

The Central Position of Knowledge In Al-Islam
Part 2: How do we learn? Why do we learn?



Prepared for:
Quran Study Group
12 Safar, 1441 / October 12, 2019

Compiled By:
Jeanette Hablullah

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Surely all praise is due to Allah the Lord, Evolver, Maintainer of all that exists; the One to Whom belongs the dominion of all that is in the heavens and on the earth. He is the One who caused the Book to descend upon the heart of His servant and messenger, Muhammad, and made him (the Book) a guide and a source of mercy for those who are convinced of Truth. He is All Knowing, the Wise Who taught the human beings what they did not know. We glorify Him with praise, we ask him for all good and we seek refuge with Him from every evil. Then, we bear witness that there is no god except Allah and we bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and messenger.

About The Quran

الرَّ تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ
إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

Alif, Laam, Raa; These are the signs of the Clear Book. Certainly We caused him to be revealed as an Eloquent Arabic Recitation so that you (all) will develop intellect. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 12: ayaat 1 – 2)

The letters that open this Surah also appear as openings to 4 others – 10, 11, 14, 15. Surah 13 – Ra'd (Thunder) – has these but also has a *meem*. Each of these opens with a statement about the ayaat or about the Book himself. Here we find a description of the Book as '*mubeen*' (clear and giving clarity) and a statement about the purpose of the expressive and eloquent Recitation.

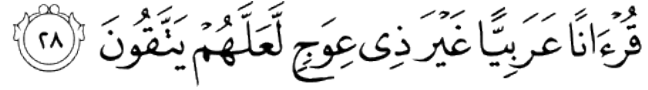
When one examines the root of the word '*ta'qiloon*', they will find the words "to bind; to hold back; restrain" as well as "be intelligent; become wise; understand".

The intellectual development caused by respectful interaction with and humble submission to the education of the Quran, the Noble Recitation, enables one to have the wisdom and ability to restrain the self from sinful, demeaning actions, thoughts and speech. In other words, Allah clearly states there is a direct correlation between the Arabic Recitation and human intelligence and that the development of this intelligence is an intended purpose of the active recitation / reading.

حَمَّ
وَالْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ
إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

Haa Meem; By the Clear Book; Surely We made him an Eloquent Arabic Recitation so that you (all) might become wise. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 43: ayaat 1 – 3)

Another statement regarding the purposeful nature of the Arabic is found in Surah 39:



An eloquent Arabic Recitation without any distortion so that they will become guardful / reverent. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 39: Ayah 28)

Commentary: Study Quran

An Arabic Quran is literally an Arabic Recitation (also in 20: 113; 42: 7) and is understood as an allusion to the supreme eloquence of the Quran, which cannot be matched.

Also, note that with a slight change of the pronoun, the purpose stated here is the same as that of the required fast (siyyaam) stated in Surah 2: ayah 183, which is developing the ability to guard and protect (the soul, the self and the creation). This ability is from an awareness that is an aspect of the ‘aqil – the intellect.

How do we learn? Why do we learn?

وَاللَّهُ أَخْرَجَكُم مِّن بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَجَعَلَ
لَكُمْ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَرَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٧٨﴾

And Allah brought you forth from the wombs of your Mothers knowing nothing and He made for you hearing, sight, and sentiments with understanding so that you will be grateful.

(interpretation of the meaning of the Quran Surah 16: ayah 78)

Commentaries:

Study Quran: Just as Allah brings things forth from hidden places – i.e. milk from the bellies of cattle (16: 66), honey from the bellies of bees (16: 69) and the Hour from the realm of the unseen (16: 77) – so does He bring forth human beings from the bellies of their mothers. ... Hearing, sight and hearts are repeatedly mentioned all together or in various combinations as Divine gifts. These are the faculties through which guidance is received and through which religious knowledge and understanding are acquired. (Surah 22:46)

It is as we stated last month, “These represent all the means by which knowledge can be gathered, judgment formed and virtues cultivated and they are graciously provided by Allah.”

There are three places in Quran where Allah speaks of the creation of human beings that he also speaks of teaching or educating us. (Surah 2: ayaat 31 – 32; Surah 55: ayaat 3 – 5; Surah 96: ayaat 1-5.

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

Read / Recite in the Name of your Evolver, the One Who created; created the human from a clot. Recite and your Sustainer is Most Generous, the One Who taught by the Pen, repeatedly taught the human being what s/he didn't know. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 96: ayaat 1 – 5)

This is definitely sufficient to show the eminent position of knowledge and the undeniable eminent position of pure and structural knowledge to our healthy existence. Allah has made us beings who absorb, process, and communicate knowledge with every fiber of our beings. Consider the communication between the heart and the brain via neurotransmitters, which exist in the heart and the brain and the intercellular communication, which is happening constantly

and also the communication of unspoken sentiments. In the fundamental components of our being Allah repeatedly mentions *hearing* and *sight*, the two main gatherers of knowledge. While these are emphasized, so is our lack of gratitude for them.

In the ayah from Surah 16, Allah brings forth two purposes of these faculties, they are:

1. *to generate knowledge*
2. *to cultivate gratitude*

ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِهِ ۗ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ
وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ

Then He proportioned him and breathed into him of His life force (His Spirit). And, He made for all of you hearing and sight and sentiments with understanding. Little is the gratitude you show. (interpretation of the meaning of Surah 32: ayah 9)

Commentaries:

Yusuf Ali (paraphrased): *In the stages of fetal development, Allah fashions (shapes) and proportions the child and gradually brings an individual into existence. The fourth stage is that of the breathing into this being of “God’s Spirit. Then this being rises higher than the animals.”*

As a complete human being the higher faculties are given. Now there are the spiritual counterparts of hearing God’s message and “seeing (i.e. the inner vision) and feeling the nobler heights of love and understanding the bearings of the inner life”.

Study Quran: *Spirit (ruh) indicates that God made Adam, who had been inanimate, into a living, conscious being. The Spirit can also be understood to represent the bestowal or activation of the intellect by which human beings control **hearing, sight and hearts**. The order in which these three terms are mentioned can be understood as an allusion to the path by which one acquires knowledge, first hearing things from others, then seeing them and attaining to them for oneself, then perceiving their true nature and coming to a more direct and complete understanding of them.*

In this commentary an important principle is stated. The order in which Allah names things and people is meaningful. Here and in other places *hearing* is mentioned first when Allah speaks of our faculties of gathering knowledge. In the process of learning, this is activated first. As Allah teaches, we must be in the condition of listening and absorbing. We all hear before we see.

In addition it is important to realize that there are levels of knowing and, also, active and latent (innate) knowledge. So, when Allah says (in interpretation) that we came from the wombs “**knowing nothing**”, this does not mean that as infants we are ‘empty pages’. We hear in the wombs of our mothers and become acquainted with sounds that we will later give specific identity to. We feel and are impacted by those feelings, though we may not be able to distinguish them. There are two general verbs in Arabic for knowing – ‘*arafa*, to be acquainted

with; to recognize and *'alima*, to have general and distinguishing knowledge. When Allah (ta'ala) speaks of us not knowing, He uses this latter verb.

We learn by exposure to and interaction with the creation of Allah. We learn by submitting our senses and our intuition to our Creator for development. We learn because we have been created to learn.

While many move through life in confusion regarding their purpose, including many with high levels of education, Muslims, in a state of awareness, live with clarity in that realm. We are given unequivocal knowledge:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

Oh you human ones, worship your Lord, the One Who created you and those before you that you might learn to be protective. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 2: ayah 21)

This ayah is an interesting as one contemplates the message. There are two possibilities as to the meaning. One is what follows:

Commentaries:

Yusuf Ali (rAa): *I connect the dependent clause with 'adore, etc.', though it could be considered with 'created'. According to my construction, the argument will be as follows. Adoration is the act of the highest and humblest reverence and worship. When you get into that relationship with God, Who is your Creator and Guardian, your faith produces works of righteousness. It is a chance given you; will you exercise your free will and take it? If your do your whole nature will be transformed.*

The other is that our very existence is for the purpose of learning how to guard, protect and revere the sacred essence of our being and that of all of Allah's creation. When we look at the second ayah stating the purpose of our existence, we will see how these two merge.

Study Quran: *That haply (la'alla) occurs frequently in the Quran and is sometimes rendered "that perchance" or "that someone might". It can be seen to present a theological problem as it implies anxiety or hope, qualities usually only associated with creatures. Some solve this matter by saying that the hope of God is tantamount to a promise, as nothing could stand in its way or that the hope is connected to the subject of the statement and not to God.*

My opinion here is that Allah gives us / endows us with what we need to achieve the desired goal – i.e. taqwa – but leaves us to choose to exercise the good of worship, service and righteousness that will give us success.

Now for the other clear statement as to our purpose:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ ﴿٥٦﴾

And I have not created the Jinn and the Humans (for any purpose) except that they worship Me. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 51: ayah 56)

Now we can merge the understanding of these two ayaat – Surah 2: ayah 21 and the one above.

The common factor in both is the worship of and service to Allah. We are commanded to worship, we are created to worship and we are created to develop a sense of guarding and protecting, which can only come from an active intellect aware of the realities of ourselves and of the Creation and the Creator. **Contemplate this and bring your thoughts to share and discuss.**

Commentary: Study Quran:

This points to the purpose for which human beings were created even if most of them do not fulfill this function. ... This passage could also be interpreted as another expression of the central Quranic theme that human beings are not created for this world but for the next. Ibn Katheer links this to his understanding of what is reported to have been written in a previous scripture. “It has been transmitted in one of the Divine Books that God says, “Son of Adam, I created you to worship Me, so play not! I have taken on the burden of your provision, so tire yourself not! If you seek Me, you will find Me. If you find Me, you have found everything. If I pass you by, everything has passed you by. And, I am more beloved to you than everything.”

This is the epitome of knowledge.

Why learn? What is the motive and why does this matter?

الْم ﴿١﴾
تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْحَكِيمِ ﴿٢﴾
هُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٣﴾

Alif, Laam, Meem; These are the signs of the Wise Book; guidance and mercy for the virtuous (those who perfect their character). (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 31: ayaat 1 – 3)

What follows are excerpts from several sessions given by Dr. Recep Senturk, President of Ibn Khaldun University; Istanbul, Turkey along with several ayaat that I have added.

Islamic education is concerned with the ultimate product – the character and values of the individual who has received the knowledge. In the Islamic view, everything we can perceive with our senses points to and educates us in the reality of Allah and increases our iman.

We study nature, but our approach is different. Nature is a book and every object in Nature is an ayah. Every object makes tasbeeh (glorification of Allah), so they must have a language and the

must have a consciousness. So, the symbiotic reality is that there is a combination of the natural and the spiritual realities.

Motive is what makes education Islamic. Why do you study? In the Western society, the motive is materialistic – status, economic advancement, etc. In Islam the pursuit of knowledge is a sacred act done for the pleasure of Allah. Education is to develop *adab* – good character, virtuous actions, good manners, and proper thoughts. It is to upgrade (improve) one's *adab*. This is first to have an appropriate relationship with Allah. It begins with how we think and with being able to exercise our will to control our hearts (how we feel) and our minds.

أَلَمْ يَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ سِرَّهُمْ وَنَجْوَاهُمْ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ
عَلَّمَهُ الْغُيُوبَ

Don't they know that Allah surely knows their secrets and private consultations? And, certainly Allah knows well the imperceptible things. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 9: ayah 78)

Commentary: Study Quran:

Secrets can mean both the things kept secret as well as the aspect of a thing that is hidden or mysterious. Private discourses (also in 4: 114; 17:47;20; 62; 21; 3, etc.) or najwa refers to conversations held between confidants ... Unseen in the Quran refers to things that are real but absent from sensory perception in the present moment or absent because they will occur or have occurred at a different moment in time or state of being.

Since we are made well aware of the presence of Allah and the attributes of Allah by which He sees, hears and knows everything, we should be concerned with our *adab*.

Then it is to teach what you know. The first thing a proper teacher gives to his / her students is *ikhlas* (purity of character; sincerity; living with an exclusive purpose), a sincere desire to please Allah. So, the goal of education (in al-Islam) is to elevate students to the level of *ihsaan* – living as if you see Allah. Good *adab* or etiquette with Allah is seeing to the needs of the creation. Learning is an act of *ibaadah* (worship) and “is the most important act of worship”.

The first *adab* of learning is to practice what you know. Then, there are 3 Etiquettes of Learning.

1. Having a higher goal
2. Having the intention to serve the creation of Allah
3. Intending to put the knowledge into the mind and hands of others

Al-Ikhlās is the secret to success. The *sahaba* (companions) of the Prophet (saw) are the most successful group in history. Being pure and sincere does not make you ascetic, it makes you get more involved in the world.

وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ حُنَفَاءَ وَيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ
وَيُؤْتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَةِ ﴿٥﴾

And they were not commanded except to worship Allah being sincere to Him in the way of life (deen) as rightly guided individuals, and to establish prayer and to give the required tax. And that is the upright and straight religion (way of life). (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 98: ayah 5)

The foundation of all of the above is knowledge. And the Prophet said in an interpreted Hadith:

“The best of you are those who learn the Quran and teach him.”