classical, do we mean by the context of time or by the context of preservation of knowledge?

Ms. Nur-ainee Lim: When we view the term, classic, it doesn't mean "antique" or "obsolete." It means [that] time has passed, but the essence has remained. So, one thing that's beautiful about Islam is it never gets old. As you can see, newly discovered scientific knowledge has already been documented 1,400 years ago. "Classical" knowledge just means the final belief system that Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) sent down was 1,400 years ago, and that the final messenger was the prophet Muhammad (salla-llahu alaihi wa sallam). But knowledge will always be dynamic. It will always suit whatever generation will come after, and that in itself is the best miracle of Islam, wherein every single, succeeding civilization and generation after the prophet Muhammad (salla-llahu alaihi wa sallam) will have salvation through that knowledge.

Do you think there is a need to include mantiq in the contemporary madrasah curriculum?

DR. NEFERTARI ARSAD: Mantiq, or logic, is an auxiliary science, and it takes a certain expertise of Arabic language to study mantiq. That's why it is not included in the core sciences; nevertheless, it is still very important. Now, if the level of learning of students in contemporary schools will enable them to reach a level that would make the teaching of mantiq useful or to their level of learning development, then certainly why not?

Based on the perspective of Islam, that knowledge should be complete, how do you address logic, aesthetics and metaphysics?

NUR-AINEE LIM: I would probably like to discuss how the Qur'an was divided. It is divided into three main topics. The first is tawhid. Even in the sirah (biography), Muhammad (salla-llahu alaihi wa sallam) spent 11 years just preaching the Oneness of Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala). The second is the stories of the prophets and stories of the days of the old where we learn from their struggles. We can adopt that into our context, and we have the verses pertaining to the hereafter like jannah, jahannam, paradise, hellfire, the Day of Judgment, accountability, and the true justice that only comes on the Day of Judgment. In this sense, when we talk about logic, aesthetics, or metaphysics, they're all embedded in the Qur'an itself.

When we say "logical," it tells you to use your reasoning or intellect, to tell what differentiates you from the animals. We all have the basic needs of procreating, eating, and drinking, but what differentiates us from animals is our intellect. For aesthetics we have to look at the world around us. It's also mentioned in the Qur'an that Creation is an ayah, a sign from the Creator that no one else can replicate. Metaphysics involves *ihsan*, wherein we know Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) exists. We operate with that belief though we haven't seen Him yet, so we have to go beyond what we see, what we can feel, and that's a belief system very much unique to Muslims. We don't have to see to believe. Whatever Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) has created, that is proof enough for us, and our ultimate reward—more than *jannah* (paradise)—is to finally see the unseen Creator to whom

we prostrate at least five times a day. All the necessity of being and existing is very much addressed in Islam. We cannot just say we have to think rationally or that we cannot feel there are no emotions. We cannot diminish the importance of all these three aspects. To be honest, if you want to look at a person who is self-actualized, who's successful, who is truly happy and content, all these three aspects must be intact. And for me, Islam subhanallah has given us all the knowledge and tools to be a complete human being.

How can you describe the implementation of the curriculum of ALIVE in public school in madrasah?

DR. NEFERTARI ARSAD: The ALIVE program in the public schools [is] simply Arabic Language (AL) and Islamic Values Education (IVE). I think all Qur'an and Arabic language sciences, including the memorization of surahs (chapters in the Qur'an), are incorporated into Arabic language studies, while Islamic values focuses on inculcating such values and basic concepts. We have to clarify these to students and show how they differ from secular ones. There is no unified curriculum among madaris (schools, plural of madrasah in Arabic) in the country. Only those madaris who sought accreditation from the government would have the same kind of subjects because they will be monitored. They have certain subjects like the Arabic language, Islamic values, and other core sciences, but they are mixed. They are added into the basic education subjects in K-12 (Kinder to Grade 12). So, if we're talking about the traditional madrasah curriculum, I expect that more often than not, most, if not all the core Islamic sciences, will be there. However, in the ALIVE program, there will be only two, which are the Arabic language and Islamic values. Both subjects would be an integration of many elements of the core Islamic sciences. Now, with the onset of the pandemic, many of the learning competencies have been further streamlined because of shortened school time.

Can we add tawhid in our curriculum since we teach hadith, Qur'an, and other related subjects in our major course in Islamic studies?

NUR-AINEE LIM: Usually, the Islamic studies curriculum always have aqidah wherein you can teach tawhid, heresiology, and all the other aspects that would firm up the fundamentals of belief. So, for me, aqidah is really important when you come up with an Islamic studies curriculum. You might need to add aqidah as part of your curriculum, not just tawhid.

What's the difference between patience and contentment in Islam? And as a young member of the new generation, how are we going to apply this in our daily life?

NUR-AINEE LIM: The Arabic word for patience is *sabr*. For contentment, you can use *qanaa* or *itmi'nan*. I'd like to think of *sabr* as being more practical because the Qur'an says, "*Wasta'eenoo bissabri was Salaah*," or "seek help in patience and prayer (for whatever calamities)" (The Cow/*al-Baqarah* 2:45). So, it is a call to be patient. You have to restrain from doing harm, to seek revenge, by processing the emotional and physical pain that you're going through. Contentment is more from within wherein the Qur'an says, "Verily, in the remembrance of Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala), the hearts find rest, and that's where the contentment you can see." So, you remember Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) when you feel unhappy or when you need more. The Prophet Muhammad (salla-llahu alaihi wa sallam) also said, "When you feel discontent then look towards those who have been given less than you." There is that concept of comparison amongst us that leads to discontentment and our hearts not finding rest. If I may elaborate on this with our current situation with the social media revolution and everything at our fingertips, you see the lives of others you know with a scroll, with a flick of your finger. So even more we have to practice both *sabr* and contentment wherein we have to be patient because we do not have this, and we also have to be grateful for what we have. So, these two come hand in hand.

DR. NEFERTARI ARSAD: I just like to say something brief about that. There's a saying, "Verily there will be people who are greater and

lesser than yourself,” and if we encounter these kinds of situations when we see that something is greater than us, sometimes there’s a tendency that we become envious or we become discontented with our lives. Yes, contentment is a state of rest and peace in the heart, that you are happy with what you are or with what you have. Definitely, it’s a difficult state to achieve because every day we encounter many things that push at that contentment. Also, it’s a struggle to keep that contentment in our heart and remember the things that are blessings or that we are content with [having them]. As Ma’am Nur-ainee points out, patience is something that you have to actively pursue because you encounter all of these things every day. We always need to practice patience not only in the big things but also in the little things which we sometimes don’t even notice are irritants. We need to have a mindfulness of ourselves and who we are as humans, how we relate to God, to humanity, [and] to other creatures, so that mindfulness will keep us in the correct perspective all the time.

How does Islam view science, what is the Islamic view on the theory of evolution, and what is Islam’s view of the environment and the importance of protecting it?

NUR-AINEE LIM: If I may answer each question: first, how does Islam view science? It’s very interesting that in Arabic, the word science is actually *ilm*. There is no other word for it. It’s ilm or knowledge. It is encouraged. It is part of seeking knowledge to know what Allah (subhanahu wa ta’ala) created, what our role in this world is, and how we can live in the physical and psychological realm. So, science in Islam is encouraged. It does not contradict [Islam], and it is actually *fard kifaya* that some of our groups or individuals Muslims will pursue. The enlightenment from science started with the Muslims. During the dark ages of the West, Muslims were in the period of enlightenment wherein all major advances in the field of science go back to their initial discoveries.

Second, what is the Islamic view on the theory of evolution? It is contradictory to the origin story of the Qur’an: we did not descend from apes but from humans, Adam and Eve. What is easier to

believe? That we descended from our very own human ancestors or that we had to evolve from primates to reach where we are now? If we were to look up the missing link, and scientists debunk this theory, it's just a theory. It's not a fact unlike in Islam, Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) Himself told us how he created the first man and the first woman.

And third, what is Islam's view of the environment and the importance of protecting it? It goes back to the role Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) described the human being to be, the *khalifatul ardh*, the protector. We're supposed to be the inheritors of this *dunya* (world). So as inheritors, we have to protect the inheritance. We have to make sure that we do our part. When you say inheritance, a family would give an inheritance to the next generation, which will make it grow so that the next one will even be wealthier. That was supposed to be the case. With this world, we're supposed to make it more beautiful and contribute to it, not just in knowledge but in its preservation for future generations. So, one of our main objectives is to give a world to our children better than the one that we have lived in. It's not just about preservation but beautification. Climate change is a real thing. The extinction of natural resources and animals should concern us. We do not live in a vacuum. No man is an island. Our role as part of this *ummah* (the community of believers, i.e. Muslims) is not to think individualistically but collectively and that in itself is where the true strength of Islam lies. If we remove that collectiveness, that's when we become disunited, fragmented.

DR. NEFERTARI ARSAD: I would just like to add something on Islam and science. Many perhaps have associated science with the secular disciplines. As I have mentioned earlier, all knowledge comes from the infinite knowledge of God, Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala). It's just a matter of how that knowledge was used or what philosophy we underpin it with. For example, in the secular world, they have dissociated [it] from God-centeredness. Science has become a tool for human advancement from which morality has been removed. So, there's no conscience in using these tools to exploit the world, and we see all of the manifestations of this exploitation that we are suffering from. But if a Muslim views science, it should be

something that would allow us to benefit our worship, allow us to be strengthened therein, and allow us to benefit all trustees, fellow humans, and fellow creatures. So, it would depend on what kind of worldview that science has or carries. If science carries a worldview that is still towards worship and towards benefiting mankind, towards the common good then, of course, we would agree with that kind of science. We definitely have to be able to push that kind of approach to the contemporary world.

Are there differences in the practices of various Muslim groups in the Philippines or do they have unified or collective Islamic knowledge?

DR. NEFERTARI ARSAD: I mentioned earlier that the madaris in the Philippines don't have a national organization of *ulama* that pushes towards a unified education framework. Actually, the Islamic schools usually follow the curriculum of the schools where their founders came from. For example, the Kasanyangan Madrasah founders in Zamboanga City are Azharis. They came from al-Azhar University (in Cairo, Egypt). They crafted a curriculum and have sought accreditation for an education continuum to Al-Azhar University. It's the same as the Salamat Institute. From other schools, for example, founders from Syria or Madina (Medina, Saudi Arabia), they would usually facilitate the learning or education model of the university where they graduated from. So, no, there is no unified curriculum among madaris or Islamic schools in the country. I mean if the core Islamic sciences are there, as of now, that should not be an issue, but still, we would hope for a more comprehensive or unified framework of education for Islamic schools that could only benefit us. But then it is not a bad thing either.

Executive Summary

Assistant Professor, Nefertari Al-Raschid-Arsad, PhD

Project Leader, UP CIDS Islamic Studies Program

Dr. Arsad started by expressing her gratitude to the host, speakers, and participants, and she acknowledged Ms. Nur-ainee Lim for her active participation during the open forum. She then warmly invited everyone for Webinar 2, which was held later in the afternoon.

This session, as described by Dr. Arsad, was to moderate a discussion on the foundations of Islamic education and answer these questions: What is Islamic education; what is the worldview that informs Islamic education; what is Islamic epistemology; what is one's philosophy and theory of knowledge, how do they inform education in Muslim societies; and many more. From this session, it was revealed that seeking knowledge is of prime importance to all Muslims. She expressed that "we will not be able to fully grasp the infinite knowledge that is out there that belongs only to the Supreme Being, our Creator, Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala)." From these philosophies or understandings of knowledge, the presentation was followed by a discussion on the classical Islamic curriculum, which consists of the core sciences, their purposes, the scope, and general terminologies.

The classical Islamic curriculum previously discussed by Dr. Arsad covered only core Islamic sciences, but she expressed that one needs to have mastery in these fields before taking up auxiliary sciences. The madrasah, or Islamic education in the Philippines, may include the core Islamic sciences; however accordingly, without a unified curriculum, it is uncertain if these are practiced in all schools.

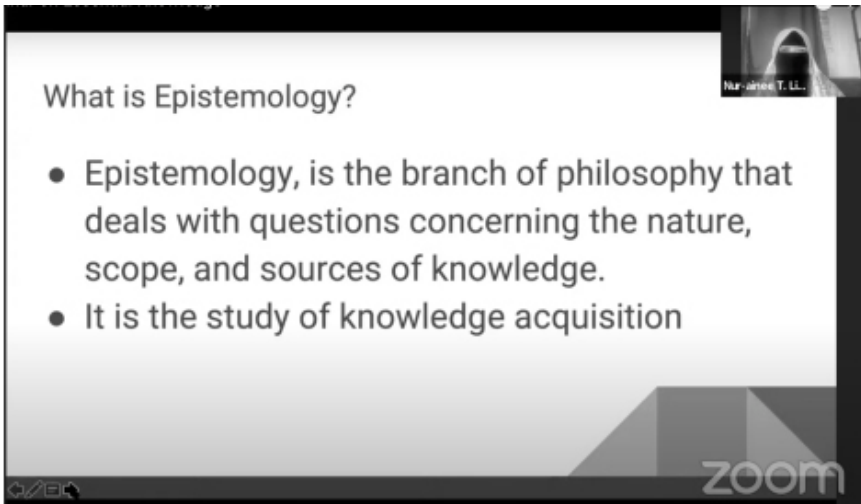
Muslims do not negate the rational sciences which help seek livelihood as long as the philosophy and intentions of seeking knowledge are guided towards worship and service to mankind. Ultimately, everything will lead to the worship of Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) and dispensing the role of khalifatul ardh (the trustees on, and inheritors of, the Earth). This is a tall order, as is attaining the sacred knowledge which empowers the certainty to dispense our duties here on earth. However, it is to be acknowledged that other sciences would also allow the dispensation of these.

A case in point is the pillar of Islam, zakat (taxes) and the case of inheritance and succession. Dr. Arsad expressed that Muslims should be financially literate to know when *nisab* is required, or when one is obligated to share one's wealth with those in need. This is the same for inheritance and succession where one should comprehend wealth that should be passed onto future generations. Financial literacy, she said, is not part of the core Islamic sciences; however, it is a rational science.

As noticed by Dr. Arsad, many of the questions were about the curriculum, clarifications on the sciences of Islam, the compatibility of Islam and science, and secular theories like the theory of evolution. She also acknowledged other issues pertaining to how Islamic epistemology would craft a methodology of learning and research in the modern world. Thus, she extended her gratitude for the interest shown by the participants, "*Jazakumu llahu khairan*" (may the Almighty recompense you with goodness), and thanked everyone who participated in the webinar, hoping certain questions and clarifications were satisfied during the discussion.

Photo Documentation

Ms. Nur-ainee Tan Lim defines epistemology during her lecture on the Islamic Epistemology.



What is Epistemology?

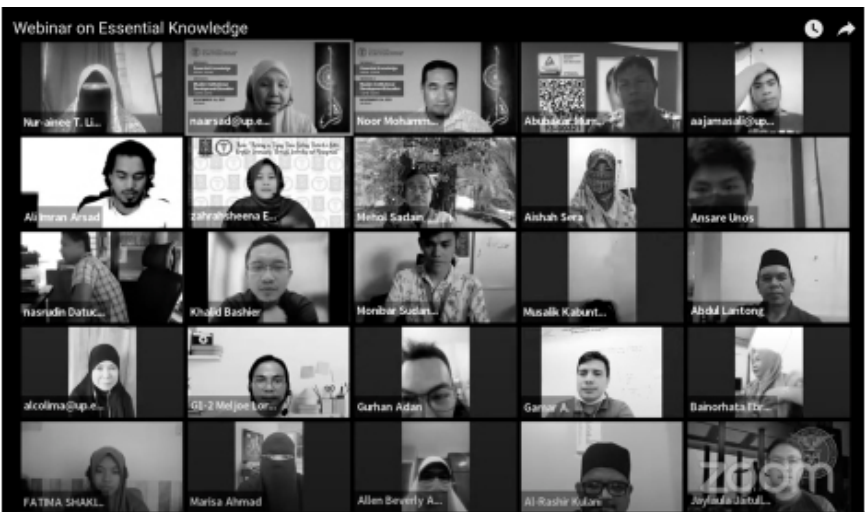
- Epistemology, is the branch of philosophy that deals with questions concerning the nature, scope, and sources of knowledge.
- It is the study of knowledge acquisition

zoom

Mr. Noor M. Umug moderates the question-and-answer portion of the webinar.



Dr. Nefertari A. Arsad invites the attendees for a photo session before concluding the webinar.



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