

ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE

(in the light of sūra al-'Alaq)

SHAYKH-UL-ISLAM
DR MUHAMMAD TAHIR-UL-QADRI



Minhaj-ul-Quran Publications

Islamic Concept of Knowledge



**Shaykh-ul-Islam
Dr Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri**

Minhaj-ul-Quran Publications

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➔ The entire income of all of Dr Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri's books, recorded audio/video cassettes & CDs of his lectures/addresses, is dedicated on his behalf to Minhaj-ul-Quran International.

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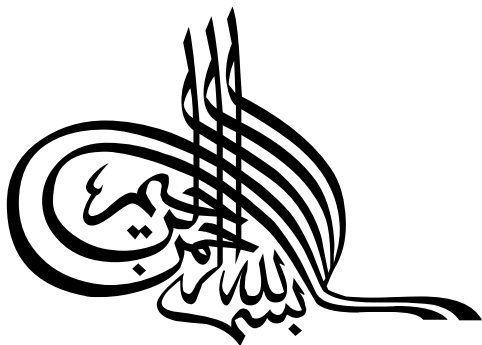
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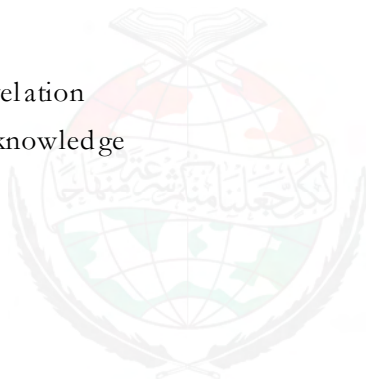
مَوْلَايَ صَلِّ وَسَلِّمْ دَائِمًا أَبَدًا
عَلَى حَبِيبِكَ خَيْرِ الْخَلْقِ كُلِّهِمْ
مُحَمَّدُ سَيِّدُ الْكَوْنَيْنِ وَالْثَّقَلَيْنِ
وَالْفَرِيقَيْنِ مِنْ عُرْبٍ وَمِنْ عَجَمٍ

﴿صَلَّى اللَّهُ تَعَالَى عَلَيْهِ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ وَبَارَكَ وَسَلَّمَ﴾

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Beyond Description

His Eminence Shaykh-ul-Islam Dr Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri is a theologian, theosophist, scientist and spiritualist of modern times. A preacher, reformer and philosopher, he is also a political thinker of world renown. He is the animating heartbeat of hundreds of thousands of Muslims around the globe. It has layers of meanings whatever he writes and speaks about, addressing simultaneously the whole mankind in general, the whole Muslim Umma in particular as the immediate focus of his magical rhetoric and fascinating pen. He talks about and proves the relevance of Islam to the modern age. Diagnosing the maladies that have afflicted mankind he prescribes Islam as the sole remedy to the entire syndrome. He has authored some 450 published works in Arabic, English and Urdu and delivered over 5,500 lectures in various languages all over the world. His capabilities, God-gifted qualities, achievements and high ideals beggar description.

Leading the Umma out of its ordeal

His teachings are deep, definite and sublime leading one's soul to the divine chambers. Galvanizing and inspiring, his oratory leaves us spell-bound, enlightening vividly as to what we are doing on earth and what, in fact, we are supposed to do; what troubles we are suffering from and how in a scientific fashion can we cure and convalesce. Speaking in terms of modern logic, he pricks one's inner core and clears one's vision on the compatibility of Islam

with the scientific realities of the universe which have so far been discovered and which the scientists may explore in the times to come. He is really an embodiment of all knowledge and wisdom that is required to lead the Umma out of its current ordeal.

Restoring man's status in the universe

Falling prey to stray ideologies and burdened by the stresses and strains of modern life, the modern man has become thoroughly materialistic, consigning all moral, spiritual and human values to oblivion. It seems as if the Hereafter, the Last Day and the Final Accountability during life after death have no more been his concerns. This has added enormous miseries to his daily chores leaving little chances of his survival from the quagmire of material pursuits and base nature. In this context, Shaykh-ul-Islam Dr Qadri has emerged as a saviour to salvage and rescue the human society from the evils of the earthly existence and lead them to man's real status Allah Almighty has blessed him with. This restoration of real spiritual as well as worldly status of man in this world is, in nutshell, all what Dr Qadri is up to.

Minhaj-ul-Quran International – a message of global peace

To achieve his objectives Dr Tahir-ul-Qadri launched his struggle in 1977 with the establishment of “Mahaz-e-Hurriyyat”, an intellectual forum for the ideological training of the youth. He advanced dynamically in the right direction and established Minhaj-ul-Quran International in 1981. His voice received warm welcome; people would sit around their TV sets and wait for his *Fahm-ul-Qur'an* programme impatiently. The MQI soon became the heartbeat of the masses. Shaykh-ul-Islam then planned to take his message to

the entire globe. It was in 1982 that he visited Iran, met the Iranian leadership and put forth his message which was given a hearty welcome. He then visited Europe in 1984 to extend the range of his missionary services and to introduce the Europeans to the true essence of Islam. The tour was a great success. The Muslims of Denmark were highly impressed and invited Dr Qadri to establish an institute in Denmark under his supervision. Consequently, an Islamic Centre was established in Copenhagen, Denmark on 25 January 1986. Dr Qadri himself performed its inauguration.

He toured Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharja and other Gulf States in 1984 and 1985 where people accorded him rousing receptions. As a result of his energizing tours, a huge branch of the Institute of Minhaj-ul-Quran was established in the United Emirates.

Dr Qadri visited England to further widen the scope of his missionary campaign: He visited the country first in May 1985 and then in January 1986. During his tour of England he addressed huge gatherings in London, Manchester, Birmingham and Boston etc. He visited United States in April, 1986 in order to extend and promote his mission. He delivered lectures in many seminars and symposia on various Islamic topics specifically pertaining to Islamic revival in the West, at New York, Washington, Chicago and others states. This visit laid the foundation of the MQI in the United States. The late 80s and the early 90s then saw a wave spreading through entire Europe, the US, Canada and the Middle East, and in only a decade's time the MQI Centres were established in more than 80 countries of the world. That is how the magic of true Islam works. Shaykh-ul-Islam Dr Qadri worked sleeplessly to spread his mission and it is now a globally welcome mission to spread Islam as the most moderate, tolerant, realistic, scientific and practicable way of life and religion for the entire mankind.

The quest for knowledge

The modern scientific thought has undergone metamorphic changes over ages. Its spirit, however, has constantly remained to justify the existing fact on rational grounds. Eventually, the twentieth century has witnessed an unimaginable scientific advancement that has assigned a vital role to man on the globe in conquest of universe. In the quest for knowledge, the modern man has also discovered that the centuries old concepts about religion are contrary to the scientific thought and, therefore, need to be either discarded or made compatible with the scientific method. This is the challenge that the religious scholars and theologians have failed to face. Instead of analyzing the problem on scientific basis, they have adhered to their timeworn ideologies with a practical surrender to the materialistic values in vogue. Even the torchbearers, the so-called intellectuals and modern scholars of Islam who pretend to be abreast with the modern scientific thought have given in to the onslaught of modern sciences and in secret depths of their hearts feel nervous how to defend their position. They are doing more harms than good by defending their post with archaic weapons.

However, at the dawn of new millennium, Shaykh-ul-Islam Dr Tahir-ul-Qadri has risen like a guiding star on the intellectual horizon and has showered rays of his effulgent wisdom on the modern mind. Equipped adequately with the scientific and religious knowledge, he has given the call to modern man that Islam is the religion that, ever since its revelation, has the scientific bases which the modern scientific thought is now claiming to discover and further needs to explore in its totality.

On Islam

The contributions made by Shaykh-ul-Islam to the modern Islamic thought and its reconstruction are colossal rather incredible. Nor can we measure his achievements in clearing and purifying Islamic ideology from muddling of various 'isms' wrought over centuries. A huge reservoir of literature, for instance, exists on Mysticism, Islamic Mysticism, Pantheism and Transcendentalism, nature of Mystic Experience, its variety, allied philosophies and schools of thought. The antagonists too have generated colossal works proving it contrary to the 'true Islam' and labeling it as an impious innovation in the approved Islamic code of life. This controversy has inflicted serious damage to the modern Muslim mind leading the young educated Muslims all over the world to desperation and abhorrence from Islam. They are confused and blatantly question the intellectual validity and logical well-being of Islamic thought. The Muslim scholars engaged in this unfortunate controversy, however, ill afford any attempt to recover from the 'spin'. They drastically lack in advanced knowledge and are unaware of the 'phenomena' of modern scientific mind. Being the odd ones, they now stay out of this war of wits, which has spread over East and West. How to satisfy the modern scientific mind on the question of Islamic Spiritualism, its nature and significance? Shaykh-ul-Islam Dr Qadri has performed this uphill task with absolute facility, authority and command.

Knowledge of modern logic

Simultaneously, endowed with a vividly historic insight, he educates the modern Muslim mind how, centuries ago, the Muslim scholars defeated their rival thinkers employing the then contemporary logic against them. He emphatically

exhorts all educated Muslims of the world to acquire perfect knowledge of modern logic and defeat the antagonists of Islam who have joined hands against the Umma with an intention to shake the solid spiritual realities which are the bases of Islamic thought and ideology. Shaykh-ul-Islam Dr Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri has a sagacious eye on rise and fall of the Muslim and non-Muslim empires. He possesses a vision that penetrates into future and clearly discerns the impending dangers and their remedies. He bases his arguments on the Holy Qur'an, attracts and convinces the modern reader and deletes his disbelief in permanent human values revealed by the Qur'an.

The primary mission of his life is to drag the Muslims out of the mire and to elevate them to heights of unprecedented glory. His creative interpretation of Islam has pulled it out of its strait-jacket in which its strait-laced critics have robed it. He has broadened the area of its meaning and application to make it conform to the rapidly changing imperatives of the contemporary world and assert its universality, which has been muffled by centuries of narrow and conservative attitudes. Shaykh-ul-Islam Dr Qadri is the most auspicious star on the murky and cloud-capped galaxy of the Islamic world whom God has blessed with knowledge, guidance and eloquence to steer the rocking world of Islam through the tempestuous billows of strife and dissension and to put it back on the rollers to make it self-reliant and self-sustaining.

He has dedicated all his energies and sources to promote and spread the message of peace, moderation, and tolerance not only in South Asia but also round the globe. Universally, he has earned reputation as ambassador of peace. His dynamic and galvanizing endeavours for ecumenism and inter-faith harmony in particular, have produced inspiring and concrete results.

As such Shaykh-ul-Islam emerges as a person of destiny with his learned instruction and creative interpretation of Islam providing refreshing perspectives of the role of Islam in the contemporary World. Unfortunately, in the past several decades, the universality of Islam has been obscured by stereotyped conservatism and Shaykh-ul-Islam with his progressive ideas and better contemporary world vision is performing an important role in the renaissance of Islam.

A glimpse of his intellectual works

We find a vivid manifestation of his depth of learning, all-embracing insight and far-reaching vision in his intellectual works of historic import. This short introduction simply cannot encompass his works. Some of the most significant of them include *Irfan al-Qur'an*, a scientific, exegetic, modern, lucid and comprehensive translation of the Holy Qur'an; *Irfan as-Sunna*, a compendium (in 25 volumes) of 30,000 fair, fine and sound traditions of the Holy Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) that validate the mainstream Islamic doctrine; *Minhaj as-Sawi*, a collection of 1100 fair, fine and sound traditions; *Sirat ar-Rasul*, (in 12 volumes) a detailed account of all the phases of the Holy Prophet's life which the Qur'an has called *Uswa Hasanā* — the best pattern; *Kitab at-Tanhid*, *Kitab al-Bid'ah* and dozens of books on the true Islamic doctrines which dispel the existing disagreement among Muslims on various doctrinal issues and present to the non-Muslim world Islam in its right, true and scientific form and spirit, precisely delineating what Islam is and what it is not. His books particularly on the subject of beliefs are numerous and voluminous. A list of these books has been produced in the end of this treatise for the benefit of our readers. His works have received global appreciation from the leading authorities, traditionists, jurists and scholars of the Muslim world.

Shaykh al-Islam has already been awarded numerous international titles in this regard.

Shaykh Abdul Aziz Dabbagh



Islamic Concept of Knowledge

Introduction

This paper reflects on his wider and broader vision on the concept of knowledge. It elaborates in the light of the Qur'anic Surah *al-Alaq* what is knowledge, its elements and its six aspects that are contained in the first five verses of the Surah. The paper also differentiates knowledge from ignorance and provides us with a new vision to see and scrutinize the issue. Ignorance does not merely imply lack of knowledge. A knowledgeable person may also be ignorant because ignorance in fact refers to failure in recognizing the Divine Truth and perceiving the power and might of the Creator of universe manifest through His creation. And it is the creation that forms the canvas of human studies. The subject of human learning is, in this way, all-inclusive ranging from physical and social sciences to studies of spiritual and transcendental pursuits. Islam does not put any limits anywhere on seeking knowledge and considers the entire universe as the syllabi of human learning. What is conditional to knowledge is the Divine Gnosis and Nearness to Allah (ﷻ) which emanates and must emanate from all learning.

But that is not the only condition Islam stresses upon. The process of gaining knowledge involves a phenomenology which by design influences the learner or a disciple in two ways. Firstly, he persistently develops a sense of not knowing anything along with the gradual increase in learning; the exposure to vastness of knowledge shrinks his self-consciousness as learner. So he starts feeling humble

and at the same time grateful to Allah (ﷻ) for his infinite blessings showered on man. Secondly, he may prove to be a blockhead and fails to recognize his own existence as a tiny and worthless spot on the expanse of universe. He starts feeling magnified and also falls prey to megalomania. This phenomenon gives birth to Pharaohs and tyrants. This is Satanic and anti-human. All radicalism, extremism and terrorism generates from it. This is ignorance and cannot be called knowledge because as its outcome, knowledge humbles man and turns him into a moderate, peaceful and loving person. Feeling humble and lowly, therefore, is one of the essentials of learning process.

Knowledge is either acquired or gifted by Allah (ﷻ). The latter refers to the knowledge bestowed upon the Messengers of Allah. The Final Prophet of Allah (ﷺ) is the fountainhead of all knowledge in the universe. The knowledge man has acquired so far has been declared by Allah (ﷻ) as little. But the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) is the city of knowledge. Yet he is humble and his life history leaves for us a striking lesson of humility and modesty. We, therefore, can acquire maximum learning from the Prophetic source of knowledge which is his life conduct, the Seerah and the Divine Revelation, the Qur'an.

This leads us to understand the various sources of knowledge. Man is extroceptive by design and make, and learns through sensory experience. But he is introspective at the same time and learns also through the faculties of intellect and ecstasy. But revelation is the supreme source which is beyond human perception and intelligibility. We can benefit from this source, therefore, only through a strong link with the chain of learning connecting us to the Holy Prophet (ﷺ). So, the mission of acquiring knowledge cannot be accomplished without seeking guidance from the

Holy Prophet (ﷺ) may the humanity put all its energies to push the way through.

As for the scope of knowledge, it is infinite. There is no end to knowledge as there is no end to Allah's Lordship and Godship and the Holy Prophet's Messengership. Knowledge has enveloped the entire creation. One strives according to one's potential and when he strikes the climax he gets amazed and this feeling can be expressed only through observing silence.

Definition

Morphologically the Arabic word *ilm* (علم) has been derived from *ain* (ع), *lam* (ل) and *mim* (م) that means to know:

أَلْعِلْمُ إِدْرَاكُ الشَّيْءِ بِحَقِيقَتِهِ.

“Knowledge is the awareness of a thing with reference to its reality.”¹

So, knowledge is that theorem or proposition which consists in knowing an objective reality existent in externity. The word knowledge is applicable to that proposition which comprises *subject* and *predicate* with an objectively existent reality parallel to the one contained in the proposition. The *subject* and the *predicate* are the two *terms* of a proposition synthesized by means of *copula*, which is always some part of the verb “to be”. Moreover, a proposition is either true or false and the question of its truth or falsity is raised only when assertions are made about the objects. We can, therefore, say that every proposition cannot be called knowledge; only that proposition will be called knowledge which is wholesome and assertive and has sound validation with reference to reality on ground, external to proposition.

1. Raghīb al-Asfahani, *Mufradat alfaẓ-il-Quran*, 343;
Zubaidi, *Taj-ul-urus min jawahir-il-qamus*, 1:7825.

Elements of knowledge

This definition of knowledge leads us to the following four elements of knowledge:

1. Observer
2. Object
3. Observing Capability
4. Objectivity

Observer

A person who seeks knowledge or is eager to learn about some truth is called an observer. This is the distinction of man alone who is the best of all the creation of Allah Almighty (ﷺ). An observer is generally known as a student, the one who is all the time inquisitive to know something. Knowledge is an unfathomable ocean. No one can claim possession of the whole of knowledge. He who knows a bit of it is known as a scholar.

Object

The thing that is being explored, sought for and known is called an object. It implies any reality concrete or abstract, whether employing senses or intellect. The entire creation that exists in the embrace of universe and its physical and metaphysical entities and truths, all are the objects of knowledge.

Observing capability

This is the third element of knowledge. This relates to the susceptibility and potential of an observer to know something. If the object is of sensory nature, the observer is required to possess sensory capability to observe, perceive and know the object through five senses. On the other hand if the object can be known through reason and intellect the

observer needs to have intellectual capability without which objects of reason cannot be encompassed. Thirdly if the knowledge of an object cannot be acquired without ecstasy and intuition the observer has to first equip himself with this faculty. And over and above all is the capability of receiving revelation which is the attribute of the Prophets and the Messengers alone. This is beyond human capabilities and cannot be acquired; this is absolutely a divine capability which Allah (ﷻ) bestows only upon His chosen servants, the Prophets and the Messengers.

Objectivity

The fourth and the last of the elements of knowledge is objectivity. It signifies purpose-oriented quest to perceive and know the object. This necessitates perceptibility of the object through any of the observer's capabilities, that it can be grasped with any of the inquisitor's potentials.

The concept of knowledge in the light of Surah Al-Alaq

Let us now see the concept of knowledge in the light of the first five verses of Surah Al-Alaq of the Holy Qur'an. It was 17 of Ramadan. The sacred seclusion of Mount Hira cave was perfumed with the holy presence of Allah's Beloved when it glowed with the brightening arrival of the angel Gabriel. Allah Most Gracious (ﷻ) addressed His Most Exalted of men and His Final Messenger (ﷺ) sent towards mankind in the following divine words through revelation.


أَقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ﴿١﴾ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ﴿٢﴾
 أَقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ﴿٣﴾ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ﴿٤﴾ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ
 مَا لَمْ يَكُن يَعْلَمُ ﴿٥﴾

“(O Beloved!) Read (commencing) with the name of Allah (ﷻ) Who has created (everything); He created man from a mass suspended like a leech (in the mother’s womb). Read and your Lord is Most Generous; He Who taught man (reading and writing) by the pen. He Who (besides that) taught man (all that) which he did not know.”¹

These are the five verses that contain the note of knowledge. Man knew nothing but now he was blessed with knowledge. He started knowing (the reality of the things). He was brought to light from the dark and deep ditch of ignorance. It was light of awareness that was conferred upon him. Knowledge is, in truth, a journey towards light and awareness.

Through mediation of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) Allah Almighty (ﷻ) connected man to the system of education and exploration of knowledge revealed in these five verses and kindled human mind with countless lights of consciousness and cognition. This was the first centre of enlightenment in Islam that came about under the divine guidance in the holy seclusion of Mount Hira cave; the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) was its first disciple and the Creator of the universe his Guide, the Teacher and the Trainer. If we ponder over various aspects of the above mentioned verses, and prepare its synopsis the following three scientific and doctrinal features stand out:

1. Quran, 96:1-5.

1. The Concept of Creation
2. Human Creation
3. The Grandeur of Allah 


But as these topics do not relate to the inquiry of this treatise and we are to talk only about the concept of knowledge we, therefore, confine our work only to exploring the following six features of the concept of knowledge concealed in these verses.

Six aspects of the concept of knowledge

1. **Knowledge:** We would see what knowledge is? And what is its nature?
2. **The objective of knowledge:** Why should we attain and venture for knowledge? And what is its purpose?
3. **Syllabus:** What is the syllabus of Islamic concept of knowledge and on what aspects of it Islam sheds light?
4. **The outcome of knowledge:** What would be the possible result or outcome after acquiring knowledge?
5. **Means of knowledge:** What should be the means of knowledge? What is the identification of its origins?
6. **The scope of knowledge:** What should be its scope?

Let us elaborate these aspects one by one.

The concept and objects of knowledge

If we think for a while over the first verse of Surah Al-Alaq we find that it starts with the word “read”. The commencement of the Surah with this word signifies that Allah  has started the revelation of His Guidance with the command to seek knowledge. Acquiring knowledge, therefore, is the first step whence apostolate initiates. In the like manner if we look at the last word of the 5th verse, it reveals that best of the apostolate also comes out to be acquisition of knowledge. The commencement as well as zenith of Messengership is but knowledge alone; that is the






be-all and end-all. What remains is found nowhere but in the embrace of knowledge. The truth of seeking knowledge and its real import comes to fore vividly. We can see how significant it is to gain knowledge to promote and promulgate the divine guidance. It also persuades to strive hard against the darkneses of ignorance.

Knowledge that merits excellence

We should bear in mind that knowledge and education does not only mean literacy. Capability to read and write or gaining some command or hold over certain aspects of professional knowledge is not in itself the major objective. The objective to attain knowledge is very high; it is a blessing that encompasses the entire universe. We can say that, high or low, nothing of this universe falls beyond the scope of knowledge. Everything in the heavens and the earth and in between them is in the ambit of knowledge. But what bears special significance in this regard is revealed in the first verse:

أَقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ.

“(O Beloved!) Read (commencing) with the name of Allah .

Allah Almighty  asks the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) to start learning with the blessed name of Allah . It brings to fore that only that knowledge is acceptable in the sight of Allah  that starts with the holy name of Allah  – knowledge based on the name of Allah , giving pivotal status to Islamic ideology and doctrine.

We should keep in mind that Islamic concept of knowledge is not confined only to religious or spiritual knowledge. It encompasses the entire scientific, modern and

1. Quran, 96:1.

secular knowledge. The Islamic history bears testimony to it that, laying the foundation of scientific knowledge, the Muslim scientists carried out the Prophetic injunction contained in this tradition:

أَطْلُبُوا الْعِلْمَ وَلَوْ بِالصَّيْنِ، فَإِنَّ طَلَبَ الْعِلْمِ فَرِيضَةٌ عَلَى كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ.

“Seek for knowledge even (you have to go) to China. Getting knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim (man and woman).”¹

The Holy Qur'an has frequently urged to conquer universe which is not possible without gaining mastery over modern sciences. But the pertinent point to make here is that only that knowledge of modern sciences merits excellence that seeks the pleasure of Allah Most High (ﷻ).

Knowledge and divine gnosis

Learning, starting with the sacred name of Allah Almighty (ﷻ), laying central emphasis on Islamic doctrine and ideology, brings about gnosis of Allah (ﷻ). Only that knowledge, therefore, will be considered real knowledge that brings man closer to Allah (ﷻ); brings Allah's gnosis and true servitude to Him and grants an access to Him and finally takes man to enforcement of Islamic law and putting Allah's commands to practice. On the contrary, knowledge that drives us away from our Lord is not the real knowledge. The modern and scientific knowledge and discoveries bring us, both intellectually as well as practically, close to Allah Almighty (ﷻ). A scientist with a broader mind and vision is basically a monotheist. Knowledge means to be aware but

1. Ibn Rajab Hambali, *Jami' bayan-il-ilm wa fadlih* 7.

only that awareness becomes knowledge in the real sense which brings divine gnosis and nearness to Allah (ﷻ).

What is ignorance?

Now the question arises as to what is ignorance. Does it mean knowing nothing? We have seen that only that knowledge is worthwhile and valuable that grants us divine gnosis. So, the knowledge that drifts us away from Allah (ﷻ) and fails to become a means of nearness to Allah (ﷻ), His awareness, consciousness and gnosis is not knowledge but ignorance. If a person holds many degrees but his knowledge makes him forget Allah (ﷻ) he is not a scholar; he is rather an ignorant soul. The knowledge he possesses is but ignorance. Abu Jahl was not known as Abu Jahl (father of ignorance) for he could not read or write; he was considered literate man of his time. But he was known as Abu Jahl because his knowledge could not help him recognize Allah Almighty (ﷻ). That is why Islamic concept of Knowledge aims awareness of Allah Almighty (ﷻ) and the learning process starts with the blessed name of Allah (ﷻ).

Teleological categorization of knowledge

This is now a settled baseline that real knowledge is that which is a means to divine gnosis and close proximity to the Creator of the universe. But categorization from this point of view would not consider only the Qur'anic Studies, Knowledge of Exegeses, Prophetic Traditions, Islamic Jurisprudence, Morphology and Syntax, Spiritualism and Sufism as branches of Islamic knowledge. This will also include Biology, Physics, Psychology, Chemistry, Politics, Sociology, Economics, History, Law, Nuclear Technology, Computer Sciences, Management, Commerce, Mass Communication etc. as religious studies. The sole condition

is that we should acquire this knowledge for the sake of Allah (ﷻ) and as means of His gnosis and nearness. So, all those who start their studies in the name of Allah (ﷻ) aiming at His nearness will be considered as students of Islamic Studies whatever specialty they work for and wherever they may be, because all these branches of knowledge do take us to the gnosis of Allah (ﷻ) some way.

The quest for the word of truth is the venture towards Lord. A man blessed with peaceful mind and faculty of reasoning working diligently in various fields of worldly knowledge will ultimately end up with divine gnosis. The more he advances and ascends grades of reason and intellect, the more he becomes aware of oneness of Allah (ﷻ), His Lordship, Godship and various aspects of His Grandeur and Glory. So, every teacher and the taught and the trainer and the trainee engaged in quest for knowledge must know that he is stepping into the field of learning with the sole purpose that his short stay on earth may prove a means towards attaining the gnosis of the Real Creator, His nearness and an access to Him alone.

The vast and open field of knowledge

Knowledge is an unfathomable sea having no bounds. It is a continuous journey towards light. It cannot be confined to any finite areas of studies. A little meditation over the word *kbalaqa* (خَلَقَ) would bring to light that no special subjects of knowledge have been taken up for acquiring knowledge; the field of learning has been kept vast and open. Allah Almighty (ﷻ) says:

أَقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ

“(O Beloved!) Read (commencing) with the name of Allah (ﷻ) Who has created (everything).”


It has not been mentioned in the holy verse as to what has been created. If it were mentioned that would delineate its confines. Allah Almighty (ﷻ) has left it open for exploration and discussion. The world *khalaqa* (خَلَقَ) has been used in the verse in general sense and the verse is quiet on describing the creation. This signifies that Allah (ﷻ) has not fixed any direction of studying the creation and the creative process. Learning too, therefore, is left undetermined. Whatever exists in the universe is created by Allah (ﷻ) alone. Man, therefore, should know through his gained knowledge that the universe is running only due to Allah (ﷻ) Who exists and is the First and the Last and Eternal. He it is Who directs the clouds to rain over the drought stricken barren lands; He it is Who feeds a small insect inside a stone; He gives His hands to his men in the time of test and trial. He is the Lord of the Universe, the One, the Peerless. His knowledge encompasses every grain of sand and is the fountain of entire knowledge. And O Man! Your knowledge leads you and guides you towards Allah (ﷻ). “He Who has created everything” means that when you look at the vastness of the universe you should imagine His infinite Mercy and Blessing showered upon the entire creation. His raining bounties provide for all the lands and quench their thirst. Whenever you lift your eyes towards heaven above, you behold the Grandeur and Transcendence of the Lord of heavens and the earth; when you see the ice-capped hilltops, you remember the Glory of Lord; when you see towards the lush green crops, fascinating waterfalls, flowing rivers and dancing fields, you recall the care, love and affection Allah (ﷻ) blesses man with. In sum, whatever you observe in the creation spread around you, you find it as a masterpiece of the Creator.

The discussion we have so far made over the contents of the first verse is from the standpoint of the concept of

knowledge and its objectivity. It leads us to conclude that we cannot decide whether some knowledge is right or wrong unless the objective of knowledge is determined. Nor can we work out any estimation in this connection. It is, therefore, the objectives of knowledge that establish whether some knowledge is religious or irreligious.

Syllabi – the programmes and packages of learning

It is important to note here that the word syllabi and its synonyms like curricula, course outlines, learning programmes and other expressions that are commonly used to convey the idea fall short of intimating what man has to know on earth for divine gnosis and means of getting closer to the Creator of the universe. That is what we intend to communicate here by using the word ‘syllabi’. That is a far broadened sense this word has been coined to convey.

Everything created in the universe is attributed to the Creator as He is the Creator of the entire universe. So, the knowledge we acquire must also pertain to everything in the universe. The earth and the sky, the moon and the sun, the stars and planets, the vastness of oceans and the meandering flow of rivers from hills to the sea down through plains, the torrents and the violent waves, the rhythm of waterfalls, blossoming of buds, the sunrise and the sunset, the freshness of vegetable world, the flora of plants, the splendour of the trees and variety of stones, the charming fragrance and pleasant colours of leaves and fruits and, so to say, the entire universe and its contents are but the creation of the One and the Only Lord. He has no partners or peers; He is Matchless and Singular. The question is what should man strive to know that he is granted divine gnosis and nearness to Allah Most High .

The Qur'anic expression *alladhi khalaqa* (الَّذِي خَلَقَ) and its applications in general refer to infinity of subjects and disciplines to learn. It is a clear pointer towards a Mega Syllabus that includes everything created by Allah (ﷻ) in the universe which man should venture to take up for study.

The syllabi include every living and non-living creation

Whatever Allah Almighty (ﷻ) has created in the universe or whatever exists in the universe besides Allah Almighty (ﷻ) fall in the ambit of the syllabi. If one wants to learn about the Earth, one will take up Geology, Archaeology, and Anthropology. This includes the study of every change occurring inside or on the surface of the earth, all the minerals, and their sources. If one wants to learn the working of human mind, the variety of psychological and psychic states and their phenomenology and biology, the discussions and studies of the conscious, sub-conscious, and unconscious mind, he will take up to study Psychology. If one wants to study matter, its form and motion and the physical phenomena, he will go for Physics. The study and analysis of the origin and the end of man and the universe on the basis of reason and original form of universe and man's position and responsibility entail an inquiry known as Philosophy. Chemistry inquires into chemical structures and bonds and actions and reactions and Biology pertains to the study of biological phenomena. So, there is a long list of disciplines of knowledge, old and new, that invite human mind to reflect on and open up a world full of explorations and discoveries. In nutshell everything created by Allah Almighty (ﷻ) is a subject of study and forms a syllabus. That is what syllabi of human learning is all about.

Removal of a common misconception

This discussion takes us to the inference that Islam does not confine knowledge seeking ventures only to the Qur'an, Exegeses, Prophetic Traditions, Jurisprudence, and Sufism. It also includes all the modern sciences and technologies in the quest for knowledge. The word *alaq* (علق) and its implications are a proof that sciences are prescribed subjects of learning. *Alaq* (علق) means suspended mass resembling a leech and it is a biological doctrine to study relating to the creative process. So, we can conclude that Islamic concept of knowledge neither recognizes any cognitive boundaries nor suggests any limited course outlines. It opens the door of knowledge to the entire universe.

The difference between the Qur'an and other branches of knowledge

The Holy Qur'an is the fountainhead of entire learning. But there is a striking difference between the Holy Qur'an and other books. The Qur'an is the word of Allah (ﷻ) and books on various branches of knowledge are human studies of Allah's creation. These books only deal with specific subjects and topics. A book on one discipline is quiet on other disciplines. They are no way comparable to the Qur'an. The Holy Qur'an is a treasure of all knowledge and learning that man may need till the end of time. The sciences and technologies are human ventures in the line of guidance Allah (ﷻ) has revealed in the Qur'an. They are parts of an infinite whole contained in the Qur'an. All knowledge originates from the Qur'an and this is the basic truth of the Islamic doctrine of knowledge.

A subtle reality

The Holy Qur'an provides us an ideology in written form. As a theory is experimented in some laboratory for its validation the Qur'anic knowledge is validated in the sacred person of Allah's Beloved Messenger (ﷺ). The holy personality of the adorable Prophet (ﷺ) is the embodiment of the Qur'an – the Quranic teachings put into practice as a practical model for the entire mankind. As the knowledge contained in the Quran is unlimited the life conduct of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) too is infinite in the like manner because a limited thing cannot encompass an unlimited thing.

The outcome of knowledge

The subject taken up in the third verse of the Surah refers to the impact of the acquired knowledge on human character, his ways, manners and habits and the personality profile at large. That is the outcome of knowledge when practiced. What influence knowledge imprints on human personality and character is contained in this third verse. Allah Almighty (ﷻ) says:

أَقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ﴿٢﴾

“Read and your Lord is Most Generous.”¹

The Grandeur and Glory of Allah Most High (ﷻ) is supreme. He has no beginning and no end. He is the Lord of both pre-eternity and eternity. He is Eternal, Most High and Transcendent. His Light encompasses the whole universe. All the creation whether living or non-living are subject to His command alone. The holy verses of the Sura inform man, the humble creature, on the greatest truth of

1. Quran, 96:3.

the universe that Greatness, Grandeur and Glory are the attributes of Allah Almighty (ﷻ) alone. Man is but a humble and lowly being. Knowledge also teaches him humbleness and modesty and manners of obedience to Allah (ﷻ). It provides him a skill to perceive and conceive His Majesty and Beauty. When his heart gets kindled with knowledge it makes him bow down before his Lord and frees him from all other chains. He fears none but Him and gets instilled with courage to rise against all the tyrants of his age. He cares not for any Pharaoh and stretches not his hands before any tycoon. He begs only from Allah (ﷻ) and His Messenger (ﷺ). He has faith in the Glory and Grandeur of Allah (ﷻ) and believes in his own humbleness and powerlessness. Influenced by these feelings he holds:

*He is meant neither for heaven nor earth;
The world is for him, not he for world.*

Feeling of humbleness and modesty

When the branches are decreed to bear fruit, they bow down before the will of Allah (ﷻ). This is the prostration of gratitude in the Holy Presence of the Lord of the universe. But the branch that stiffens instead of bowing down gives way and breaks. Allah (ﷻ) despises pride and arrogance the most. In the same way when man ventures to explore and study various branches of knowledge, mysteries of the world start dawning on him. He then feels humble, down to earth and becomes paragon of modesty. His lips quiver with thankfulness and gratitude and he gets immersed in His blessings. He practically affirms that Allah (ﷻ) is Clement and Gracious and all Glory and all praises are for Him alone. But if contrary to that, knowledge rouses in him feelings of self-love, egotism, and arrogance and man starts giving credit for his achievements to himself instead of attributing them to Allah (ﷻ) and becomes stiff-neck taking


all good as the result of his personal hard work he is not a true scholar or man of learning. He is rather an ignorant person having no knowledge of the truth.

The word *iqra'* (أقرأ: read) has been repeated in this verse. Allah (ﷻ) has mentioned His Glory also along with "read". This signifies that faith in His Glory is an inevitable result of acquired knowledge. But if knowledge does not leave this impact on him and he does not feel humble, lowly and modest and does not believe in the Majesty and Glory of Allah (ﷻ), then his knowledge is no knowledge and he is but an embodiment of ignorance and unawareness.

Removing the superiority complex

Knowledge fosters sense of obedience in man, purifies his heart and soul with humility and humbleness and roots out arrogance and sense of superiority from his mind. Superiority complex is almost an incorrigible malady. It takes its roots deep in man. God-feeling also stems from the same disease. Tyranny and oppression is the outcome of this awful state of mind which gives birth to Pharaohs and Nimruds. This feeling is the mother of all radicalism, extremism and terrorism. It spoils peace and devastates human societies. But yet we can cure it through knowledge. Knowledge condemns and discourages growth of superiority feelings in man and helps him maintain balance, equilibrium and moderation. It promotes tolerance and emotional stability in societies. It inculcates humbleness in man which provides a fertile soil for human prosperity. However, this is wrong if someone starts feeling that he is the know-all and has completed his venture to acquire knowledge. If a person after getting knowledge crafts such a belief as if he knows everything, his course of study has been completed, and he has become a veteran scholar, he is still wandering in the darkness of ignorance and has lost the path of truthfulness.

Showing lack of knowledge stands for knowledgeability

The men of knowledge and intellect say: "Beware of the fool who thinks himself a wise man." The journey to the destination of knowledge never ends. One remains a student always. We cannot even think of acquiring complete hold over knowledge. The truth is that the more we acquire knowledge, the more we develop a sense of lack of knowledge. The more we acquire the wealth of knowledge, the more we are ravaged by the sense of being ignorant. We should believe that knowledge is a bottomless ocean and we have not sipped even a drop of it. When we reach the top of the hill we find that we are still at the bottom and we find our bowl of knowledge still empty. Allah Almighty  is the fountainhead of all the knowledge.

Knowledge defined by Abu Bakr Siddiq (ؓ)

Knowledge generates this feeling as if man does not know anything. Modesty and humility springs out of knowledge. Abu Bakr Siddiq (ؓ) said:

أَلْعِزُّ عَنْ دَرَكِ الْإِدْرَاكِ إِدْرَاكٌ.

"Feeling conscious of being unable to know is called knowledge."¹

The higher one goes in seeking knowledge the more the mysteries and secrets dawn on him. And the more the secrets are unveiled to him the more modest and humble he becomes. He thinks as if he is insignificant. The point to note is that this modesty and humility should not be confused with inferiority complex because these feelings generate after acquiring affluence in knowledge. Moreover,

1. Aalusi, *Rub-ul-Ma'ani min tafsir-il-Quran-il-aẓim nas-sab'il-mathani*, 13:141.

this humbleness is expressed before the Holy Presence of Allah Almighty (ﷻ). Any inferiority complex is, therefore, out of question.

A point to consider


It is very unfortunate that one who gains a little knowledge starts feeling very high of him ultimately losing all balance. He is all arrogance and conceit. Egotism flashes in his eyes. He deceives himself feeling as if he is matchless and a greater scholar than all. That he is the greatest orator, the greatest research scholar, the greatest jurist and authority, and the most renowned intellectual and modernist of the world. This is the most dangerous virus which spoils human mind with evil thoughts. Its venom is lethal and the ailment that it causes is fatal. When it corrupts one's mind it kills all his faculties and constructive abilities; he forgets the truth that there is someone who is holding higher position in knowledge than he does¹:

وَفَوْقَ كُلِّ ذِي عِلْمٍ عَلِيمٌ

The ranking of Prophetic knowledge


The claim that man can acquire the whole knowledge is meaningless. Knowledge is an endless continuity of information and awareness which is infinitely spread out in the universe. It is acquired by the seeker as well as gifted by Allah (ﷻ). Allah (ﷻ) confers it upon His chosen servants, the Prophets and Messengers through His Perfect Might. The Holy Prophet (ﷺ) is the Beloved Messenger (ﷺ) of the Lord of the universe. He is the final Messenger of Allah (ﷻ) for whom Allah (ﷻ) has created the entire universe. It


1. Quran, 12:76.

is beyond our estimation and evaluation to know and measure as to what knowledge and how much of it Allah  bestowed upon His Beloved.

God has granted everything to the Prophet (ﷺ);

That is in the embrace of the best of men.

As already mentioned there is someone higher in rank in the field of knowledge than the one who claims to be high. We should also bear in mind that the level of Prophetic knowledge begins where all the knowledgeable ranks come to an end. The rank of Prophetic knowledge is always too elevated to be imagined. It is the highest in the universe beyond which is the impenetrable knowledge of Godship. Human mind is not formed to have any idea of the Divine Knowledge. A study of the sacred life of Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) reveals that he was raised to the highest station of knowledge but still he demonstrated for us a perfect lesson of modesty and humility through the conduct of his life. His is an incomparable high ranking in knowledge. Talking of mankind Allah Almighty  has said that human beings have been granted but very little of knowledge:

وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِّنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا 

“You have been given a very little part of knowledge.”¹

The total extent of knowledge acquired by mankind is just a portion of what the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) possesses. It is from him that all knowledge has emanated. He said:

أَنَا مَدِينَةُ الْعِلْمِ وَعَلَيَّ بَابُهَا.

“I am the city of knowledge and Ali its door.”²

On another occasion he said:

1. Quran, 17:85.

2. Hakim, *al-Mustadrak alas-sahib ayn*, 3:124.

أَنَا دَارُ الْحِكْمَةِ وَعَلِيٌّ بَابُهَا.


“I am the home of wisdom and Ali its door.”¹

So, the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) is the fountainhead of knowledge in the annals of human history. It is his attribute alone that standing on the pulpit he told all the truths and events from the initiation of the universe till the day of reckoning and answered the questions of every questioner. He who possesses knowledge of the whole universe, the beloved Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) encouraged us and taught us a lesson of humility and modesty when he said to his humble students and companions who used to quench the thirst of their knowledge at his fountain that they were better in the worldly affairs than he. His modesty is adorable and glorious. His every action exhibits his obedience to his Lord. His every word displays his gratitude to his Lord. How humble a common man must therefore be? What in reality is the whole universe; splendid and high or inferior and low rather nothing? What man is today proud of; his knowledge or his ignorance he is unaware of? Why does he become so arrogant? He becomes conceited, haughty and arrogant just for the insignificant knowledge he has his hand on. That is wicked of man. Knowledge must always result in upright character embellished with the traits of humility and submissiveness.

Humbleness stands for dignity

When a person is blessed with knowledge by Allah Almighty (ﷻ), he gets immersed in gratitude. He bows down before his Lord and prostrates to submit his thanks and obedience. But if unfortunately, assuming high position for his knowledge and worship, he rebels and transgresses and

1. Tirmidhi, *al-Jami'-us-sabih*, *abwab-ul-manaqib*, 2:214.


becomes stiff-neck he turns into Satan because arrogance and disobedience are Satanic qualities. But humbleness and submissiveness are angelic traits; they in return beget dignity and splendour. Bowing down earns elevation. When a servant bows down before his Creator, He showers respect and honour on him. They turn towards Him to quench the thirst of knowledge. Man continues to bow down seeking more and more knowledge. Allah Almighty  keeps raising his status higher and higher. Iqbal says:

Humble yourself to exalt yourself;

The seed gets buried to become flowers.


The gist of the discussion is that humbleness, modesty and humility are the outcome of knowledge. Feeling of lacking knowledge overpowers him welling eyes with tears. Knowledge and arrogance cannot be yoked together or rather they cannot exit together. Knowledge does not dwell in a heart filled with arrogance; it departs forever. Contrary to that knowledge illumines the heart imbued with humility and modesty; it flourishes there with in peace and comfort.

The sources of knowledge

“Sources of knowledge” is a broad subject. Much can be written on it. We, however, confine ourselves to the dictates of first five verses of Surah Al-Alaq which is our subject here. Allah Almighty  says:

الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ

“Who taught knowledge by pen.”¹

The light of knowledge radiates from the nib of the pen. The pen is a significant milestone on the way to learning. The sources of knowledge and learning are numerous which Allah  has not mentioned here. He only mentions that


1. Quran, 96:4.

which helps us start our quest for knowledge and which is the most effective and reliable means of learning. So the pen represents all other ways and means of learning. Mentioning pen as source does not negate other sources of knowledge; it only highlights the significance of pen in the process of gaining knowledge and its role as the most helpful means to preserve knowledge and transfer it to the coming generations. With this significance of pen in view we also need to know other sources of knowledge as well which are briefly discussed below.

The sources of knowledge are divided into three parts:

1. Five Physical Senses
2. Five Spiritual Senses
3. Five Subtleties of Intuition

The five physical senses

Allah  has endowed man with five sources of knowledge for contact and communication with the surrounding environment and milieu. He learns through them about the physical world and its realities and develops his awareness about them. They are called five physical senses. They continue growing along with age. These are:

1. Sense of Touch (sensations from skin; cutaneous senses: pressure, warmth, cold and pain)
2. Vision (sense of seeing)
3. Audition (sense of hearing)
4. Gustation (sense of taste)
5. Sense of Smell (sensations of olfactory organ, nose)

These senses provide the human mind with only raw sensory information. Each one of them works in its specific sphere. These senses cannot replace one another. If one of them malfunctions, the others cannot be depended upon for its peculiar function to perceive the reality of a thing. If any of the senses fails or breaks down, the rest of them cannot

make up its deficiency even jointly. For example, a voice is sensed through ears, the colours through eyes, fragrance through nose, hot and cold through touch and bitter and sweet through tongue. On the contrary, an eye cannot hear, the skin cannot see, nor an ear can taste. All the five senses have their respective functions. Sense of taste cannot even temporarily work in the place of sense of smell, nor touch can become its standby. None can step away from its fixed course to give a judgment in an area it is not meant for. So it is established that if a thing exists but the specific sense to perceive it does not exist, the thing cannot be sensed even by deploying all the other senses jointly. From these premises we infer the conclusion that we cannot claim non-existence of a thing on the basis of ineffectiveness of the limited scope of our physical senses.

Inevitability of reason for five senses

Here is another limitation of the five senses. They furnish the desired data under supervision and guidance of intellect. Unless lead by human reason they cannot take man to any conclusion despite accurate and immaculate perception. The stimulation of sight, hearing, touch and taste spurs intellect. These sensations cannot shape into knowledge or meaningful information unless they are processed and directed by intellect along a peculiar approach of man's inquisition to draw inferences. The human body works like an automated machine. Brain in this machine is like an inbuilt computer. It controls operations of human apparatus. It coordinates the body under a system. In addition to that it generates in the senses a state of consciousness. Allah (ﷻ) has made human brain a factory and senses function like its cogs. They produce raw material of information for the brain and do not have to know or understand the stimulations. Ears do not have to decide

what the words that they hear mean. Nor have the eyes to judge the difference between red and green. Likewise other senses too are not involved in any data processing. It is reason or intellect that processes the received data; brain is its station.

Five spiritual senses

As Allah (ﷻ) has created five physical senses for the material world so has He endowed human intellect with five spiritual senses. These are:

1. Common Sense
2. Imagination
3. Thinking
4. Memory
5. Association

A brief summary of each of these senses is given below.

1. **Common Sense:** No sooner this faculty of human intellect receives data from physical senses than they get absorbed into it. For instance, when our eyes see something, common sense takes and accepts this sensation. It can be illustrated with the similitude of a pond that is common sense and five physical senses are five drains bringing water into it.

2. **Imagination:** It preserves the shapes and images of sensations and perceptions received in the common sense pool from sensory channels. For example when we hear the word “Lord” its images “L, O, R, D” are stored in imagination.

3. **Thinking:** This spiritual sense perceives the meaning and implications or spiritual forms of physical sensual stimulations and transfers the received impressions to the next sense for preservation.

4. **Memory:** It retains meanings of sensations in the same way as imagination stores their physical images.

5. **Association:** It connects meaning preserved in faculty of thinking to the physical images saved in imagination. This enables us to understand and differentiate between words on hearing them. All these five senses work jointly and with mutual cooperation and coordination. It is here where sensory information changes into knowledge and understanding. These senses may break down if common sense is wiped out. Each sense has a link with the other. They are ineffective and unproductive without one another.

This syllogistic study clearly proves that physical five senses depend upon spiritual five senses to culminate into knowledge and understanding. The perceptions of material realities received through physical senses can mature into knowledge only if they develop into some conclusion through spiritual senses. Physical senses can only perceive a thing but cannot know it. On the other hand intellect and spiritual senses too are dependent upon physical senses. If all sense organs fail to perform their functions, intellect just cannot draw any conclusion owing to absence of the required data. So intellect and senses are interdependent.

Our senses are extremely susceptible to environmental impressions. If a newborn baby is shifted immediately after his birth to a place where there is no voice to stimulate his audition, he will grow abnormal, unable to speak or understand any word even after getting fifty years old. It will happen for the sole reason that whatever we say results from whatever we hear. That is the learning phenomenon. We hear voices, which our memory retains. The intellect supplies meanings to these voices through the process of association. Then we reproduce the same voices on the S.I.R. pattern: stimulation, integration and response. If there is no stimulant, there will be no response and no learning simultaneously. If a man does not hear anything his intellect will remain barren, unable to retain any voices, words,

syllables, enunciations, accents, rhythms and styles. His mind remains like a clean slate with no impressions drawn on it. Likewise, he also cannot and does not acquire any capability to say and express his feelings, desires and needs. It was for the same reason that in the Holy Prophet's times the Arabs used to send their children with rural women so that they might learn pure and fluent Arabic through hearing them, talking to them, getting corrected by them and by living with them.

Man and limitations of his knowledge

There is no denying the fact that human intellect can reach only where senses can take it. It works only within the jurisdiction of senses. It does not exist outside the sensory territory. It is a paralyzed limb without sensory support. All senses at the same time are useless and insignificant without intellect.

So the sources man is blessed with are inter-dependent. Despite dynamic functioning of senses and intellect several questions about reality of human life remain answerable. For example what is the purpose of man's life? Who has created man? How was he created? How the universe began and how and when will it end? What is the relation of man with the universe? Which law has to be obeyed to live a pleasant and useful life in the world? What is good and what is bad? What is just and what is unjust? What is man's abode after death? Is death the end of life or the start of a new life? If after death man enters a new life then what are its modalities? After death, will he be responsible for his deeds or not?

And many more inquiries may be added to the list. These questions crop up in man's mind, which every sensible man who believes in a purposeful life needs to answer. When these queries whirl his mind man can only

endeavour through five senses to know who the Creator is and what life and death, good and bad imply. Senses, however, are confined only to the task assigned to them. The realities these questions lead to are far off from the sensory perception; they are beyond the material world. For senses it is a foreign land.

Human intellect too fails to probe into. It does not deal with metaphysical inquiries. The physical and spiritual senses are like its limbs. It functions through them. It gives up when they give in. These are in fact not the means to know about the Lord of the Universe.

Ecstasy


Allah (ﷻ) has bestowed upon man another spiritual source called ecstasy or intuition. It also has five dimensions, which are known as five subtleties (*lata'if*; لطائف):

1. The subtle essence of the heart
2. The subtle essence of the spirit or spiritual subtlety
3. The subtle essence of the secret or secret subtlety
4. The hidden subtle essence
5. The subtle essence of the most secret of the secret.

These subtleties provide light to the eye of your heart. The realities start unveiling themselves. The spiritual ears start hearing. Then our heart learns about such realities that our senses and intellect cannot grasp. But Intuition or Ecstasy (*wajdan*) also works within the confines of material existence. Imam Ghazali says:

وَوَرَاءِ الْعَقْلِ طَوْرٌ آخَرٌ، تَنْفَتِحُ فِيهِ عَيْنٌ أُخْرَى فَيُصَرُّ
بِهَا الْعَيْبُ، وَمَا سَيَكُونُ فِي الْمُسْتَقْبَلِ، وَأُمُورٌ آخَرُ،
الْعَقْلُ مَعْزُولٌ عَنْهَا.

“And there is a station ahead of intellect, where the spiritual eye opens up. By means of this vision you can see the realities of the realm of unseen; the occurrences destined to happen in the time to come get discernable and other matters that fall off the jurisdiction of intellect come to light.”¹

Ecstasy too, however, has its own limitations. It is also unable to transcend its span of action to prey any awareness of the Divine Reality or His Attributes. The senses, the intellect and the ecstasy, none of them can serve any conclusive and final information about creation of man, purpose of its creation, death and queries related to postmortem occurrences. Man has knocked at all the three doors one by one but could earn only disappointment. None of the sources of knowledge could bring about anything conclusive, decisive and final. Losing hope, options and courage, one can only fall in prostration before Allah Almighty  and submit: “O Lord of the Universe! I seek your gnosis; I want to know about this universe and long for my own recognition as well. But I do not have any means to satisfy this urge. It is only You now Who can provide me out of Your Unseen Infinite treasures some source spring that would enlighten me with awareness about the secret and hidden realities. It is but You alone Who can confer some source of knowledge on me from where I may beg and gain.”

The divine revelation

Where all possible means of acquiring knowledge that fall in man's reach come to an end, the Divine Revelation comes in. The facts and truths lying beyond the access of five senses, reason and ecstasy are learnt only through Divine

1. Ghazali, *al-Munqidh min-ad-dalal*:54.

Revelation. This is the special blessing of Allah Almighty (ﷻ) that He showers on His chosen servants, the Prophets and the Messengers. A common man cannot even think of his access to this divine source. Nor can he comprehend as to what is the nature of this experience called revelation.

This Divine Revelation continued to the Final Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), the Prophet Mohammad (ﷺ). With his apostolate the chain of sending the Messengers to mankind came to an end and the door of revelation was shut forever.

It is now the life history of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) wherefrom all knowledge and cognition one has to acquire. All the truths veiled from human perception and which man has always pursued to learn but his senses, intellect and ecstasy failed to explore are revealed to mankind through the enlightening guidance of the Final Messenger of Allah (ﷺ). With the mediation of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ), Allah (ﷻ) has provided to mankind that fountainhead of knowledge which is the end-all of all learning. He is the city of knowledge and all the roads of human inquiry lead to this city and end up there. The mission of acquiring knowledge cannot be accomplished without seeking guidance from the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) may the humanity put all its energies to push the way through.

The scope of knowledge

We have learnt in the light of Surah Al-Alaq the concept of knowledge in Islam, the major objective of seeking knowledge, the syllabi prescribed for man to learn, the sources of knowledge and the outcome of knowledge. Now if one asks as to what has Allah (ﷻ) taught man to learn or whether the Quran has fixed any limit with regard to seeking knowledge we need to turn towards fifth holy verse of Surah al-'Alaq. Allah (ﷻ) says:

عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ﴿١٧٠﴾

“He Who (besides that) taught man (all that) which he did not know.”¹

So, the Holy Quran has not fixed any limit of knowledge. Allah Almighty (ﷻ) has taught all what man did not know before. He has enlightened him on all the truths and the realities of the universe of which he had no knowledge. He kindled his mind with awareness enabling him to distinguish right from wrong. Allah Almighty (ﷻ) has blessed us with knowledge of all the professions. His teachings keep pouring down. And everyone benefits from it according to one's capacity. It all depends upon man how much he benefits from Allah's infinite blessings. Allah (ﷻ) has not put any limit on it. The entire universe is lying open before him like a prescribed text book. It is endless and unlimited. This vastness can be perceived from the saying of Almighty Allah (ﷻ):

وَفَوْقَ كُلِّ ذِي عِلْمٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٦﴾

“There is always someone higher in knowledge than the other.”²

This sets man free to go as far as he can in the pursuit of knowledge. There is no restriction or upper limit which one cannot transgress. There is no end to this journey. He can learn as much as he wants from the open syllabi. Allah Almighty (ﷻ) has not set any destination to this journey. There is no end to knowledge as there is no end to Allah's Lordship and Godship and the Holy Prophet's Messengership. Knowledge has enveloped the entire creation. One strives according to one's potential and when

1. Quran, 96:5.

2. Quran, 12:76.

he strikes the climax he gets amazed. The height of this unique feeling of amazement is but silence. One can say nothing, possessed by an inner feeling of appreciation that inundates all his faculties:

*If I remain silent, you are the ultimate beauty;
If I speak, your beauty is confined.*



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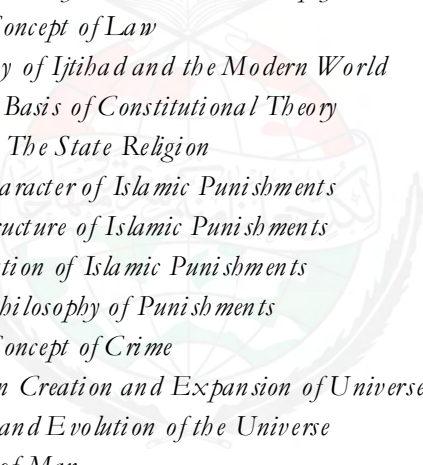
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