

Good News

And give good news to those who do good (to others)

-Holy Quran 22:37

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Knowledge – The Bedrock of Our Faith in the Divine

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This week the world celebrated ‘Read Out Aloud Day’ to inspire and encourage what the angel Gabriel commanded the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s¹) to do more than 1400 years ago, namely:

‘READ! In the name of (or with the assistance of) your Lord (Rabb) Who creates –
Creates man from a clot.
Read! and thy Lord is most generous,
Who taught by the pen,
Taught man what he knew not’ –
(Holy Quran 96:1-5)

As these were the first words revealed to the Prophet (s), it goes to show what prominence Islam places on ‘knowledge’ or the ‘pursuit of knowledge’. The reason for this is easy to understand because knowledge in Islam serves as the foundation-stone on which our faith in Almighty God rests. The more knowledge we have about GOD and His creation the stronger our faith in Him becomes. Conversely if we are ignorant of His attributes and His creation, our faith is like a structure that is built on a weak, sandy foundation ready to collapse once the slightest pressure is placed on it.

Islam therefore does not teach blind faith in some dogma that says salvation lies in mere faith in someone or something. There is no logical sense in such a dogma; much

¹ *Salallaa hu alahi wassallam Peace and Blessings of God be upon him*

as there is no logical sense in the belief that mere faith in the doctor and not the medicine he prescribes would suffice to bring about relief to a patient.

Nay! Islam calls for knowledge in what we believe in so that we can apply such knowledge as principles of action for our progress and success in life. When we become Muslims we declare that we bear witness that there is only One God and none other and that Muhammad is His Messenger. This is called the *shahada*, the testimony of faith. The question is, how can we testify to something we have no knowledge about? This does not mean we are not Muslims, it merely means we are still at the early stage of submission and proceeding to the stage of becoming a *mu'min*, a believer; where faith will enter the hearts as we gain more certain knowledge of the existence of God Almighty and His message to humankind.

Thus it is important that we keep on seeking true knowledge and guidance in this quest from the One

Who brought us all into existence in the first place that is our Lord (Rabb), the Creator and Evolver of all the worlds. He indeed tells us to Read meaning to study, reflect, ponder, research with the assistance of your Rabb. It is interesting to observe that whilst 'Iqra' 'Read' was the first word revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s) by the angel Gabriel, **Rabb** was the first attribute of God revealed to him by the Arch Angel. This is very significant because **Rabb** very briefly means the One who nourishes and sustains everything through various stages towards perfection. **Rabb** is therefore the Great Evolver of everything (*alamin*) and only for sake of brevity it is commonly translated as 'Lord' for convenience sake; but Lord does not come anywhere near the rich meaning of the Arabic **Rabb**.

Thus for our souls to evolve to perfection we will need the assistance of our **Rabb**. Such assistance He has provided in the

form of a Book of Guidance. This Book is called Quran, which means that which is read from the same root as Iqra 'to Read'. Our **Rabb**, we are told, is the author of the Book:

'I Allah, am the Best Knower, This Book, there is no doubt in it, is a guide to those who keep their duty.'
– (2:1, 2)

What more certainty do we need but to hear from the Author Himself that the Book is a Guide to those who are on the path of righteousness; whose hearts and minds are pure seeking the knowledge provided to them by their **Rabb**. This Book is the answer to the prayer we made in the Fatiha where we asked for guidance on the right path.

But the Book can only be of benefit to us if our mindsets are properly tuned in to find and remain on that path that leads to the purity and perfection of our souls. This, we come to know is the objective of the Book; for us to find the path of the prophets; the righteous (sawliheen); the truthful (siddiqeen); the bearers

of witness of the truth (shuhadaa) ; and so forth and NOT the path of the disobedient souls that incur Allah's wrath and who go astray.

So the Author of this Book significantly and with great Wisdom, teaches us about Himself first so that we can understand His true nature and Who He really is. In this way we are now able to build our own moral and spiritual life-structures on such knowledge and thus become a true witnesses of His existence.

Thus in the very first chapter of the Holy Quran, we read and learn about His **Rahman** - that He is Beneficent to all His creatures, regardless of who or what they are. He gives to every created being what is due to them in carefully structured measures without short changing anyone. We then learn that He is **Raheem**, Merciful or the One that rewards every good deed that you do on the physical and spiritual planes. For example if we apply our hearts, minds and senses in a proper way and acquire knowledge of nature and

how its laws work then we can turn the workings of nature to our advantage. We have already seen what we can do with resources such as electro-magnetic and solar energies. We also know what we can achieve through agriculture, mining, fishing etc. In all cases we are using the resources provided by Allah's **Rahman** and turning it into beneficial uses through the Divine Law provided by Allah's **Rahim**. By making full, good use of our faculties, is the highest form of expressing our gratitude for His Beneficence that He provided us with free of charge. So we should study all the attributes of Almighty God, much of which we observe in nature around us, and make these the prototype on which we proceed to build our own life structures. In other words, we should become like **Rahman** and **Rahim** - Beneficent and Merciful - in our attitudes and conducts.

First we should respond positively to the command '**Iqra**' Read! And ponder over the words,

'And thy Lord is most generous Who taught by the pen, Taught man what he knew not.' – 96:3-5. In other words, the Holy Quran should not only be recited but reduced to writing and studied in order to obtain the best understanding of it and then taught and made accessible to others as well. In fact **Iqra** has very broad connotations that include 'proclaiming' and 'teaching' as well. Such proclaiming and teaching must be extended to all humankind in search of such knowledge and not just to Muslims. That is so because we are told our **Rabb** is **Akram**, Most Generous. This means He has made knowledge available to all who are eagerly and passionately in search of it. There is no favouritism when it comes to distribution of knowledge. We see this in our own life time. Whilst the Russians and the Americans have travelled into space several times already, we Muslims are still quibbling whether to compute our lunar calendars using naked eye sightings or technology. This is very sad because there was a

time when Muslims because of the Holy Quran were leaders and pioneers in the sciences. That is because they studied the Holy Quran and drew gems from it and adapted their lifestyles according to it. They used their faculties to gain as much knowledge and used it to become the best in whatever field they entered whether, mathematics, anatomy, medicine, astronomy etc. They knew that Almighty God frowned upon those who did not use their God-Given faculties and compared such people to dumb animals and beasts:

“Is, then, he who goes prone upon his face better guided or he who walks upright on a straight path?”

“Say: He it is Who brought you into being and made for you ears and eyes and hearts. Little thanks it is you give!” – 67:22, 23

The two classes spoken of here are the animals and men. Those who do not observe things through proper use of their ears, eyes and hearts are likened to the animals – they are

destined to be inferior and ruled by others. Because they are insolent and do not make use of their faculties by gaining knowledge and understanding and putting it to productive use, they are said to be ungrateful.

To illustrate the point by way of an analogy; imagine you arrange to help some struggling farmers by supplying them with top of the range equipment and the means to obtain the necessary skills to operate it and use it for agriculture to sustain themselves and the community; and say after a year or so you visit them to see how they are progressing and you find the equipment stuck away somewhere, unused full of dust and rust and the land turned into a literal waste land; and the farmers sitting around idly having siestas in the sun. You would no doubt feel very disappointed and insulted at the ingratitude shown for your benevolence. The thanks you expected for the benevolence you afforded them, was that they should develop the skills and means to put

their resources to good use. This is what Almighty Allah, our great Benefactor, expects of us; and not to be like the idle, ungrateful farmers. The Holy Quran describes such people as ‘deaf and dumb’ as *‘sharrad dawaab’* – the vilest of beasts in the sight of Allah – (8:22)

No! Mankind has no excuse not to obtain knowledge because the main source of our knowledge and understanding is free and accessible to humankind; this is the inspirations instilled in our hearts by divine revelation known as *wahy* i.e. an inspired thought which the heart communicates to the brain. Information is also obtained by the heart through proper use of our senses such as our ears and eyes which the heart takes on and communicates to the brain for processing and action. This kind of knowledge is taken to heart literally from personal observations and deep contemplations of Nature around us.

Recent studies by a neurocardiologist, Dr Andrew Armour show that the heart itself

acts as a brain when it communicates with the brain. He found that the heart’s nervous system consists of around 40,000 brain cells called neurons that communicate with the brain. At first it was thought that neurons existed only in the brain. He dubbed this discovery as the ‘little brain’ in the heart.²

Another experiment revealed that the heart is always a step ahead of the brain and prompts the brain when any kind of emotion is stimulated. For example a study showed that the heart acts intuitively. When one of the volunteers in the experiment was about to be presented with a disturbing picture, recordings showed that his heart remarkably registered an anticipatory response before the image appeared and sent a message directly to the emotional centres of the brain. The brain then prepared the body for action. These

² <https://youtu.be/LelkiUDS0yM>

are recent studies, very much still a work in progress and by no means definitive but very factual based and we can see why the Holy Quran refers to the heart in many places as a living, thinking organ and as the receiver of divine revelation:

‘Surely he (Gabriel) revealed it (the Holy Quran) to thy heart by Allah’s permission.’ – 2:97.

And the believers are told:

‘Nay, it (the Quran) is clear messages in the hearts of those who are granted knowledge. And none deny our messages except the iniquitous.’ – 29:49

Thus it is through the study of the Holy Quran, revealed to the heart of the prophet and that entered the hearts of the believers, that we are inspired to explore all branches of knowledge. Thus the true definition of *ulema* or scholar in the parlance of Islam, is one who has a very broad knowledge of all aspects of life’s sciences not just theology.

The Holy Quran, therefore, lays special stress on our contemplations

on Nature and all other aspects of life.

Kwaja Kamal ud Din the Founder of the Woking Muslim Mission, England, in 1913 and respected missionary of Islam, writes a very insightful piece on this topic in his booklet entitled ‘*The Human Faculties and their Development*’ pages 15 and 16.

The following is based on his observation. The Quran, he says, refers to four kinds of contemplations which have been termed ‘*taffaquh or taffaqqad*’ (see 27:20), ‘*tadabbur*’, ‘*tafakkur*’ and ‘*ta’aqul*’. They are of-course different forms of thinking or making observations best expressed in the Arabic as their English equivalents – thinking, pondering, meditation and contemplation - fail to convey the shades of meaning in which they differ.

1. *Tafaqquh/ Taffaqqad* –

When we try to get a correct idea of things and think about their distinctive features in order to understand them

properly, we do *taffaqqad* which signifies a process of review or inspection. (The Holy Quran says: ‘*Wa taffaqada tayra* – And he reviewed, examined or inspected the birds or the horses.’ – 27:20 – *Ed.*)

2. *Tadabbur* – means to acquire such knowledge ‘of things as to enable us to understand the purpose of its existence.
3. *Tafakkur* – Means to ‘reflect’ or ‘meditate deeply’ on something in order to find out the properties of things and how they came into existence.
4. *Ta’aqqu* – Means to acquire that kind of knowledge that will enable us to make the proper use of things by determining the merits or demerits of things. Therefore through the application of *ta’aqqu* we strive to discover the proportions in which the properties of things are combined with each other to

make new things. For example we know that two parts of hydrogen combined with one part of oxygen creates water. But we also know if we get the mixtures wrong we might create a poison. So by using the process referred to as *ta’aqqu* we learn to act responsibly and determine what is useful and acceptable and what is injurious and dangerous and should thus be avoided and discarded.

It was the application of these contemplations that actuated and inspired all scientific researches among the early Muslims and made them leaders in Medicine, Astronomy, Biology, Anatomy, Mathematics, Chemistry etc.

Thus, in summary, if the **first** contemplation enables us to understand things in their general character, **the second** speaks to their ‘why’ and ‘how’; and if the **third** brings us knowledge of their

properties, **the fourth** shows us the way to make use of them in their daily lives.

Islam therefore makes the search, the acquisition and proper application of knowledge a priority for the broader good and benefit of all mankind.

May God Almighty, the Beneficent and Merciful increase us in knowledge!

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