

To Acquire Knowledge

“And say, O’ My Lord, Increase my knowledge”. (Qur’an, 20: 114).

Recently two functions were held in Tanzania. The Holy Prophet’s birthday and the Literacy Week. It was a very appropriate coincidence as the following paragraphs will show.

Day in and day out, the Holy Prophet urged his followers to strive to create divine attributes in themselves to the maximum extent possible; and over all the attributes he gave precedence to knowledge. He made its acquisition as a duty of every Muslim man and woman.

The Qur’an repeatedly and emphatically asks man to exercise his intellect to acquire knowledge by study of nature and history; to travel through the land and observe things; to ponder and reflect over the laws of Universe; and to seek the help of God in acquiring knowledge by praying to Him. O’My Lord, Increase my knowledge.

The main purpose of the Qur’an, according to Dr. Iqbal, is to awaken in man the higher consciousness of the manifold relations with God and Universe. It was in view of this essential aspect of the Qur’anic teaching that Goethe, while making a general review of Islam as an educational force, said to Eckermann; “You see, this teaching never fails. With all our systems, we can not go, and generally speaking no man can go, farther than that”.

The emphasis of the Holy Prophet of Islam on acquisition of knowledge was directly responsible for the fact that, in the words of George Sarton, “When the West was sufficiently mature to feel the need of deeper knowledge it turned its attention first of all, not to Greek sources, but to the Arabic (i.e. Muslim) ones”. (Introduction to the History of the Sciences).

Brifault says in “Making of Humanity”: “The debt of our science to that of Arabs does not consist only in starting discoveries or revolutionary theories: science owes a great deal more to Arab culture; It owes its very existence. Science is the most momentous contribution of Arab (i.e. Muslim) civilization to the modern world”.

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