

Towards an Islamization of Housing

Menuju ke arah Islamisasi Perumahan

Spahic Omer*

Abstract

Islamizing housing phenomenon is a very serious issue in the context of the Muslim architectural reality. It requires major contributions and high-spirited concerted efforts of many parties from across the wide spectrum of society: government, educators, practitioners, professional bodies, NGOs, members of the business community, students and the general public. In this paper, the focus is made on the role of education and educators and, to some extent, practitioners. In the process, the remarkable spiritual dimension of housing in Islam, and the importance of its proper handling, both at the conceptual and practical planes for the success of the project of Islamization, are emphasized. Islam distinguishes between the house, as a physical component, and home, as an aura, environment and ambiance generated by the former. In Islam, the house is an institution. It is a family development centre. Muslim architects, planners, structural engineers and final users alike, should perceive the house phenomenon as a sheer means, an instrument, a carrier of the spiritual, not a goal itself. The paper seeks to enhance people's awareness as to the significance of correctly conceptualizing Islamic housing and how some of the fundamental aspects of its potential revival could be related to the notion of Islamization of knowledge.

Keywords: Housing, Islamization, Islam, Muslims, Education.

Abstrak

Fenomena mengislamkan perumahan adalah isu yang amat serius dalam konteks realiti seni bina Islam. Ia memerlukan sumbangan besar dan usaha bersepadu dan bersemangat tinggi oleh banyak pihak dari seluruh spektrum luas masyarakat: kerajaan,

* Associate Professor in the Department of Fundamental and Interdisciplinary Studies, International Islamic University Malaysia.

para pendidik, pengamal, badan-badan profesional, pertubuhan bukan kerajaan, ahli-ahli perniagaan, pelajar dan orang awam. Dalam kajian ini, tumpuan dibuat atas peranan pendidikan dan pendidik dan, sedikit sebanyak, kepada pengamal. Dalam proses itu, dimensi luar biasa perumahan dalam Islam, dan kepentingan pengendalian yang betul, kedua-dua di peringkat konseptual dan praktikal bagi menjayakan projek Islamisasi, ditekankan. Islam membezakan antara rumah, sebagai komponen fizikal, dan rumah, sebagai aura persekitaran dan suasana yang dihasilkan oleh komponen fizikal. Di dalam Islam, rumah itu adalah sebuah institusi. Ia merupakan pusat pembangunan keluarga. Arkitek-arkitek, perancang, jurutera struktur dan pengguna akhir Islam, perlu melihat fenomena rumah sebagai satu cara, alat dan pembawa rohani dan bukan matlamat itu sendiri. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kesedaran rakyat tentang kepentingan mengilhamkan perumahan Islam dan bagaimana beberapa aspek asas kebangkitan potensinya boleh dikaitkan dengan konsep Islamisasi ilmu.

Kata Kunci: Perumahan, Islamisasi, Islam, Orang Islam, Pendidikan.

Introduction

Housing is a physical locus of a culture's nucleus in that the primary elements of society, individuals organized along the family lines, are born, raised and educated in them. The strength of the institutions of the family and house denotes the strength of a society and the verve of its cultural agendas. Similarly, frailties in the institutions of the family and house denote frailties in a society and its cultural standing. The house dominion is where people either succeed or fail in managing and executing the most crucial aspects of their lives. Housing is where the epicentre of the rise and fall of cultures and civilizations also lies. Thus, some of the chief causes of the decline of Islamic culture, if properly examined, could be related, one way or another, to the complex subject of housing and its own decline and its causes. Likewise, some of the main cures and catalysts for the revival of Islamic culture could be found right in the subject of reviving genuine Islamic housing. Indeed, Islamizing housing today could be a turning point, as well as an engine of growth, insofar as a total recovery and revival of Muslim cultural consciousness and involvement at a world stage are concerned. This paper aims to contribute to creating such much needed mindset among Muslims by drawing some

parallels between the subjects of Islamic housing and Islamization of knowledge.

Conceptualizing the Phenomenon of Islamic Housing

Islamic housing is a blend of the belief system, teachings and values of Islam, on the one hand, and the prerequisites and influences of indigenous cultures, climates, topographies, building materials, talents, technologies and economies, on the other. The former is characterized as universal, total, permanent, immutable and absolute. It came from God in the form of revelation (*wahy*). It is divine. The latter, however, fluctuates and varies from one region to the other and from one community to the other. It is indigenous, though locally permanent and unchangeable as far as climates and topographies are concerned, but it is impermanent, conditional and changeable as far as some cultural manifestations, building materials, talents, technologies and economies are concerned.

Islamic housing is a mixture of the heavenly and terrestrial factors and elements. Both sides are extremely important, playing their respective roles. They finely complement and add to each other's strength and operation. Neglecting either of the two poles in Islamic housing inevitably leads to a serious damage in its fundamental nature, at a conceptual or a practical level. The heavenly or divine factors give Islamic housing a soul, moral fiber and its conspicuous identity. They present it with a special aura that is effortlessly exuded by Islamic houses inside as well as outside their ambits. The terrestrial factors, on the other hand, impart about Islamic housing an intuition about its compelling worldliness, simplicity and utter practicality and pragmatism. They provide a powerful feeling about Islamic houses' and their users' congenital mortality, so nobody should get carried away and, deceived, treat his or her house or his or her self differently. Even though Islamic housing is inspired and deeply rooted in a transcendental inspiration and message, it still operates and is greatly influenced and shaped by the exigencies of the space and time factors, relationships and experiences. It is because of this that Stefano Bianca remarked about the extent to which the Islamic spirituali-

ty influences Islamic architecture: “Compared with other religious traditions, the distinctive feature of Islam is that it has given birth to a comprehensive and integrated cultural system by totally embedding the religious practice in the daily life of the individual and the society. While Islam did not prescribe formal architectural concepts, it molded the whole way of life by providing a matrix of behavioral archetypes which, by necessity, generated correlated physical patterns. Therefore, the religious and social universe of Islam must be addressed before engaging in the analysis of architectural structures.”¹

At the heart of Islamic housing stand Muslims as patrons, architects, planners, engineers, draftsmen and users. Thus, Islamic education should give Muslims a clear picture of the religious and civilizational significance of Islamic housing, as well as of all the relevant issues which are directly and indirectly related to it. Surely, a segment of such an educational process and system should be a notion that there is nothing fixed or predetermined in the area of Islamic housing, and that Islamic housing is a result of a process where more than a few factors, phases and parties are involved and are thus all equally important. It is as good as impossible to identify a phase, or a factor, or a party in that process and regard it as more important than the others. The Islamic housing process starts with having a proper understanding and vision which leads to making a right intention (*nīyyah*). It continues with the planning, designing and building stages, and ends with attaining the net results and how people make use of and benefit from them. What is important is that everyone involved in the creation and actualization of Islamic housing: from patrons and various authorities, over planners, architects and builders, to the owners and users of houses, duly honours the dictates of both the teachings and principles of Islam, and the localized cultural, socio-economic and ecological elements and phenomena.

Indeed, this is a serious requirement in Islamic housing. It is a requirement that everyone involved possesses a proper understanding and

¹ Stefano Bianca, *Urban Form in the Arab World*, (London; New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000), p. 22-23.

vision, that everyone sincerely tries his or her level best to rise to the challenge of transporting the idea of Islamic housing from the realm of theory and concept to the realm of physical realities and solutions, and that the goals and aspirations of Muslims, especially housing authorities and professionals, mirror, and are subservient to, the ultimate goals and aspirations of Islam. Regardless of what might be the net result of this approach of Muslims to housing, their houses are entitled to be rightly called and held as “Islamic” as they duly adhere to the few, but fundamentally pertinent, requirements of Islamic housing. It does not matter in Islamic housing how houses are planned and look like, if their appearances are not related to, nor inspired by, the verve of the synthesis of Islam and the fluctuating space and time factors. Moreover, in Islam, it does not matter how houses look like, if their appearances are not due to some creative initiatives stirred by the amalgamation of the spiritual and material spheres of existence, of revelation and reason, and of the heavens and the earth. Such is the importance of this canon that a housing style that does not honor the tenets and values of Islam cannot be called “Islamic”. Equally, a housing style that betrays the demands of its indigenous climate, environment, traditions, technology and economy cannot be called “Islamic” either.

It follows that concerning housing, the only thing that Islam wants from Muslims is that they entertain no compromise with regard to the subject of ardent following in pure religious matters, which, too, constitute the essence and character of Islamic housing, but at the same time, that they completely shun imitation and that they become great advocates of innovation and creativity while trying to overcome their housing problems and challenges. Since its inception, Islam declared a war against ignorance, mediocrity and blind following. Since its inception, too, Islam became the greatest proponent of knowledge, reason, ingenuity, initiative and excellence. For Muslims to turn away from the inspiration and guidance of Islam in their housing will be a serious felony against their religion, history, culture and their very selves. For Muslims, furthermore, to blindly follow and import other people’s housing solutions will also be a serious felony against the very spirit of Islam, as well as against the in-

nate disposition of life and human consciousness. In other words, Islam insists that Muslims be devout, righteous and ethical. It also insists, as a condition for securing the benefits of the former, that Muslims be open-minded, sensible, proactive, productive, pragmatic and ingenious.

Islam did not instruct Muslims how to plan and build houses, but it did instruct them how to carry out a number of tasks directly or indirectly associated with the house and housing. Some of such tasks are: privacy protection against the outside world, among the family members and between the family members and visitors, respect for the rights of guests and visitors, respect for the rights of neighbours, the relationship between men and women, the implications of carrying out religious obligations, hygiene, peaceful coexistence with the natural environment, safety, security, recreation, modesty, Islam's aim to preserve the life, religion, mental and psychological strength, descendants and wealth of its people, etc.²

The net result of this strategy is that there are – and there should always be -- many types of the Islamic house, such as those in the Middle East, the Indian Subcontinent, Turkey, Iran, the Islamic West (*al-maghrib al-Islāmī*), South-East Asia, etc., but the soul and fundamental nature of all those housing types will always be one and the same and will be easily recognizable by those familiar with the character of Islam and the character of its civilization. In actual fact, what those different-yet-same, or same-yet-different, houses represent connotes people's solutions to the challenges posed by their living of their family lives aligned with their religious tenets while, at the same time, complying with the requirements of physical and cultural contexts in which they exist. While creating Islamic architecture, Muslims betray neither their religion nor their living conditions. Islamic housing honours the principle of unity in diversity.

Eventually, most of what came to be known as the language of Islamic residential architecture, such as the inner courtyard, partly or fully screened windows, raising windows above the eye level, bent entrances,

²Spahic Omer, *The Origins and Functions of Islamic Domestic Courtyards*, (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 2008), p. 15.

parapets, or protective walls, along the edges of balconies and open roofs, double circulation inside houses: one for men and the other for women, or one for the family members and the other for guests and visitors, inward looking designs, positioning guest rooms close to main entrances and away from houses' core, gradual and held back progression from the outside to the inside, certain decorative systems and styles, arcades, arches, porticos, recesses or niches, etc. -- such must be seen as sets of best solutions that people have evolved for themselves. They are to be seen as no more than that. Such structural solutions should not be seen as the prescribed language of Islamic residential architecture that cannot be revised, enriched, improved, altered and even abandoned, to a certain extent or completely, if necessary and in favour of some other equally or more viable solutions presented by advances made by science and technology, and generally by the implications of people's living conditions. More importantly, such structural solutions are not to be held as religious symbols with some ontological significance.

Muslims ought to keep in mind that their Islamic houses are to be alive, pulsating and serviceable. Their houses are to comfortably suit and fit them as their users just as a perfect dress comfortably fits a body. About this, Ibn Qutaybah, a Muslim scholar of the 9th Hijrah century, compared the house -- as quoted by Afif Bahnassi³ -- to a shirt, saying that just as the shirt should fit its owner, the house too should suit its dwellers. Every ingredient in an Islamic house is functional and serves a noble purpose, on its own or along with some other ingredients. An Islamic house contains no elements that are meaningless and lifeless, or that are unessential to its widest spectrum of functions and serviceability. An Islamic house does not function like a museum or a monument which only sporadically springs into life. An Islamic house is pleasant, friendly, warm, welcoming, relaxing and exciting. In short, an Islamic house is Islam manifested. Within and without its realm, it exudes the power and beauty of an Islamic lifestyle, promulgating its spiritual appropriateness

³Afif Bahnassi, *The Islamic Architecture and its Specificities in Teaching Curricula*, <http://www.isesco.org.ma/pub/Eng/Islarch/P2.htm> (accessed on October 9, 2014).

and worth. At the outset, Muslims conceive and shape their houses, and then when they become fully operational, they tend to influence and “shape” them and their attitudes. This is in line with a statement made by Winston Churchill on human built environment: “We shape our buildings (built environment) and afterwards they shape us.”⁴ Finally, neither formalism nor literal symbolism has a place in Islamic housing.

Creating Islamic housing is anything but an easy and simple task. Muslim housing professionals must come to terms with the enormity of the task that awaits them. The good news, however, is that in no way can they fail in their undertakings so long as they remain sincere, try their best and stay the course while attempting to remedy the current Muslim housing ailments. This is an assurance from God to every servant of His who dedicates his or her life to the service of God and to the service of Islamic society. This is so because in Islam human deeds are judged by their intentions (*nīyyah*), because God appreciates human efforts, which are under people’s very jurisdiction, rather than the outcomes, which, more often than not, are beyond the jurisdiction of people, and finally because of the unique Islamic concept of *ijtihād* according to which if a person, while forming diligently independent opinions or judgments about matters on which divine texts are silent using as a platform the framework of available texts, gets things right he will receive two rewards, but if he for whatever reasons gets things wrong, he will still get one reward for his sincere intention and dedicated efforts.

Certainly, there are no better incentives for Muslim housing professionals to get down to the scheme of reviving the phenomenon of Islamic housing than the above-mentioned Islamic precepts. There are no alternatives that can yield better results and benefits to them, in this world as well as in the Hereafter. If truth be told, at the present when the signs of a Muslim cultural and civilizational re-awakening are becoming increasingly evident, reviving Islamic housing becomes so vital. It becomes a

⁴FaidaNoori Salim Atto, *The Importance of Architecture and Urban Design to Identity Formation of Neighborhood’s Community*, The Proceedings of the International Housing Symposium III, 20-23.5.2007, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, p. 101.

sheer necessity. Nothing else could be an adequate alternative or a surrogate. Hence, the best contributions of Muslim housing professionals to the ongoing Muslim regeneration will be their contributions to the revival of Islamic housing. Such contributions will be on par with any other colossal contribution in terms of its value, impact and general appreciation and approval. Finally, it goes without saying that deliberately failing to do their part, yet lead the way, in revitalizing and restoring Islamic housing, exposes Muslim housing professionals to a serious peril. The peril will be on par with any other colossal peril due to which the cultural and civilizational apathy and stupor of Muslims only exacerbate and lengthen. Reviving Islamic housing warrants great rewards. Ignoring, and thus aggravating it, warrants some serious and unwelcome repercussions for all the responsible parties.

About the state of the majority of Muslim architects and planners today, Cliff Moughtin and Tarik Shalaby in their paper “New approach to housing design in Muslim cities” said: “The planner and architect in the Muslim world seem to have rejected the discipline of their culture, unaware of the fact that each community has its specific social and cultural roots. Instead they adopted alien ideas which are unsympathetic to the tradition of the people they serve (i.e., Muslims). The “good” housing solution is the one that fully expresses the preferences, aspirations and psychological needs of the group for whom it is meant. It has nothing to do with the clever application of principles deduced from an abstract theory of architecture.”⁵

An Alliance of Knowledge and Power

It is an undeniable truth that a proper education is a key to Islamizing and reviving the wonder of housing, as an essential part of the Islam-

⁵ Cliff Moughtin & Tarik Shalaby, *New Approach to Housing Design in Muslim Cities*, (pp. 211-236); Inside: *Housing in the Islamic City*, Proceedings of a Symposium held in Ankara, Turkey, on 21-25.7.1984. Proceedings prepared by: Center of Planning and Architectural Studies, Cairo, 1984.

ization and revival of the total of Islamic culture and civilization. A comprehensive educational vision and plan, coupled with concrete policies and laws and their avid and wise enforcement, account for the most powerful force that can lead to making the idea of contemporary Islamic housing a reality. A clever fusion of knowledge and authority is the best way to take the idea of Islamic housing from the world of abstract ideas to the real world of corporeal challenges and realities.

Indeed, knowledge without its systematic actualization and application is absurd and worthless, whereas authority, or power, with no support of an adequate and appropriate knowledge and its protagonists is a hollow and dangerous thing. It is a sham, and a farce. For knowledge to fully play its projected roles of enlightenment, enrichment, guidance, transformation and progress in society, it needs the unreserved help and support of genuine and honest authority, or power, and its protagonists. In the same vein, for authority and power to play their own projected roles of guidance, administration, protection and development in society, they need the constant help, advice and direction of knowledge and its own protagonists. Knowledge and authority need each other for their bare survival. The existence of either of them in the absence of the other is rather illusory. Such an existence is artificial and ineffective in the extreme.

Certainly, it is because of this that in Islam one of the chief characteristics of a ruler is that he is pious and knowledgeable. He must hold in high esteem the people of knowledge and wisdom regularly consulting and listening to them. Mutual consultation the Holy Qur'an highlights as a foremost feature of the Muslim community (*al-Shūrā*, 42:38). Even Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) used to consult his companions in a number of worldly matters. The Qur'an explicitly instructed him to do so (*Āli 'Imrān*, 3:159).

At the same time, and due to the same reasons, knowledge without its practical application and dimension is strongly repudiated and condemned in Islam, just as is the case with the sheer faith without deeds to supplement and support it. It is thus rightly said that knowledge without deeds, or a theory without practice, is like a tree without fruits. Due to

this, furthermore, the Qur'an declares that it is the learned believing men and women who fear God most, i.e., they make up the best category of believers as they exemplify and combine knowledge, faith and practice.

Echoing the importance of harmoniously combining true knowledge and its people with genuine and honest authority, or power, and its own people, and that the wellbeing of society depends on them, the appropriateness of their respective services to society and on how sound and solid the relationships between them are, 'Abd Allah b. Mu-bārak, a leading Muslim scholar from the second *Hijrah* century, is reported to have said: "There are two types of people, when they are good and righteous the whole community becomes good and righteous, but when they are bad and morally corrupt the whole community becomes bad and morally corrupt. Those two types of people are scholars and rulers."⁶

Thus, it is not the rulers alone who rule and are in charge of society. Rather, it is both rulers and scholars that are responsible for administering and leading society. The role of the public is not to be excluded in the process either, because it is nobody else but them who are the target, as well as the strength, of virtually all laws and policies. Public participation in every aspect of rule, in whatever regulated forms and capacities, is both crucial and reasonable.

Nor is it that scholars alone are to be the depositories and owners of the most precious commodity, knowledge, thus devaluing and misusing it. They must apply and share it with others so that everyone else can benefit from it. If there could be an autocracy and tyranny in relation to authority and power, similarly there could be an intellectual autocracy and tyranny in relation to knowledge as well, if it became a personal and concealed, or a manipulated and abused matter.

Truly, knowledge and authority stand for the two greatest responsibilities, or trusts (*amānah*), that a person can take up. They are for a

⁶Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *l'lam al-Muwaqqi'in 'anRabb al-'Alamin*, http://www.islamweb.net/newlibrary/display_book.php?flag=1&bk_no=34&ID=2 (accessed on October 15, 2013).

common, and not for a personal, good or gain. They are more about giving than receiving. The rewards for fulfilling them are immense, and the penalty for neglecting and betraying them proportionately immense too. Thus, if a person is not qualified for, or serious towards, them, there is then nothing special in coveting them. They then simply can destroy their pursuers. They can be the main cause of their downfall in both worlds.

Parenthetically, in Islam -- as a matter of fact -- nobody reigns over anybody, because the whole authority and power belongs to God alone (*al-Baqarah*, 2:107). Correspondingly, nobody is to selfishly claim any credit for an amount of knowledge he or she might acquire, because all knowledge belongs to God alone and we are bestowed but with a tiny portion of it (*al-Isrā'*, 17:85).

People are all servants of God. They are all God's vicegerents on earth. They are all equal. They are all important for the fulfillment of the spiritual purpose on earth. They all must contribute to their mutual good, something which cannot be done except if people are allowed to freely, honorably and responsibly operate in their diverse capacities and in their diverse societal positions. No capacity or position in society, it stands to reason, is to be viewed as superior, or inferior, to others, for the interests of society depends on the performances and productivity of each and every member. If a segment of society malfunctions or breaks down, the whole of society can be brought to a standstill. Capacities and positions in society are relative. Absolute is only a person's commitment to the cause, regardless of his or her societal rank or position. Hence, it is an Islamic tenet that the best among people are those who are most God-conscious (*al-Hujurat*, 49:13), as well as that God does not look at people's outward appearances, backgrounds and skin colors, but looks into their hearts and deeds. Rulers and scholars, it follows, are no more than the care-takers (*Rā'in*) of society, and are thus the most responsible groups in it. Just like everyone else, they, too, in their respective capacities serve society and its people. No position in society is a privileged one. It is all about myriad levels and modes of serving within the intricate matrix of social responsibilities and duties.

This viewpoint is further supported by the following words of God in the Qur'an: "Say: "O my Lord! Let my entry be by the Gate of Truth and Honor, and likewise my exit by the Gate of Truth and Honor; and grant me from Your Presence an authority, or a power, (*sultān*) to aid (me)" (*al-Isrā'*, 17:80).

The Prophet (s.a.w.) also said: "Indeed, Allah curbs with (earthly) authority, or power, (*sultān*) what cannot be curbed by the Qur'an alone."⁷

The scholars of the Qur'an and the Prophet's *Sunnah* unanimously agree that the message of the above mentioned Qur'anic verse and the Prophet's tradition is that in some circumstances the power and influence of the guidance, normative teachings, glad tidings and admonitions of the Qur'an alone -- the ultimate and primary source of knowledge -- is not sufficient for some people to take note of and adhere to them, notwithstanding the aptness of systems, methods, resources, commitment and zeal that might be in place. Due to the lack of an enforcing authority or power (*sultān*), achieving the ultimate goals and aspirations of knowledge -- which must be espoused by, and mirrored in, the vision and mission of society and its leadership -- is bound to be seriously affected. Thus, the impetus of a genuine power and authority is badly needed. This is especially so if the objectives of knowledge appear to be at odds with the objectives and aspirations of some other active and powerful forces in society. In this case, it is not only the duty of the highest societal authority to champion the knowledge calling and its noble purpose and goals, but also to deal with the negative trends and currents in society which could undermine the interests of knowledge and with it the interests and wellbeing of society as a whole. The Qur'an, as a symbol of knowledge and a spiritual power, and the *sultān*, as a symbol of worldly power and authority, support and complement each other in man's attainment of his honorable earthly *khilāfah* (vicegerency) mission. They are both God's gifts to man which must be handled benevolently, gratefully and respon-

⁷ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, <http://www.altafsir.com> (accessed on October 14, 2013).

sibly. They are both to be given their respective established dues. Neither of them is to operate at the expense of, or in isolation from, the other. The Qur'an and the *sultān* constitute an amalgamated sum total that cannot be separated. Islam is both religion and state; it is both this world and the Hereafter; it is both matter and soul.

The following Qur'anic verse should also be seen in the same light of integrating knowledge, as symbolized by Prophets and revelations sent to them, and authority, as symbolized by the idea of "iron" and its many worldly benefits. That integration is an assured path to comprehensive success and happiness on earth: *"We sent aforetime our messengers with clear signs and sent down with them the Book and the balance (of right and wrong), that men may stand forth in justice; and We sent down iron, in which is (material for) mighty war, as well as many benefits for mankind, that Allah may test who it is that will help, unseen, Him and His messengers: For Allah is full of strength, exalted in might (and able to enforce His will)" (al-Ḥadīd, 57:25).*

Islamic Housing and the Universality of the Islamic Message

So, therefore, a significant step towards a contemporary Islamic housing will be a synthesis of true knowledge and education, as well as authority, enforcement and implementation. Furthermore, it will also be important to realize that the current problems with regard to housing in the Muslim world are purely Muslim ones. Thus, the solutions must be Muslim ones, too, closely linked with Islam. Some foreign factors and influences could be welcomed somewhat, but their roles should always be auxiliary, and the scope of their authority second to an Islamic one.

Indeed, perceiving and creating an Islamic housing is a very serious task. It is about giving people some of their fundamental rights, about executing a religious obligation, and about contributing to an appropriate, or an otherwise, implementation of the message of Islam. The immediate corollary of this noble initiative is that Muslim architects, and all the other professionals in the field of housing at large, should enhance consider-

ably their knowledge of Islam: its *Shari'ah* (laws) and worldview. This may appear as a daunting task to many. However, needless to say that it is incumbent upon every Muslim, male and female, to learn and know the rulings of Islam pertaining to the obligations and teachings they have to adhere to in their daily lives. Not surprisingly, the same teachings which Muslim housing professionals should be acquainted with, so that they can practice them as part of their association with Islam, constitute the very core of Islam. As such, those teachings are closely correlated with and are never far-flung from the subject of Islamic housing as well, in that the latter embodies much of the fundamental nature of both Islam and the human terrestrial existence.

It goes without saying that Islam is life and life is Islam. Housing is a physical locus of the broadest, most crucial and most vibrant life activities. Islamic housing, both as a notion and a corporeal marvel, and Muslim housing professionals, as the former's main protagonists, thus play a very important role in combining and integrating the phenomena of Islam and human life into a successful and powerful blend. Islamic housing, in addition, functions as a ground for such a blend to operate and express itself. Islamic housing, therefore, cannot exist without Islam. Nor can it be conceived, created and sustained without individuals: policy makers, housing professionals and users, who personify the message of Islam in their thoughts, words and deeds.

Islam is a total religion that consists of faith, knowledge and practice. Islam cannot be fragmented and then reduced to any, or to a couple, of its three salient constituents. Therefore, every Muslim is duty-bound to conceive and plan his personal, family and professional life in accordance with this philosophy as much as possible, subjecting his or her personal wishes and interests to Islam and not Islam to his or her self. This code applies to Muslim housing professionals as well. And for one to practice and live the Islamic message, one must possess a reasonable amount of knowledge about it, in particular about those Islamic subjects and issues with which one comes into contact on a regular basis. It is a paradox that a person claims to be a devout and practicing Muslim but is ignorant about the basic things of Islam concerning its beliefs, rites, val-

ues and morals. It is even a greater paradox that a person claims to be a completely secular Muslim, in the sense that he somewhat believes in the Islamic message but reckons that he has nothing to do with its foremost religious rites, values and morals. These beliefs are dangerously misleading and can seriously jeopardize one's spiritual standing and growth, both in this world and in the Hereafter. Hence, Islam strongly rebukes ignorance, egotism, carelessness and indifference. It considers them of the greatest impediments to man's realization of his spiritual purpose on earth. It is thus rightly said about the intents and goals of Islam that they were given to man so as to take him away from the darkness of sin and uncontrolled indulgence to the light of virtue and high morals, from the ignorance rooted in faithlessness, bias and narrow-mindedness to the knowledge, wisdom and enlightenment rooted in faith, trust and man's total and accountable worldview, and from the worship of phony idols and shallow personal interests, desires and goals to the worship of the real Creator, Lord and Master of the whole universe.

God reiterates time and again that for Muslims there could be no civilizational ventures and initiatives that will not be steeped in the consciousness and spirituality of Islam. If, however, there come about such endeavors, they will be bound to eventually fall short of tasting the real success and victory. For example, in the course of advising and warning his materialistic and overly ambitious people, 'Ād, Prophet Hūd is said to have told them, as testified by the Qur'an: "*O my people! Ask forgiveness of your Lord, then turn to Him (in repentance); He will send on you clouds pouring down abundance of rain and add strength to your strength, and do not turn back guilty*" (Hūd, 11:52).

"So keep your duty to Allah, and obey me. Keep your duty toward Him Who has aided you with (the good things) that you know; has aided you with cattle and sons, and gardens and water-springs. Lo! I fear for you the retribution of an awful day" (al-Shu'arā', 26:131-135).

Prophet Nūḥ also told his disobedient and corrupt people: "*Ask forgiveness of your Lord, surely He is the most Forgiving. He will send down upon you the cloud, pouring down abundance of rain. And help you with wealth and sons, and make for you gardens, and make for you riv-*

ers. What is the matter with you that you fear not the greatness of Allah?" (Nuh, 71:10-13).

Truly, as far as Islam and Muslims are concerned, one's -- or a nation's -- triumph is conditioned by the vitality of a fine mixture of faith, unceasingly turning and keeping duty to God, knowledge that illuminates hearts and minds, and an all-embracing culture of excellence, hard work, integrity and willpower.

Islamizing and Teaching Housing

While Islamizing the notion of housing both in theory and practice, as a matter of great urgency and a remedial measure, Muslim architects, planners and engineers can draw on their own familiarity with the rulings of Islam, provided the same is adequate. Otherwise, trustworthy religious scholars, who are both qualified and broad-minded, should be consulted and engaged as many times as needed. Even as professional advisors and consultants some religious scholars could be appointed either by the government or by private firms and establishments. It goes without saying that unremitting inter and cross-professional housing studies and research activities appear to be inevitable. This is bound to lead gradually to narrowing down the glaring gap separating the religious scholars and their fields of interest from the secular ones and their own fields of interest. This way, every scholar will become aware as to his/her role in society and his/her obligations toward society, nature and Allah. Certainly, the religious scholars will have to widen their interests and concerns, becoming what they are actually always meant to be: the guardians of societies. But to secure that accolade they ought to reevaluate themselves and their undertakings, striving to be a more practical, approachable, people-friendly, and less dogmatic and idealistic lot. Whereas the secular scholars will have to think of Islamizing their knowledge, wherever there is a conflict of interests and as much as possible, realigning their scientific goals and aspirations with the goals and aspirations of Islam and the Muslim community to which they belong.

Definitely, it is a high time that a serious and scientific initiative of integrating the Islamic worldview, ethics and value system into residential planning and architecture takes off in the Muslim world. However, such a scheme is to be only a segment of a broader Islamization project which will aim to bring about a total harmonization between the education systems of Muslims and the teachings and values of Islam. It is not that residential planning and architecture should be only targeted by this scheme, but also the whole of built environment professions. The process of integration between built environment professions and Islam will yield best results if it were embarked on wisely and gradually, after the people: policy makers, built environment professionals and users, have become convinced of its relevance and urgency, and that they all must as much contribute to as they benefit from it, and even more.

As a beginning, in universities and colleges where students undertake planning, design and architecture programs and where a strong emphasis on housing issues is made, some in-depth and deemed most needed programs on Islamic studies can be taught. Lecturers and tutors will have to be well-educated, well-trained and will have to lead by example. Their role will be critical. The mission of Islamization is a massive and complex one so students will always look up at their teachers for inspiration and guidance.

The programs can be taught independently, or they can be integrated into the syllabus of other courses. The latter option is the finest one, as it is spontaneous and natural, hence more effective. Due to the obvious relevance and applicability of the integrated subject matter, the students will have little or no reasons to develop any aversion to what they are subjected to. The former option, however, if applied alone is not really an effectual one, as it is suggestive, nominally though, of perpetuating the existing rift between the religious and planning and architectural sciences. At best, the same can be seen as just an addendum to the existing curriculum, to which the students are bound to develop much indifference.

Unquestionably, the best and most workable solution would be a viable combination of both options. In the process, either option can be given more emphasis at the expense of the other, subject to the dictates of

different situations. However, regardless of what model is eventually developed, this aspect of Islamization process can become effective only if students are constantly urged to incorporate what they have learned in the classroom into their practical works in studios and laboratories. Above all this, furthermore, intensive workshops, seminars and trainings on Islamic housing can be periodically organized for those who have already graduated and are actively and professionally involved in the housing sector, so that continuity is ensured and if considered necessary with some professionals, enthusiasm for the mission renewed.

It would be even better if the education systems of Muslims are such that all students come to colleges and universities with a reasonable amount of knowledge about Islam and its culture and history, which they have obtained beforehand at the lower levels of their study. What would then transpire in colleges and universities -- where the curriculum, teaching methods, references and the knowledge of the lecturers and tutors are expectedly all Islam compliant -- is that no time will be wasted on clarifying basic concepts and on dealing with introductory issues. Rather, straight from the beginning the core issues in Islamic housing could be seriously approached from perspectives that suite the level of students' study, aptitude and interests. It could be then hoped that within the prescribed timeframe which students spend in colleges and universities, a significant set of objectives with respect to Islamization and integration of knowledge in the housing sector can be successfully achieved. Then, the whole enterprise will in due time become a serious, sought-after and productive scientific project, rather than a superficial, superfluous and decorative addendum and diversion.

In universities and colleges the students can be taught some independent courses on the belief system (*'aqidah*), ethics (*akhlāq*), traditions, culture (*thaqāfah*) and history of Islam. However, this will have little or no impact if the same knowledge is not referred to and is not attempted to be applied in those subjects which are directly linked with the question of housing as society's biggest concern, focusing on its historical, theoretical, cultural, aesthetic, religious, ethical and environmental dimensions.

For example, in an independent Islamic course the students are expected to thoroughly learn about the position of Islam on peaceful coexistence with the environment. Apart from the theoretical part, a lecturer in the same course must be ready to stir up the thoughts of students through a discussion, an assignment, or a question in a test, towards the practical implications of that particular theme -- to which Islam, not by an accident, attaches so much importance -- for planning, designing and building houses. Next, in the studio where the students might be asked, for example, to plan an environment friendly neighborhood, or design an energy efficient or sustainable house, the environmental lessons learnt beforehand in an independent Islamic course should serve to the students as the foundation, inspiration and chief guidance in their works. The studio lecturers, in turn, are expected to be very familiar with the same lessons -- at best that those lessons make up the core of their own environmental education -- looking forward to seeing the students ingeniously apply those environmental lessons in their planning and design final products which can be called, for example, "an Islamic environment friendly neighborhood", or "an Islamic energy efficient house", or "an Islamic sustainable house".

Similar methods are to be devised and applied to the integration of the rest of the Islamic teachings and values which underpin the idea of housing in Islam into the Islamic housing education. Indeed, for the Islamization of the housing education, the students and lecturers must work closely as a team, helping, supporting, encouraging and learning from each other, while relying on, and deriving the strength from, the oneness of their divinely sanctioned life vision, mission, purpose, objectives and knowledge sources.

Presently, the housing planning and building education in the Muslim world, by and large, is very heterogenic in terms of its historical, theoretical, philosophical and cultural propensity and substance. Unfortunately, one has got to believe that there is no clear sense of purpose and direction, which is always the case when blindly following others, in this

case the West, becomes a trend.⁸ Undeniably, Islam and its cultural and civilizational perspectives are still there, however, they are choking under the constant pressure of the other willingly imported perspectives and options. Partly due to this, and partly due to the glaring lack of a political and decision-making will, it will be very difficult for Islamic housing to institute and ascertain itself. The current overall climate is unfavorable for a dramatic change to take place in a foreseeable future.

As far as the relationship between the Islamic and other housing perspectives in Muslim universities and colleges is concerned, the most ideal scenario will be that the lecturers and tutors whenever dwelling on any of the housing aspects, either in theory or practice, give a clear and comprehensive overview of the topics discussed firstly from an Islamic perspective, as the one to which both the lecturers and students faithfully subscribe, trying then to incorporate the clearly presented Islamic input into the practical works on housing. This process could be supplemented by occasional and brief references to some other cultural, historical, religious, philosophical and environmental perspectives on housing, but only for the sake of student exposure, comparative studies, and the broadening and enriching of the student minds, and not for the sake of becoming suspicious of the Islamic perspective's place and validity and for the sake of possibly abandoning and bartering it in favor of a foreign perspective.

Two Major Challenges

However, there remain two major challenges to be overcome. Firstly, there is a problem of educational systems and educators from the level of policy and system making and implementation to the level of training and teaching. Most of the personnel involved have obtained their educa-

⁸Ahmed Mejid Mollah Sherif, *The House of Al-Musel* (pp. 1-10); Abdel Baki Ibrahim, *Revival of Deep Rooted Islamic Values in Contemporary Architecture*, (pp. 11-22); Inside: *Housing in the Islamic City*, Proceedings of a Symposium held in Ankara, Turkey, on 21-25.7.1984. Proceedings prepared by: Center of Planning and Architectural Studies, Cairo, 1984.

tion under the systems, locally or abroad, that do not recognize the Islamic perspective in housing – and in the whole of the built environment – as a potential and viable one. The Islamic perspective, even if somewhat deemed as an option, is still regarded by many as inferior, of a lesser value, and not on an equal footing with other housing planning and building perspectives.

Since the systems and the personnel behind them, as well as the educators, signify the richest and most important source of knowledge and wisdom to the students, there could be no many significant changes, it goes without saying, until the situation improves at its source(s). The policy makers and implementers, lecturers, tutors and trainers, to a large extent, account for the most immediate cause of the predicament facing the Islamic housing education in Muslim universities and colleges, as much as they can become the most immediate agents of change and the most direct cause of any paradigm shift aimed at the improvement of the situation.

The second challenge is one of the housing planning and building curriculum and literature which, too, have been tailored and produced in Muslim universities and colleges least of all according to the Islamic perspectives. This way, everything seems to be set for the perpetuation of the separation of the future Muslim professionals in the built environment from their true identity, culture and history. Thus, even if the level of Islamic awareness of some lecturers, tutors and students is remarkably high, they still cannot completely live, learn and operate away from the influences of the philosophical and empirical perspectives, some of which are neutral, but some of which are plainly contradictory and conflicting, insofar as the Islamic worldview and its value systems are concerned. This is so because the curriculum which those Muslim lecturers, tutors and students have subjected themselves to, and the literature which their curriculum feeds and depends on, originate from the same philosophical and empirical perspectives which they wish to disentangle themselves from. So depressing is the state of affairs that a person, especially from amongst the young ones, those with fragile minds, may simply lose his heart and end up believing that he is faced with a lose-lose sit-

uation. The best option that is left, one may think with an intellectual resignation, is to try and choose from the two predicaments a smaller and less painful one. Trapped in this vicious cycle, the Muslim mind can hardly free itself from its clutching fetters and burst through its inhibiting sway and authority, setting then out to contrive in line with its own preferences some feasible and more adequate and acceptable alternatives.

Central to the encountering and overcoming of the second challenge is the production of Islamic books and references on housing. They will counter and substitute those books and references which with their contents, ideas and interpretations tend to confuse and keep the Muslim students at bay from their authentic Islamic identity, culture and history. Some of those books with some of their malicious contents even manage to indoctrinate those young Muslims minds which are poorly grounded in Islam against themselves and their Islam.

As an example, there are people who believe that the four-square arrangement of rooms around a central domestic courtyard, which is the most conventional plan in many traditional Islamic houses, reflects the fact that a Muslim may marry as many as four wives. "In this case, each wing of the house must constitute a separate dwelling, for each of his wives is entitled to equal treatment; she must be able to receive her husband in her own home, and he must be the guest in turn of each of his several wives according to strictly formulated rules or, more exactly, according to the Prophet's example whose fairness and generosity to his wives is the model to be emulated."⁹

This belief is not totally baseless, though, as the Muslim men indeed may marry up to four wives and courtyard houses are perhaps the most ideal type for a large family in terms of convenience and smooth interaction among family members. Bu to single out polygamy as the only reason, or as one of a very few reasons, for having courtyards on such a large scale in Islamic domestic architecture, failing to see sets of splendid Islamic values and principles which, in fact, called for their existence,

⁹Titus Burckhardt, *Art of Islam*, (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company Ltd., 1976), p. 191.

would be a serious scientific, intellectual, and for Muslims, spiritual shortcoming.

Moreover, Islamic houses are sometimes depicted as “harems” (places for engaging in physical pleasures); as “prisons” in that many housing types, at a first glance, appear as though unable to receive any light from the street because they have no windows on their outside facades; as places meant for the total seclusion of women because their position and roles have nothing to do with the outside world; as intended images of Paradise (*Jannah*) in which case the house plans and designs are heavily loaded with needless literal symbolism, etc.

Successfully dealing with the second challenge, in particular, will be conditioned by the creation of a strong, excellent and all-pervading research culture on a variety of issues in relation to the subject of Islamic housing. A salient feature of such a culture will always be the encouraging, promoting and heavily investing in original, creative, critical, universal, unprejudiced and tolerant thinking. This means that each and every Muslim housing and built environment educator, supported by each and every Muslim housing professional on the field, cannot afford to turn his or her back to, and thus perpetuate, the present dismal scenario in the field of Islamic housing education by failing to grasp the extent of the problem and then fail to contribute his or her share to its improvement.

Being educated, sometimes to the highest possible level and in the best of the world’s educational institutions and establishments, implies that much has been invested in Muslim educators and professionals. They must give something back to their religion and society. Investments must be paid back. Holding a Master’s or a PhD degree today in the Muslim world, for example, is not a privilege; rather, it is a burden and responsibility. Such a degree becomes a mark of distinction only when the society is duly served. It is not only about selfishly taking for one’s self; it is about selflessly giving back to others as well. Ignoring the intellectual and spiritual plights, as well as the silent pleas, of their societies and peoples, after they had managed it to the top, often at the expense of societal and public resources, such actions of Muslim educators and pro-

professionals will be tantamount to betraying their people, society, culture and religion.

An illustration of this type of social betrayal is that a Muslim educator while teaching his students a course on housing – or some other relevant courses – uses constantly a reference book which contains elements that explicitly contradict the message of Islam. In doing so, the educator, maybe, fails to notice the problems, so he misleads his self and others. Or he notices them but fails to act and adequately address them, thus failing to properly warn the students and equip them with what it takes to deal with the problems at hand. Laziness, indifference and apathy eventually get the better of him. Despite all this, however, the educator never even bothers, let alone undertakes some constructive initiatives and some concrete steps, to come up, alone or with someone else, as a result of his own research activities or someone else's, with more acceptable and more compatible with the Muslim spirit and mind alternatives as a subject's main references. The educator thus betrays two trusts which have been placed on his shoulders: the trust of knowledge and the trust of students.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon each and every Muslim educator, in particular, to contribute greatly to cleansing and enriching the existing curriculum and its literature on Islamic housing education in their universities and colleges by producing quality research papers, articles and books on the subject, and then by disseminating the same to the students and colleagues in the classrooms, studios and during the academic meetings, seminars and conferences, locally and internationally. These contributions are never to dwindle, or end, as the road to a global Muslim intellectual and spiritual recovery is long and challenges lying ahead are immense and numerous. Intellectual mediocrity, lethargy and indifference in the arena of Islamic housing, and the Islamic built environment in general, it follows, are serious crimes with some far reaching consequences for the wellbeing of Muslims. Intellectual self-centeredness, selfishness and greed are equally repulsive in Islam with equally detrimental impact and consequences.

At any rate, however, it all boils down to the systems of education that the Muslim community adopts, and to what extent the same community is ready and willing to embrace that which is best for preserving its housing identity and reinvigorating its cultural and civilization prospects. Indeed, it is essential that people start realizing that by creating houses a framework for much of their lives is created. To a large extent, people's lives are thus dictated and influenced. Hence, the two, i.e., the framework with its character and services and the exigencies of people's lives, must be compatible.

It is very difficult to live delightfully, honoring and applying the teachings and values of Islam, in a residential architectural world that is alien to the same teachings and values and their divine philosophy. It is only when compatibility between the two poles exists that people's actual interests and welfare will be ensured, and that residential planning and architecture will become more than just a process of planning, designing and erecting houses. Indeed, there is much more to Islamic housing than just that, that is, than the physical aspect of the whole thing.

Through a genuine Islamic housing, Islam is being observed and presented in a way it ought to be observed and presented. Islamic housing is about beholding much of the Islamic ideology and creed at work. It is about witnessing a microcosm of Islamic society, civilization and culture. Islamic housing is about much of Islam taking up a manifest form. This accurate image of Islamic housing can go a long way towards correcting a great many misconceptions about Islam and Muslims within the ranks of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Islamic housing thus can become an excellent and effective means of *da'wah Islāmiyyah*, that is to say, promoting the cause of Islam and inviting people to follow it.¹⁰

Islamic Housing and the Holistic Educational Systems of Muslims

¹⁰Spahic Omer, *Islam and Housing* (Kuala Lumpur: AS Noordeen, 2010), pp. 224-248.

It will be of paramount importance that Muslim children be taught from the very beginning of their educational journey such fundamental concepts as the position, role and significance of man, Islamic morals, nature, the world, the family, the house, the neighborhood, neighbors and society. Studying these concepts should be done on the basis of both the revealed knowledge, in the form of the Qur'an and the Prophet's *Sunnah*, and the acquired or conventional knowledge as derived from and accumulated through the daily lives and experiences of people. This integrated knowledge should be real, alive, total, pragmatic and applicable. It must be Islamic in that its ideals and goals are instigated and watched over by the ideals and goals of Islam, the two remaining in agreement with each other all the way through. This integrated knowledge, furthermore, should be, principally, from Muslims, by Muslims and for Muslims. It cannot be unreal, deceiving or false, as it cannot stem from some foreign sources that are in an outright conflict with the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Nor can it be obsolete and dead, as it cannot be based on outmoded and dead life traditions, phenomena and experiences. Nor can it be unrealistic and utopian, as it cannot entertain imaginative, naive and fancy ideas that are far from the real world and its challenges. Nor can it be superficial, fractional and narrow-minded, as it cannot be focused on certain life aspects or phenomena only, while overlooking or paying very little attention to the others.

This integrated knowledge ought to be at the core of the general educational systems of Muslims because its fundamental concepts denote the fundamental aspects of both human existence and Islam as a comprehensive code of living. In those educational systems, there can be no such thing as a separation, or a rift, between the religious and secular realms, between the religious and secular sciences, and between the religious and secular scholars. In Islamic education, moreover, there can be no separation, or a rift, between the spiritual and material spheres, and between this world and the Hereafter. Nor can either sphere be pursued at the expense of the other. The two spheres finely balance each other up. Either one without the other will be incomplete. Because Islam is a practical and factual religion, seeing and appreciating life the way it is and in its

total sense, meaning and being, each and every one of life's fields and facets is extremely relevant. Each and every person involved in cultivating those fields and aspects, as well as their roles in and contributions to life are extremely relevant too and are to be duly appreciated.

Thus, by the time a Muslim child reaches the tertiary education, it is expected that he or she commands a reasonable knowledge about the basic concepts which are integral to the message of Islam and, as such, integral to human life, culture and civilization, and, due to the role and significance of housing in human life, integral to the subject of housing too. Such basic concepts, as mentioned earlier, are related to God, life, man, family, nature and society. By then, a Muslim child should be very comfortable with the Islamic answers to those critical questions that revolve around his or her purpose in life, his or her place in the world, his or her duties and rights as a citizen, as a neighbor, as a future mother or father, as a future wife or husband, etc. In other words, a Muslim child while reaching the tertiary education should have a decent idea as to his or her place and role in the delicate web of creation and the socio-political and economic contracts that hem him or her in. Islam with its educational outlook teaches a Muslim child to be optimistic, strong, sincere, pragmatic, balanced, open-minded, earnest and productive.

It would be grossly unfair if a Muslim child is not sufficiently acquainted with those matters and issues by the time he or she reaches the level of his or her tertiary education. Equally unfair would it be if a Muslim child is given a flawed and irreconcilable with Islam education, partly or completely, based on some alien worldviews, cultures and value systems. Such would signify the worst kind of frittering away, deceiving and betraying the young, potential, excited and keen minds and talents of Muslim children which have been entrusted to society's learning institutions and establishments for cultivation and development. What those children at the end of the day get in return are the firmly established tendencies for a further alienation from Islam, confusion, misguidance, lack of self-esteem, eternal doubts, and spiritual and intellectual hypocrisy, which will accompany and haunt the persons concerned till the end of their lives.

These tendencies and these appalling academic and spiritual conditions which are endemic to many parts of the present Muslim world are elevated to the highest level in universities and colleges, by virtue of them being the leading institutions of higher learning. There, the process that commenced many years ago is finally brought to an end. The enthusiasm and promising talents of many young Muslims are misused and wasted forever, and their unfortunate fate, in all likelihood, sealed once and for all. Besides, when they establish families and start working, many of those former students through their family lives and professional engagements and contributions to society will become active, some unconsciously and unaware though, in promoting the same flawed and misguided educational policies, systems and conditions under the aegis of which they have been brought up and educated.

The university and college level education is rather a sophisticated one, as it spells the end of the educational journey for most people. Students coming to universities and colleges, therefore, should have a strong academic foundation with regard to general knowledge and the academic fields they intend to specialize in. Students in the institutions of higher learning are being guided and prepared to play a constructive role and make decent and diverse contributions to societies they belong to. They are trained to become agents of change, to lead and make the world we live in a better place.

Having said this, how can one expect the Muslim students to become agents of change, to transform and make their Muslim societies better places to live in if they are strangers, partly or completely, to Islam: its message, philosophy, worldview, history, culture and values? How can they contribute to reviving Islamic culture and civilization if they, apart from their ignorance of Islam, feel no affection and enthusiasm for, and can hardly associate themselves with, such culture and civilization? As far as Islamic housing is concerned, how can one expect the Muslim architecture, planning, art and engineering students to appreciate its world of splendor, making an effort to play some constructive roles and make some decent contributions to reviving and preserving Islamic housing, if they themselves are strangers to the philosophy, principles,

values, purpose and functions that the sophisticated and refined realm of Islamic housing exemplifies?

The answer to reviving and upholding the phenomenon of Islamic housing obviously lies in education, more than anywhere else. By education we mean its widest horizons, all levels and all protagonists: the house as an educational center, kindergartens, schools, colleges, universities, institutes, organizations, NGOs and mass-media. Every educational horizon and level will play its expected roles in ways that suit it and its human resources best. Housing is the most important thing in society, so promoting and working towards the creation of a high-quality housing should be everyone's obsession. It should be an honor. It should feature most prominently in the hierarchy of priorities of almost all governmental and private agencies. The house is the only institution and a built environment component that is badly and constantly needed by every member of society. People's happiness with their houses is the best form of happiness that one can get.

It is thus required that all of the above mentioned institutions and establishments with their personnel, and in different capacities and with different scopes and emphasis levels, work together towards a united goal which is the endorsement and promotion of the Islamic personal and family lifestyles, coupled with the endorsement and promotion of the concept of the Islamic house as a framework or a physical locus where such lifestyles are nurtured, conducted and facilitated. Indeed, from this life core everything else in society emanates and starts off its public career, retaining proudly the house and family institutions as their foundation and point of reference. It follows that there cannot be an ideological dichotomy in the contents of the various curriculums, plans, agendas and the programs of study, as well as in the ways themes and issues are advocated, presented and taught, as far as the subjects and problems directly or indirectly related to Islamic housing are concerned.

For example, it is gravely erroneous that with regard to the Islamic concepts of the family, the house institution, aesthetics, man-woman relationships, privacy, modesty, the dress code, etc., a Muslim in a Muslim environment is bombarded with a way of life on television programs, or

in newspapers, or in journals and magazines, but whenever he goes to the mosque, reads the Qur'an, the Prophet's *Sunnah*, or any book with a pure religious content, he easily runs into glaring discrepancies between what has been served to him through the local mass media and what his religion propagates and teaches.

As another example, it is likewise gravely erroneous that a Muslim child is constantly being taught by his or her parents or grandparents at home about how significant, excellent, pure and principled the Islamic concepts of the family, the house, environmental protection, man-woman relationships, privacy, modesty, the dress code, etc., are, but in school he or she is being taught and encouraged to do some different things, often contrary to the principles and values of his or her family and house upbringing. At best, what he or she has learned at home is being totally ignored, or even scoffed at, in school and in its study programs. Moreover, he or she easily sees that in the real world too, just outside his or her house sanctuary, things are very different from what he or she is being taught and asked to duly adhere to.

Unfortunately, the present state of affairs in most Muslim communities is not helpful at all to the revival and restoration of Islamic housing. Moreover, owing to the importance of housing in society, such a situation clearly maintains and nourishes the other intellectual and spiritual ailments that have been afflicting Muslims and their communities for many years by now. There is a real danger that even some new and hitherto unknown ailments might be generated in the process. If truth be told, there is very little in most Muslim societies today that render them immune to such potential hazards.

As said earlier, a comprehensive overhaul of educational systems in the Muslim world will be the key, not only with regard to Islamic housing, but also to all the other aspects of Islamic culture and civilization. In the field of education, everyone, from the leaders to the man on the street, and even children, can play a role and make a contribution. This exactly will be an answer to, as well as a compliance with, a divine *modus operandi* for a change. Allah says: "*Surely, Allah does not change*

the condition of a people until they change their own condition (that is, what is inside their hearts)” (al-Ra‘d, 13:11).

“This is because Allah has never changed a favor which He has conferred upon a people until they change their own condition; and because Allah is Hearing, Knowing” (al-Anfāl, 53).

Education is everyone’s concern and domain. Everyone has a duty towards it, and everyone reaps some benefits from it. By overhauling their educational systems, Muslims will become bound to cause some dramatic changes and improvements to their personal conditions, to the conditions of their hearts, minds and souls, both in short and long terms. What lies beyond and above their spheres of influence, however, is not theirs to excessively worry about. That is the responsibility of Allah, their Master, best Friend and Protector. He will take care of it as an extension of, and a reward for, what His servants heretofore have done to themselves and their personal conditions.

As part of Allah’s way of doing things with people, He also says: *“On no soul does Allah place a burden greater than it can bear. It gets every good that it earns, and it suffers every ill that it earns” (al-Baqarah, 2: 286).*

Finally, by revamping and Islamizing their educational systems, Muslims will be bound to bring divine light, and all goodness that goes with it, back to their lives. Such is the importance of creating, disseminating and applying the true knowledge in Islam. In so doing, the darkness and evil of ignorance and faithlessness, and all malevolence and sin that go along with it, will become set to vanish sooner rather than later. This is so because in Islam light and darkness, and goodness and malevolence, cannot coexist. The presence of light always renders darkness imaginary, and the presence of goodness always renders malevolence illusory. There, in point of fact, exist only light and goodness, as there always exists Allah and with Him the truth and light. He said about His Holy Self that He is the Light of the heavens and the earth (*al-Nūr, 24:35*). There is no such thing as darkness. There is only the absence of light which we mistake for darkness. There is no malevolence either. There is only the absence of goodness, which, too, we mistake for ma-

levolence. Hence, for Muslims to get rid of their present maladies they should not really worry about the maladies themselves. Rather, they should worry about how to make sure that divine light and goodness of Islam are actualized and brought to life. Once that is done, the fading of their maladies and problems will be ensured, and will be both spontaneous and swift.

Allah says on this: “*And say: the truth has come and the falsehood has vanished; surely falsehood is a vanishing (thing)*” (*al-Isrā’*, 17:81).

“*Nay! We cast the truth against the falsehood, so that it breaks its head, and lo! it vanishes; and woe to you for what you describe*” (*al-Anbiyā’*, 21:18).

Conclusion

Islam as a comprehensive way of life influenced the planning and designing of the houses of its adherents. Not only that, Islam also laid a solid foundation, in some instances in form of laws, for creating what became known as the phenomenon of Islamic housing. The Holy Qur’an furnishes Muslims with a comprehensive conceptual framework for housing. This framework was first applied, explained and further enriched by Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.). While developing the city of Madinah, upon his and his followers’ migration (*hijrah*) from Makkah, the Prophet (s.a.w.), inspired by revelation, provided for people scores of lessons on Islamic housing. In Islam, the house is a place to rest, relax the body and mind, and enjoy legitimate worldly delights. Within the realm of their houses, Muslims also worship, teach, learn and propagate the message of Islam. Central to the standards by which a house may be categorized as “Islamic” are the holiness and purity of its philosophy, vision, function and utility, accompanied by convenience, efficiency, safety, awareness of the physical surroundings, environmental integrity, and anything else that Islam reckons as indispensable for living a righteous, accountable and civil family life. The house institution occupies an extraordinary place in Islam. It is a family development centre. It is a mi-

cosmos of Islamic culture and civilization. Islamic housing is a mixture of the heavenly and terrestrial factors and elements. Both sides are extremely important, playing their respective roles. They finely complement and add to each other's strength and operation. Neglecting either of the two poles in Islamic housing inevitably leads to a serious damage in its fundamental nature, at a conceptual or a practical plane. Creating, or Islamizing and reviving housing today cannot be fulfilled by applying the conventional knowledge, methods and skills. Bearing in mind the state of Islamic housing today, bringing about positive changes requires a significant shift in architectural knowledge paradigms and an introduction of sets of avant-garde architectural methods and attitudes, coupled with utmost sincerity, dedication and perseverance. Such a feat is to signify a segment of a total Muslim excellence culture. Muslim housing professionals should be ready to go the extra mile from their conventional professional practices in order to rise to, and conquer, the challenges lying ahead. This is a reason why the word "*bayt*", which is the most frequently used word in Arabic for the house, also means a line of a poem. Indeed, creating an authentic Islamic house is tantamount to creating a piece of a poem in terms of the requirements for possessing some extraordinary skills in order that some extraordinary objectives are achieved, in terms of philosophical, technical and artistic sophistication in the domains of both, as well as in terms of a profound spiritual, mental and emotional connectedness between the central characters involved in both housing and poetry and their respective tasks at hand. An excellent house evokes the attributes and values of fineness, impeccability, accuracy, exuberance, rhythm, originality, harmony, balance and engagement of the heart and soul. It is no wonder that the same ideas in various degrees are articulated in relation to good poetry as well.