

# History of Islam

An encyclopedia of Islamic history

## The Origin, Nature, Methods and Limits of Knowledge (The Epistemology of Knowledge)

Professor Nazeer Ahmed

### Summary

“Love is the remedy for all ills, and it is the remedy of the soul in the two worlds”, Fared ud-din Attar (d 1219 CE), *Mantiq at taysr (The Conference of the Birds)*.

Truth is one and indivisible. There cannot be one truth for nature and another truth for faith and a third one for history. This self-evident reality is overlooked by secular man who compartmentalizes science, history and faith.

Science, history and faith are interrelated in their origin as well as their functionality. The origin of all knowledge is the Divine Name. Humankind is born with an innate capacity to know the Divine Name, and through the Name, know the names and nature of all things.

The function of knowledge is to know God so that humankind may serve and worship Him. This is the grand schema for the existence of the human species.

All that exists springs from God and returns to God. History began when humankind separated itself from Divine presence. Ever since then it has been engaged in a perpetual struggle to find Him. In this struggle, the body, mind, heart and the intellect are his cohorts. As humankind approaches Divine presence, the awe inspiring panorama of nature and the grandeur of the historical process pale into insignificance, collapse and become mere Signs. These Signs, in turn, point the way back to Divine presence from where humankind originated in the first place. Thus science and history become a study of Divine Signs. They lose their profane character and take on a sublime character.

The discipline of each – science, history and faith- is a noble and grand enterprise in its own right. Each one shows the grandeur and majesty of God’s creation and guides man to his noble destiny. Each one has its own assumptions. A man of wisdom is aware of these assumptions so that when he embarks on his discovery of the Truth, he does not confuse what is apparent with the reality that lies hidden behind the manifest.

In what follows, I present a unified vision of knowledge that integrates science, faith and history. The basis of this integration is the wisdom of the Qur’an.

The interrelationship of science, history and faith through a search for Divine presence is a theme that repeats in this collection of essays.

### **The Origin of Knowledge**

*Read! In the Name of your Rabb, Who created,*

*Created the human from that which clings.*

*Read! By your Rabb, the most bountiful,*

*Who taught by the Pen,*

*Taught humankind what it knew not.*

*No! The human does indeed transgress,*

*When he looks upon himself as autonomous. (The Qur'an 96:1-5)*

Knowledge is a treasure. It is gifted through the Spirit which is the source of life. Whether one is a saint or a scientist one must concede that with birth come life, knowledge and power. A dead man has no life, no power and no knowledge. It stands to reason that knowledge is a Divine gift that accompanies the Spirit which is infused into a person between conception and birth. It is the Spirit that is the life source. Without the Spirit, there is no life and no knowledge.

### ***Ilm ul Ibara and Ilm ul Ishara***

Broadly speaking, knowing is of two kinds:

- Knowledge that can be taught
- Knowledge that cannot be taught but can only be alluded to.

Knowledge that can be taught is called *ilm ul ibara*. In this category belong science, history, mathematics, geometry, civics and the languages. Knowledge that cannot be taught but can only be alluded to is termed *ilm ul ishara*. In this category belong faith, love, honor, valor, courage and compassion.

There is a third category of knowledge, *ilm al Wahi* that is bestowed only upon the Prophets.

The Qur'an uses parables and similes to convey transcendent ideas that are difficult or impossible to communicate through discursive language. Transcendental ideas such as love, grace, beauty, wisdom and peace are best felt, not expressed. Accordingly, knowledge can be divided into two categories: *ilm ul ishara* (knowledge that is allusory and cannot be expressed through language), and *ilm ul ibara* (knowledge that is descriptive and can be expressed through language). *Ilm ul Ibara* can be measured and taught in a school. *Ilm ul Ishara* cannot; it is a Divine gift, a moment of Grace.

Consider, for instance, love which animates creation. Love is the cement that binds the world of man. Human love is but a simile to Divine Love that sustains all creation, like the light of an oil lamp is a simile to the light of the sun. The difference is that while the sun and its light are finite, Divine Love is infinite, boundless, beyond description. Such is the language of love, the language of the heart, the language of allusion.

The word *Ibara* has its root in the trilateral Arabic word A-B-R (*a-ba-ra*) which means to wade, as wading across a river from one shore to the other. In prose, it means a line or a description. Accordingly, any thought or idea that can be described through prose, poetry or mathematical symbols can be classified as *ilm-ul-ibara*. Such is the language of the body and the mind.

The Nafs or the Self straddles *ilm ul ibara* and *ilm ul ishara*. It receives its inputs from the senses, mind and heart. It is molded and transformed by these inputs. Like the senses, the Nafs measures in time-space. Like the mind it extrapolates. Like the heart it perceives. But it has its own unique characteristic which is not shared with other parts, and that is its free will.

We illustrate in the diagram below our classification of knowledge.

## A CLASSIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE QUR'AN

*"Soon shall We show them Our Signs on the horizon and within themselves until it is clear to them that it is the Truth)"- (The Qur'an 41:53)*

### KNOWLEDGE (A TREASURE THAT IS A DIVINE GIFT )

- ILM UL IBARA (KNOWLEDGE THAT IS PERCEIVED AND CAN BE TAUGHT)
  - SIGNS THAT ARE PERCEIVED BY THE SENSES (INDUCTIVE SCIENCES)
    - NATURAL SCIENCES
    - HISTORY
    - SOCIOLOGY
    - THE LANGUAGES
    - CIVICS AND GOVERNANCE
    - RITUALS
  - SIGNS THAT ARE PERCEIVED BY THE MIND (DEDUCTIVE SCIENCES)
    - PHILOSOPHY
    - NUMBERS
    - MATHEMATICS
    - GEOMETRY
  - SIGNS THAT ARE PERCEIVED BY THE NAFS (SENSE OF RIGHT AND WRONG; JUSTICE AND BALANCE; ORDER AND PROPORTION)
    - NAFS E AMMARA
    - NAFS E MULHAMA
    - NAFS E LAWWAMA
    - NAFS E MUTMAENNA
- ILM UL ISHARA (KNOWLEDGE THAT IS BEYOND PERCEPTION AND CANNOT BE TAUGHT)
  - SIGNS THAT ARE PERCEIVED BY THE HEART
    - KNOWLEDGE ACCESSIBLE TO THE SADR
    - KNOWLEDGE ACCESSIBLE TO THE QALB
    - KNOWLEDGE ACCESSIBLE TO FUAD
    - KNOWLEDGE ACCESSIBLE TO BIRR
- ILM AL WAHI (KNOWLEDGE BESTOWED ONLY UPON THE PROPHETS)
  - REVELATION
  - GUIDANCE FOR HUMANKIND
  - CRITERION FOR RIGHT AND WRONG

AN ALIM IS ONE WHO IS GIVEN THE GIFT OF BOTH ILM UL ISHARA AND ILM UL IBARA AND IS ALSO BLESSED WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF ILM AL WAHI.

### **Empirical Knowledge as a Sign**

The created world becomes but a simile before the grandeur and majesty of God. This simple truth provides a basis for the integration of the physical and the spiritual. The physical becomes “a Sign” and points the way to Divine presence. So does history. So do the Signs in the heart.

The approach of the Qur’an is inductive. It builds the awareness of Divine omnipresence through Signs in nature and in history. The quest for the Divine is through the struggle of man on earth; the path lies through science and history. It is a limitless, unceasing effort until man meets God. By contrast, the philosophical approach is deductive. It starts with axioms and theses and deduces inferences from it. If the axiom is flawed, so is the deduction. In addition, reasoning and the process of deduction itself have inherent limits.

God reveals His majesty and His bounty every moment through nature and through history. Nature is a great teacher. It offers an infinite variety of vistas. Humans try to understand nature and use it for their benefit. The question is: how can the physical and the natural be integrated into a holistic picture which includes not just the inputs from the body and the mind but also the perceptions of the heart?

The Qur’anic perspective integrates the physical, rational and emotional by asserting their common origin and their common functionality. Each of these modes of knowing springs from the spiritual and is a Divine gift. Each of these assists humankind in discharging its responsibility to know, serve and worship Him. We will briefly outline here how the senses, the mind and the heart facilitate the perception of Signs for Divine presence and serve to augment faith.

In the secular view there is no interconnectivity between the worldviews of the body, the mind and the heart. The interconnectivity is established when these worldviews are taken as Signs from a Single Source so that man may perceive the presence of the Divine and attain certainty of faith.

Consider the physical. The senses act as windows to the physical in time-space and facilitate the construction of an empirical worldview which forms the basis of science. This worldview, based on the assumptions of before and after, subject and object, is flawed, deceptive and imperfect. Consider a rainbow. A physical description of the rainbow would take us in the direction of wavelengths, dispersion, wave propagation, optic nerves, and neurons in the brain. Consider this worldview of wavelengths, dispersion and neurons. Where is the enchanting beauty of the rainbow as it vaults the sky from horizon to horizon? It is not there. Yet, even the most unlettered human can relate to the beauty of the rainbow and be awed by it. The beauty of the rainbow is not in the physical description because beauty is not in wavelengths, cells and atoms. It is in the Self, the Nafs which is hidden from the physical, but makes its presence felt through interaction with it.

The secular man is constantly at war with himself. He cannot circumscribe the heart with his logic. Secular thought would have us believe that there is nothing more to the cosmos than the physical. The materialists go even one step further; they reduce all experience to the physical. In the process they negate the essence of being human which lies in the perceptions of the heart and the Self.

This dichotomy between the physical and the Self is removed when the physical is presented as a Divine Sign. Such a perspective does not negate the scientific approach which demands its validation in observation and measurement. It merely imparts a transcendent vision to the physical so that the

scientist can use the experience of the senses, not as an end in itself but as an occasion for Divine intervention so that humankind may perceive the presence of the Divine and witness the grand panorama of creation from a platform of faith. Such a view does not negate the processes of science. But it changes the perspective in a profound way.

Every moment Divine grace displays itself in nature, and it does so with majesty. In it there are Signs for the perceptive minds. The study of nature thus becomes mandatory on humans to witness these Signs, use them as an occasion to celebrate Divine grace and create Divine patterns in the world.

*Whatever is in the heavens and the earth ask of Him,*

*Every moment He (reveals His Signs) with grandeur. (The Qur'an 55:23 )*

The physical sciences are a part of *ilm ul ibara*. They can be described and taught.

### **History as a Sign and a Teacher**

History offers a fascinating panorama of human struggle on earth. The rise and fall of civilizations, the making and unmaking of dynasties, the formation and breakup of societies offer endless lessons for the discerning mind. The question is: Is history a part of a grand Divine scheme or is it merely a collection of dates, events, conflicts, triumphs and tragedies?

In the secular paradigm, history has no Grand Purpose. It is like a meandering stream, without a known origin and without a known destiny. It may reveal its secrets to philosophical scrutiny but such scrutiny yields answers that are partial, incomplete and change with the vagaries of time-space.

In the Qur'anic paradigm, history has a beginning and an end. It has a meaning and a purpose. It begins with creation and ends with judgment. Its meaning is to be sought in the perpetual struggle of man to find God:

Verily! You are toiling on toward your Lord! Painfully toiling! And you shall meet Him! (84:6)

The purpose of creation is to know God:

*I was a Treasure unknown. I willed that I be known. So I created a creation (that would know Me). (Hadith e Qudsi)*

Man is not separate from nature, or antagonistic to it, as he is in the secular perspective. The Divine laws that govern the universe govern humankind also:

*The Most Compassionate,*

*Taught the Qur'an,*

*Created Humankind,*

*Taught him speech,*

*The sun and the moon, (rotate in accord) with mathematics,*

*And the stars and the trees submit (to His heavenly Laws),*

*The heavens has He raised high and established dynamic equilibrium therein,*

*So that you do not violate that equilibrium in your own lives (The Qur'an 55: 1-7)*

In the Qur'anic view, history is another Sign, like nature. It is like a mirror that teaches humankind something about itself so that humankind may learn and work towards its ethical journey to find God.

### **The Noble Station (*Maqam*) of the Mind**

In all of God's creation, there is nothing as noble as the Mind, except the heart. The Mind is that collection of attributes that sifts through, analyzes, integrates and creates that enormous ocean of knowledge that distinguishes man from the beast. The distinguishing characteristic of the Mind is that it conceives of the possibility of things. It even admits of the possibility of heaven, of the Tablet and the Pen. Logic is its companion, reason its queen. Questioning is its lance. It plays with the concrete and processes what is abstract. When it is set free, it seeks to conquer the heavens and the earth.

### **Mathematics and Symbols**

The Mind is the master of the abstract. Symbols and concepts are its vocabulary. This ability to grasp symbols and concepts, work with them, transform them, integrate them and bring forth new symbols and concepts is a divine gift. It is one of the distinguishing capabilities of the human genre that sets it apart from the beast. This ability is what has enabled humankind to build the edifice of knowledge. It is a natural ability, inherited at birth by every human.

Mathematics and symbols can be taught just as language, history, sociology, civics, politics and governance can be taught. Hence the study of symbols also falls under *ilm ul ibara*.

### **The Mutuality of the Body and Mind**

Sublime as it is, the Mind is helpless without the body. It draws upon the inputs from the senses to validate its perceptions. It is for this reason that sometimes one says that the Body and the Mind are one: the Body is an extension of the Mind while the Mind is an extension of the Body. Let us elaborate this subtle idea by an example.

Our knowledge of the cosmos is space-time bound. The senses, i.e., the eyes, the ears, touch, taste and smell, take inputs from this space-time bound world which are then processed by the mind so that we "know" what it is that we have seen, heard, tasted or touched. The mind is like the processor of a computer into which inputs are provided by the senses. For example, a child touches a hot stove. The input from his touch is processed by the mind which tells him that it is hot. Even if we devise a sensor to measure the temperature, the sensor must be read before we know that the stove is hot. Neither the body nor the mind would know anything of the condition of the stove without the help each of the other.

The sublime character of the mind is that it is space-time bound but it can conceive of the possibility of a world that is not bound by space-time and has many more dimensions than space-time. Indeed, it can conceive of the possibility of heaven.

### **The Position of Philosophy**

Philosophy supported by empirical evidence becomes science. Philosophy unsupported by empirical evidence becomes speculation. Logic and rational thought are its tools. Reason is its companion. Philosophy is deductive science. It starts with a premise and draws conclusions from it. The limitations

of philosophy are in the very assumptions that form its foundation. The errors of the philosophers arise when they forget the assumptions on which their philosophy is based and proceed to apply their methods to issues and concepts that are beyond the domain of philosophy. Let us offer an example.

In the eighth century CE, the Mu'tazalites (Muslim philosophers) adopted Greek philosophy as their own and rose to a position of political dominance. They were enamored of the precision, the logic and apparent cohesiveness of rational thought. In their enthusiasm they proceeded to apply their rational scrutiny to matters of faith forgetting that faith has a transcendental dimension beyond time-space whereas logic and philosophy are space-time bound. In the process, they fell flat on their faces. Their positions were rejected following an intellectual revolution led by Imam Hanbali and the Usuli ulema (846 CE) and they were expelled from their position of power and influence.

In summary, *ilm ul ibara* is knowledge that can be expressed and taught. It includes the knowledge that is acquired through the body and the mind. The disciplines that are a domain of the body include science, history, sociology, economics, politics and governance. Knowledge acquired through the body (the senses) depends on observation and measurement and is called inductive knowledge.

The body and the mind work together to form a worldview. They are intertwined with each other to such an extent that oftentimes it is said that the Body and the Mind are one. The mind is a noble faculty. It is the master of logic and reason. It is distinguished by its ability to read symbols and conceive of the possibility of things. Knowledge acquired by the mind can also be taught and hence it is also a part of *ilm ul ibara*. It includes mathematics, geometry, logic and philosophy.

### **What is *Ilm ul Ishara***

*Ilm ul Ishara* is knowledge that can be alluded to but not expressed through language. It includes the language of the heart and the language of the hidden Self (the soul). Examples are: love, hate, compassion, mercy, generosity.

The secular worldview recognizes only the empirical and the rational (the Body and the Mind) as sources of knowledge. The secular world is cold, rational, devoid of feelings and emotions. Secular man finds himself alone in this cold world. He does not speak to this world; the world does not speak to him.

What makes us human is not just our Body and our Mind. It is also our heart and our soul. Feelings and emotions are valid sources of experience. And experience is the basis of knowledge.

How can we deny that we love? Or that we have compassion and mercy? Why does a man want to climb a mountain? Why does a woman sing or write poetry? Joy and sorrow cannot be measured by instruments nor comprehended by the mind. They are attributes of the heart and of the soul.

### **The Flawed Worldview of the Body and the Mind**

Secular man who believes only in the material and the rational overlooks the flaws in his worldview. As an illustration, consider the red color of a beautiful rose. Ask a materialist to tell you where the redness in the rose comes from. His description will be something along the following lines: Electromagnetic waves from the sun hit the rose. All waves except those around .63 micrometers are absorbed by the rose. When reflected, they travel through the air and are received by the eye. They hit the retina, travel along the optic nerve and are recorded in brain cells. Ask yourself: where in this picture is the red color of the rose? It is not there. The red color is neither in the rose nor in the eye. It is somewhere else. It is in the Self (soul).

The attributes of color, beauty, joy and sorrow that make our world rich and meaningful are absent from a materialist worldview drawn purely on the basis of the empirical and the rational. Such a worldview is flawed and incomplete. It is also deceptive, erroneous and misleading.

### **The Exalted Station (*Maqam*) of the Heart**

In all of God's creation, there is nothing as noble, as sublime as the human heart, for it alone is capable of knowing the Name of God. Nothing, not the body, not the mind, measures up to heart in its nobility, its expanse and its heavenly character. Mohammed ibn Ali al Hakim al Tirmidhi, that great Sufi shaikh of the tenth century, in his treatise *Bayan al Sadr wa al Qalb wa al Fuad wa al Lubb*, compared the heart to the throne of God. He wrote: "The heart has a nobler position even with respect to the Throne (*arsh*), for the Throne receives the Grace of God and merely reflects it, whereas the heart receives the Grace of God, reflects it and is aware of it." The sublime attribute of the heart is that it is aware of the Name of God; it knows what the angels do not know.

*A Hadith e Qudsi* (divinely inspired saying of Prophet Muhammed (pbuh)) says: The heavens and the mountains and the earth were not large enough to contain Me. But the heart of the believer was large enough to contain Me."

The heart as it is used here should not be confused with the physical heart. It should be understood as a collection of attributes. Based upon the terminology of the Qur'an, Imam Tarmidhi, ascribes four ascending stations to the heart, each with its own distinct characteristics.

**The Sadr.** This is the outmost station of the heart. It is open to the goodness that comes from the spirit as well as the distractions of the world. It expands with the light of the spirit and contracts with the darkness of evil whisperings. In this sense it is like the aperture of a camera. The more it opens, the more it admits of light.

**The Qalb.** This is the heart proper. The word Qalb in Arabic means that which turns. It is like a gimbal in a spacecraft. One face of the heart turns towards the Light of the spirit. The other face turns towards the distractions of the world. The heart that turns towards the spirit receives the light that comes from Divine presence. A heart that turns towards the deceptive appearance of the material world is sealed off from that light.

**The Fu'ad.** The word Fu'ad comes from the word Fayida which in Arabic means that which is of benefit. It is the kernel of the heart. It is that attribute which enables the heart not only to be aware of the Divine Name but to see the presence of God around it. Hence it is the eye of the heart.

**The Birr.** This is the essence of the heart. It is like the oil in the lamp, that which gives off light. It is the station wherein are manifest the beauty and majesty of Divine presence. It is the inner sanctum of the heart that gazes in its rapture at the ruh or the spirit and receives the infinite Grace that comes from God's presence. The word Birr has two letters, b and r. The "b" stands for Baraka. The "r" stands for *ra'a*, that is to see. The Birr is a perpetual witness to the blessings that accrue from the presence of the Divine. This is the highest station of the heart, the one that is attained by the sages, the *awliya*.

### **What is ilm al laduni?**

This is the knowledge that is given only to the Prophets, the Messengers of God. It is Divine wisdom. It contains guidance for humankind and the criterion to separate right from wrong. It provides the framework within which all other knowledge is sorted out.

## What is the Nafs

The Nafs is a composite term which includes the body, the mind and the heart. Like the heart, it is a collection of attributes and is not to be confused with a specific part of the body. Depending on the context it is translated as “person”, “soul”, or the Self. It is the “I” that remains hidden and yet makes itself felt through the body, the mind and the heart. In the English language it is sometimes incorrectly translated as “the Ego”. The Ego is only one aspect of the Nafs; it does not capture the full, comprehensive meaning of the Nafs.

The secular perspective denies the existence of the Nafs. In its materialist outlook, it confines itself to the concrete and the rational. “What is material is real and what is real is material” is its perspective. Consequently, secular man cannot come to terms with the emotions and the passions that govern the world of man. In the secular perspective there is no color, only wavelengths. There is no joy and no sorrow only chemical changes in the body. The secular world is cold, rational, devoid of the higher impulses that make us human.

## Attributes of the Nafs

The Nafs is distinguished by its attributes, just as are its individual elements, the heart, the mind and the body. Some of the most important attributes of the Nafs are:

1. The Nafs is the seat of cognition and knowledge. The sounds that we hear are “heard” not by the ear but by the Nafs. The sights that we see are “seen” not by the eye but by the Nafs. The “heat” and “cold” that we experience are not experienced by the skin but by the Nafs. The Nafs (soul or the Self) is the cognitive element in a human being.
2. The Nafs is the fountain of speech. The faculty of “*bayan*” as it is called in Arabic, is not merely the ability to speak a particular language such as English, Urdu or Zulu, but it is that human ability to transform sounds and signs into ideas, to dissect, combine and integrate them and build the tree of knowledge that distinguishes the world of man from the world of the beast. Speech is not in the tongue; it is in the Nafs or the soul.

*God, Most Gracious,*

*Taught the Qur’an,*

*Created the human,*

*Taught him speech.” (The Qur’an 55:1-4)*

3. The Nafs is the owner of free will.

Humankind is distinguished by its free will. “I will, therefore I am”, is the succinct way to state this. Man has the free will to choose and realize his existential potential. It is this same free will that makes a man climb a mountain, conquer the oceans, ride the waves, and send a rocket to the moon.

4. The Nafs is the knower of beauty, of order and proportion.

*And the Nafs*

*And the sense of order and proportion bestowed upon it. (The Quran 91:7)*

The Nafs has a sense of order, proportion and beauty. Every human, man, woman and child is endowed with these attributes. That is how even the most unlettered person can relate to the enchanting beauty of the rainbow or the serene majesty of a mountain. The Nafs recognizes beauty, order and proportion in the external world and relates to it because the external is a reflection of what is already in the Nafs. It is like looking in the mirror; the beauty of the image is a reflection of the beauty of that which causes the image.

#### 5. The Nafs is the seat of the Ego.

The Nafs is sometimes mistranslated into English as the Ego. In Arabic, the corresponding term for the Ego would be "Anaya". The term "Ego" is a Freudian term used in Western psychology and has its own specific connotations. The Nafs is a broader term than the Ego inasmuch as it includes the hidden attributes of the body, the mind and the heart, and hence connotes the total human being, or simply, the Person.

It is the Ego that incites the human to self-aggrandizement, to rebel against the commandments of God and set himself up as an open adversary to Divine Will and in the process lays the groundwork for his self-destruction:

*Nay! But humankind does rebel*

*In that it considers itself autonomous (self-sufficient);*

*We will drag him by his forelock,*

*A lying, sinful forelock! (96: 6-7)*

#### 6. The Nafs has a conscience and is the differentiator of good and evil.

Perhaps the most important characteristic of the Nafs is its ability to know right from wrong, good from evil (...And its guidance as to what is wrong and what is right... Qur'an 91:8). The propensity towards evil and its ability to say "no" to that tendency is a uniquely human ability. Humankind is born with "deen ul fitra", in the natural state with closeness to Divine presence, but through its own actions gets away from the Divine presence and has to be reminded again and again to return to the Divine fold.

#### **The Veil of the Nafs**

The susceptibility of the Nafs to evil makes the Nafs the biggest barrier between the Light that comes with the Ruh and its perception. Properly trained, this barrier can be removed and the Nafs can become the carrier of that Light. The progression of the Nafs from an obstructor of Light to a carrier of Light is a continuous process. Four stations of the Nafs are identified in the Qur'an:

*Nafs e Ammara:* This is the dark side of man, prone to whisperings from the evil one. *Nafs e Ammara* stands steeped in darkness, cut off from the light emanating from the Spirit.

*Nafs e Mulhama:* This is the aspiring Nafs, the state when a person starts questioning the evil tendencies of his own Self and tries to rectify them.

*Nafs e Lawwama:* This is the blaming Nafs, the station from where the Self, having overcome the evil inclinations of the Self, reaches out to a higher station, to find the Light that comes from Divine presence.

*Nafs e Mutmainna*: This is the highest station of the Nafs and the closest to Divine presence. At this station, the Nafs has overcome its Ego and has shunned whisperings of the evil one and has turned with complete surrender to Divine presence. It is the station of satisfaction, tranquility and peace.

Tirmidhi tabulates the stations of the Nafs with respect to the stations of the heart: *Nafs e Ammara* corresponds to Sadr; *Nafs e Mulhama* corresponds to the Qalb; *Nafs e Lawwama* corresponds to the *Fu'ad*, and *Nafs e Mutmainna* corresponds to *Birr*.

### **The Interconnectivity of Knowledge**

Truth is one. Its origin is the Light that comes with the *ruh* (the Spirit). It is the Spirit that suffuses the heart, the mind and the body to acquire knowledge. It follows that the various categories of knowledge are interconnected.

The primal origin of knowledge from a divine source establishes the interconnectivity between different forms of knowledge. *Ilm ul ibara* and *ilm ul ishara* both have Divine origin. What is learned through the senses springs from the same Source as what is learned through the mind and what is perceived by the heart. And all of them point like arrows (symbols) towards that divine purpose in creation, namely, to serve and worship Him. Unlike the secular framework where the body and mind stand as antagonists to the heart and to each other, in the Qur'anic paradigm, the body, mind and the heart are partners, each contributing its share to the acquisition of knowledge that enables humankind to discharge its divinely established responsibility to serve and worship.

There is interconnectivity in nature. There is interconnectivity between the perceived world and the world beyond perception. This interconnectivity is through the Creator, who creates everything, every moment, with sublime beauty, complete perfection and supreme majesty.

### **The Purpose of Creation**

The various categories of knowledge are also interconnected through their shared functionality.

Does the universe have a purpose? As opposed to the secular view of a purposeless world, the Qur'anic view holds that there is a moral purpose to creation, that is, to serve and worship God:

*I created not the Jinns and Humankind except to serve (worship).* The Qur'an (51:56)

The word that is used in the Qur'an to describe this purpose is "*abd*" which may mean worship or unqualified servitude. Thus humankind and jinns (another forms of intelligent creation made of formless energy) are enjoined to acquire knowledge so that they may know God and serve and worship Him.

### **The fossilization of knowledge**

Knowledge is fossilized because of the assumptions made by man about the secular nature of the cosmos. By dissociating the material and the rational from the heart and the soul, secular man ends up in a blind alley where the heart and the Nafs (soul) are absent from his worldview. History, science, philosophy, mathematics, good and evil, passion and emotion each are pigeon holed into separate compartments with no interconnectivity. Secular man sees no grand purpose in creation. He embarks on a search for the truth using atoms, molecules, neutrons, protons, strings and wavelengths as his props. And what he finds in the end are nothing but atoms, molecules, neutrons, protons, strings and wavelengths.

**Summary:** I have presented in this paper a vision of knowledge that integrates the empirical, the rational, the intuitive and infusive. Knowledge is a Divine gift. It has a grand purpose, and that is to know and serve Him. The laws of nature and of history are Signs in this quest whose ultimate purpose is to find God. Humankind must struggle to study these Signs so that through them it fulfills its heavenly destiny. Science, history and faith are not antagonists; they are Divine gifts and it is through them that man finds God.

Comments are closed.

[Create a free website or blog at WordPress.com.](#)