

*The Central Position of Knowledge
In Islam*



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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Surely all praise is due to Allah the Lord, Evolver, Maintainer of all that exists. He is the One who caused the Book to descend upon the heart of His servant and messenger, Muhammad, so that he would recite and convey this Message to us. He is the First and the Last, the Apparent and the Hidden and He is All Knowing and Wise. We glorify Him with praise, we ask him for all good and we seek refuge with Him from every evil. There is none to be worshipped except Him. 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

قُلْ مَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُتَكَلِّفِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾
إِنَّهُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾
وَلَنَعْلَمَنَّ نَبَأَهُ بَعْدَ حِينٍ ﴿٨٨﴾

Say, I don't ask of you any reward for him (the message) and I am not of those who deceive. He (the Quran) is only a Reminder for all classes of beings and you will certainly know his elevated message after a time. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 38: ayaat 86 – 88)

The first statement here, made by the Prophet Muhammad, is one common to many other Prophets – i.e. Nuh, Hud, Salih, Lut and Shu'aib – alaihim salaam (See Surah 26: ayaat 109, 127 – 145; 164; 180.) – and is an example of the truth of their common mission through time and also of their being sent by One Divine Source.

Commentaries – ayah 86

Yusuf Ali: *The prophet of God neither seeks nor expects any reward from men. On the contrary, he suffers much at their hands. ... He is satisfied with the hope that each one who will may take a straight Path to his Lord. That is his reward. AS for the reward he hopes for from God, it is that he earnestly hopes to win His good pleasure – “to see His Face”*

Study Quran: *A mark of true Prophethood is that those claiming it ask for no reward from the people. They only ask that the people follow the message with which they have been sent.*

The Prophet's statement that he is not from among the pretenders (mutakallifeen), which can also mean imposters, is addressed to the Quraish reminding them that he had never feigned or sought a position that was not his right or sought to claim something that was not his.

Though there was an immediate recipient at the time of this revelation, this ayah (#86) must be seen with application through time. We can all recall in recent years spoken and written

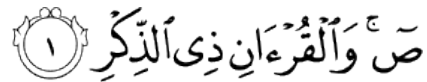
accusations against our Prophet, against Allah’s final messenger (saw). The statement remains to be repeated until the end of this finite world.

Ayaat 87 -88

Yusuf Ali: *The Message proclaimed in Revelation is in accord with all parts of God’s Creation and makes us kin with all Creation.*

Study Quran: *The Quran is only sent to remind people of God and the Hereafter. People will come to see that what the Quran says is true after they die, after the Resurrection or after the victory (purification of Makkah – parenthesis mine) and spread of Islam.*

There is something extremely significant in the statements found here at the end of this Surah. First, note how the beginning of the Surah and the end resemble. Here is the 1st ayah:



Saad, *By the Recitation abundant with reminders.* (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 38: ayah 1)

Then, there is the fact that Allah says *“dhikru lil’aalameen”* – reminder for all beings, for all classes and types of beings, all that Allah has brought into existence – , indicates that all that He has created recognized the truth of this Message and comprehends to whatever capacity with which each has been endowed. “The word ‘al-‘aalameen’ signifies all that is besides Allah, animate and inanimate things, including heavenly bodies ...” (Dictionary of the Holy Quran) ‘Ilm, a faculty given to each unit of creation, is the ability to know and distinguish one being or class of beings from another.

We all know, but some are more receptive to the knowing than others. However, as Allah says (in translation), *“You will all certainly know him after a time.”*

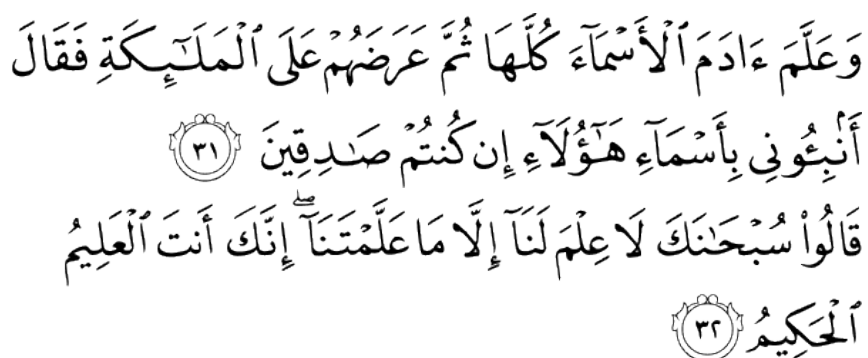
The Central Position of Knowledge in Al-Islam



The Most Merciful, He taught the Quran over time; He created the human being. Through time, He taught him the means of clear expression. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 55: ayaat 1 – 4)

The use of this singular attribute, related to the unconditional beneficence of our Creator, followed by His noble, frequent and abundant teaching, speaks volumes as any pause and allow that message to come through. Allah is the Supreme, Original Teacher, Source of all true, beneficial knowledge. As He structures his teaching of the Quran prior to the creation of the human being, we have confirmation of and testimony to the facts with which we opened this Study, that the Creation is aware of the Quran.

The human being, certainly part of al-‘aalameen and having the general characteristics of all beings has then been singled out for particular education in ability to clearly convey thoughts, feelings, knowledge and ideas. And, the knowledge given specifically to our original parents came directly from Allah.

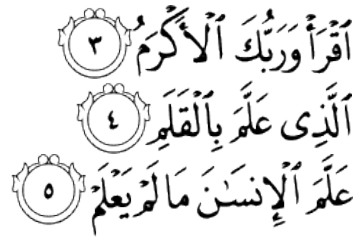


And over time He taught Adam the realities and distinguishing features, all of them. Then, He presented them to the Angels and said, “Tell me the distinguishing features of these beings, if you are truthful.” They said, “Highly Exalted are You, we have no knowledge, except what You have taught us. Surely, You are the All Knowing, The Wise. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 2: ayaat 31 – 32)

In addition to this type of knowledge, the human being, in his / her very existence has perceptive ability. Our title is related to ‘*anisa*’, which means to be familiar, to be polite, kind, social and have intimate connections with others. Then with the small change of the middle vowel we

have ‘*anasa*’, which is to see with feelings of warmth and to perceive things from a distance. (Dictionary of the Holy Quran pgs. 35 – 36)

Allah said in the first Revelation:



Read / 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 3 – 5)

First, related to this selection of ayaat, it is important to remind ourselves that the very first word of Revelation is related to knowledge and not specifically to acts of worship – such as ‘*aslam*’ or ‘*asjud*’. *Iqra*’ is a command or mandate that cannot be done without knowledge. In the above ayaat you see the word ‘*allama*’ twice. Once in relation to a method of conveying knowledge –

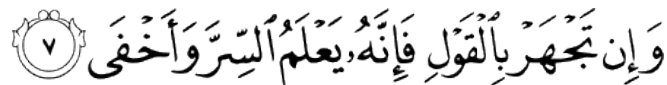
The Arabic words teach and knowledge are from the same root. It is impossible to produce in a Translation the complete orchestral harmony of the words for “read”, “teach”, “pen” (which implies reading, writing, books, study, research, knowledge - including science, self knowledge, and spiritual understanding. (Yusuf Ali)

and then to the content of the education.

Knowledge, then, is an innate part of our being and learning is “*fardh kifayah*”, required of each and every servant of Allah.

Allah the All Knowing

Al-‘Aleem is an intensified attribute. It is for One Who Knows All and for Whom this knowledge is permanent and cannot be diminished or increased, because it is already fully comprehensive. He encompasses everything with this knowing. “He knows what is secret and even more concealed. He knows man’s inner apprehensions and passing thoughts.”



And, if you speak the word aloud (it doesn't matter), for surely He knows the secret and what is even more hidden. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 20: ayah 7)

This attribute of Allah appears in the Quran quite frequently both alone (i.e. Surah 2: 273, 283; Surah 3: 92, 154) and in pairs such as “*waasi’un ‘aleemun*” (Surah 2: 247, 261, 268; Surah 3: 73), “*samee’un ‘aleemun*” (Surah 2: 224; Surah 3: 34, 121), “*‘aleemun hakeemun*” (Surah 9: 106, 110) and “*khabeerun ‘aleemun*” (Surah 66: 3). However, in the first pair that appears in Quran Allah joins His Knowing with His attribute of being Appreciative – *shaakirun ‘aleemun*.

Knowledge is important enough to Allah that derivatives of this word appear in Quran over 850 times. The actual word for knowledge – *‘ilm* – appears more than 100 times.

How We Come to Know

وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَنشَأَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَرَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ

And He is the One Who has developed for you the ability to hear, to see and the sentiments and understanding. Little is the thanks you give. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 23: ayah 78)

These represent all the means by which knowledge can be gathered, judgment formed and virtues cultivated, and they are graciously provided by Allah.

“The prevailing notion in modern life asserts that our senses and our ability to reason determine how we know what is real. ... This way of knowing, however, does not take into account other human faculties, such as intuition and imagination, which the ancients traditionally included in their understanding of knowledge and the soul. ...Islamic civilization is unique in history for having as its raison d’etre the discovery, preservation, and transmission of knowledge.” (Hamza Yusuf; Journal of Zaytuna College; Spring 2019)

The Ummah (Community) of Muhammad (saw) is an ummah whose core characteristic is supposed to be profound, ethical, faith based knowledge. Consider:

- a. Every Book that Allah sends is meant to be studied, discussed, learned from and applied in a practical manner.

As Allah speaks of Bani Israil in Quran, He mentions *“meethaaqu-l-kitaab”* (Surah 7: ayah 169) – a Covenant of the Book, that they would not say anything about Allah other than *“haqq”* (what is true and just), and that they would study what was in the Book.

The ayaat of our Book are similarly meant to be studied, reflected on and reflected in our character (Surah 38: ayah 29).

- b. Every thing required of us – what we are to do and what we are prohibited from doing – is designed to teach us. i.e.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

Oh you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you will develop the ability to guard (the soul). (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 2: 183)

Taqwa is knowledge of a need to be cautious, protective, guarding the most precious of our possessions, our souls. And, Allah says at the end of the longest ayah in the Quran, (*Arabic not included*).

Protect Allah (in yourselves) and Allah will teach you again and again. And Allah is One Having Full Knowledge of all things. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 2: end of ayah 282)

Allah, as the **Rabb**, causes us to encounter individuals, situations, geographic sites, and variations in our health, wealth, and well-being in order to teach us. Under the entry for rabba in the Quranic Dictionary it states, “*foster a thing in such a manner as to make it attain one condition after another until it reaches the goal of completion. ... He is the arranger of the different stages through which they have to pass on their way to perfection and completion.*”

c. And, Al-‘Aleem wants us to know. So He says,

فَلَقَّىٰ آدَمَ مِنْ رَبِّهِ كَلِمَاتٍ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿٣٧﴾

Then Adam learned some words from his Lord/ Master / Guardian Evolver and He turned mercifully to him. Certainly, He is the Often-Turning with Grace, the Compassionately Responsive. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 2: ayah 37)

And He says, (in interpretation) “*and of His signs ...*” Surah 30: ayaat 20, 21, 22 – 25

And, “*Do they not regularly reflect?* – Surah 30: ayah 8

And, “*Do they not travel through the earth ...?*”

أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ
كَانُوا أَشَدَّ مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً وَأَثَارُوا الْأَرْضَ وَعَمَرُوهَا أَكْثَرَ مِمَّا
عَمَرُوهَا وَجَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَمَا كَانُوا لِيُظْلَمَهُمْ
وَلَكِنْ كَانُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿٩﴾

Do they not travel through the earth and observe what was the outcome of those who existed before them? They were superior to them in power; they tilled the earth and inhabited her in greater numbers than they inhabit her. Then their messengers came to them with clear signs. But, it was not Allah who was unjust to them, rather they were unjust to their own souls. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 30: ayah 9)

Also, Surah 22: ayah 46

Then in Surah 30: ayah 30 (below) as Allah speaks about our fitrah (basic nature), He ends the ayah with the statement (in interpretation), **“But certainly most people don’t know.”** That is a challenge to us to become of those who do know.

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا
بَدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ
النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

Then establish your face (your self) to the correct way of life as a rightly guided one; the pattern of Allah, the one on which He brought the human being into existence. Let there be no change for the creation of Allah. That is the established religion (way of life), but certainly most of humanity does not know. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 30: ayah 30)

The encouragement to look at nature, at the many worlds of plants, animals, insects, bodies and formations in the heavens, the rivers, oceans, etc. is all meant to increase our knowledge and strengthen our iman.

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَى مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ يَنْفِيوْا ظِلَّهُ دَعَانِ الْأَيْمَانِ
وَالشَّمَائِلِ سُجَّدًا لِلَّهِ وَهُمْ دَاخِرُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

Don’t they even look at what Allah created of anything how their shadows turn from the right and the left prostrating to Allah, and they are humble beings. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 16: ayah 48)

Yes, even in the observation of study of the shadows there is knowledge to be obtained .

Anzhur – Observe! Look at! Behold! – The Heavens

أَفَلَمْ يَنْظُرُوا إِلَى السَّمَاءِ فَوْقَهُمْ كَيْفَ بَنَيْنَاهَا وَزَيَّنَّاهَا وَمَا لَهَا مِنْ
فُرُوجٍ ﴿٦﴾

Don’t they observe the heaven above them, how We structured her and carefully decorated her and there is not in her any gaps / openings. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 50: ayah 6)

(Also Surah 80: ayah 24 and Surah 88: ayah 17)

Ending Duah

Look at the endings of these 2 ayaat:

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تَذْبَحُوا بَقَرَةً قَالُوا
أَتَنُخِذُكُمْ هُنَا قَالُوا قَالَ أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾

He (Musa) said, “I take refuge with Allah lest I be of the ignorant”. (Interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 2: end of ayah 67)

فَنَعَلَى اللَّهِ الْمَلِكُ الْحَقُّ وَلَا تَعْجَلْ بِالْقُرْآنِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يُقْضَىٰ
إِلَيْكَ وَحْيُهُ وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا ﴿١١٤﴾

And say, “My Lord increase me in knowledge”. (interpretation of the meaning of Quran Surah 20: the end of ayah 114)