

Knowledge and its Sources in the Quran

Shehata Hafez Mohamed Elsheikh, Mohamed Aziz
AbdElmaksoud Sayad Ahamed, Omaina Hamdany Mohamed
Habiba

Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah International Islamic University (UniSHAMS) Kedah "Dar
Al-Aman", Malaysia, & Al-Madinah International University, Malaysia

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i11/23850> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i11/23850

Published Date: 29 November 2024

Abstract

The Quran has had a profound impact on propelling Muslims into a remarkable scientific and methodological advancement within just a few years. For Muslims, the Quran is a source of truths and knowledge, particularly concerning the unseen, such as belief in Allah, angels, divine decree, the afterlife, and its events. Additionally, it serves as a foundation for principles and values that regulate the life of a Muslim and underpin the social fabric of individuals and communities. The study presents a new methodological reading of the Quran, highlighting its guidance in shaping the Muslim intellect, fostering knowledge-based creativity, and establishing scientific methodologies that Muslims pioneered ahead of contemporary civilizations. To address this issue, the study articulates its questions through the following parameters: I ensured that the study did not rely on a single methodology but instead employed several interconnected scientific methodologies simultaneously, given the depth of the topic and the significance of the research. These methodologies include the historical, comparative, and critical approaches

Keywords: Knowledge in the Quran, Intellect in the Quran, Knowledge-Based Creativity in the Quran.

Introduction

Allah created the universe, referred to in the Quran as the "visible world," for human life. He provided humanity with materials, tools, and mechanisms to facilitate their existence and livelihood. The Quran encourages humans to explore the universe, derive knowledge and sciences from it, and follow specific methods and techniques outlined within its verses. These include the senses, such as hearing and sight, which provide observable knowledge, and the intellect, which enables humans to deduce and derive further knowledge and sciences. In addition, divine revelation equips humans with information and insights about the universe and its contents. By examining the Quran, it becomes evident that it establishes frameworks for knowledge and specifies its means, as will be discussed in the following lines.

When we trace the concept of "sources of knowledge" in various studies, we find inconsistency and even confusion in its linguistic usage, often overlapping with other concepts. This leads to intellectual issues for researchers and misconceptions for readers, resulting in studies that adopt a literary, narrative style rather than a scientific approach. As Al-Daghashi (2004) notes, "Due to some researchers' failure to define their study terms, they have fallen into ambiguities, such as conflating sources with fields. Others tend to generalize, making Allah the source of knowledge and revelation merely a tool." Hence, it is essential to clarify and refine the terminology.

The Concept of Knowledge

Linguistic sources agree that knowledge and its derivatives are associated with science. To know something means to be aware of or perceive it through one of the senses or the intellect. The term *'irfan* also denotes knowledge (Manzur, 1414; Al-Fayruzabadi, 1426). However, scholars differ on the relationship between *ma'rifah* (knowledge) and *'ilm* (science). Some argue that knowledge is broader than science, while others believe the opposite. A third group views them as identical. Those who see them as synonymous define both as the perception of a thing as it truly is. On the other hand, those who differentiate between the two argue that knowledge is preceded by ignorance, while science is not. Al-Jurjani explains: "Knowledge (*ma'rifah*) is the perception of something as it truly is, and it is preceded by ignorance, unlike science." Hence, Allah is described as *'Alim* (All-Knowing) and not *'Arif* (Knower).

Furthermore, it is argued that knowledge (*ma'rifah*) pertains to particulars, while science (*'ilm*) relates to universals. Knowledge is used to denote conceptions, whereas science denotes affirmations. For example, one might say, "He knows Allah" but not "He sciences Allah." Similarly, we say, "The knowers of Allah" (*'arifun*) but not "The scientists of Allah" (*'alimun*). Science implies comprehensive understanding, while knowledge implies familiarity with an aspect, appearance, or detail of a thing. This distinction is why Allah is described as possessing *'ilm* but not *ma'rifah* (Al-Jurjani, 1983; Al-Daghashi, 2004). It is noteworthy that the Quran does not use the term *ma'rifah* to denote science but employs its derived verbs, such as *'arafa* (to know) and *ya'rifu* (he knows), to indicate direct experience, as in the verse: "*And you perceive what they do*" (An-Naml: 12).

Sources of Knowledge in the Qur'an

The primary source of human knowledge in the Qur'anic worldview is Allah, the Exalted, who taught humanity what it did not know. This is exemplified in the verse: "*Read, and your Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know*" (Qur'an 96:3–5), and in: "*And He taught Adam the names—all of them*" (Qur'an 2:31).

Allah also granted humanity the means of acquiring knowledge through hearing, sight, and intellect, as stated: "*And Allah brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers, knowing nothing, and He gave you hearing, sight, and hearts that perhaps you would give thanks*" (Qur'an 16:78).

Human beings receive divine knowledge through the faculties provided by Allah (the senses and reason) in matters concerning the observable universe. As for the unseen, Allah has

conveyed knowledge of it through divine revelation, which human beings comprehend using their intellect.

Sources of Knowledge in Islam

The sources of knowledge in Islam are twofold

1. Divine Revelation (Read Scripture): The Qur'an and the Sunnah.
 2. Divine Revelation (Observed Universe): The cosmos as a manifestation of Allah's signs.
- In the following lines, we summarize the sources of knowledge as presented in the Qur'an

The Qur'anic epistemological system recognizes two complementary and integrated sources:

1. **Revelation:** Includes recited verses, prophetic traditions, visions, inspiration, and intuition.
2. **The Cosmos:** Includes created signs, horizons, the self, historical narratives, and current events.

First: Divine Revelation

The divine revelation—represented by the Qur'an and Sunnah—is the fundamental source of knowledge, especially regarding the unseen, which cannot be grasped through sensory experience or fully comprehended by reason. The sensory faculties and intellect guide humanity to understand the material world (the observable universe), but they cannot grasp the realities of the unseen. Thus, the sole source for such truths is divine revelation, which addresses issues of faith and its foundations, including belief in Allah, angels, books, messengers, the Day of Judgment, and divine decree (both good and bad). For example, Allah says: *"The Messenger has believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord, and so have the believers. All of them have believed in Allah, His angels, His books, and His messengers"* (Qur'an 2:285).

Similarly, in the Hadith of Jibreel, when he asked the Prophet Muhammad about faith, it included belief in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Last Day, and divine decree. (Muslim, 1955).

The Qur'an elaborates on these pillars and their impacts on human life—both individually and collectively. It emphasizes how firm belief influences trust in Allah, reliance upon Him, and contentment with His decree, among other virtues. The Qur'an also establishes evidence and rational proofs for these truths.

Moreover, revelation directs human activity on Earth, setting ethical and behavioral frameworks, answering innate existential questions about purpose, and clarifying duties toward oneself and others. This is exemplified through the Qur'anic laws and guidance. The Qur'an also contains numerous references to natural phenomena, such as mountains, trees, rivers, seas, celestial bodies, and galaxies.

Second: The Cosmos

The second source of knowledge is the observable universe. The Qur'an refers to numerous cosmic phenomena, on Earth and in the heavens, and records human interactions with them. It calls upon people to explore the Earth and skies, reflect on themselves and the horizons,

and uncover the sciences and knowledge they hold. Through these explorations, the Qur'an aims to make cosmic knowledge a means of affirming unseen realities.

The relationship between the unseen and observable realms is one of harmony and complementarity. The observable universe answers important questions related to the material world and human existence, such as how to live on Earth, utilize its resources, and preserve one's well-being.

The Qur'an addresses humanity's intellectual faculties through two pathways:

1. Those who believe in revelation immediately, finding its message aligned with their innate disposition (fitrah), who then reflect and find logical and empirical proofs supporting its truths.
2. Those who require tangible, observable miracles alongside logical arguments to comprehend and accept divine guidance.

Thus, revelation and the cosmos serve as the two original sources of knowledge, with subsequent sources, like accumulated knowledge (memory, written records, or transmitted information), deriving from them.

The Qur'an not only draws attention to these sources of knowledge but also emphasizes the means of acquiring knowledge, inspiring intellectual creativity and scientific advancement.

"Man should not stop at the superficial level of what the senses perceive, but is required to understand the realities of things and reflect on the truths of the afterlife. Allah, the Almighty, says: "They know only the outward appearance of the life of this world, but they are heedless of the Hereafter" (Surah Ar-Rum, 6-7).

This means that most people possess knowledge only of worldly matters, its gains, and affairs. They are skilled and intelligent in acquiring wealth and understanding the ways of earning, but they are heedless regarding religious matters and what benefits them in the Hereafter, as though one of them is ignorant with no mind or thought. Al-Hasan al-Basri said: "By Allah, one of them may be so adept at handling his worldly affairs that he can turn a coin in his hand and tell you its weight, but he does not know how to pray." Ibn Abbas, commenting on the verse, said: "They know the affairs of this world, but are ignorant of matters of religion" (Kathir, 1419H).

It is almost universally accepted that no religious text has given as much attention to the issue of thinking as the Quran has. The Quran's emphasis on addressing human faculties of thought and reasoning has led some scholars to consider thinking a duty in Islam, as important as the religious obligations and rituals. As Aqad states: "Thinking in Islam is not a substitute for the text or something similar in rulings; it is a prescribed duty, required in itself, and necessary for understanding other duties. It is forbidden for a Muslim to neglect it if he is capable of fulfilling its responsibilities without necessity. If he neglects it without necessity, he is considered deficient and accountable for this neglect" (Aqad, 1932).

Thirdly, The Heart

The heart here does not refer to the physical organ located on the left side of the chest that pumps blood, but rather refers to the divine essence – as Al-Ghazali describes it – that a

person feels, the place of faith and belief. Given that Islamic thought opens up to the unseen world, the belief in revelation and the universe as sources of knowledge is founded upon belief in the unseen and faith in it. The belief in the Oneness of Allah as the Revealer of revelation and Creator of the universe can only be realized through the heart, which is the place of belief and faith. Therefore, we find that Allah the Almighty precedes the word 'faith' with 'belief in the unseen': "Those who believe in the unseen" (Surah Al-Baqarah, 3). They firmly believe in everything that is unseen and cannot be perceived by the senses, such as the Lord, His essence and attributes, the angels, the resurrection, paradise and its pleasures, and hell and its punishments.

Findings

1. The Quran is the eternal miracle of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the guiding framework for Muslims in every time and place. Every prophet was given a miracle and a scripture: Moses had his staff and the Torah, Jesus had the ability to raise the dead by God's permission and the Gospel, but Prophet Muhammad's miracle was his scripture itself, the Quran, which is free from falsehood, both from the front and from behind.
2. Knowledge, from the Quranic perspective, is not merely the accumulation of facts and information, but rather knowledge that connects a person to Allah. The true value of knowledge is that it leads to faith, which is inherently connected to action. The ultimate goal of knowledge is to guide a person to the righteous path that leads to happiness in this world and the Hereafter. Through this knowledge, a person understands himself, his Lord, and his rights and duties as a vicegerent on earth, tasked with building it with truth and establishing justice among people.
3. Any scientific renaissance project in the Arab and Islamic world must embrace this Quranic vision of knowledge, which accommodates the varied inclinations of humans, where revelation and reason, experience and inspiration, and contemplation and action converge. This vision motivates humans to strive in this world for the sake of the Hereafter. By adopting this vision, Arabs and Muslims can contribute to the contemporary scientific renaissance or, at the very least, guide its course to prevent humanity from the destruction and disaster implied by the modern philosophy of science.

References

- Abdul-Baqi, M. F. (1364). *Al-Mu'jam Al-Mufahras Li-Alfaz Al-Quran Al-Kareem*, Publisher: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Misriyyah, 1364 AH.
- Al-Aqqad, A. M. (1932). *Al-Tafkeer Fardah Islamiyyah* (Thinking is an Islamic Duty). Nahdat Misr for Printing, Publishing, and Distribution.
- Al-Dughshi, A. M. (n. d.). *Nadariyat Al-Ma'rifah Fi Al-Quran Al-Kareem Wa Tadmīnehā Al-Tarbawīyyah*, Issued by the International Institute for Islamic Thought, and Dar Al-Fikr.
- Al-Firuzabadi, M. T. M. (n. d.). *The Ocean Dictionary*, Publisher: Al-Risalah Publishing & Distribution, Beirut, Lebanon.
- Al-Jurjani, A. M. (1983). *Al-Ta'arifat (Definitions)*, Edited and verified by a group of scholars under the supervision of the publisher. Publisher: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah, Beirut, Lebanon.
- Al-Raghib, A. (n. d.). *Mufradat Al-Alfaz Al-Quran*, Dar Al-Qalam, Damascus, p. 127, Basar (Sight).
- Al-Rushdan, M. A. (1997). *Islamiya Al-Ma'rifah, "Hawla Al-Nizam Al-Ma'rifi"*, High Institute for Islamic Thought, Washington, Issue (10).
- Al-Rushdan, M. A. (1997). *Hawla Al-Nizam Al-Ma'rifi Fi Al-Quran Al-Kareem*, Al-Fikr Al-Islami Al-Mu'asir, Volume 3, Issue 10.
- Faris, I. A. A. H. (1979). *Mafhum Al-Aql Fi Al-Lughah Wal-Istilah, Mu'jam Maqayis Al-Lughah*, Edited by Abdul Salam Muhammad Haroun, Dar Al-Fikr.
- Kathir, A. A. I. (1419). *Tafsir Al-Quran Al-Azim*, Edited by Muhammad Hussein Shams Al-Din. Publisher: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah, Publications of Muhammad Ali Baydoun, Beirut.
- Manzur, I. M. B. M. (1979). *Lisan Al-Arab*. Publisher: Dar Sader, Beirut.
- Majma' Al-Lugha Al-Arabiyya Bil-Qahira, (1983). *Al-Mu'jam Al-Falsafi*, Publisher: The General Authority for Printing Affairs.
- Muslim, A. H. (1955). *Sahih Muslim*, Edited by Muhammad Fouad Abdul-Baqi, Publisher: Issa Al-Babi Al-Halabi & Co., Cairo.