

# An Alternative Quranic Approach to the New Palestinian Curriculum

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## Brief Analysis

In one of its commanding verses, the Holy Quran calls upon the believers to pray to God to advance them in knowledge, "Say, My Lord, grant me more knowledge" (20:114).

In late 2018, the Palestinian Authority (PA) issued new curriculum in its first revision of Palestinian textbooks since 2000. In comparing this Quranic verse to the new Palestinian curriculum, two questions emerge: does the current curriculum advance the knowledge of its students in a positive manner as God commands? The new curriculum may contain pedagogical improvements, but it currently deviates from such a noble goal. The second question is how to remedy this deviation. As longtime educators, we propose **a methodological framework ([http://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/WASATIA-IMPACT-Booklet\\_Digital-Format-A5.pdf](http://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/WASATIA-IMPACT-Booklet_Digital-Format-A5.pdf))** that strives to educate students to be moderate, tolerant, rational, objective, open-minded, and peace-loving.

As individuals, we share a strong commitment towards bringing reconciliation and lasting peace to our two peoples. Peaceful Palestinian and Israeli educational curricula are key and Wasatia (middle ground) education is the best path to raising Palestinian children in a culture of moderation and peace.

The Palestinian school curriculum is making headlines because of its antagonistic orientation. Donor nations have given millions to the PA, hoping that their donations would help guide Palestinian children towards a more fruitful, prosperous, and peaceful future. The PA, with international assistance, designed a new, revamped curriculum for its schools that teaches animosity, violent jihadism, martyrdom, and antagonism.

Missing from the curriculum is the teaching of empathy, love, compassion, the overcoming of prejudice and rising

above vengeance and retaliation when treated poorly. One of our favorite verses from the Holy Quran says, “O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may get to know one another” (49:13). This should be one main criteria to judge the content of the Palestinian Authority’s curriculum.

Having realized the gloomy reality of the recent reforms, several international organizations are seeking alternatives. **The European Union (EU) recently announced (<https://www.euronews.com/2019/05/22/eu-funds-study-into-palestinian-school-textbooks-after-claims-of-radical-themes>)** a planned review of the Palestinian Authority’s curriculum following European Parliament’s approval of **legislation (<https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/EU-passes-bill-to-promote-anti-hate-education-in-Palestinian-schools-551175>)** that insisted that the curriculum meets the UNESCO-derived standards of peace and tolerance.

Moreover, the **British government raised similar concerns (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-government-has-successfully-pushed-for-a-review-into-palestinian-textbooks>)** while the **United States Congress introduced (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/2343/text?r=5&s=1>)** the Peace and Tolerance in Palestinian Education Act last month.

Fortunately, there is another educational model that already exists—Wasatia (middle ground) instruction. This approach is rooted in Islamic thought, culture, tradition, and teaching and promotes the values of moderation, reconciliation, tolerance, trust, goodwill, and respect that lie at the heart of our hopes and expectations.

The flaws in the current PA curriculum can be remedied by teaching creative and critical thinking, temperance, rationality, and peaceful approaches to conflict resolution. These values are rooted in Islamic creed—principles that view other faiths as being harmonious and not clashing religions.

And so, instead of glorifying martyrdom and teaching jihad in terms of militant conquest, Wasatia education explains that jihad can have other meanings including ‘jihad within the self,’ a concept that can also be understood as “struggling against evil within oneself.” Instead of inculcating hostility, enmity, and hatred towards Jews, Wasatia education teaches the building of tolerance with dialogue and reason emphasizing Islamic empathy and compassion towards Jewish suffering in the ghettos of Europe and during the Holocaust.

This curriculum also highlights historic examples of coexistence between the two Abrahamic believers, such as in al-Andalus. Rather than canonizing poetry that calls for “sacrificing blood” and “eliminating the usurper,” Wasatia education showcases poems that describe the beauty of the land and the sanctity of life. After all, literature should offer hope, inspire, delight, give pleasure and beauty to life, not depress and frustrate.

Furthermore, rather than lionizing violent extremists like Salal Mughrabi, who took part in a terrorist attack that killed 38 civilians, 13 of which were children, Wasatia education celebrates positive role models. These include educator Khalil al-Sakakini, who accepted Jewish students to his school with open arms, Hind al-Husseini, who opened an orphanage for children who lost their parents following the 1948 war, and Fatima al-Fihri, the Arab Muslim female founder of the oldest existing university in the world in Fes, Morocco in 859 CE.

The Wasatia Education model offers a tantalizing glimpse of what might be. It offers hope and optimism. For decades, the international community has taken an active interest in creating a better, more peaceful Middle East. But bitter experience has shown that ‘top-down’ change remains an unlikely avenue towards true progress. Perhaps the time has come for a different, ‘bottom-up’ approach—using education to change the minds of everyday people, to alter public misperceptions and stereotypes by eradicating intolerance and prejudice in order to remain true to our values.

Wasatia education shows that an optimistic alternative is already in place to make the right choice. Palestinian children have the right to be raised with a healthy education that can offer them the bright future they deserve. ❖

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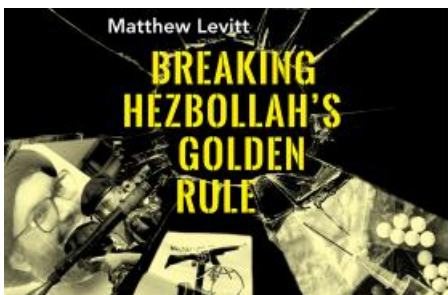
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