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ISLAMIC VERSUS WESTERN CONCEPTIONS OF  
KNOWLEDGE

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**SPECIAL ISSUE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF FUNDAMENTAL AND INTER-DISCIPLINARY STUDIES (FIDS), AHAS KIRKHS, IN COLLABORATION WITH AL-HIKMAH: INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC STUDIES AND HUMAN SCIENCE**

Selected Papers from annual symposium on Scholarship Advancement Programme (SAP) on the 5th of August 2021.

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**FOREWORD: A SPECIAL ISSUE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF FUNDAMENTAL AND INTER-DISCIPLINARY STUDIES (FIDS), AHAS KIRKHS, IN COLLABORATION WITH AL-HIKMAH: INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC STUDIES AND HUMAN SCIENCES**

Following the directive from the AHAS Kulliyyah of IRKHS, the Department of Fundamental and Inter-Disciplinary Studies held its annual symposium on Scholarship Advancement Programme (SAP) on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 2021. The one-day programme was an intervention to advance the development of scholarship among academics in AHAS KIRKHS. Its focus was to accelerate knowledge generation and dissemination by providing a conducive avenue for all academics to write, present, and publish their scholarly work in an academic journal. Since 2019, papers presented at the SAP symposiums have been published individually by staff at the FIDS. In 2022, FIDS has taken the initiative to publish selected papers as a special issue in collaboration with the Journal of Al-Hikmah.

This special issue contains eleven articles, nine in English and two in Arabic, which were presented at SAP 2021. This collection of SAP papers comes under the themes of Islam, Philosophy and Spiritual development. Most if not all articles selected for publication go in tandem with the scope and requirement of Al-Hikmah Journal. Among the areas touched by the authors are on Islamic religious teaching and learning activities, and Islamic movement in the region.

We hope this special issue would provide a kind of poignant magnetism that would touch the readers' interest as most of the papers highlighted the supremacy of knowledge and the significance of the role of spirituality. The concept of papers emerged from the thought that different scholars from diverse Asian countries would offer their respective experiences, historical facts and cultural heritage that would provide the highest level of satisfaction to the readers.



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# Islamic Versus Western Conceptions of Knowledge

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## Abstract

Islam has given great importance to knowledge acquisition, preservation, application and dissemination. It regards knowledge as one of the uncountable favours of Allah and His greatest gift to mankind. With knowledge, not only mankind can change the environment or create a civilization, but they are also able to distinguish reality from illusion, truth from falsehood or other alternatives. Despite the value of knowledge and its indispensability, there is a lack of consensus among epistemologists and philosophers as to what knowledge is and where it comes from or how it is acquired. This article sets out to: first, evaluate Plato's view that knowledge is "justified true belief"; second define and explain the meaning of knowledge from the Islamic and Western perspectives; third, identify the ways of knowing or methods of acquiring knowledge, and; finally, describe the relationship between *'ilm* or the all-embracing Islamic epistemic term, and the following Islamic concepts: *yaqin* (certainty), *iman* (belief, faith or conviction which is based on reason and knowledge), *taqwa* (God-consciousness), *hikmah* (wisdom) and *ma'rifah* (recognition of Allah, knowledge of the reality of things, etc.). This article is based on desk research and it draws on primary Islamic sources namely, the Qur'an and Hadith, as well as secondary works on the concept of knowledge from the Islamic and Western perspectives. Translation of the meanings of the selected verses from the Qur'an is based on 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali's Translation of the Meaning of the Qur'an except in a few places where other translations seemed more appropriate. After reading this exposition of knowledge, one should be able to: (a) explain the meaning and concept of knowledge from the Islamic and Western perspectives, (b) examine the relationship between knowledge and information, and *'ilm* and *taqwa*, *ma'rifah*, *iman* and *hikmah*, and (c) differentiate between the Islamic and Western perspectives of knowledge.

**Keywords:** Justified true belief, *'ilm*, *taqwa*, *hikmah*, *ma'rifah*, *yaqin*

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## Introduction

What is meant by the term “definition”? Why defining terms is necessary? And, why defining knowledge is difficult? To begin with, defining something means to make it “distinct” or “clear.”<sup>1</sup> According to Webster, “definition” is “a statement expressing the essential nature of something”<sup>2</sup> meaning, its “essential characteristics” or “the behaviour that is intrinsic to it.” From this we can infer that everything has a set of characteristics which describes it; it is its definition.

Definition is needed to “clarify a term” or to “explain the nature of a thing” so as to enable people “to have a common understanding of (it) (Whitfield, 2012).” It is likened to a “compass, providing a lost reader with several potential directions from which to proceed (Chittick, 1989).”

A lot of people know when something is knowledge and when it is not but they are unable to tell what knowledge is due to several reasons: first, knowledge is expansive meaning, it covers a wide area in terms of scope and it has a tendency to expand, and elusive, which means it is a concept without complete mental grasp or clear perception:

“Knowledge cannot be defined in the sense of delineating its essential nature and determining its bounds (*hadd*) since it embraces all bounds. Nothing is more luminous than knowledge to throw light upon it (Chittick, 1989).”

The different interpretations of knowledge may be likened to the descriptions of an elephant by blind men. Each one of them described it differently, that is, based on their limited, subjective experiences. Hence, the different experiences led to different perceptions and subsequently, to different descriptions or interpretations of an elephant. The bottom line here is that what may count as knowledge for someone may not be so for someone else. As Steve Denning writes, “In the West, intuitive knowledge has often been devalued in favor of rational scientific knowledge, and the rise of science has even led to claims that intuitive knowledge is not really knowledge at all (Denning, 2022).”

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<sup>1</sup> “Definition.” *Dictionary.com*. May 14, 1995. Retrieved from <https://www.dictionary.com/> (April 15, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> “Definition.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com> (April 15, 2021).

Second, knowledge is acquired through various sources. For example, some knowledge is acquired through experiences and interactions with the physical world, some is acquired through inductive and deductive reasoning, and yet some other knowledge is acquired through education and intuition. The different types of knowledge cannot fit into one definition.

Knowledge is about real things or reality. While reality may be described as “everything that there is” or “the totality of all things,” the problem with definition of reality arises from its composition. Some reality is “material or physical” meaning, it is composed of matter and energy, while some other reality is immaterial or non-physical. It remains controversial among Western scholars whether immaterial reality can exist independently of material reality, that is, outside of our sensory perceptions, or whether it is dependent on it. i.e., material reality. To define the reality of a thing one must know what it consists of meaning, its nature. The nature of some immaterial reality is unknown, such as the nature of God. He is infinite and transcendent, so human beings can never fully understand Him.

Last but not least, some definitions do not stand alone; they are dependent on other definitions to convey their meanings. Part of the difficulties to define knowledge arises from its relationship to other concepts such as wisdom and information.

## **A. The Western Concept of Knowledge**

The Western descriptions, definitions or interpretations of knowledge include, but are not limited, to the following:

### **(a) “*Justified true belief (JTB)*”**

There are at least three plausible questions pertaining to JTB theory of knowledge, also known as “the tripartite” (three part) definition. First, what exactly are justified true beliefs? And, how do beliefs become knowledge? Western epistemologists commonly define “belief” as an attitude about the world that can be either true or false. The meaning, definition, interpretation or theory of knowledge as “justified true belief” has been attributed to Plato and it is regarded as one of the classic theories of knowledge. From this definition it is learned that: first, knowledge has three components or requirements namely, justification, truth and belief. Second, there can be no knowledge where there is nothing true. Third, knowledge follows beliefs. In other words, a belief is a subjective require-

ment for knowledge. This means, a person must first believe that something is true or real in order to know it. Therefore, it is contradictory to say that one knows something, but one does not believe it. Fourth, a belief is considered knowledge only if it is a justified true belief. In other words, knowing something does not necessarily mean having a justified true belief. For example, one may believe that something is real, but until one's belief is justified and true, it is not knowledge. Fifth, beliefs possess the status of being "true" or "false." Sixth, false beliefs do not constitute knowledge whether justified or not.

Second, what are justified true beliefs based on? Beliefs can be classified into five in regards to their bases. First, beliefs that are based on one's sensory experiences of the natural world. They are called "empirical beliefs." Second, beliefs that are based on logic and pure reason. They are termed as "logical and rational beliefs." Third, beliefs that are based on scientific methods namely, structured observations, experiments, and inductive and deductive reasoning or rational induction and deduction. These are called "scientific beliefs." Fourth, beliefs that are based on intuition. They are called "intuitive" or "instinctive" beliefs. Fifth, beliefs that originate from reading of the sacred writings of religions, newspapers and academic books, and also what is told by authorities, such as one's parents, specialists, and religious leaders. Religious authority is regarded by many people as the ultimate authority providing knowledge about God, the purpose of life, and life after death. A person who strictly adheres to these beliefs is described as having an authoritarian personality.

Third, how does one determine if a belief is true and justified? The "justification" condition subjects Plato's theory of knowledge to different interpretations. Here are four plausible interpretations of a justified true belief: first, a belief that corresponds to reality or whatever exists, whether or not it is observable or comprehensible. Here correspondence to reality is the justification of the belief; second, a belief that is based on quantifiable or unambiguous evidence. Here the justification of the belief is a clear and an unambiguous evidence. Intuitive beliefs and supernatural beliefs lack quantifiable supporting evidence. Hence, according to the scientists, empiricists and rationalists, they are unjustifiable; third, a constant and unchangeable belief. For example, it is universally accepted that  $5+5=10$ , being divisible by two is a necessary condition of being an even number, and the sun rises from the east and sets in the west except at the north and south poles where there is no east or west. Here constancy is the justification of the belief; fourth, a belief that is based on authority and one's experience.

For example, one who has been told that elephants have grey skin, if he saw elephants with grey skin, he would believe objectively, without requiring further evidence or justification, that what he has been told is true. His claim is a justified true belief.

To include, believing that something is true does not necessarily make it knowledge even if it is true. In simple terms, a justified belief can be false. Therefore, as Edmund Gettier has shown in his 1963 paper “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”, justification, truth and belief are insufficient requirements for knowledge.

***(b) Facts, information and skills acquired through experience or education***

From this definition, it is understood that knowledge entails facts, information, and skills, and it is acquired through experience and/or education. The difference between ‘facts’ and ‘information’ is that ‘facts’ are definite and indisputable while ‘information’ is general and questionable, meaning it can be true or untrue. Interpreted facts are also classified as ‘information.’ Experience entails skills that are gained over time through one’s practical involvement in an activity, event, etc. Hence, in conclusion, it can be safely said that education and experience, both personal and professional, are essential for knowledge attainment.

***(c) The theoretical and practical understanding of a subject***

According to Oxford Dictionary, the term ‘knowledge’ refers to “the theoretical and practical understanding of a subject.” Knowledge in this context is of two types namely, theoretical and practical knowledge. Each of these has its importance in the learning process and both are complementary to each other. They are likened to two sides of the coin. The former entails “reasoning, techniques, and theory of knowledge” and is gained by reading, while the latter is acquired through “doing and experiencing (Posthuma-Coelho, 2016).” In other words, it is theoretical knowledge converted into practical performance. Therefore, it is important to know the interconnection of “thought” and “action” or “theory” and “practice” and the distinction between the two. One of the greatest challenges in the process of learning is “actualization of theories/thought,” which means “union of theory/thought and practice (Rotenstreich, 1977)” or conversion of knowledge into real-life situations. This includes the ‘union of religious beliefs and practices. In Islam, for example, theoretical knowledge that is not converted into action is of no use. Philosophically, knowledge is ‘intangible. When it is converted into action it becomes ‘tangible.’

## B. The Islamic concept of knowledge

The most common Islamic concept of knowledge is *'ilm*, which appears in the Qur'an and Hadith as a noun, verb, and adjective. It is a bigger concept compared to other Islamic concepts used for knowledge namely, *ma'rifah* which means "cognition" and *hikmah*, which means "wisdom."

Literally, *'ilm* embraces a spectrum of meanings including: (1) *fahm* (understanding the meaning of something, e.g. the text as it appears on the surface), *tafaquh* (in-depth understanding of Islam or the *Shari'ah*, Islamic law). It is to dive deep into something to discover the hidden meaning. *Fuqaha'* are those who are specialized in Islamic law, those with in-depth knowledge of the *Shari'ah*. Mu'awiyah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "If Allah intends goodness for someone, he gives him understanding of the religion (Al-Bukhari, 1997);" (2) *tafakkur/tadabbur* (to reflect/to think over something or a situation deeply/to dive into the depth of the meaning of something); (3) *tadhakkur* (to remember, to be mindful, to be aware, to be attentive); (4) *tabassur* (mental perception); (5) *ta'qqul* (reasoning); (6) *tasawwur* (to perceive); (7) *tabyin* (to clarify); and (8) *tamyiz* (to discern). All these are the activities and functions of *qalb*, the heart (mind/intellect).

The opposite of *'ilm* is *jahl* (ignorance). Its related concepts are: *shakk* (doubt) and *zann* (supposition/conjecture). The key differences between *'ilm* i.e. knowledge in Islam and knowledge in non-Islamic perspectives are as follows:

First, *'ilm* is a polysemous concept; it is associated with: (1) *Iman*, faith or belief in Allah. It revolves around *al-Tawhid*, the indivisible oneness of Allah; (2) *Nur*, light; (3) *Taqwa*, God-consciousness; and (4) *'Amal al-Salih*, righteous practices.

Second, pursuit of *'ilm* is a form of *'ibadah*, a noble act, a form of worship or an act of devotion to Allah, if the intention of pursuance is *mardhatu'llah*, attainment of Allah's Pleasure.

Third, *'ilm* implies goals. It is a goal-directed human activity. The goal of seeking knowledge in Islam is attainment of *taqwa* meaning, to be God-conscious; to be obedient to Allah.

Fourth, as contrasted with knowledge as "a piece of subjectively acquired information about the world," *'ilm* covers the entire spectrum of

the objects of knowledge namely, the apparent realities and the hidden realities; it is exhaustive, that is, detailed and complete in its scope. It embraces all the physical and metaphysical realities, and also all matters related to man's creation and purpose on the earth.

The technical meaning of *'ilm* is broad and subjective. This is because there are various perspectives of knowledge in Islam and the opinion of the scholars concerning what counts as *'ilm* or what *'ilm* relates to vary widely.

In the general sense of the term, *'ilm* denotes (the total of) what is perceived, experienced, revealed, understood, and remembered through memory or writing. Specifically, it refers to the following, among others:

- i. The arrival (husul) in the soul of the meaning of a thing or an object of knowledge and the arrival (wusul) of the soul at the meaning of a thing or an object of knowledge* (Al-Attas, 1980)

This definition by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas implies that: first, the act of knowing is a dual process involving the arrival of the meaning (and/or image or form) of an object in the soul (*husul*) and the soul's arrival at the meaning (and/or image or form) of an object (*wusul*).

Second, knowledge is an attribute of the soul. The soul is the knower; the place where what is collected by the senses is processed, interpreted, and judged. Therefore, it is where the meaning of the object of knowledge is retained. While things may disappear, their meanings, concepts or forms and images remain in the soul.

The soul is likened to a mirror where the form or image of the object is viewed. However, it should be noted here that al-Attas used the term "meaning" instead of "image" or "form" of an object of knowledge to include things or beings that exist beyond the physical world or metaphysical realities; they are inconceivable. For example, Allah is a Being without image or form yet He is known to the soul:

فَاطِرُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَمِنَ الْأَنْعَامِ أَزْوَاجًا ۗ  
يَذَرُوكُمْ فِيهِ ۚ لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ ۚ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

(He is) the Creator of the heavens and the earth: He has made for you pairs from among yourselves, and pairs among cattle: by this means does He multiply you: there is

nothing whatever like unto Him, and He is the One that hears and sees (all things) (Qur'an, 42:11).

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

And there is none like unto Him (Qur'an, 112:4).

Third, everything, physical and non-physical, has meaning and/or form, and purpose. This includes the things that happen to us or non-physical beings. The condition for the attainment of knowledge, however, is the arrival in the soul of the meaning of a thing and the soul's arrival at the meaning of a thing. The problem with this definition is that it excludes the "imperceptible" or things that are beyond the reach of the senses and mind, and also objects or entities whose meanings fail to arrive in the soul and the soul fails to arrive at their meanings.

**ii. "Knowledge of a religious nature"**

Some scholars maintain that *'ilm* denotes "The statements of Allah and His Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) and the statements of the *Sahabah* (Companions), along with the unanimous agreement of the scholars (*ijma'*) and correct logical conclusion (*qiyas*) (Baazmool, 2006)." From this description it is understood that there are four major sources of knowledge in Islam namely, the Qur'an or the statements of Allah, Hadith or the statements of the Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him), *ijma'* or the unanimous agreement of the scholars, and *qiyas* or correct logical conclusions.

**iii. "Specialised religious knowledge"**

Those having specialized knowledge of the Qur'an and Hadith or words and deeds of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) are known as *'ulama'* (sing. *'Alim*) meaning, "the learned ones" or "scholars." They are the "authorities on religion" or the "guardians of religion (Islam)." Therefore, they play the most important role in the Muslim community. According to some scholars, the power of the *'ulama'* supersedes that of the *'umara'*, the rulers or the government. This view is based on the belief that secular institutions are subordinate to Islamic law. In the early days of Islam, possession of *'ilm* was necessary requirement of leadership, which is to say, knowledge and leadership were inseparable. Until today, *'ulama'* continue to play an important role as advisors to the Muslim leaders and *qudha'*, judges, in many Muslim countries.

*iv. The cognition (ma‘rifah) of the object known as it is (‘ala ma huwa bih) – idrak al-Shay’i ‘ala haqiqatihi*

This statement refers to “The asseveration (*ithbat*) of the object known as it is (*‘ala ma huwa ‘alayh*)” in a way that “does not leave open the possibility of (its) opposite” and “without mistake or error.” In other words, *ilm* is about “understanding the reality of things,” which means, understanding what the things are in themselves and not only what they appear to be. This includes “an understanding of their meaning both in depth and in extent, real purpose, and significance (Abd Rahman and Abdul Muthaliff, 2017).”

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) used to supplicate to Allah to guide him and open his eyes to the reality of things saying: “*O Allah! Show me the reality of all things as it (really) is...*” Also ‘Umar bin al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) used to supplicate for the same saying: “O Allah, show me the truth as truth and guide me to follow it. Show me the false as false and guide me to avoid it (Buhuti, 1996).” Here it is evident that there is a difference between perception and reality. Reality is one and the same, meaning that it does not change with the change of environment and passage of time; it is timeless. What changes is the way it is perceived: “Reality is unaffected by the filters and lenses through which it is observed, and therefore unaffected by a person’s perception (Miles, 2018);” “Reality does not change to adapt to our viewpoints; reality is what is (Ringer, 2013).” The statement “reality is not absolute” simply refers to the perception of reality and not reality itself.

### **C. Ways of knowing or methods of acquiring knowledge**

Knowing and knowledge are two different things. The former is a process of arriving at the latter, hence the latter is the result of the former. The act of knowing is a complex and continuous process that involves the following activities:

#### **C.1. Reading**

Reading is an essential activity in knowledge acquisition. Thus, in the first revelation to Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) Allah instructed him and all of us to read and/or acquire the skills of reading:

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ \* خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ \* اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ \* الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ \* عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ

“Proclaim! (or read!) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created. Created man, out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood. Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful. He Who taught (the use of) the pen. Taught man that which he knew not.” (Qur’an, 96:1-5).

Reading can be for fun, pleasure, entertainment, relief, inspiration, illumination of the soul, refinement of the heart or guidance. In these verses Allah commanded reading of the Qur’an for the purpose of guidance. Reading is also the source of all salvation for humanity. By reading, listening to, and reflecting over the Qur’an one is rewarded. There are four obligations Muslims have to the Qur’an namely, (1) to learn it in order to distinguish right from wrong, (2) to do what is right and abstain from what is wrong, (3) to set a good example to others by embodying the words of the Qur’an or in other words, by translating the Qur’anic values such as justice, equality, freedom, social solidarity into practice, and (4) to ensure that that right and justice triumph over wrong and injustice. This, however, cannot be achieved without *iman* or upholding Allah’s oneness in legislation; He is the One Who decides what is right and what is wrong, and establishment of a legitimate authority.

### C.2. Listening

Good listening or paying attention to what is being conveyed is vital to knowledge acquisition. First, it allows a person to gain an understanding of a speaker’s communication. Second, it is a signal to the speaker that what he is conveying is of value to the listener. One of the indicators of good listening is turning one’s body completely towards the speaker.

Good listening creates a connection between the speaker and the listener. Hence, aiding the communication process. According to the following Qur’anic verse, it is an obligation to listen attentively to the Qur’an when it is being recited:

وَإِذَا قُرِئَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ وَأَنْصِتُوا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

When the Qur’an is read, listen to it with attention, and hold your peace that ye may receive Mercy (Qur’an, 7:204).

Thus, one of the rights of the Qur’an is to be listened to and not ignored. Listening to the Qur’an is one of the acts of devotion to Allah (*ibadah*); a means to receive His Mercy and Guidance. It is a prioritization of Allah over other things.

### C.3. Experiencing

Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: “A believer is not stung twice (by something) out of one and the same hole (Al-Bukhari, 1997).” It is understood from this Hadith that a mistake should not be repeated twice. Thus, one has to be precautious. While a believer can be stung by a poisonous creature, such as a snake or scorpion due to unawareness, the same should not be allowed to happen in the same place twice or repeatedly. Repeating a mistake simply means that one failed to learn from experience.

There are many verses in the Qur’an in which we are instructed to travel to gain experience. For example, Allah says:

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمْ الْأَرْضَ ذَلُولًا فَامْشُوا فِي مَنَاكِبِهَا وَكُلُوا مِن رِّزْقِهِ وَإِلَيْهِ  
النُّشُورُ

It is He Who has made the earth manageable for you, so traverse ye through its tracts and enjoy of the Sustenance which He furnishes: but unto Him is the Resurrection (Qur’an, 67:15).

Travelling is a valuable learning experience. It enables us to reflect on what we see and to experience other cultures (learn about those who are different from us), which in turn enables us to learn more about ourselves and rethink our cultural biases. Understanding the different cultures is one of the requirements for peaceful coexistence. Allah says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ  
أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things) (Qur’an, 49:13).

### C.4. Mental activities

Mental activities such as understanding, reflection, reasoning, perception and remembrance are crucial to knowledge acquisition. First, to understand something simply means to be aware of its meaning and/or function. The Islamic concept for understanding is *tafaqquh*. Allah urges us to deepen our understanding of the purpose of creation and the purpose of life. For example, He says:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ وَلَهُ اخْتِلَافُ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ ۚ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

It is He Who gives life and death, and to Him (is due) the alternation of Night and Day: will ye not then understand? (Qur'an, 23:80).

He also urges that there should be a party from each community to dedicate themselves to *al-Tafaqquh fi al-Din*, which means to deepen their knowledge or understanding of religion (Islam):

وَمَا كَانَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لِيَنفِرُوا كَافَّةً ۚ فَلَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِن كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ مِّنْهُمْ طَائِفَةٌ لِّيَتَفَقَّهُوا فِي الدِّينِ وَلِيُنذِرُوا قَوْمَهُمْ إِذَا رَجَعُوا إِلَيْهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَحْذَرُونَ

Nor should the Believers all go forth together: if a contingent from every expedition remained behind, they could devote themselves to studies in religion, and admonish the people when they return to them, that thus they (may learn) to guard themselves (against evil) (Qur'an, 9:122).

It is worth noting that knowledge of Islam is a vast ocean into which one may choose to swim horizontally or vertically but without reaching the coastline (the area where land meets the ocean) or the ocean floor (the bottom of the ocean). Allah says:

وَلَوْ أَنَّ فِي الْأَرْضِ مِن شَجَرَةٍ أَقْلَامٌ وَالْبَحْرُ يَمُدُّهُ مِن بَعْدِهِ سَبْعَةُ أَبْحُرٍ مَا نَفِدَتْ كَلِمَاتُ اللَّهِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

And if all the trees on earth were pens and the ocean (were ink), with seven oceans behind it to add to its (supply), yet would not the words of Allah be exhausted (in the writing): for Allah is Exalted in Power, full of Wisdom (Qur'an, 31:27).

The deeper one goes into the ocean the more one explores. Therefore, one should never fail to attempt to understand (gain knowledge). In

the following verse Allah describes those who fail to attempt to understand as the worst of living creatures:

إِنَّ شَرَّ الدَّوَابِّ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الصُّمُّ الْبُكْمُ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ

For the worst of beasts in the sight of Allah are the deaf and the dumb, those who understand not (Qur'an, 8:22).

#### C.4.1. Reflection

The Islamic concepts for reflection are *tadabbur* and *tafakkur*. *Tadabbur* refers to repeated observation, which is to look over and over something until it becomes clear to the observer(s). In several verses in the Qur'an Allah exhorts us to observe and reflect on the Qur'an, the universe, ourselves, and the fall of nations so that we can reach full certainty and conviction that He is the Sole Creator and the Most Powerful, and to learn from the mistakes of the fallen nations:

أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِنْدِ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا فِيهِ اخْتِلَافًا كَثِيرًا

Do they not consider the Qur'an (with care)? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein Much discrepancy (Qur'an, 4:82).

أَفَلَمْ يَتَّبِعُوا الْقَوْلَ أَمْ جَاءَهُمْ مَا لَمْ يَأْتِ آبَاءَهُمُ الْأُولِينَ

Do they not ponder over the Word (of Allah or has anything (new) come to them that did not come to their fathers of old? (Qur'an, 23:68).

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَالْفُلْكِ الَّتِي تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِمَا يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ مَاءٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَبَثَّ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ وَتَصْرِيفِ الرِّيَّاحِ وَالسَّحَابِ الْمُسَخَّرِ بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the night and the day; in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which Allah Sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds, and the clouds which they Trail like

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their slaves between the sky and the earth; (Here) indeed are Signs for a people that are wise (Qur'an, 2:164).

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَى الْأَرْضِ كَمْ أَنْبَتْنَا فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ زَوْجٍ كَرِيمٍ\* إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّمَنْ عَمِيَ وَمَا كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

Do they not look at the earth, how many noble things of all kinds We have produced therein? Verily, in this is a Sign but most of them do not believe (Qur'an, 26:7-8).

وَكَأَيِّنْ مِنْ آيَةٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ يَمُرُّونَ عَلَيْهَا وَهُمْ عَنْهَا مُعْرِضُونَ

And how many Signs in the heavens and the earth do they pass by? Yet they turn (their faces) away from them! (Qur'an, 12:105).

A careful examination of one's body, observation of the natural objects and contemplation over the regular order, that is, the precise computation of things, such as the changing of night into day and day into night and the changing of seasons, reveals that there is a Creator, and that is Allah.

### C.4.2. Reasoning

Allah has distinguished human beings from other creatures by endowing them with the faculty of reasoning. The Islamic concept for reasoning is *ta'qqul*, meaning the ability to draw inferences or conclusions from one's daily life experiences, historical events and reading of the Qur'an. The dwellers of hell are described as people who have eyes but they do not use them to see the signs of Allah in the universe, they have ears but they do not use them to listen to Allah's message, and they have mind but they do not use it to think, in other words, they are unmindful. They will regret not using their Allah-given intellect to understand His message. Hence, they will say:

وَقَالُوا لَوْ كُنَّا نَسْمَعُ أَوْ نَعْقِلُ مَا كُنَّا فِي أَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ

Had we but listened or used our intelligence, we should not (now) be among the Companions of the Blazing Fire! (Qur'an, 67:10).

One of the importance of listening to the Divine message or the Qur'an is that it illuminates the faculties of reason and perception; it enables them to function properly. According to the following verse, people who do not use their Allah-given faculties of sight, hearing and reasoning are worse than animals:

وَلَقَدْ ذَرَأْنَا لِجَهَنَّمَ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الْجِنِّ وَالإِنسِ لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ بِهَا وَلَهُمْ أَعْيُنٌ  
لَّا يُبْصِرُونَ بِهَا وَلَهُمْ آذَانٌ لَا يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا أُولَئِكَ كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ أُولَئِكَ  
هُمُ الْغَافِلُونَ

Many are the Jinns and men we have made for Hell: They have hearts wherewith they understand not, eyes wherewith they see not, and ears wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle, nay more misguided: for they are heedless (of warning) (Qur'an, 7:179).

#### C.4.3. Perception

There are two types of perception namely, perception of the external world through the five known senses and it is known as "sensory perception," and perception in the brain, which is known as "mental perception." Sensory perception (vision, touch, sound, taste and smell) is immediate and spontaneous, and it precedes mental perception. The latter (mental perception) is a consequence of the sensory perception of an external object; it proceeds over something of which the image is created in the mind. In simple words, it can be defined as the process by which the brain interprets information about the world that it receives through the senses. It acts as a filter and lens through which one perceives the sensory objects. This type of perception is the one referred to in the following verse:

أَوَلَمْ يَتَفَكَّرُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ ۗ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ  
وَأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ۗ وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ النَّاسِ بِلِقَاءِ رَبِّهِمْ لَكَافِرُونَ

Do they not reflect in their own minds? Not but for just ends and for a term appointed, did Allah create the heavens and the earth, and all between them: yet are there truly many among men who deny the meeting with their Lord (at the Resurrection)! (Qur'an, 30:8).

#### C.4.4. Remembrance (memory)

Remembrance e.g. of the facts or information, past events, and experiences is part of knowing. One of the functions of the human brain is to retain and recall knowledge (perceptions, experiences, and learned information). The Islamic term for remembrance is *tazakkur*. It is the ability to retrieve the information stored in the brain.

#### D. ‘*Ilm* (knowledge) and *yaqin* (certainty or conviction)

*Yaqin* (certainty or conviction) is the end of one’s search for the truth. In Islam, having *yaqin* is critical for the validity of one’s religious beliefs and practices. Belief with certainty means “knowing that something is true.” It is a mental state in which the mind is free from *shakk* (doubt or skepticism) and *zann* (supposition). It is the arrival in the soul or heart what is termed as “accurate, doubt-free knowledge.”

In Islam, a person is required to have the highest degree of certainty (absolute certainty) in the fundamentals of faith or core beliefs namely, affirmation of Allah, His angels, His Books, His Messengers, the Last Day, and belief in the Divine Destiny whether it be good or bad. There are three varying levels or degrees of certainty namely, ‘*ilm al-Yaqin* (the knowledge of certainty), ‘*ayn al-Yaqin* (the vision of certainty), and *haqqu al-Yaqin* (the truth of certainty).

##### D.1. ‘*Ilm al-Yaqin* (The Knowledge of Certainty/certainty in faith)

This degree or level of certainty is reached through thoughtful reading of and/or attentive listening to what has been informed or conveyed by Allah’s Prophets and Messengers (peace and blessings be upon them) regarding *al-Ghaybiyyat* (sing. *Al-Ghayb*), that is, the hidden matters or what one has never seen or experienced before (the metaphysical unseen realm). Having faith in *al-Ghaybiyyat* is termed as *iman* and *al-Mu’minun* are those who believe in *al-Ghaybiyyat* or the unseen and unexperienced matters (unexperienced knowledge). Opposed to *iman* is *kufr*, that is the denial of the unseen matters. *Al-Kafirun* are those who deny unseen matters.

##### D.2. ‘*Ayn al-Yaqin* (The Vision of Certainty)

This degree or level is reached through rational reflection and reflective observation of *khalqullah*, Allah’s creation. That is, an observation after which a person continues to reflect on what he or she have seen. Allah has commanded *tadabbur*, thoughtful reading of and/or attentive listening to

the Qur'an, in the same way He has commanded *tafakkur*, reflective observation of His creation (the nature of our existence and the universe):

أَوَلَمْ يَتَفَكَّرُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ ۗ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ  
وَأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ۗ وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ النَّاسِ بِلِقَاءِ رَبِّهِمْ لَكَافِرُونَ

Do they not reflect in their own minds? Not but for just ends and for a term appointed, did Allah create the heavens and the earth, and all between them: yet are there truly many among men who deny the meeting with their Lord (at the Resurrection)! (Qur'an, 30:8).

Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani explains the meaning of this verse by quoting al-Khattabi as follows:

It is said the meaning [of the verse] is: Were they created without a creator? That is impossible, as they must have a creator. If they deny the Creator, then they must have created themselves, and that proposition is even more foolish and false, for how can something without existence create anything? If they reject these two opinions [that they came to be without a creator or they created themselves], then the proof is established upon them that they were in fact created.<sup>3</sup>

According to the Qur'an, the entire creation belongs exclusively to Allah. It is *ayah*, evidence, proof or sign of His existence:

هَذَا خَلْقُ اللَّهِ فَأَرُونِي مَاذَا خَلَقَ الَّذِينَ مِن دُونِهِ ۗ بَلِ الظَّالِمُونَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

Such is the Creation of Allah. Now show Me what is there that others besides Him have created. Nay, but the Transgressors are in manifest error (Qur'an, 31:11).

Prophet Ibrahim (peace and blessings be upon him) gained *iman* or faith in Allah's existence based on astronomical observation of the motion of celestial bodies namely, the stars, Moon, and the Sun. Unlike the people in his time who observed the sky with a sole purpose of admiring of its beauty, his observation was for the purpose of finding out why the sky

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<sup>3</sup> Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari bi-Sharh al-Bukhari*. Bayrut, Lubnan: Dar al-Ma‘rifah, v.8, 1959. p. 603. I am indebted to Justin Parrott for this reference.

looks so beautiful and the bodies in the solar system have uniform and orderly motion. Allah says:

وَالشَّمْسُ تَجْرِي لِمُسْتَقَرٍّ لَهَا ۚ ذَلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ \* وَالْقَمَرَ قَدَرْنَا مَنَازِلَ  
حَتَّىٰ عَادَ كَالْعُرْجُونِ الْقَدِيمِ \* لَا الشَّمْسُ يَنْبَغِي لَهَا أَنْ تُدْرِكَ الْقَمَرَ وَلَا اللَّيْلُ  
سَابِقُ النَّهَارِ ۚ وَكُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ

And the sun runs his course for a period determined for him: that is the decree of (Him), the Exalted in Might, the All-Knowing. And the Moon, We have measured for her mansions (to traverse) till she returns like the old (and withered) lower part of a date-stalk. It is not permitted to the Sun to catch up the Moon, nor can the Night outstrip the Day: Each (just) swims along in (its own) orbit (according to Law) (Qur'an, 38-40).

وَكَذَلِكَ نُرِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلِيَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُوقِنِينَ \* فَلَمَّا جَنَّ  
عَلَيْهِ اللَّيْلُ رَأَىٰ كَوْكَبًا ۖ قَالَ هَذَا رَبِّي فَلَمَّا أَفَلَ قَالَ لَا أُحِبُّ الْآفِلِينَ \* فَلَمَّا رَأَى  
الْقَمَرَ بَازِعًا قَالَ هَذَا رَبِّي فَلَمَّا أَفَلَ قَالَ لَأُنْزِلَنَّ رَبِّي لَأَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ  
الضَّالِّينَ \* فَلَمَّا رَأَى الشَّمْسَ بَازِعَةً قَالَ هَذَا رَبِّي هَذَا أَكْبَرُ ۖ فَلَمَّا أَفَلَتْ قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ  
إِنِّي بريء مما تُشْرِكُونَ \* إِنِّي وَجَّهْتُ وَجْهِيَ لِلَّذِي فَطَرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ  
حَنِيفًا ۖ وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

So, also did We show Abraham the power and the laws of the heavens and the earth, that he might (with understanding) have certitude. When the night covered him over, He saw a star: He said: "This is my Lord." But when it set, He said: "I love not those that set." When he saw the moon rising in splendour, he said: "This is my Lord." But when the moon set, He said: "unless my Lord guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray." When he saw the sun rising in splendour, he said: "This is my Lord; this is the greatest (of all)." But when the sun set, he said: "O my people! I am indeed free from your (guilt) of giving partners to Allah. For me, I have set my face, firmly and truly, towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and never shall I give partners to Allah (Qur'an, 6:75-79).

From these verses we can infer that: (1) Allah is transcendent above all things, meaning He is entirely different from all things created and far above His creation; (2) the universe or the heavens and earth, is *ayah* or a manifest proof for the existence and Lordship or the Power and Might, of Allah. Hence, it is infused with purpose; (3) the path of knowledge in Islam is a journey towards Allah. It is also a quest for certainty, which is the summit of the journey to knowledge. Hence, whoever does not reach the summit, does not complete the journey of knowledge. Furthermore, certainty is a valuable attribute which Allah confers upon a few people. Subsequently, they enjoy comfort, satisfaction and inner-peace. By contrast, many proponents of philosophical skepticism claim that certainty is only possible in a priori domains such as logic or mathematics; (4) knowledge is a requirement for certainty; (5) certainty should be evidence-based. The evidence is what gives one the highest degree of justification for one's belief; (6) knowledge without certainty is knowledge without epistemic worth; it has no epistemic value; (7) Prophet Ibrahim (peace and blessings be upon him)'s quest for Allah or the higher power, was also a quest for the higher meaning of life or existence, and the purpose of creation. It is worth noting that having a purpose in one's life is a necessity in making a life worth living; (8) a human heart is void, empty, discontent, and uneasy with existence until it is filled by discovering the meaning and purpose to life or in other words, until it achieves faith in Allah; (9) knowledge of Allah's existence is not achieved by reason alone, there must be revelation. This is why Allah has sent Prophets and Messengers (peace and blessings be upon them) to all nations:

وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولٌ فَإِذَا جَاءَ رَسُولُهُمْ قُضِيَ بَيْنَهُمْ بِالْقِسْطِ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

To every people (was sent) an apostle: when their apostle comes (before them), the matter will be judged between them with justice, and they will not be wronged (Qur'an, 10:47).

وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولًا أَنْ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ فَظَمِنَهُمْ مَنْ هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ حَقَّتْ عَلَيْهِ الضَّلَالَةُ فَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَانظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُكْذِبِينَ

For We assuredly sent amongst every People an apostle, (with the Command), "Serve Allah, and eschew Evil": of the People were some whom Allah guided, and some on whom error became inevitably (established). So, travel

through the earth, and see what was the end of those who denied (the Truth) (Qur'an, 16:36)

(10) Prophet Ibrahim (peace and blessings be upon him)'s arrival at the state of certainty in faith was by pure instinct, with or without a prophetic revelation to guide him. According to the following hadith, every child is born with a spiritual instinct termed as fitrah that inclines him or her towards Allah or towards the transcendent.

Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported Allah's Messenger (peace and blessing be upon him) as saying:

The mother of every person gives him birth according to his true nature (disposition to believe in Allah). It is subsequently his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian. Had his parents been Muslim he would have also remained a Muslim. Every person to whom his mother gives birth (has two aspects of his life); when his mother gives birth Satan strikes him but it was not the case with Mary and her son (Jesus Christ) (Muslim).

This hadith is supported by the following verse that mentions that Allah took a primordial covenant with every person before the creation of the world or before humans appeared on Earth, that they would recognize Him as their Creator:

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا أَن تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ

When thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying): "Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?"- They said: "Yea! We do testify!" (This), lest ye should say on the Day of Judgment: "Of this we were never mindful (Qur'an, 7:172).

Ibn Taymiyyah wrote:

The establishment and recognition of the Creator is a fundamental instinct in human nature, even though some people have done something to corrupt their nature such that they need an argument to achieve knowledge of God. This is the opinion of the majority of people, as well as the

skilled debaters, that knowledge of God is sometimes achieved effortlessly and other times by argument, as was recognized by more than one of the theologians (Barrett, 2011).

Affirming the Creator by means of signs is an obligation, as it has been revealed in the Quran and Allah has made it instinctual to his servants. Though deductive arguments may be correct, their usefulness is lacking (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1995).

The spiritual longing for truth or the innate impulse within people to seek out the Creator or higher power, is also referred to as *fitratu'llah* in the following verse:

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا ۚ فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا ۚ لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ۗ  
ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

So set thou thy face steadily and truly to the Faith: (establish) Allah's handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind: no change (let there be) in the work (wrought) by Allah. that is the standard Religion: but most among mankind understand not.

(11) Through reflective observation of the sky, Prophet Ibrahim (peace and blessings be upon him) reached a high degree of certainty known as *'ayn al-Yaqin* (The Vision of Certainty). Allah says:

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ أَرِنِي كَيْفَ تُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ ۗ قَالَ أَوَلَمْ تُؤْمِن ۗ قَالَ بَلَىٰ ۗ وَ لَكِن لِّيَطْمَئِنَّ قَلْبِي ۗ قَالَ فَخُذْ أَرْبَعَةً مِّنَ الطَّيْرِ فَصُرْهُنَّ إِلَيْكَ ثُمَّ اجْعَلْ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ جَبَلٍ مِّنْهُنَّ جُزْءًا ثُمَّ ادْعُهُنَّ يَأْتِينَكَ سَعْيًا ۗ وَاعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

Behold! Abraham said: "My Lord! Show me how Thou givest life to the dead." He said: "Dost thou not then believe?" He said: "Yea! but to satisfy My own undertaking." He said: "Take four birds; Tame them to turn to thee; put a portion of them on every hill and call to them: They will come to thee (Flying) with speed. Then know that Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise" (Qur'an, 2:260).

### D.3. *Haqq al-Yaqin* (The Truth of Certainty)

Beyond the levels of *'ilm al-Yaqin* (the knowledge of certainty) and *'ayn al-Yaqin* (the vision of certainty) lies another level known as *haqq al-Yaqin* (the truth of certainty). It is the highest level or degree, of certainty which is only reached through spiritual experiences.

In Sufism or *Tasawwuf*, *haqq al-Yaqin*, also termed as *mushahadah* (inner vision or intuitive perception), is the highest level in the spiritual journey, the closest state of Allah to His servant. It is argued that a servant who reaches this level can witness (some of) the divine and invisible secrets. Hence, he is granted the highest dignity. According to al-Ghazali, only the *Siddiqun* and *Muqarrabun*, those who always obey Allah's commands or practice the *shari'ah*, can reach this level which is only reached through *mujahadah* (struggle) and *riyadhah* (spiritual training).

### E. *'Ilm* (knowledge) and *iman* (faith/belief)

The relationship between *iman* and *'ilm* is the question of as to how each of these two supplement each other and how each affects a person's deeds of the mind, tongue, and limbs. In Islam, *iman* and *'ilm* are correlated. Both elevate the status of man and each is an integral part of the other. Allah says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ تَفَسَّحُوا فِي الْمَجَالِسِ فَافْسَحُوا يَفْسَحَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَإِذَا قِيلَ انشُرُوا فَانشُرُوا يَرْفَعِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ

O ye who believe! When ye are told to make room in the assemblies, (spread out and) make room: (ample) room will Allah provide for you. And when ye are told to rise up, rise up Allah will rise up, to (suitable) ranks (and degrees), those of you who believe and who have been granted (mystic) Knowledge. And Allah is well- acquainted with all ye do (Qur'an, 58:11).

*Iman* without knowledge is futile. The same is true with the vice versa. Sufyan Al-Thawri (may Allah be pleased with him) used to seek Allah's refuge from two *fitan* (trials): first, from the *fitnah* (singular of *fitan*), trial, of the ignorant worshipper, and second, from the *fitnah* of the wicked scholar (one whose actions are corrupt despite the fact that he knows the truth). For he believed that their *fitnah* is the *fitnah* of everyone

who is put to trial (Al-Ajuri, 1978). From this it is understood that actions without knowledge and knowledge without right actions are trials to the society.

### F. *‘Ilm* and *taqwa* (fear of Allah or God-consciousness)

*‘Ilm* and *taqwa* are intertwined. According to the interpreted meaning of the following verse, it is only those who know Allah (through His Divine Names and Attributes) and comprehend Islam (the Qur’an and Hadith) that have *taqwa* of Allah, meaning “are conscious of Allah,” “revere Allah,” “have a sense of responsibility before Allah and His creation,” “abstain from moral indecency and whatever is incompatible with human dignity,” “follow the teachings of Islam,” “guard themselves against Allah’s anger and His punishments,” etc.:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ وَالْذَوَابِّ وَالْأَنْعَامِ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ كَذَلِكَ ۗ إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ  
الْعُلَمَاءُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ

And so amongst men and crawling creatures and cattle, are they of various colours. Those truly fear Allah, among His Servants, who have knowledge: for Allah is Exalted in Might, Oft-Forgiving (Qur’an, 35:28).

It worth noting that *taqwa* increases with the level of *‘ilm* and the degree of *yaqin* (certainty or conviction). This means the more the believer possesses *ma‘rifah* or *ma‘rifatu’llah*, knowledge about Allah, and the more he is certain about His existence and the Day of Judgement, the greater is his *taqwa*. Hence, *taqwa* is in varying degrees. Allah says:

... نَرْفَعُ دَرَجَاتٍ مَن نَّشَاءُ ۗ وَفَوْقَ كُلِّ ذِي عِلْمٍ عَلِيمٌ

... We raise in degrees whom We will, but over every possessor of knowledge is one [more] knowing (Qur’an, 12:78) (Saheeh International, 2004).

At the head of *‘ulama’* (sing. *‘alim*), religious scholars, are the Prophets and Messengers (peace and blessings be upon them). They are the most knowledgeable of people about Allah and hence the most fearful of Allah, and then the succeeding scholars. *Taqwa* also decreases with the level of *‘ilm*. This means the less one knows about Allah, the less one fears Him.

## G. 'Ilm, hikmah and ma'rifah

An enunciation of the concept of 'ilm is not complete without highlighting the differences between 'ilm, hikmah, and ma'rifah. Following are the differences:

### G.1. Hikmah

Like 'ilm, hikmah is a multifaceted concept. It conveys different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah described it as "doing the correct thing in the correct manner at the correct time (Al-Jawziyyah, 2005)" while al-Ajuri interpreted it as "intellect, deep understanding and right speech (Al-Ajuri, 1978)." The same interpretation was given by Mujahid (Al-Ajuri, 1978). Its other meanings are as follows:

- 1) Knowing the true nature of things or seeing things as they are. This requires, among others, the removal of the veil created by pride, jealousy, hatred, desire, and other diseases of the heart that prevent a person from seeing the true nature of things, and transcendence or looking beyond the materialistic assumptions about reality.
- 2) Lighted insight that guides a person to that which is correct. This is termed as *nur*. Allah says:

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ مَثَلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ ۚ الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي  
رُجَاةٍ ۚ الرُّجَاةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَا شَرْقِيَّةٍ  
وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ ۖ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ ۚ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ ۗ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ  
مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۚ وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The Parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp., the Lamp enclosed in Glass, the glass as it were a brilliant star: Lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light! Allah doth guide whom He will to His Light: Allah doth set forth Parables for men: and Allah doth know all things.

Ibn 'Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that he spent the night with the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) and he woke up. The Prophet (peace

and blessings be upon him) cleansed his teeth, performed ablution, the call to prayer was announced, and he went out for the prayer while he was saying, “O Allah, place light in my heart and light on my tongue. Place light in my hearing and light in my seeing. Place light behind me and light in front of me. Place light above me and light below me. O Allah, grant me light! (Al-Bukhari, 1997)”

- 3) Maturity in thought.
- 4) The ability to make correct judgments and decisions.
- 5) Knowledge and acting on it, combination of knowledge and action or in other words, acting on what one knows.
- 6) Knowing or “understanding of how to use what we have and what we know to gain what we desire or need (Newton, 2011).”
- 7) Divine mysteries and intentions inherent in things (Questions on Islam, 2019). Allah is *Al-Hakim* (Qur’an, 62:1), meaning “All-Wise; “the One with ultimate wisdom who did not create and legislate anything in vain (Understand Quran Academy, 2019).” He says:

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاءَ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا بَاطِلًا ۗ ذَٰلِكَ ظَنُّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ۗ فَوَيْلٌ لِلَّذِينَ  
كَفَرُوا مِنَ النَّارِ

Not without purpose did We create heaven and earth and all between! that were the thought of Unbelievers! but woe to the Unbelievers because of the Fire (of Hell)! (Qur’an, 38:27).

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا لَاعِبِينَ \* مَا خَلَقْنَاهُمَا إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَلَكِنَّ  
أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

We created not the heavens, the earth, and all between them, merely in (idle) sport: We created them not except for just ends: but most of them do not understand (Qur’an, 44: 38-39).

أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ عَبَثًا وَأَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا تُرْجَعُونَ

Did ye then think that We had created you in jest, and that ye would not be brought back to Us (for account)? (Qur’an, 23:115).

Anyone who ponders over Allah's creation will come to the conclusion that there is wisdom behind everything. Nothing happens by a coincidence, not even a leaf falling on the ground. Thus, writes Al-Jibouri: "Accidentally," "coincidentally," and "by chance" are words and expressions that should be eliminated from the language altogether; they are intruders. They are sacrilegious (Al-Jibouri)." We can substantiate this argument with the following verse:

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ  
 \* الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ  
 وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ

Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, there are indeed Signs for men of understanding. Men who celebrate the praises of Allah, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth, (With the thought): "Our Lord! not for naught Hast Thou created (all) this! Glory to Thee! Give us salvation from the penalty of the Fire" (Qur'an, 3:190-191).

8) Deep understanding (of religion – Islam). As regards this meaning, Ibn 'Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) put his hand on my shoulder and he said: "*Allahuma faqqihuhu fi al-Din wa 'allimhu al-Ta'wil* – O Allah, give him understanding in religion and teach him the interpretation of the Quran (Al-Bukhari, 1997)." In another narration he reported that: "The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) embraced me and said: "*Allahumma 'allimhu al-Hikmah wa ta'wila al-Kitab* – O Allah, teach him wisdom and the (correct) interpretation of the Book (Al-Bukhari, 1997)." *Muhakkam* is an old man with experience while *Hakim* is one who is mature in thought or wise.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah be pleased with him) wrote that *hikmah* is two types and has three levels. The first type is related to knowledge and it is "to realize the essence of things, and to understand the connection between cause and effect – in regards to the creation, occurrence of events, fate, and legislation." The second type is related to action and it is "to put things in their proper places." The three levels of *hikmah* are:

1. “that you give everything its right and do not exceed the limits in this, and that you do not rush it before or delay it past its proper time;”
2. “that you realize Allah’s intent in His Promise, realize His Justice in His Decision, as well as His grace in preventing you from something. And from that which defines this level is that which has been said by the people of firmness and Sunnah: ‘*Hikmah* consists of the lofty and praiseworthy goals that are necessitated by his Creating and Commanding, for which He Commanded, and for which He Predestined;”
3. “that you reach the highest levels of knowledge when making deductions and coming to conclusions, and it is the insight, the knowledge of which is to the heart like something which is being looked at to the eyes that are looking at it (i.e., in confirming that the organ is functioning properly). And this is the exclusive level that has been reserved for the Companions over the rest of the Ummah, and it is the highest level that the scholars can reach (World Heritage Encyclopedia, 2016).”

Ibn Sina described the relationship between *‘ilm* (knowledge) and *hikmah* (wisdom) as follows: “The soul is like a glass lamp and knowledge is light (giving fire) and the wisdom of God is the oil. If it is lit, you are alive, and if it is darkened, you are dead (Rosenthal, 1970).”

From the above mentioned, it is evident that *hikmah* (wisdom) is distinct from *‘ilm* (knowledge). Knowledge is futile if its acquirer is (1) unguided by it, (2) unable to differentiate the right from the wrong and make the right decision, (2) speak to people according to the level of their understanding, and (3) does not understand the knowledge and apply it correctly. The *Khawarij* (Kharijites) used to recite the Qur’an excessively but due to their immaturity in thought, they interpreted it wrongly. Al-Bukhari (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that Ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with both of them) described them as the worst of Allah’s creation and he said: “Verily, they take verses that were revealed about unbelievers and use them against the believers (Al-Bukhari, 1997).”

## **G.2. *Ma‘rifah* (Gnosis/knowledge of the reality of things)**

*Ma‘rifah*, to some scholars, is a higher degree of knowledge than *‘ilm* (Chittick, 1989). Al-Ghazali describes it as “knowledge that leads to felicity (*sa‘adah*) in the afterlife (Treiger, 2012).” Some describe it as “experiential knowledge;” that is, knowledge “reached through ecstatic experiences, rather than revealed or rationally acquired”. In simple terms, it is

“knowledge attained through spiritual practice (Chittick, 1989),” self-purification, and divine grace. In this context, *ma‘rifah* is believed to be the knowledge referred to in this part of the following verse:

وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۖ يُعَلِّمُكُمُ اللَّهُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

Observe your duty to Allah, and Allah will teach. And Allah is Knower of all things (Qur’an, 2: 282).

Others describe *ma‘rifah* as “knowledge about Allah which is attained through His Beautiful Names and Sublime Attributes.” The one endowed with *ma‘rifah* is called *al-‘Arif bi’llah* (pl. *al-‘Arifun bi’llah*), the one who knows Allah (gnostic), and he is known by the following characteristics:

- a) Shyness before Allah: He is shy of doing anything displeasing to Allah – *Haya’*.
- b) Obedience of Allah: He obeys Allah’s commands – *Ta‘ah*.
- c) Affirmation of Allah’s existence: He acknowledges and believes in Allah’s existence – *Iman*.
- d) Devotion to Allah: He has no love or desire for anything besides Allah. In other words, he prioritizes Allah over anything else. Whoever does this Allah, prioritizes him over others.
- e) Intimacy with Allah: He feels a close sense of intimacy with Allah; he yearns for the meeting with Allah – *Raghbah*.
- f) Remembrance of Allah: His heart finds peace in the remembrance of Allah.
- g) Seeking Allah’s forgiveness: Whenever he remembers his sins, he seeks Allah’s forgiveness – *Tawbah*.
- h) Awe of Allah’s majesty: His heart trembles with awe whenever Allah is mentioned – *Wajlah*.
- i) Patience: He is patient in performing his duties to Allah in accordance with the Sunnah (practice and sayings) of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) – *Ihsan*.
- j) Reflection upon the Divine signs – *Tafakkur*.

Allah is only worshipped after being known. He says:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

I have only created Jinns and men, that they may serve Me (Qur’an, 51:56).

The famous Quranic exegesis (*mufassir*), ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) interpreted the words “that they may serve Me (*illa li ya ‘budun*)” as “that they may know Me (*illa li ya ‘rifuni*).” Mujahid and some others held the same opinion (Al-Baghawi, 2010).

### Conducting Remarks

This article has explored the concept of knowledge from both the Western and the Islamic perspectives. It began by defining the term “definition,” stating the reasons for its necessity and why it is difficult to define knowledge, then it examined the theory that knowledge is “justified true beliefs,” described the ways of knowing or the methods of acquiring knowledge namely, reading, listening, experiencing and mental activities (i.e. reflection, reasoning, perception and remembrance), the degrees of certainty (i.e. *‘ilm al-Yaqin*, *‘ayn al-Yaqin* and *haqq al-Yaqin*) and highlighted the differences between *‘ilm*, *hikmah*, and *ma ‘rifah*, among others. The sources consulted to obtain information about the topic of this article were the Qur’an, Hadith, books and articles on the concept of knowledge. It has been understood that knowledge is the byproduct of understanding, reflection, reasoning, and remembrance (memory). Part of the knowledge is that which we gather from the world around us through our senses, and part of it is that which is conveyed to us by the Prophets and Messengers (peace and blessings be upon them) regarding the hidden matters, such as resurrection, paradise and hell, angels, and jinns.

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