

Deep and Definite Knowledge

The Qur'an emphasizes that one should pursue only that aim of which he has a definite and clear knowledge.

"Do not pursue that (matter) of which you have no knowledge, for ears, eyes, and heart all are accountable": (Surah Bani Israel, 17:36).

Such a knowledge is obtained through convincing and clear proof.

"Do you possess any authority (Sultan) for making this assertion, or do you say concerning Allah what you do not know ". (Surah. Yusuf, 10:68).

"These are their own wishful fancies. Say: Let us have your proof (Burhan) if what you say is true". (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:111).

Guess and conjecture do not lead to such a knowledge.

"Most of them follow nothing except conjecture, and conjecture can certainly not take the place of truth. Surely, Allah is fully aware of what they do". (SurahYunus, 10:36).

From the point of view of the Qur'an conjecture has no value at all. In several verses it has been described as a senseless and blind action. (Vide Surah al-An'am, 6: 148 and Surah Ale Imran, 3: 154).

The Qur'an mentions a number of factors which tend to give rise to conjecture and put it in the place of correct and precise knowledge.

(1) Pursuit of base desires

The base desires, lust, cupidity and self interest obstruct correct judgment and the finding of truth.

"Who is more misguided than he who follows his caprice without guidance from Allah?" (Surah al-Qasas, 28:50).

(2) Customs of the forefathers

"In fact they say: We have found our fathers practising a religion, and we are only following in their footsteps. It has always been the same case. Whenever before you, We sent a warner to a town, its rich people invariably said: We have found our fathers practising a religion and we are only following in their footsteps." (Surah al-Zukhruf, 43 : 22 – 23).

(3) Blind submission to the great and the powerful

"They shall say: Our Lord! We obeyed our chiefs and elders, and they misled us from the right path". (Surah al-Ahzab, 33 : 67).

Inferiority complex so bewitches a man and overwhelms his thinking that he ceases to think for himself and blindly follows the thoughts, ways and habits of big powers or even the advanced countries. Such a man sees with the eyes of others, hears with the ears of others and thinks with the brain of others.

The Qur'an has mentioned some basic organs through which reliable knowledge is obtained. They are:

Ears for hearing, Eyes for seeing, Heart for understanding

"Allah brought you out of your mothers' wombs in such a state that you knew nothing. He gave you ears and hearts, so that you may be thankful". (Surah al-Nahl, 16:78).

There is another verse which says:

"Then He fashioned him and breathed His Spirit into him. He has given you ears, eyes and hearts; yet you show little gratitude ". (Surah al-Sajdah 32:9).

One of the main sources of our knowledge is hearing, through which we come to know of the experience, investigations, and the ideas of others. We hear of many events from other individuals and other reliable sources.

Another main source of our knowledge is seeing and observation.

The third source is inner perception and comprehension. The knowledge which is obtained through seeing, hearing and inner observation still remains superficial and has little value till it is further studied, evaluated and analyzed. This raw material must be processed in the region of heart so that it may become reliable, valuable and fit for being accepted and followed.

According to the Qur'an the maturity of man depends on the correct use of these faculties. If these faculties are not used properly, man sinks to the level of animals.

"They have hearts but do not understand with them, they have eyes but do not see with them and they have ears, but do not hear with them. They are like beasts or further astray. They are heedless ". (Surah al-A'raf, 7: 179).

Basic and expanded role of heart

The Qur'an has variously described the role of heart.

Thinking, pondering and comprehending are some of its functions. Thinking means arranging the known data for the purpose of analysis, composition, comparison and evaluation. As the result of this process, general rules and principles are obtained and then applied to particular cases.

Pondering means going into the hidden aspects of the apparent phenomena in order to find the way to the real truth. What we can discover by means of our senses is only a superficial reflection of what is the present appearance of the things. Our senses can neither discover the inner truth directly, nor can they find out the ultimate end of any event.

By means of our senses we can know only what is perceptible and observable, but they do not have enough power to have access to the inner truth. Only pondering, deep thinking and mental analysis can do that.

Hence scientific knowledge must not be based on credulousness, guess and conjecture, superficial judgment and short sightedness. It must be accompanied by correct mental analysis and deep thinking so that the result may be clear, convincing, reliable and fit to be followed.

Consideration

The Qur'an at several places urges us to consideration, which means to look at things carefully and inquisitively and observe them attentively along with deep thinking. Look at the following verses carefully:

"Say: Look at what is in the heavens and the earth ". (Surah Yunus, 10: 101).

"Say: Travel across the land and see how He originated the creation" . (Surahal–Ankabut, 29:20).

"Consider what the fate of the miscreants was" : (Surahal–A'raf, 7:86).

"Do they not consider how the cannon was created, how the heaven was raised, how the mountains were set up, and how the earth was spread?" (Surah al–Ghashiah, 88:17 – 20).

We see that in all these cases consideration should be so careful, accurate and effective that it may provide an answer to the questions which may arise and solve the difficulties which may be faced. It should be to the accompaniment of deep thinking and careful study.

This consideration, reflection and contemplation is applicable to all the realities of the world and is not confined to any particular sphere. The Qur'an counsels to consideration in divergent fields. For example it says:

"Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day, there are signs for men of understanding, who remember Allah, standing, sitting and reclining, and consider the creation of the heavens and the earth. (They say): Our Lord! You have not created all this in vain. Glory be to You! Save us from the torment of Fire". (Surah Ale Imran, 3:191 – 192).

There are hundreds of similar verses in the Qur'an which call man to the fruitful study and investigation of this vast world. In respect of history the Qur'an says:

"Relate these stories to them so that they may think over them". (Surah al–A'raf, 7:176).

There are other verses which consider the ups and downs in the history of the ancient nations and the causes of their progress and downfall to be a lesson.

"We will show them Our signs in all horizons and within themselves until they will clearly see that He (Allah) really is ". (Surah Fussilat, 41: S 3).

Regarding the knowledge imparted through revelation, the Qur'an says:

"Do they not meditate on the Qur'an, or are there locks on their hearts?"(Surah Muhammad, 47:24).

Knowledge and science in modern usage the word, 'knowledge' has been limited to experimental knowledge. In fact there are two words. One is 'knowledge', which covers all kinds of learning and

information, and the other is science which exclusively means knowledge based on experiment and induction. With the limitation of knowledge to scientific knowledge, a fallacy has arisen. It is said that:

(a) Any information not based on knowledge has little value, and hence it is not convincing.

(b) Knowledge means experimental knowledge, and hence any knowledge not obtained through experiment is worthless and not fit to be followed.

You may observe that in the first sentence the word knowledge has been used in its general and wider sense, and consequently this sentence gives a meaning about which there can be no doubt. It is true that any information not based on knowledge, has little value. But in the second sentence the word, 'knowledge' has been qualified and used in a limited sense.

The result is that there are people who say that it is only experimental knowledge which is reliable and has value. They have gone so far that to believe their own existence they want to light upon human soul through a surgical operation, and to come across Allah during a space journey!

Another Fallacy

We have observed how the word knowledge has been limited to a narrow sense. This mistake has given rise to another fallacy.

It is said that only experimental knowledge being reliable, a truth can be proved only through observation and experiment, and therefore anything which cannot be subject to observation and mathematical calculation has no reality. From this it has been deduced that a reality is only that which may be established by means of an experiment, the nonmaterial things which cannot be tested in a laboratory, obviously have no reality and are no more than an idea or a notion conceived by the mind.

On this basis it has been further inferred that realism is a philosophy which regards only matter as a reality, whereas idealism is that approach to the world which believes in nonmaterial things also. As the logic of nature requires us to give preference to realism over idealism, materialistic approach to the world is preferable to the divine approach

What a flight of clearly imaginative thinking! If we think over the above argument carefully, we can easily observe how unscientific it is. In fact it is no more than a fallacy. Should we take realism and idealism in the sense of realistic thinking and imaginative thinking respectively, there is no doubt that the former has a priority over the latter. But we must see what is the scope of reality and who can be called a realist?

Objective reality is that which actually exists. It may be material or nonmaterial. It is not essential that a

thing which exists must necessarily be material. Similarly it is also not essential that everything which is based on knowledge must be observable in a laboratory.

Hence divine realism is the belief in realities, whether material or nonmaterial but not the belief in mere conceptual notions and imaginary ideas. Those who believe in divine approach to the world, maintain that they have reached the absolute truth through insight and knowledge. They have found it and not merely conceived it. This is an indisputable truth which unfortunately has been misrepresented and wrongly interpreted.

Islam has its own general outlook on the world which should be correctly understood, for without knowing it, it is not possible to understand the Islamic teachings in many other fields of doctrine and practice.

From the Islamic point of view the world is a collection of multifarious but interconnected realities which have and continue to come into existence through the will of Allah, the One, the Omnipotent and the Omniscient. The world is constantly changing and moving. It is a motion, based on goodness and blessing, in the direction of gradual perfection i.e. every being achieving the degree of perfection for which it is suited. Out of His infinite mercy Allah has willed that in its evolutionary march everything be preplanned and based on a series of the laws laid down by Allah. The Qur'an has termed these laws as the "Divine Practice".

From the point of view of Islam man is an outstanding phenomenon and a creative being who himself determines his future. For this purpose he has been endowed with two gifts: (1) Faculty of acquiring vast and ever increasing knowledge about himself and the universe, and (2) volition.

The Islamic outlook on the world can be summarised thus:

- a. Realism
- b. Correct thinking
- c. Monotheism
- d. Future making with conscious effort
- e. Gaining knowledge through reflection and experiment
- f. Receiving knowledge through revelation
- g. Acquiring utmost knowledge through the stable system of action and reaction including immediate, long term and even permanent reactions.

Thus Islamic outlook consists of knowledge, freedom and responsibility. It is an outlook of hope, optimism and possession of a purpose.

To elucidate these points further, we propose to deal with them at some length.

Realism

As we have pointed out, according to the viewpoint of Islam, the universe is a collection of multifarious but interconnected realities which are constantly changing and moving. It has come into being by the will of Allah. Islam requires man to keep this fact in mind while getting himself acquainted with himself and the world. He should acknowledge everything as it really is with all its dimensions and relationships.

At the stage of acknowledgement there is no exception to the principle of realism. But should man be realistic at the stage of action? At the stage of action realism has two aspects which should be distinguished from each other.

Sometimes it is said that man should always be realistic and practical. What is meant by practical is that one should submit to the present realities and should never try to resist them.

Islam does not approve of this sort of realism and considers it to be inconsistent with man's position, his mission and the creative power with which he has been endowed. Man of Islam has no right to submit so easily to his physical and social environment under the pretext that a sensible person should not fall foul of realities.

Another aspect of realism is that man should take into account the limitations of his intellectual and practical powers while making efforts to improve himself and his environment. He should find out the best way of mobilizing his potentialities and removing or overcoming the intervening difficulties. In doing so he should always be realistic and must not overestimate his potentialities. This sort of realism at the stage of action is approved by Islam, and is in fact a part of the realism at the stage of acknowledgement. Islam has pointed out to man that he can change only a part of the realities of the world, but not all of them. The power of changing the realities varies with different persons and with the different periods of the life of the individuals and the society.

Correct Thinking

Islam lays much stress on the point that man should pay full attention to the basic role of correct thinking and knowledge in his life and that he should realize that his salvation depends on them. In this respect the Qur'an says:

"Give good tidings to our servants who hear advice (and reflect carefully on it) and follow the best thereof. Such are those whom Allah has guided. They are the people of understanding".
(Sura al-Zumar, 39: 17 - 18).

In many other verses the Qur'an has repeatedly addressed – 'the men of understanding', 'the people who think', 'the people who understand' and 'the people who remember' and it wants the wise, the sensible and the thoughtful to think correctly and not to fall into the pitfalls situated on the path of intellect.

Islam requires man to put his ever-increasing intellectual and creative power into action, to bring about necessary changes in his natural and social environments and to create new useful things so that he may become more equipped to ensure a better and decent life for himself as well as for other human beings and should not submit straightaway to the existing realities. Hence, in the eyes of Islam, man is required to incline towards his goal rather than to the existing realities.

Man of Islam

The most interesting part of the Islamic Outlook on the world is concerned with man and the Qur'anic view about this eminent being. From the Qur'anic point of view man is not a natural being, i.e. like other natural things it does not have to follow a fixed and unalterable course and career.

Man – – the self-maker and the selector

The Qur'an considers man to be a being having the responsibility of self-making. In this respect he has a divine role. Partially he is a material being and partially a divine one. In the words of the Qur'an man has been made of clay, but divine spirit has been infused in him. In his various capabilities of being good and bad have been intermingled. He has been endowed with the power of exercising his will and choosing his way.

The Qur'an says:

"Indeed We have created man from the union of sperm and egg to test him. We gave him the faculties of bearing and seeing. We have shown him the right path. Now it is upto him to be thankful or thankless". (Surah al-Dahr, 76:2 – 3).

Man has more intellectual capacity than any other living being. From the point of view of gaining knowledge, he is far ahead of even angels. In the beginning of his genesis man learnt things which were unknown to them.

The Qur'an says:

"He taught Adam all the names, then He presented those to the angels and said: Tell Me the names of these, if what you say is true. They said: Glory be to You! We have no knowledge except that which you have given us. You alone are All-Knowing, Wise. Then He said: O Adam! Tell them their names, and when He told them their names, Allah said: Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of the heavens and the earth?" (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:31 – 32).

Man has the big advantage of having a vast field in which he can secure power by gaining knowledge. He has the practical ability of executing his desires. He is also able to choose his way and direction. Thus the Creator of the world has made him superior to most of His other creatures.

"Surely We have honored the children of Adam. We carry them on the land and the sea. We have provided them with good things, and have definitely given them superiority above many of Our creatures". (Surah al-Isra, 17:70).

Big trust

The 72nd verse of the Surah al-Ahzab describes those powers with which man has been endowed as a big and valuable trust, worthy of man alone. It is he alone who could hold it. Otherwise in spite of all their grandeur, the heavens, the earth and the mountains had declined to take such a responsibility.

The Qur'an says:

"We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it. But man assumed it".

Human personality

The personality of man depends on his holding this big divine trust, viz. the ability of choosing his way of conduct. His well-being depends on utilizing this power to the best advantage. The human society is human only so long as in it everybody is free to think for himself and choose the way of life he deems to be the best. If a man thinks as others want him to think and does as others want him to do, he is no longer a man. He is only a thing which lacks human will and independent personality. If his actions are to be planned by others, he can neither be a planner nor a chooser.

The biggest and the most painful degradation which man of this century has suffered as a result of the modern mechanized life is that he has been deprived of his humanity and turned into a mere cog of the elaborate and huge mechanical devices. In many cases the economic value of his job is far less than that of the machine beside him. More than anything else it was the material philosophy which paved the

way for such a humiliating situation. But at last the trust which is held by him has stirred the man of this century who is now trying to dislodge the yoke of the slavery of machines from his neck. In the present state of half sleep and half awakening he is on the lookout of an intellectual and social system which may help him regain his human dignity

Human emancipation

From the Islamic point of view the only way for man to get out of his present predicament is to get rid of his egoism and should worship Allah. A man who thinks only of his material desires, whose efforts are concentrated on having better food, better clothing and better facilities to enjoy sex or who is day and night after securing pomp and pelf, can never be a free man. He can easily be enticed and then dominated by those who can put the means of enjoyment at his disposal. But if a man is God-loving who seeks the pleasure of Allah more than anything else, he can keep his passions under control and satisfy his desires with moderation, without becoming a slave of them. Such a man can surrender his desires, if necessary, to gain the pleasure of Allah, whose pleasure is more valuable than everything else. Allah will recompense him for his sacrifice in a better and purer way in the eternal world.

The Qur'an says:

'Alluring for people is the love of the joys that come from women, sons, boarded heaps of gold and silver, horses of mark, cattle and plantations. All this is the comfort of this worldly life, but with Allah is a far better abode. Say, shall I tell you something better than that? For those who practice piety, with their Lord are Gardens underneath which rivers flow. They shall abide in them forever, and shall have spouses purified and Allah's grace. Allah watches over His slaves. Those who say: Our Lord! We do believe. So forgive us our sins and save us from the punishment of the Fire. Who exercise patience, speak the truth, who are devoted in prayers, spend their property in the cause of Allah and pray for pardon in the watches of the night". (Surah Ale Imran, 3:14 - 17).

A religious man is naturally interested in all the good things in this as well as in the next world. But for him the pleasure of Allah is above everything else. The Qur'an says:

"Allah has promised the believers, both men and women, Gardens underneath which rivers flow, and in which they shall abide. He has promised them nice dwellings in the Gardens of Eden. What is more, Allah shall be pleased with them. That is the supreme achievement ". (Surah al-Bara'at, 9:72).

In fact a self-renouncing and devout man loves Allah more than anything else.

"Yet there are some who take for themselves objects of worship beside Allah, whom they love as they should love Allah; but those who believe, love Allah more ardently". (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:165).

The best sign of the love of Allah is this that for gaining His pleasure a man should be always ready to sacrifice his life, his wife and children, his hearth and home and his wealth and assets, for none of them could take the place of Allah in his heart.

Bond with eternity

Such a man never finds himself lonely, perplexed and without dignity. He feels to be attached with an everlasting bond to an eternity, a majesty and a perfection. He feels to be a being who can never be annihilated and even whose death is the beginning of a new era of life.

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