



The Relevance In Muslim Thought In Modern Times — An Exposition  
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## Traditional Muslim Thought

**What is it and why is it important to think like a Muslim?** The ability to be “aware” of things **and to articulate that awareness in concepts, language, and even behavior** that reinforces and appeases TMT, and ultimately, Islam/God [*tawhīd*, Prophecy and the Return to God].

This endeavor will always involve **attempts to appease certain incontrovertible truths and transcendent values found in Islam**. However, Islam itself will never look the same in two difference places or two different times. And **this process of Muslim thought will always demand intelligence, creativity, and courage from Muslims in their efforts to realize this goal**, both individually and collectively.

When speaking about TMT, this in no way implies that

1. Muslims never had to do this in times past. That it is just something particular and peculiar to this term “modernity” that is causing all this hubbub.
2. In fact, if we were to look at the past [i.e., Muslim history] and see no such examples [and we are sure to see many!] it would have more to do with the dereliction of duty on the part of those scholars of the past than the absence of the necessity in TMT in every time and space.

So – **is TMT just a historical curiosity? Is it relevant** in any way to the issues that Muslims face today? If so, then part of this relevance must include a *tahqīqī* approach. This is especially crucial in light of the recent rebranding of the word “tradition” into such catch phrases as “Traditional Muslim knowledge”.

## What Does Muslim Thought Address?

TMT addresses four major things:

1. God.
2. The cosmos.
3. The human soul.
4. Interpersonal relationships.

The **first three** form the basis of how reality is conceived in Islam. **The fourth** is from perceptions obtained through studying the first three in a human interaction paradigm.

## Goals of Muslim Thought

To know the reality of *lā ilāha illa Allah* [there is no god but God] for oneself.

The defining of roles: *taqlīd* and *tahqīq*.

**Taqlīd**: if one wishes to be a member of a group, then one must learn from those who are already a part of that group. **Prophetic narrative**. No one can better perfect a method of making ablution than that of the Prophet.

**Tahqīq**: the process of coming to know and own the knowing of *tawhīd/la ilaha illa Allah* [there is no god but God].

**Tawhīd**: is outside of *taqlīd* as “*there is no compulsion in faith*” لا إكراه في الدين [Q: 2: 256]. Instead, *taqlīd* is trying to inculcate *tawhīd* through free-willed, internal/intellectual means.

Muslims need to realize that **TMT’s *raison d’être* is the transformation of the human soul**, not simply a collection of textual and historical facts.

TMT allowed for a multidisciplinary approach but those branches were **tied to a root** [*tawhīd*].

**Establish the primacy of The Sacred**. Therefore, one needs to come to know and understand what is sacred to Muslims/Islam and what is sacred [if anything at all] to modernity.

**Preservation of the human being**. Modernity/secularism makes vain attempts at this through language such as freedom, democracy, human rights, efficiency, etc.

## Ijtihād – What’s In A Name?

The word is used so much by modernist Muslim reformers that it’s lost any context and meaning.

- To qualify as a ***mujtahid***, one had to master the disciplines [*fiqh*, etc.]. In other words, **master transmitted knowledge** [Qur’ān, Sunnah, etc.].
- This bar has been set very high in traditional Sunni schools of thought.
- If one does not attain the level of *mujtahid*, then one must then follow a school of *ijtihād* [Sunni: dead masters – Shi’ism: living masters].

- **Shari'ah can only be learned from someone who already knows it.** This is problematic for orthodox, Sunni Muslims if we're only able to learn from dead people!

## Challenges Facing Muslims/TMT Today

**Modern Muslim scholarship** has been dominated by a non-Muslim spirit of academia in which, only to be partly humorous, one can know everything there is to know about a text except what it's saying

Is it possible to think as an engineer or sociologist and still think in a *tawhīd-ic* mind frame?

How can Muslims/Islam come to really [and in mean real as from The Real] mean anything significant if **religion, in the eyes of modernity, is scarcely tolerated so long as it is restricted to ritual and morality.** In modernity, religion can have nothing definitive to say about the nature of reality.

When looking at the thought processes behind certain modes of thought or 'isms, are they/can they be infused or synthesized /re-contextualized by TMT or no? Why/not?

Modern environments are not conducive to inculcating/reinforcing an outlook on the world based on *tawhīd*. **Modern theories of knowledge seek to compartmentalize versus bring varying knowledge disciplines into a unifying vision.** This compartmentalization applies to the self as well as knowledge. This leads to a kind of **cultural/social schizophrenia** [see Daryoush Shayegan]

**Science/Scientism:** science is often said to be a sign of God but the Qur'ān asks man to think/reflect. But think/reflect on what? The Qur'an emphasizes natural phenomena. **Science, however, requires one to first have scientific training as well as accept the supremacy/hegemony that scientific/tistic thought often demands of us.**

Modern Muslim thought/scholarship does not challenge the status quo of modern/*takthīr* thought but rather sees how it can best serve, adopted and co-opt it.

## Takthīr – Modernity's New Gods

**Takthīr** is, if not the theological opposite of *tawhīd*, is its antonym in a modern context. The function of *tawhīd* is to see the many as relating to The One. *Takthīr* is wanton proliferation.

**Tawhīd:** to make God one, **the recognition of divinity, pointing back to one ultimate source** [God].

**Takthīr:** to make many gods. To refashion the recognition of divine presence as manifold.

**Modernity lacks a solid core** – a single center of purpose. TMT professes the purpose of life is to realize/worship/prepare for the return to God.

Modernity's goals [?]: freedom, equality, evolution, progress, science, medicine, nationalism, socialism, democracy, Marxism. More innocuous versions: care, communication, consumption, development, education, information, standard of living, management, model, planning, production, project, resource, service, system, welfare.

## TMT & Modernity – A Dialog

**TMT may question modernity's and Muslim reformers' intentions.** And while MR's may wish to bid "good riddance" to TMT because of its perceived baggage, **reform-minded Muslims** are **oblivious** to the fact that much of what they're **basing their thoughts off of** are based on **modes of thought that at their core are antithetical to the three crucial aspects of TMT/Islam:**

1. *Tawhīd*.
2. Prophecy.
3. The Return to God [Ma'ād].

If Muslims are to remain true to the core values that Islam is built upon, those very same values that underpin TMT'ing, then how can the adaption of the above be legitimized?