Intellectual Discourse

Intellectual Discourse

Intellectual Discourse is a highly respected, academic refereed journal of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). It is published twice a year by the IIUM Press, IIUM, and contains reflections, articles, research notes and review articles representing the disciplines, methods and viewpoints of the Muslim world.

Intellectual Discourse is abstracted in *SCOPUS, ProQuest, International Political Science Abstracts, Peace Research Abstracts Journal, Muslim World Book Review, Bibliography of Asian Studies, Index Islamicus, Religious and Theological Abstracts, ATLA Religion Database, MyCite, ISC* and *EBSCO*.

Questioning Styles in the Qur'ān and Their Impact on Human Thinking a Conceptual Analysis

Jamal Ahmed Badi, Salah Machouche and Benaouda Bensaid

Abstract: Questions and questioning represent one of the most important communicative and illustrative mediums of the Qur'an. Qur'ān exegetes devoted significant efforts to the study of styles of questioning across various disciplines of the Qur'ān sciences, and as such, have addressed the topic of questions from the perspectives of language, theology, jurisprudence, dialectics, philosophy and ethics. Little interest, however, is shown to the relationship between questions and thinking. This textual analysis of selected Qur'ānic questions examine Qur'anic questions, their forms, scope, functions and effects with respect to development of human thought. This study shows that questions in the Qur'ān serve a broad range of objectives. The style of questioning inherent the Qur'ān presents an intuitive and familiar method that may be included in current Muslim education and learning to revive critical thinking and creativity known to early generation.

Keywords: Qur'ānic questions. Islamic education, Islamic learning, human thinking.

---

* Jamal Ahmed Badi, Professor, Department of Department of Fundamental and Interdisciplinary Studies, Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). E-mail: badi@iium.edu.my

** Salah Machouche, Assistant Professor, Department of Department of Fundamental and Interdisciplinary Studies, Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). E-mail: bentahar@iium.edu.my

*** Benaouda Bensaid, Assistant Professor, Department of General Education, College of Science and Humanities, Effat University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Email: bbensaiid@eatuniuniversity.edu.sa

Abstrak: Soalan dan mempersoalkan sesuatu merupakan salah satu medium komunikatif dan ilustratif Al-Qur'an. Eksegesis Al-Qur'an menumpukan terhadap usaha yang ketara untuk kajian bagaimana cara-caranya bagi menyoal pelbagai disiplin sains Al-Qur'ān. Oleh itu, kertas kerja ini telah membahaskan topik tentang soalan daripada perspektif bahasa, teologi, perundangan, dialektik, falsafah dan etika. Walau bagaimanapun, terdapat minat yang kurang terhadap pertalian antara soalan dan pemikiran. Analisis tekstual ini mengkaji soalan-soalan Al-Qur'an, bentuk, skop, fungsi dan kesannya terhadap perkembangan pemikiran manusia. Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa soalan dalam Al-Qur'an memberikan objektif yang luas. Gaya mempersoalkan Al-Qur'ān turut membentangkan kaedah intuitif dan kaedah biasa yang boleh diambil kira dalam pendidikan Islam semasa, serta pembelajaran untuk memulihkan pemikiran kritis dan kreativiti bagi mereka yang ingin tahu terhadap Generasi terdahulu.

Kata Kunci: Soalan-soalan al-Qur'an, pendidikan Islam, pembelajaran Islam, pemikiran manusia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Questioning denotes several meanings, as with invocation (*du'ā'*). For philosophers (*ahl al-Naẓar al-'aqli*), however, it evokes raising an objection by the asking subject to the one acting as an opponent (al-Tahānawī, 1996: vol. 1: 920). Hence, the asking person places himself in a position of denial or rejection of a judgment made by the claimant who presents it without producing a satisfactory argument. Asking questions or questioning as such continues to represent one of the most fundamental and crucial forms of expression, communication, and social interaction throughout the history of man. Philosophers, past and present, used the method of questioning to develop ideas, sharpen arguments and build sophisticated theses. Socrates (d. 399 BC) was known among those who developed a unique method of questioning, using it to motivate youth to question prevalent beliefs and practices in Athenian society (Nadler & Chandon, 2004: 16). Due to their merits in communication and teaching, religious scriptures have often used them to draw their readers to fundamental theological and moral themes such as the unity of God, source of creation, nature and destiny of man, the truth of ethics, and so forth. It is estimated that there are about 1363 questions in the Qur'ān (Kehlī, 2009: 14-16; al-Balkhī, 2007: 157).

This fact continues to raise the attention of Muslims scholars on the theme of questioning and its study according to different approaches and perspectives, most notably, however, with reference to language and theology[1]. Qur'ān exegetes, for instance, have discussed two types of questioning: the real and rhetorical/metaphorical. As mentioned, the topic of questioning is addressed in different fields of religious inquiry including language, theology, exegesis, philosophy (dialectics), education, and so on. However, less attention was dedicated to understanding how questions and questioning in the various fields of learning contribute to the development of intellectual ability and skill, and human thinking in general. Moreover, unaddressed is the question of different questioning styles correspond to specific levels of human consciousness and perception, and how questions in the Qur'ān relate to one another, as a result affecting the reader of or listener to Qur'ān.

This study will analyse the essential objectives and scope of Qur'ānic questions and further discuss how they seek to challenge and cause the human intellect to acknowledge questioning as a solid method of argumentation, understanding and submission to the truth. The paper will also seek to examine both the forms and content of questions with respect to belief and thinking. The research surveys the different forms of questions in the Qur'ān, yet selects representative samples to analyse their content and form, going on to draw further comparisons. The research views the Qur'ānic questions as coherently interrelated units formulating a "sequence of meanings and perceptions" which revolve around the Oneness of the divine (*tawḥīd*). Questions in the Qur'ān appear be individually executing specifically different tasks, however, taken together, culminate in the fulfillment of a united goal with regards to the specific questions that meet the belief conditions of targeted people.

The significance of the research lies in the potential of further expanding the field of Qur'ānic studies (*'ulūm al-Qur'ān*), especially with respect to crossing boundaries of Muslim religious education with the field of education and human development.

2. The Practice of Questioning in Early Muslim Works

Questioning has long been one of the main characteristics of Muslim religious learning. The tradition (*sunnah*) of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) is replete with examples of questioning as a method of

teaching and illustration (Naghich, 2012; Dukhān 2010). The Islamic religious literature also showcases familiarity with the use of questions, especially in the fields of dialectic (*jadal/munaẓarah*). Al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463AH/1071AD), a notable Muslim scholar from Bagdad, used to advise students to sit near their teachers, be silent, and then raise questions. He reported the following statement of Abu 'Amr Ibn al-'Alā' (d. 154 AH/770AD): "Learning begins with observing silence, followed with questioning, listening attentively, developing a good ability and skills for memorization, and then propagating knowledge to others (those seeking it) (al-Baghdādī, 1996, Vol: 2:199). Both the raising of questions and the debate around such questions are also used to evaluate a students' readiness, competence, and intelligence. Often, teachers would urge students to sit closer to the teacher, raise questions, answer them or oppose the answers of others. Abu Sa'd al-Mutawalli (d. 478AH/1086AD), the Professor at the Nizāmiyah School of Baghdad, described his personal experience as follows:

> I attended the class of Abul *Ḥ*ārith b. Abi al-Fadhl As-Sarakhsī and sat among those of his fellows who were seated at the end of his class. A question was brought up for disputation, and I spoke and raised objections. When my turn was over, Abul-*Ḥ*ārith ordered me to move up closer and I did. And when my turn had come up again for disputation, he brought me closer still and continue to do so until my seat was next to him. He saw to my needs and took me in as one of his fellows. (Makdisi, 1981: 92).

There are many relevant examples in the practice of Muslim educators showing that questioning is one of the fundamental pillars of learning in Islam. Imam al-Nawawī (d. 676 AH/1277AD), for example, advises students not to be ashamed of asking to know what he does not know or is not clear for him until the matter becomes completely clear. This means, that the disciple is required to ask more question as long as he feels that the matter is not clear at least for him. Nawawi draws reader's attention to the following statement: "He who is skinny (of shyness), his knowledge would be thick (less) as well" *(man raqqa wajhuhu raqqa 'amalahu)* (al-Nawawī, 1987: 32). Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751 AH/1350AD), a distinguished Muslim jurist and theologian, considered questioning, proper listening, understanding, good memorization, teaching and implementing as the first steps towards acquiring knowledge (Ibn al-Qayyim, vol. 1:482).

On the other hand, one finds prominent educators and scholars such as Ibn Jamā'ah (d. 733 AH/1332AD) considering questions fundamental to learning (Ibn Jamā'ah, 2012:120). In a chapter entitled, "The learner should not be reluctant to ask about the matter which is unclear or seek understanding of what is not understood", Ibn Jama'ah emphasised observing the manners of gentleness, suitable speech, and good manners. For him, student needs to ask questions during the proper time and context unless they are necessary or urgent. Should students' questions not be answered, they should insist on one. But in case they receive the wrong answer, they should not be quick to comment, but rather, should delay it. In the case where they fail to understand the instructor's point, they should not feel shy to speak, as shyness will deprive them of goodness of their present and future life (Ibn Jamā'ah, 2012: 121). Ibn Jamā'ah quoted narrations of 'Umar, Aisha, and Mujāhid who supplicated for the women of Anṣār whose shyness and modesty were no barrier to asking and learning about religious matters pertaining to women. Similarly, in the domain of *al-fiqh*, Abul Walalīd al-Bājī (1081/474 AH), in his famous book "*al-minhaj fī tarīb al-ḥijāj,*" devoted one chapter explaining the values of questioning and the varying categories of questions within the context of *fiqh*. According to him, questions are used to demonstrate the position, nature, argument, relevance, and critique of the argument of the jurisprudential school (*al-madh-hab*). (al-Bājī, 1980: 34-41).

In his discussion of the rules and parameters of questions and answers, Abū Ishāq al-Shātibī (d. 875 AH/1388AD) classified learning questions according to scholars of the rank of ijtihād (*mujtahids*) and those in *taqlid* (*muqallid*). For him, the goal of scholarly questioning is verification, dispelling confusion and ambiguity, remembrance of and identification of errors, as well as the acquisition of knowledge. Shāṭibī also maintained that when questions are levelled to learners, the instructor seeks to highlight issues that are problematic, then phase out guided questioning, testing and obtaining more knowledge from students, and therefore developing new knowledge. However, questions are normally used for reasons such as reviewing and obtaining more knowledge, or as an intellectual guide to better comprehend issues explained by scholars (al-Shāṭibī, 1997, vol. 5: 369). In spite of recognising the significance of questions in learning, al-Shāṭibī draws attention to exaggerated forms of questioning in religious matters, or what he terms as blameworthy

questioning. In this regard, he makes reference to the Qurʾān and ḥadīth, alongside cases reported on by the Prophet's companions; going on to select ten illustrative cases. These are questions with no religious merit, questions transcending the boundaries of necessary knowledge, asking about information when it is not immediately needed, asking very provocative, difficult and potentially harmful questions, asking about the causes of religious rituals which lie beyond reason, posing exaggerated questions about detailed information, asking questions that cause opposition to the Qurʾān and ḥadīth through mere personal opinion, and asking about allegorical verses (*al-mutashābihāt*), and asking for sake of showing off self abilities over others and stubbornness (*suʾāl al-taʿannut wal –ifḥam wa talab al-ghalaba fī al-khiṣām*) (al-Shāṭibī, 1997: 387-392).

As mentioned earlier, the topic of questioning has generally been addressed according to language, law, and mannerisms (ʾādāb) in learning. The cognitive and social dimensions, however, remain understudied. As current learning systems and the pressing need for quality education and skills continue to grow in sophistication, there is also a need to further extend the scope and advance research in the fields of questions so as to contribute to the overall development and reform of religious learning today.

3. QUESTIONING IN THE QURʾĀN

For Muslims, the Qurʾān consists of the divine word of God sent down to Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) in Arabia in the year of 610 CE. Sent down in the Arabic language, the Qurʾān makes use of Arabic metaphors, parables, analogies and questioning, which are instrumental to communication, and provoking listeners' focus and attention. Chief among those styles are questions geared to define and clarify problems, lead listeners to persuasion through argumentation, generate knowledge, and help the performance of memory. Questions however, vary according to their objectives, forms and content; and can further be divided into different categories according to an anticipated level of reasoning. Examples would include questions raised in a one-system question (or established method), no-system question (subjective reference), or conflicting system (or conflicting of different viewpoints) (Linda, Richard, 2010: 9.). The role of questions can be powerful (Eric,

David Isaacs, 2003: 3), smart, fundamental, complex, essential, good, short, big, tricky, beautiful, strategic, polite, right and so forth.

As far as their purpose and nature are concerned, Qur'ānic questions appear to have largely emphasized generating contrast through a classification of questions that are 'right' or 'wrong'. Right questions are constructive, and through investigation and verification, help guide to the right answers. Yet, because of their independence and predictability, questions pertaining to the physical world are perceived to be easier than those that touch on humans (Neil, Stuart, 2007: 7). 'Wrong questions' therefore, can be detrimental to human thinking and action; can cause more confusion and may lead to increased levels of doubts, mistrust and undermined credibility, reliability, and intellectual authenticity. Interestingly, scholars like al-Ṭūfī (d. 716AH/1316AD) in his work entitled ''alām al-jadhl fi-'ilm al-jadal', addressed the need for question ethics, and sought to differentiate between 'right' and 'erroneous' questions. He identified four forms of questions, which can be caused by those who ask, the person being asked, as well as the form and purpose of the question (al-Ṭūfī, 1987: 33-37).

In an examination of Qur'ānic questions however, attention is necessary to the interrogation context known among Qur'ān scholars as the *maqām*. Balkhi summarized these contexts as follows; preaching the oneness of the Divine, rebuttal of polytheism, illustration of the nature, content and message of the Qur'ān, the theme of resurrection, the rewards of the divine, Proofs of the Day of Judgment, providing people with clear evidences, refutation of falsehood, rebuttal of polytheists and cautioning against sinning, criticising believers' errors and forgetfulness, motivation for enjoying all that is good and beneficial, as well as attracting the attention of the Prophet (S.A.W.) and listeners to surprises (Balkhi, 2007:166-190). Questions in the Qur'ān address a variety of themes yet are nonetheless grounded with clear attention to human surroundings whether they pertain to the spiritual, cognitive, behavioural, or social dimensions. They also deal with a broad range of themes such as God, the cosmos, human nature, society, ethics, spirituality, law, order, history and so forth. This variety of interest affects the content and diversity of questions. The reader of the Qur'ān often sees that its questions create a flow of intellectual motion, thus expanding human perception and understanding, driving one to more questions and deeper reasoning.

In order to explore those Qur'ānic questions closely, one first needs to examine the inseparable fields of human nature and the physical world. To this end, the Qur'ān often uses identifiable signs of nature as guiding posts for human thought about their own being and existence, and to elicit thinking on belief, thought, and action. Questions appear to be built upon the idea that the universe stands as a powerful, overwhelming visual representation and proof of God's unity while creating a lasting impact on the human intellect. In addition, Questions in the Qur'ān entertain human thinking and curiosity. Some questions introduce contrasts of meanings to touch upon the basic form of human thought so as to cause it to confront truth as is the case with the use of contrasting examples such as 'blind' and 'deaf' in contrast to 'hearing' and 'seeing' (Qur'ān, 11: 24). The Qur'ān also uses singular cases of contrast through the description of a man who serve many in contrast to another serving one only (Qur'ān, 39: 29). Yet, when questions relate to a single example, fact, or description of visual content, some additional details about the personal traits and character of people (Qur'ān 16, 75-76). The provision of supplementary image information appears to be set to stimulate senses in the process of the transfer of surrounding external data to the level of the abstract. Qur'ānic questions also appeal to justify claims with evidence as shown in the Qur'ān (2: 111), (21: 24), (27: 64), and (28: 64).

The Qur'ān encourages an understanding of the self and *raison d'être* of human existence for it leads to sound understanding the message of the divine, as showcased in the reference of posed Qur'ānic questions on themes of human nature, potential, and capability. Qur'ānic questions address topics of the soul, heart, hearing, sight, and thought, and further apply a two-way transition approach, thus allowing a reasonable shift from the human to the physical world and vice versa (Qur'ān, 56: 57-73). Questions utilizing contrast and existence are widely prevalent, inclusive of where the Qur'ān reminds its reader of the Last Day, and of the division of humans into categories of the 'right record', 'left record', and foremost, 'those close to God'. This reminder is followed with a question on the initial stage of human creation (emitting semen), which then moves on to a broader scope, where the physical world stands as reminder of the listener about the basic human needs. Here the Qur'ānic question refers to the sowing seed (growth), rainwater, and kindling

of fire; utilizing micro-macro contrast and linking questions to human purpose, need and function.

This holds true when questions target a physical object, where the answer often carries messages with far-reaching dimensions. While the scope of the Qur'ānic questions is broad, the focus is rather on acknowledging the Creator's sustenance of the world and the illustration of the meaning and value of human life, laws and order. The Qur'ānic questions pertaining to the physical world objects and their wonders are intertwined with the themes of faith such as the unity of God, His Omnipotence, and the physics of the last Day and Resurrection. Throughout these combinations and variations, questions of this sort are utilized to inculcate the remembrance of the Divine, His Majesty, and Splendor. For example, the answer Qur'an has provided to a question regarding the mountains (Qur'ān 20: 105) includes different contents and it is heading to two different directions. One is going towards the physical world through description method, while the second moving to the unseen world reminds people of the end of the time. In the first, the Qur'ān describes how they will turn into scattered dust (Qur'ān 7:143), be left as a desolate waste with no curve and ruggedness, and ultimately will glorify God (Qur'ān 17: 44), prostrate to Him (Qur'ān, 22: 18), are subservient to Him (Qur'ān 21:79), come in different types (Qur'ān 35:27), are humbled and split asunder upon reception of the Qur'ān (59: 21), are firm (Qur'ān 79: 32), act as masts or pegs to the world (78: 7); are being hewed (Qur'ān 15: 82), provide shelter and refuges (Qur'ān 16: 81), are caused to shake as if they were a canopy (Qur'ān 7:171), and are recalled in the raising of Mount al-Tur above the Jewish tribes (2: 93). But in the second move, the answers are concerned more about eschatology event where mountains blasted into a scattered dust on Doomsday (Qur'ān 20: 105), shattered and crumbled (Qur'ān 56: 5), set into motion (Qur'ān 78: 20), and ruined (Qur'ān 19: 90). Here we can see clearly that the answer to the question is not limited to the description of the physical state of the mountains, but it includes also their different functions as well as their becoming at the end of the time.

4. FORMS AND OBJECTIVES OF QUR'ĀNIC QUESTIONS

Questions play an essential part in the development and shaping of thinking and communication with resultant effects on socialization. The role of the noted three also varies in accordance with the nature of

contextual questions, their motives and drives, substance, style, validity, and morality. 'Right questions' can be instrumental for both thinking and action, as they drive one to follow processes of openness, reflection, investigation, and verification; effectively leading to correct answers and reasonable solutions. Therefore, ensuring the right substance of questions is no less important than the search for 'right answers'. In contrast, questions pertaining to the physical world serve as certain solid drivers to right answers in view of "their precision, independence, measurability, and predictability" (Neil & Stuart, 2007: 7). In contrast, 'wrong' questions may be detrimental to both thinking and decision, and could affect intellectual credibility, reliability and trust.

The Qur'ānic questions are set to guide the reader and listener together to the ultimate truth. Some of those questions are used for refutation and denial of polytheism and wrong human perception of divinity (Qur'ān, 2: 44, 85, 87, 266; 4: 82, 6: 122) while others are for validation and confirmation (Qur'ān 2: 246; 39: 36, 3: 20) (Kehil, 2009, p. 19). However, both strategies are used together and separately according to the conditions of each questioning case. They use warning (Qur'ān 3: 137, 4: 33) and blame (Qur'ān 3: 101, 82: 6) as a strategy to stress the responsible use of human senses and faculties such as hearing, perceiving, and reasoning while creating enthusiasm (Qur'ān, 20: 40) and motivation (Qur'ān, 24: 22).

Due to their communicative weight, the Qur'ān uses different forms of questions set for specific orders to eventually ensure intended objectives, and together, share roles that stimulate human thinking. The type of content of questions renders them to two categories of tangible and intangibles. One of the utilities of questions in the Qur'ān is to relate tangible entities, represented through illustrative objects linked to a range of abstract principles, thoughts, ideas and values, in addition to other conceptual action-related fields pertaining to the particular and general, right and wrong, the confusing and the clear, ignorance and knowledge, as well as truth and falsehood. The Qur'ān uses varied forms of questions' contents, forms and styles to possibly meet the diverse backgrounds and assimilation capacity of readers and listeners, and positions them according to different perspectives of intellectual and rational stimulation, and emotional awakening, with the heart playing three fundamental cognitive functions: reflection (*ta'aqqul*), pondering

(*tadabbur*), and understanding (*tafaqquh*) in addition to engaging the human senses.

Questions in the Qur'ān can be set according to the categories of religious beliefs, moral choices, or socio-economic practices of the targeted audience as is the case with reporting questions often-used by pagans (Qur'ān 1: 259; 36: 78) and those raised by the People of the Book (Qur'ān 4: 153). In this regard, disbelievers' questions often show outright rejections and clear objections to proposed cases, standing against the exercise of thinking; often rooted and unconditionally immersed into models of living and reasoning inherited from their ancestors. In contrast, believers' questions revolve around God, lunar months, spending, sacred months, intoxicants, gambling, orphans, the lawful, women's menses, spoils of war, and so on.

In an effort to taxonomize and classify the multiple functions of such questions, the Sixteenth Century notable Muslim exegete, Jalāl Din al-Suyuti (d. 911AH/1505AD) (Suyuti, 2008: 576-579) proposed thirty-two different objectives for Qur'ānic questions. To this end, he notes that questioning in the Qur'ān is set to convey to the listener the message of the unity of God. The immediate objectives of Qur'ānic questioning however, vary, and serve as a medium of information (*'ikhbār*) (Qur'ān, 76:1) or making an offer (*'ard*) (Qur'ān, 24: 22). Questioning can therefore serve as a reminder and correction of the listener's thinking and character. In such cases, questioning would refer to cognitive states such as confirmation (*taqrīr*) (Qur'ān, 94: 1-2); reminding (*tadhkīr*) (Qur'ān, 36:60), warning (*taḥdhīr*) (Qur'ān, 25:45); dramatizing and magnifying (*ta'ẓīm*) (Qur'ān, 18:49), showing abundance (*takthīr*) (Qur'ān, 7:4), drawing equal conclusions (*taswiya*) (Qur'ān, 2:6); ignoring (*tajāhul*) (Qur'ān, 38: 8); and confirmation (*ta'kīd*) (Qur'ān, 39:19). Qur'ānic questions are also used for request of what is needed or missed as in the case of supplication (*du'ā'*) (Qur'ān, 7:155); search for guidance (*istirshād*) (Qur'ān, 2:30); command (*amr*) (Qur'ān, 3:20); instruction of abstinence (*nahy*) (Qur'ān, 9:13); commination (*taḥdīd*) (Qur'ān, 9:13). On other different occasions, questions seek to socialize discipline via eliciting specific emotional attitudes and states of mind, as in the case of renunciation of (*inkār*) (Qur'ān, 52:39); admonishing (*tawbīk*) (Qur'ān, 37:95); surprise (*ta'ajjub*) (Qur'ān, 2:28), critique (*'itab*) (Qur'ān, 57: 16); longing (*tamannī*) (Qur'ān 7:53), wishing delay (*istibṭā'*) (2: 214); omitting (*istib'ād*) (89:23); showing sufficiency

(*iktifā'*) (Qur'ān, 39:60), mockery (*tahakkum/istihza'*) (Qur'ān, 11:87); warning and threatening (*tahwīl/takhwīf*) (Qur'ān, 69:1); facilitating and easing (*al-tashīl/takhfīf*) (Qur'ān 4:39); and threat and menace (*tahdīd/wa'īd*) (Qur'ān 77:16) (Suyuti, 1987, pp. 308-317).

Questions in the Qur'an agree to change and better the conditions of belief, thought and character*,* however, they serve other critical goals. The first and perhaps the foremost in ranking is the interest in conveying the concept of belief in the unity of God (Qur'ān, 23: 68, 69, 70, 84, 86, 88). Relevant questions revolve around themes of prophethood (Qur'ān, 23: 69), origin of earth (Qur'ān, 23: 84), origin of the seven heavens (Qur'ān, 23: 87), revelation (Qur'ān, 23: 105), purpose of life, and resurrection (Qur'ān, 23: 115). Those questions seek to draw attention to matters related to the origin of life and creation, nature of man, meaning and purpose of life, morality, life after death, prophethood, as well as organizations of human association and society, including patterns of the physical world and natural order in an attempt to provide a general framework supportive of the thoughts and perceptions on the issues mentioned above. Such a framework does not necessarily reflect what has been experienced earlier by preceding communities (Nicole, Josef, 2009, vol. 10: 1), but comes as a vocation for processes of reform, renewal, and other major changes that aim at overcoming wrong and failed human experience.

Second, questions in the Qur'an are also structured to remind one of Divine commands, laws and order, and, as such, tackle themes like the source of sustenance (Qur'ān, 56: 64), utility of the human senses and their accountability (Qur'ān, 7: 195), life and death (Qur'ān, 5: 18; 5: 95), management and control of the world (Qur'an, 5: 40), including creation and re-creation of things (Qur'ān, 10: 31-36). Major issues pertaining to human life are addressed to create awareness around the fundamental meaning of life and death (Qur'ān, 2: 28) while reminding listeners about the consequences of their decisions after clear evidences put forward by the Creator (Qur'ān, 6: 149). Sometimes, the question is repeated in wording however, with reference to themes that are diverse, as is the case with Chapter 55 which 'repeats' the following question 31 times. The Qur'ān states: "Then, (O humankind and jinn), which of the favours [power] of your Lord will you deny [disavow]?" Rāzī (d. 604 AH/1209AD) believes that this repetition is meant to confirm the truth of God's power and His might. He believes however that the grasp of

'repetition' lies beyond the reach of the intellect (al-Rāzī, 1981, vol. 29: 97).

Third, questions seek to check errors and erroneous assumptions. One prime example is the story of Prophet Abraham who questioned his father and community about their claimed gods and the devotion they offer them (Qur'ān, 21: 52). It appears that Abraham was mostly concerned with criticizing his community's devotional practices, especially when their arguments were merely based on the blind following of ancestors. As told in the Qur'ān, Abraham concluded the following: "both of you, you and your forefathers, have been in obvious error" (Qur'ān, 21: 54). Upon realizing Abraham's determination and rejection of their worship, they question him one more time, this time however, with a different interest "Is it the truth that you are proclaiming to us or are you jesting?" (Qur'ān, 21: 55). According to Rāzī, this question shows that Abraham's people hoped his criticism was not serious, especially given that it targeted their ancestors' entrenched old practices. (al-Rāzī, 1981, vol. 22:181). According to the Qur'ānic account, Abraham reminded his audience about the attributes of God which deserve to be truly worshipped. The Qur'ān recorded his answer: "No, but your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, Who has originated them, each with particular features, and I am one to bear witness to this truth" (Qur'ān, 21: 56). The question in Chapter 16 also addresses core matters of worldview pertaining to divinity and creation as in the following: "Is He then Who creates to be likened to him who does not create? Will you not reflect and be mindful?" (Qur'ān, 16: 17). The simple contrast in this verse, however, demonstrates the obvious differences between God, the Creator and Originator, and those fabricated idols.

Fourth, there are those questions in the Qur'ān that intend to create spiritual states of the heart. Through its treatment of the innate human nature (Qur'ān 21: 24, 27: 64), relevant questions not only direct the listener to know more about the true meaning of life and existing states of reality around them, but also to acquire proper habits of thinking such as understanding relationships, making good judgments, removing bias and prejudice, clearing conjectures, abiding by evidence, using a variety of thinking styles, and abstaining from blind following. These questions in the Qur'ān criticize and judge those who ascribe partners to God (Qur'ān, 10: 35; 37: 145) or make erroneous judgments on treating true servants of God as equal to those who do wrong (Qur'ān, 68:

36). Relevant questions seek to increase independence and eventually decrease subjectivity, while minimizing interference from negative factors that obscure the truth. For example, the following question (Qur'ān, 47: 10) blames those who fail to learn from the fate of the earlier generations. The Qur'ān states: "Have they, then, never journeyed about the earth and beheld what happened in the end to those [wilful sinners] who lived before their time? God destroyed them utterly: and the like thereof awaits all who deny the truth" (Asad, 1980:778). Those questions are not restricted to developing reasoning capacity alone, but also to improving humans' spiritual conditions. On occasions, those questions remind about God the Merciful who forgives upon repentance (Qur'ān, 9: 104). On others however, the spiritual question is expressed in a rather serious warning tone that anticipates destruction and misfortune for those who do not heed it as it shows the real difference between those who follow the divine guidance and others (Qur'ān 39: 22).

Fifth, there are questions that aim at the clarification through illustration or casting parables. Questions in such contexts of illustrations lead to conclusions where people are not expected to fall once more into wrong judgments, as conclusions are self-evident and intelligible. For instance, the Qur'ān (16: 75-76) strikes two parables, each followed with the following question "are the two equal?". This is made with reference to two parts of the parable. The first is about two men; the first of whom being enslaved and understandably, incapable of doing anything while the second is free and God provided him with provisions which he can spend secretly and openly. The second parable of contrasting situations is about a disabled person with no control over anything but relies fully on his master and who brings him no good wherever he directs him. The second man stands in opposite direction; he is healthy, exercises his capacity fully, enjoins the rights and justice, and keeps himself on the straight path.

As discussed above, Qur'ānic questioning varies in form, content, context and targeting audience. Nonetheless, there is an interrelated shared common objective, which leads people to think about the Creator and believe in the One God. Each of those questions in the Qur'an is designed to deliver knowledge that systematically removes doubts and scepticism. The simplicity and clarity of those questions communicates and builds on the basic cognitive ability inherent in human nature (*fiṭrah*) regardless of intellectual, cultural and social frames that surround it.

5. QUR'ĀNIC QUESTIONS AND HUMAN THINKING

The Qur'ān motivates its readers to reflect about their own selves and creation. It makes use of different verbs to describe different forms of thinking such as '*fakkara*', '*tadhakkara*', '*naẓara*', '*tafaqqaha*', '*i'tabara*', ' '*aqala*', '*istbaṣara*' and '*tadabbara*' (Abu 'Abdullah, 2011, vol. 1:.523-523). To appeal to different temperaments and cognitive states, the Qur'ān chooses to use different approaches and tones. For instance, in conditions without indications of problems of extreme misconception, the Qur'ān employs a proper approach. When it tackles conditions of ignorance, naivety, and arrogance, it utilizes a stricter language of threat and commination so as to shake assumptions, and draw attention to the path of the truth. In other cases, the Qur'ān uses a more concrete medium form of questioning relying on powerful, visual illustrations and imagery, which leaves no room for doubt and scepticism (Badri, 2000: 53-64).

With its focus on self-reflection and criticality, Qur'ānic questions correspond to various cognitive states. The term '*tafakkur*' which means to think about the question's contents (Qur'ān 6: 50, 7: 184, 30: 8) highlights the current association between questions and thought. This would seek to stimulate the mind into contemplating upon the beauty and splendour found in the creation, with the ultimate order of determining the meaning and purpose of life (Ziyad, 2005, vol. 32, no. 1:200). The Quranic question like "Are the blind and the seeing alike? Will you not, then, reflect?" (Qur'ān, 6: 50) provides a contrasting yet self-evidential example concerning the difference between those '*who are blind*' and those '*who can see without failure*'. To this end, the Qur'ān also urges its readers to acknowledge truth and reject falsehood.

Organization and the placement of the Qur'ānic questions are also very important as they enable us to understand the work of Qur'anic questioning and its impact on human thinking and behaviour. Perhaps the first observation we can make in this regard is that these questions are working separately from one another. In fact, they are placed in a set series to develop a strong field of consciousness touching on different dimensions of human nature, whether emotional, rational or behavioural. In the verse mentioned before (Qur'ān, 6: 50), and in follow up to the first question set to test the readers/listeners' common sense; the Qur'ān provides yet a second question: "Will you not, then, reflect?" (Qur'ān,

6:50), then calling for the use of reasoning ability. Those relationships prevalent among many Qur'ānic questions highlight their inherent interconnections irrespective of the possible differences found in their objectives or context. Those interconnections appear to target eliciting different levels of human consciousness, yet contribute to the rational and emotional maturity of readers and listeners. Again, those inherent associations connect to human thought as shown with attention and appreciation of the abilities of understanding and means of progressive rational growth.

This extended function of Qur'ānic questioning is also observed in the instruction on how to formulate right questions, right answers, or refute or undermine questions serving wrong motives. The Qur'ān records what it judges to be right and wrong questions of different preceding individuals, groups, and communities. Furthermore, Qur'ānic questioning also targets acquisition of increased levels of consciousness as shown in the verses describing Prophet Abraham praying to God as he asks him to show him how He brings the dead to life. His question was not meant as a denial of the truth of the resurrection or doubt of it, but rather sought to acquire inner peace and tranquillity. The Qur'ān states: "And recall when Abraham said: "My Lord, show me how You will restore life to the dead!" God said: "why? do you not believe?" Abraham said: "Yes, but that my heart may be at rest" (Qur'ān 2:260).

In this spirit, questions posed in the Qur'ān also challenge current assumptions, perceptions, and poor analogies, which develop as result of conjecture, stagnation, blind imitation, personal desire, or other constraints. Building on this, questions are designed with different content appropriate for different states of thought to forge interactive communication and tolerated negotiations of thoughts, assumptions and attitudes. Yet to cause the desired thinking-shift, the close questions with instrument (or/'am) are used to highlight contrast and clearly reveal the right thinking-path direction by making answers self-evident as found in (Qur'ān, 52). The latter shape the fundamental themes of belief such as the existence of God, prophethood, or the Day of Judgment. Consequently, questions also seek to remove barrier to thought or clear erroneous assumptions, including the denial of Prophethood, or labelling Prophets as magicians, soothsayers, madmen, sorcerers, or poets. They also help build scenarios that challenge the mind and heart, especially when an ordering statement is added, as shown in the

following verse: "If they really believe such a Book can be forged) then, let them produce a discourse like it, if they are truthful (in their claims)" (Qur'ān, 52: 34).

Similarly, Qur'ānic questions seek to cultivate and sustain spiritual states among listeners, especially with reference to the unity of God, or the example of Prophets or believers' good character. In this context, the following three emotional states can be identified: falsifying old negative beliefs, discrediting or questioning inappropriate styles of thought by way of showing their consequences whenever needed, and refining their behaviour. According to the Qur'ān (52: 48), the spiritual dimensions of Quranic questions are exemplified by way of urging Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) to wait patiently for God's judgment, and to glorify and praise Him during the day and the night. Many of those questions uses the Divine tangible signs instead of offering only abstract information due to the power of visual language which is very closed to people's life routines and experiences.

Seen according to their content and role, the thinking order found in Qur'ānic questions can be identified through the following hierarchical sequence: the focus-subject of the question, purpose of the question, and implications of the question. This categorization essentially means that higher-level questions are those, which seek to lead to the acknowledgment of God. Intermediate ones however, pertain to those related to humans, their nature and their social order. The last however, pertains to the physical world, which serves as a viable sign leading to the acknowledgement of God.

In establishing acknowledgement, the Qur'ān is replete with calls for reflection on the creations of the divine. Interestingly enough, verses related to the universe are estimated at one thousand compared to five hundred concerned with the law. Between the two, the Qur'ān however, underscores inhibitors of sound human reasoning including the pursuit of caprice, following conjecture, blind imitation, and oppressive dictatorship (Kamali, 2006, no. 2:155-157). It is in this context that one can see other aspects of Qur'ānic questioning which deal with those inhibitors, pertaining to illnesses and disorders such as ignorance, false conjecture, erroneous assumptions, fatal errors, misunderstandings, and reductionism.

6. QUR'ĀN QUESTIONING AND CRITICAL THINKING

One such meaning given to questioning is the acquisition of forms in the intellect (*ḥuṣūl ṣūrat al-shay' fī al-dhihn*) (al-Jurjanī, 2004, p. 18). Critical thinking in this regard is concerned with focused mental efforts seeking to achieve higher levels of perception and understanding. Critical thinking is characterised by being "purposeful, reasoned, and goal directed; a form of thinking involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions when employing skills that are thoughtful and effective for the particular context of thinking" (Machouche & Bensaid, 2015, 23:2: 203).

The examination of Qur'ānic questions shows that they are geared to make people sit for deep thinking-pause about matters related to their worldview and life's meanings. The Qur'ānic questions are inclined to ensuring the flow of human thought follows its innate path, however, without obstructing it, while keen to communicate with unparalleled clarity with the native human nature yet keeping the scope of the questions open before human reasoning. They also look to clarify matters and to yield firm persuasions without leaving gaps to doubt or to unanswered questions. As such, the Qur'ānic questioning provides an effective cognitive environment favourable for the development of thinking skills, both creatively and critically. Additionally, questions also train listeners to activate and utilize their cognitive capacities in order to properly understand issues and as result make the right judgments. On many occasions, the Qur'ān reminds people to use their faculties, abilities, and potential to find true meanings in their lives. On some occasions, Qur'ānic questions are verbalized following introductions, which appear to work as incentives that stimulate those abilities and prepare them for following stages of reflection.

The relationship of Qur'ānic questioning with critical thinking can be shown through understanding and identifying their associated functions as mentioned earlier. For example, the function of correction of the Qur'ān's questions seek to affect the listeners' perception and thoughts about the nature of man, the physical world, the unseen world, as well as the human relationship with the Creator. Other functions include uncovering invalid assumptions and methods of reasoning, as shown in the interest of the Qur'ān in people's spiritual illnesses and intellectual taboos. The Qur'ān, for example, explains the detriments

of injustice and transgression, weakness, despair, ungratefulness, stinginess, excessively biased argumentation, hopelessness, haste and impatience, oppression, ignorance, and ungratefulness on human life and the individual. The Qur'ān also points to about forty different spiritual diseases that affect the heart, which it considered an intelligent organ able to engage in the thinking processes.

Drawing on all this, it may be asserted that the functions of questions in the Qur'ān develop a fertile ground for nurturing creativity and thinking skills in general. For such benefits, Islamic system of learning has considered questioning as one fundamental instrument of acquiring knowledge and a sign of intellectual maturity. Interestingly enough, Ibn Khaldūn's critique of the Maghribi learning approach illustrates this point. For Ibn Khaldūn, learning or scientific instruction is a craft as reaching excellence in learning and science, knowledge of its diverse aspects, and mastery of it, are the result of acquiring the skill and habit of it (*malakah*) which would enable learners to comprehend all the basic principles of that particular science (Ibn Khaldūn, 1967: 340). For him, the easiest method of acquiring skills is through acquiring the ability to express oneself clearly in discussion (*fatq al-lisān bil muḥāwarah wal munāẓarah*) and debating problems of knowledge. These two methods, which involve the learning of the art of questioning and answers, are highly effective in learning. Ibn Khaldūn noted that lacking such learning among students has caused some of them to spend most of their lives attending scholarly sessions, yet they remain silent, and do not talk or discuss matters; to their detriment (Ibn Khaldūn, 1967: 341).

CONCLUSION

Questions of the Qur'ān are powerfully utilised to convey the message of God's unity (*tawḥīd*) and create change and motion in the people regardless of the differences found in the mode of their social conditions. These questions dive in the depth of human consciousness to elicit positive states of reflection. Serving as communication medium to convey the message of *tawḥīd*, the questions in the Qur'ān approach people according to their innate nature (*fiṭrah*). To perform such a great task, questions of the Qur'ān are designed to correspond with human needs and circumstances. They are organised in varying forms with differing targets yet altogether unitary purposes leading one to the ultimate truth of creation and belief in the Unity of God. However, the

field of questions in the Qur'ān continues to be an interesting domain of inquiry, especially with respect to the effects they engender on human thinking and creativity. The objectives, themes, forms, language, visualization, and illustration they utilize need further examination so as to unveil the power of questioning in the Qur'ān in the field of learning, communication, and human development. Questioning in the Qur'ān continues to be a very rich domain of research, which can provide deep insights on spirituality, thinking, worldview perception, development and creativity.

Endnotes

1 Ibrahim Ibn Isḥāq al-Ghaznawī (d. 1000 AH) compiled his "Questions of the Qur'ān" which consists of 100 verses on questioning in the Qur'ān. See Ḥājī Khalīfa, Beirut: Dar Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī. 1941, vol. 2: p.1008.

REFERENCES

Al-Baghdādī, al-Khatīb. (1996). *Al-faqih wal-mutafaqqih*. Ed. Abu 'Abdul Rahman 'Adil Ibn Yousuf al-Ghazazi. Jeddah: Dār Ibn al-Jawzi. Vol: 2.

Al-Bājī, Abul Walīd. (1980). *Al-minhaj fī tartīb al-ḥijāj*. Ed. Abdel Majid Turki. Beirūt: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, pp. 34-41.

Al-Balkhi. M. Ibrahim M. Sharif. (2007). *Asālīb al-istifhām fī al-baḥth al-balāghī wa-asrāruha fīl-Qur'ān*. (M. A Thesis). International Islamic University of Pakistan.

al-Daghamin, Z. Khalil. (2005). "Manhāj al-Qur'ān fi siyāghat al-tafkir al-insān". In Majallat Dirāsāt 'Ulum al-Shari'ah wal-Qanun, Vol 32, no. 1,

Al-Jawziyah, Ibn Qayyim. (2011), *Miftāh Dār al-Sa'ādah*. Ed Abdul Rahman bin Hassan bin Qa'id: Jeddah: Dār 'Ālam al-Fawā'id li-Nashr wal-Tawzī'. vol.1.Al-Jawziya, Ibn Qayyim. (2011). Miftāh Dār al-sa'ada wa manshur wilayat al- 'ilm wal-'irada. Ed. Abdurahman bin Qasim ben Qa'id. Dār 'Alam al-Fawa'id li Nashr wa Tawzī'. vol. 1: pp. 523-523.

Al-Jurjani, Ali ben Muhammad. (2004). *Mu'jam al-Ta'rifāt*. Ed. Muhammad Siddiq al-Minshawi. Cairo: Dār al-Fadhilah.

Al-Nawawi, Yahya bin Sharaf Muhyi Din. (1987). *Adab al- 'ālim wal muta'alim*.

Egypt, Tanta: Maktabat al-Sahābah, p. 32, 48.

Al-Razi Fakhr, al-Din. (1981). *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. Beirūt: Dār al-Fikr li Tibā'ah wal-nashr wal-Tawzī', vol. 22.

Al-Sikkaki, Abu Ya'qub Yusuf b. Abi Bakr. (1987). *Miftāh al-'Ulum*. Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2ⁿᵈ ed.

Al-Shatibi, Abu Ishāq Ibrahim. (1997). *al-Muwāfaqāt*. Ed. Abu 'Ubayda Ibn Mashhur Ibn Hasan Ibn Salman. Saudi Arabia: Dār Ibn 'Afān lil-nashr wal-Tawzī',vol. 2.

Al-Suyuti, Jalal al-Din. (2008). *al-Itqan fi 'ulum al-Qur'ān*. Ed. Shu'yab al-Arna'ut. Beirūt: Mu'assat al-Risālah, pp. 576-579.

Al-Tahannawi, A. Muhammad. (1996). *Kash-shāf istilāḥhāt al-funūn wal-'ulūm.Ed.* Ali Dahruj. Beirūt: Maktabat Lubnān. vol. 1.

Al-Tufi, Najm al-Din. (1987). *'Alam al-Jadhl fi 'Ilm al-Jadal.* Ed. Herausgegeben

Von. Beirūt: Orient-Institute, p. 37.

Asad, Muhammad. *The message of the Qur'ān*. (1981). Dār al-Andalus, Gibraltar.

Badri, Malik. (2000). *Contemplation: An Islamic Psychospirtual Study* (USA, Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought.

Browne, M. Neil; Stuart M. Keeley. (2007)**.** *Asking the right questions: a guide to critical thinking*. 8ᵗʰ Ed. New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Dukhan, K. Muhammad. (2010). *Al-dalālat al-tarbawiyah li-uslūb al-su'āl wal-jawāb fī al-sunnah al-nabawiyah* (MA Diss.). Palestine: Islamic University of

Gaza.Elder, Linda & Richard Paul. (2010). *The art of asking essential questions* (The

Foundation for Critical Thinking, 5ᵗʰ ed. Eric E. Vogt, Juanita Brown, and David Isaacs. (2003). *The art of powerful question: Catalyzing Insight, Innovation, and Action*/ USA: Whole Systems Associates.

Gerald, N. & William J. Chandon. (2004). *Smart questions: learn to ask right questions for powerful results*. Jossey-Bass, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Ibn Jama'ah, al-Qadi Badr al-Din Muhammad. (2012). *al-Tadhkirat al-Sāmi' wal-mutakallim fī-'adab al-'ālim wal-muta'alim*. Annotated by Muhammad bin Mahdi al-'Ajami. Beirūt: Dār al-Basha'ir al-Islamiyyah, 3ʳᵈ ed.

Ibn Khaldūn. A. (1967). *The muqaddimah.* Trans Franz Rosenthal, edited by N. J. Dawood London: Princeton University Press.

Kamali, H. Muhammad. (2006). "reading the sign: Qur'ānic perspective on thinking" Islam & Science. Vol. 4, winter, no. 2, pp. 155-157.

Kehil. W. Mustafa. (2009). *Al-su'āl fi-ḍaw' al-Qur'ān al-Karīm:* dirāsah *mawḍū'iya* (M. A Thesis). Islamic University of Gaza.

Mustapha bin 'Abdullah (Hājji Khalifah). (1941). *Kashf al-Zunu 'an asāmi al-kutub wal-funun.* Beirūt: Dār Ihyā' Turāth al-'Arabi. vol 2.

Machouche, Salah & Benaouda, Bensaid & Fadila Grine. (2012). "Positive thinking: An Islamic perspective". In *Al-Shajarah*. vol. 17, no. 2.

Machouche, Salah & Bensaid Benaouda. (2015). "The roots and constructs of Ibn Khaldūn's critical thinking". In *Intellectual Discourse,* 23(2): 201-228.

Makdisi, George. (1981). *The rise of colleges: Institution of Learning in Islam and the West.* Edinburgh University Press.

Naghich, Aida. (2012). *Uslūb al-istifhām fī al-ahādīth al-nabawiyah* (MA Diss.): Algeria: University of Tizi Ouzou.

Nicole Note *et. al* (Ed.) (2009), *Worldviews and Cultures: Philosophical Reflections from an Intercultural Perspective.* (Springer Science and Business Media B.V.), vol. 10.

In This Issue

Articles