

THE TAWHIDIC AXIS AND ONENESS OF KNOWLEDGE: A REFLECTION

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ABSTRACT

The Qur'an underlines 5 methods that are used by humans to acquire knowledge, among which are *ta'qqul* (thinking), *tadhakkur* (memorizing), *tafakkur* (meditating on), *tadabbur* (reflecting) dan *tafaquh* (understanding). In Islam the main source of knowledge is divine revelation, which is also considered as the penultimate source of universal knowledge. This specific kind of knowledge can only be derived or received through the accute spiritual honing of the senses and mental capacity and a strong faith in the sovereignty and oneness of Allah swt. This paper discusses and reflects upon the concept and philosophy of the oneness of knowledge and its relation, by means of the *tawhidic* axis, to the creator of all creatures and universe. Islam defines knowledge epistemologically as the understanding of a certain meaning that dawns deep within a person or more aptly, 'knowledge is the enlightenment that dawns when meaning approaches an individual and that individual embraces meaning'. This paper will also discuss the western world's definition of knowledge; a narrowed and modernized definition of which focuses purely on the acquirement of information and skill, or knowledge which is based on the introduction or perception of solid fact that can be physically and empirically sensed. As such, matters that are beyond the perception of physical senses are labelled non-factual, un-academic and not part of the knowledge collective, thus, religious teachings are automatically ruled out of the set and defined scope of knowledge and labelled as a belief of faith.

Keywords: *Tawhidic*, Oneness of Knowledge, Epistemology.

INTRODUCTION

All of Allah's swt creations are subject to the structural governance that He had set; these creations include humans, other living and non-living thing and the entire universe. The universe and its entire contents are bound by the laws and strictures of the universe that had been set by Allah swt. One of these structural strictures is *fitrah* (the base nature of things). Humans are not human if they are not bound by their nature or *fitrah*; similarly the universe and non-living things are also bound by its nature or what we know as Physical Laws. For example, the Earth has been set to spin at its own axis, it cannot stop nor deny that natural order, thus, being in line with the word and divine edict of Allah swt that means:

“And He created night and day, sun and moon. All of which moves (*yasbahuun*) in line according to its orbit/astronomical positioning.” (Al Anbiyaa' 21: 33)

“And the sun moves (*tajiri*) to its destination (*mustaqar*). So it has been set by the Him who is Almighty and All-knowing.” (Yasin: 38-39)

It is likewise in the case of animals, they too are governed by a set structure of governance known as instinct. Animals mate when their mating season arrives just as dictated by the structure governance that has been set for them. They mate during the mating season regardless of place or environment totally in accordance to their predisposed instinct. Only humankind differs in this regard, as we are given the freedom of choice. We are also given a set and defined nature or *fitrah* however many don't adhere to it. The universe, inanimate objects and animals have no choice, they are bound to their given nature, instinct and will follow it to the letter. Whereas, humans have the freedom of choice and free will to be however they want to be and to do whatever their heart desires. Humans can devote themselves to Allah swt and follow His guidelines just as the earth spins on its axis, but they too can behave and act as mindlessly and as debased as animals. This is one of the defining characteristics of a human being.

When humans are free to direct their own step and choices, they require sound judgment to make decisions. In making judgment calls or weighing the odds a human being uses his or her wisdom and conscience (*qalbu*). However, just having the freedom to take decisions and act on it is not enough to make a person humane, the freedom to choose needs to have its limitations and strictures. Consequently, to identify and formulate the proper limit a human needs knowledge, to ease judgment and decision making. This gives rise to the question “How can we know?” The Qur'an urges us to think and contemplate, thus, the Qur'an is and should be our guideline. In other words, a person who does not utilize the Qur'an as a guideline in life is not a humane person at all. The Qur'an is likened to a precious pearl that contains priceless jewels of wisdom and knowledge, in addition to being that which connects all knowledge in the world.

THE TAWHIDIC AXIS AND ONENESS OF KNOWLEDGE: A REFLECTION

According to the Kamus Dewan dictionary, the word ‘oneness’, among its varied definitions, is defined as the state of being singular, relating to the sovereignty and divine supremacy of Allah swt or the state of being one or together (Kamus Dewan (fourth edition), 2007, pg. 1397). The word ‘knowledge’ on the other hand is defined as the knowing of things or matters that are worldly, of the afterlife, material, spiritual or of the soul etc. Knowledge also incorporated the learning of and study of things inanimate and immaterial (e.g. the earth, society etc.). (Kamus Dewan (fourth edition), 2007, pg. 567)

On the Arabic language front, the word ‘ilm’ refers to the term ‘knowledge’. ‘Ilm’ is also related and encompasses the meaning of words like ‘*makrifah*’ or the knowing of something unknown through experience of reflection and *shu'ur* which means the knowing of something unknown through perception (Mohd. Nasir Omar, 2005, pg. 6).

The definition of knowledge in the view of the modern western world is quite narrow as in their view knowledge is made up of three main schools of thought which are empiricism, rationalism and pragmatism (Noor Hisham Md Nawi, 2011). When compared to the definition of knowledge in the view of Islam. According to Al-Attas (1978), the term ‘knowledge’ is categorized according to a tweaked and improved method of categorization, which was first introduced by

Fakhruddin Al-Razi, and is defined as such “when referring to Allah swt as the source of all knowledge, knowledge is the dawning of meaning in an individual. On the other hand, in the case where an individual is referred to as a conveyor of knowledge, then this knowledge is defined as the arrival of oneself at the gist and the meaning of a certain matter (Noor Hisham Md Nawi, 2011).” The Islamic view and definition of knowledge is based on the solid fact that Allah swt is the true source of knowledge while humans are active creatures that have to work towards acquiring knowledge and the fact that in Islamic doctrine it is believed that all knowledge and the penultimate source of knowledge is from the one almighty source, that is Allah S.W.T. (Awang Sariyan, 2009).

a) The Concept of Knowledge /علم

The meaning of knowledge had been narrowed and modernized to just mean the understanding and knowing of information and skills. According to the western definition, knowledge refers to the introduction and clear perception of fact, whereas their baseline of fact is specific to things perceived by senses, material and empirical. The existence of things or matters beyond the perception of the physical senses is deemed non-factual, un-academic and not part of the field of knowledge. According to them, religious teaching has no part in the categorization and defining scope of knowledge, thus it is dismissed as mere belief of faith.

Furthermore, according to the western view of knowledge, the acquisition of knowledge is one that must be done in terms of a set ratio, which is based on experience in addition to reflection, meditation, observation, study and investigation using the physical senses as external receptors of fact. This method, according to one rationalist journal, is defined as empiricism. According to Professor Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, the accurate definition of knowledge is that which is found in the Qur’an, translated from its original Arabic it can be understood as follows:

‘We have defined knowledge epistemologically as the enlightenment of meaning that dawns on an individual or the arrival of one’s inner self at the meaning of something’.

According to Al-Thahanawi in Risalah:

‘Knowledge is the enlightenment that dawn when meaning approaches an individual and that individual embraces meaning’

As said by Imam Ghazali Rahimahullah Ta’ala:

“Knowledge that benefits is knowledge that increases your reverential fear of Allah Ta’ala; knowledge that hones your conscience to better perceive your weaknesses; knowledge that strengthens your faith to your one true god in relation to your perception and spirituality towards Him; knowledge that decreases your love for the world; knowledge that increases your love for the afterlife; knowledge that reveals to your inner-self the destructive effects of your practices so that you may correct your path; knowledge that reveals to you all the traps, machinations and temptations of the devil, Satan”.- [Bidayatul Hidayah]

According to Muhammad Mumtaz Ali, etimologically speaking, the term “علم” (knowledge) originates from the word “alama” that can be defined as “sign” or something that happens in a person’s life that can be understood as a guidance that leads to deeper understanding and a

guideline to assist an individual through his/her life on earth. Furthermore, the sign referred to by the word “*alama*” can not only bring a person closer to knowing himself and his purpose but also helps a person understand and draw closer to God.

b) Categorization of Knowledge

Islamic scholars agree that theoretically, knowledge is divided into two important components; religious knowledge (knowledge of divine revelation that is also known as the knowledge of *diniyya*, *illahiyya*, *milliyya* and *naqliyya*) dan philosophical knowledge (*falsafiyya*) which is also known as the knowledge of hikmah or wisdom (*hikmiyya*). Currently, religious knowledge is known as knowledge of *fardu ain* and philosophical knowledge is known as the knowledge of *fardu kifayah*. The function of religious knowledge (knowledge of divine revelation) is to heal the souls of mankind and to provide a guideline for them to enjoy a happy life in this world and in the afterlife. Religious knowledge is made up of four main parts, namely knowledge of the Qur’an (*al-Quran*), the Hadith (*al-hadith*), the *Fiqh* (*al-feqah*) and the science of discourse (*al-Kalam*) (Mohd. Nasir Omar, 2005).

However, according to the al-‘Amiri, the main purpose of acquiring religious knowledge is to bring one’s self closer to Allah swt, as this knowledge does not focus on the individualistic need but rather to the universal need and the betterment of mankind and. Thus, religious knowledge is the most pure, holy and highest form of knowledge. Al-‘Amiri added that religious knowledge can be categorized into three parts, the first is the knowledge based on sensory perception or the knowledge of the Hadith. The second is the knowledge based on common sense, the knowledge of the science of discourse or *Kalam*. The third is the knowledge based on both sensory perception and common sense or the knowledge of the *Fuqaha*. The knowledge of language on the other hand functions as a tool to facilitate the grasping of the knowledge listed above and other forms of useful knowledge. Islamic scholars also strongly forbid the learning of worthless and harmful knowledge like magic, sorcery, the occult, tricks and charms (Mohd. Nasir Omar, 2005).

Philosophical knowledge or acquired knowledge is better known with its defined name in the scriptures of the Qur’an which is ‘*al-Hikmah*’ (rational and philosophical knowledge). Acquiring the knowledge of *al-Hikmah* is given much importance in the Qur’an (16:125) as seen from the exhortation to all Muslims to be wise and full of knowledge when preaching (*dakwah*) the word about Islam to others. This exhortation portrays the importance of acquiring philosophical knowledge in the efforts of spreading Islam. For example, the prophets of old that had been sent by Allah swt had all been rich in philosophical knowledge; the prophet David was a blacksmith, Abraham was an expert in construction and Prophet Muhammad saw was an expert in business, politics and the art of war (Mohd. Nasir Omar, 2005).

c) Knowledge in Islamic Philosophy

Islamic philosophers classify philosophical knowledge as acquired knowledge that is divided into two, theory and practical. The purpose of learning this theoretical knowledge is to acquire knowledge, for example knowledge on the oneness of Allah swt, which will then help reinforce an individual’s confidence, inner peace and surety of faith. On the other hand, the purpose of

learning practical knowledge is to garner knowledge and truth that can be embodied and enjoyed like knowledge on economics, politics and morals. However it is undeniable that philosophical knowledge must be made up of the combination of both theoretical and practical knowledge at the same time. Specifically, all kinds of physical knowledge (*akliyah*) that a human learns is philosophical or acquired knowledge (Mohd. Nasir Omar, 2005, pg. 14-15). Moreover, all knowledge that is categorized as physical knowledge (*'ilm 'aqli*) has to be mastered and honed as a supplement to religious knowledge (Abdul Monir Yaacob, 1994, pg. 42).

d) The concept of 'Islamization of Knowledge'

In Islam, knowledge itself means 'the truth' (*al-haqq*) and is the antonym of the word ignorance (*al-jahl*) and assumption (*al-zann*). The following listed verses of the Qur'an, 12:76, 29:43, 58:11 emphasizes the need for humans to be knowledgeable and pursue knowledge as it will thus bring them to the obvious truth which is Allah swt is the truth and the source of knowledge or (*al-haqq*). Many writers have given credit to the fact that the term '*al-'ilm*', which is found in the Qur'an, refers to the knowledge that comes from Allah swt, among which is the knowledge of divine revelation whereas the term '*ilm*' refers to the acquired knowledge or human knowledge. Take note that human knowledge though classified as knowledge is subject to change and human error except when vindicated by divine revelation (Abdul Monir Yaacob, 1994, pg. 17). Knowledge begotten of divine revelation is absolute in truth and is supreme as it is the source of all other knowledge, whereas human knowledge is always taken for granted and manipulated by the various human character deficiencies like ignorance, misconception, bias, lust, varied perception, methodology etc.

The concept of Islamization of knowledge does not refer to the replacement of existing knowledge with newly begotten, Islamized knowledge, but rather is the process of formulating a methodology to deal with knowledge and its sources. It can also mean the process of screening and cleansing of knowledge to purge it of all its negative elements, for example misconceptions, ignorance, bias, hate etc. The process of Islamization encompasses the assimilation of Islamic principles into the methods, methodology, strategy, data, objective, goals and aspirations of a certain academic field of study; e.g. field of science and technology. The process of assimilation of Islamic principles and vision is crucial in ensuring the benefits and the betterment of Muslims and mankind universally (Abdul Monir Yaacob, 1994, pg. 18, 44).

e) The Qur'an and its Presence throughout History

The Qur'an is the main reference (*masdar*) for all fields of knowledge both tacit and/or explicit. True understanding of the Qur'an is gained not through focus on the explicit content but that which is tacit and implicit. Only through the edification of faith one can unlock the deeper secrets and understand the underlying truths in the Qur'an. Basically, a human being can acquire knowledge through four main mediums, namely: a) Healthy senses (*Al-Hawas al-Salimah*); b) News that is true/Divine revelation (*Al-Khabar al-Sadiq*); c) Healthy intellect (*Al-'Aql*), and d) Idea/Intuition.

The academic tradition of the Islamic civilization reinforces the importance and function of each medium of reception in an individual's efforts to acquire true knowledge; as such, this age old

tradition does not show favouritism to any one specific medium while downgrading and questioning the viability of the other mediums as can be seen in the academic discourse practiced by the western scholars in their rational and empirical school of thought.

A combination of all the four mediums of reception listed above, without leaving out any of the four mediums will give birth to a harmonized, balanced and perfect process of knowledge acquirement. If anyone medium of knowledge reception is specifically focused on, while ignoring the rest, a dichotomy will be formed and separation between rationale (*aqal*) dan empiricism (*pancaindera*) or intellect (*aqal*) and divine revelation (*wahyu*) will arise.

FIVE METHODS OF KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION IN ISLAM

The Qur'an underlines 5 methods that are used by humans to acquire knowledge, among which are *ta'qqul* (thinking), *tadhakkur* (memorizing), *tafakkur* (meditating on), *tadabbur* (reflecting) dan *tafaqquh* (understanding). Below are several scriptural passages from the Qur'an that function as undeniable evidence that relates to the exhortation to acquire knowledge:

- a) *Ta'qqul* Exhortation (to think) (تعقلون), Surah al-Baqarah verse 44 which reads:
'Why do you exhort others to acts of piety and righteousness and obedience, whereas you forget to practice it yourselves, though all the while reciting the scriptures (Torah), Have you then no sense?'
- b) *Tadhakkur* Exhortation (to memorize), Surah Ali Imran verse 190-191 which reads:
'Truthfully, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs of the greatness of Allah swt for men of understanding. Those who remember Allah swt always and in prayers, while standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides and meditate on the creation of the heavens and earth (saying): Our God, you have nit created all this without purpose, glory be to You! Give us salvation from the torment of the Fire.'
- c) *Tafakkur* Exhortation (to meditate on), Surah ar-Ra'd verse 3 which reads:
'And it is He Who spread out the earth and placed therein the firm mountains and rivers and every kind of fruit he made two in pairs; He brings the night as cover over the day. Truly, in these things there are the signs for people who reflect.'
- d) *Tadabbur* Exhortation (to reflect on), Surah an-Nisa verse 82 which reads:
'Do they not then consider the Qur'an carefully? Had it been from other than Allah swt, they would surely have found therein many a contradiction.'
- e) *Tafaqquh* Exhortation (to understand), Surah al-A'raf verse 179 which reads:
'And surely, We have created the many of the jinn and mankind for Hell. They have hearts with which they understand not, and they have eyes with which they see not the sovereignty of Allah swt, and they have ears with which they hear naught of the truth revealed by Allah swt. They are like cattle, though more astray than the beasts. They are heedless ones.'

THE CONCEPT OF ONENESS OF KNOWLEDGE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE TOWARDS THE TAWHIDIC AXIS

This universe in actuality is dark. The universe became bright due to the divine revelations sent down by Allah swt. This is also true of human beings whose souls and hearts had been cleansed and brightened through the acquisition of said knowledge and the application of it through their practices. For example, if we were to stand on the zenith of a mountain in a dark night, all that we will see is just pure and plain darkness. When day comes, the sun shines its light upon every corner and only then the greeneries of the land and the animals that roam the mountains become visible. Thus, it is the light that substantiates existence whereas the darkness envelops it. If the darkness is minor then existence is faint, if it is absolute then existence becomes as if non-existent, as such, only light can attest to existence as only the light can triumph over darkness. The light can be likened to the enlightenment that is knowledge.

The darkness clouds the conscience and separates the heart from the truth. Only the heart is susceptible to the darkness never the truth as it is always open and pure. The facts, truths and evidence that many search for is not for the purpose of finding or gaining new truth but rather to bring out the heart that has been stuck in the valley of darkness and enlighten it with the light of the truth which has had been shaded from them. Only the light of truth can fill the heart with light and unlock the heart and set it free. The light of God (*Nur Ilahi*) is the light that shines on a shaded heart and brings it out of the darkness, to then enlighten the heart with the truth in its original pure state. When the shades are open and the bright light of God (*Nur Ilahi*) pierces into the soul, the conscience and heart can then see the truth and the knowledge that has been shaded to them by the world's reality. As the light of God (*Nur Ilahi*) is accepted by an enlightened heart, the light will grow brighter and brighter and the truth becomes ever clearer to the heart that has been enlightened. The knowledge and wisdom that a heart and conscience receives through the receiving of the *Nur Ilahi* or light of God is called the divine knowledge, which is knowledge received directly from Allah swt. The amount of the knowledge received depends on the intensity of faith and strength of the heart that is enlightened by the *Nur Ilahi*.

An individual that is dependent on the *tawhidic* axis and its process of knowledge acquisition will gain increased knowledge and while his heart is enlightened and cleansed it too will begin to shine with the light of truth. This light emanated by the heart of an enlightened individual is called the *Nur Qalbu* or light of the righteous heart. This light will shine into the mind and enlighten the thought capacity and intellect, enabling the enlightened individual to reflect and meditate upon divine matters relating to the universe and oneself. This heightened awareness enables an individual to actually feel the deep bond with the *tawhidic* axis which in turn causes the person to devote his body and soul to Allah swt and this gives birth to the feeling in an individual's heart that Allah swt is ever present and close by. The individual then realizes that Allah swt sees all; his/her actions, movements, speech, conduct and deep thoughts, thus the individual then becomes a Mukmin (a pious faithful Muslim) who is always composed, careful and righteous. As said in the Hadith that means "Worship Allah swt as though He is visible to you, if you cannot visualize Allah swt in your heart, truly Allah swt is watching you."

CONCLUSION

Humankind is always pushed to use their wisdom and mental capacity to study God's creations; i.e. the universe and its phenomena's. The deeper the understanding and knowledge gained about the creations of Allah swt, the greatness and sovereignty of Allah swt becomes more and more apparent. Consequently, the linkage and oneness of knowledge, that will greatly benefit the entire universe, will take place. As an individual has free will to make choices, the need for sound judgment is crucial so as to facilitate good decision making, this is done through the utilization of his/her wisdom and trained conscience. However, just having the freedom to make decisions and act on it is not enough to make a person humane, the freedom to choice begs limitations and strictures to avoid all out chaos. Consequently, to identify and formulate a limit on choice a human needs knowledge, to ease judgment and decision making. This gives rise to the question "How can we know?". The Qur'an urges us to think and contemplate on it and the deeper principles of Islam, thus, the Qur'an is and should be our guideline. In other words, a person who does not utilise the Qur'an as a guideline in life is not a humane person at all.

The acquisition and mastery of all the said characteristics will make an individual a caliph on earth that is free to make personal choices as long as it is bound by the limitations and guidelines set by Allah swt as stated in the Qur'an. As a caliph, an individual makes sound judgement through the exercising of their conscience which is trained and honed by the Qur'anic verses. A caliph holds the responsibility given by Allah swt and carries it out faithfully and righteously as he waits his eternal perfect afterlife.

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