

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# Majlis Ansarullah UK

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Taleem Paper Syllabus

*Qiadat Ta'leem*



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## **FIFTH QUESTION**

### **Sources of Divine Knowledge**

The comprehensiveness with which the Holy Quran has dealt with this subject cannot be set forth at this stage for want of time. We shall, therefore, confine ourselves to a concise statement by way of illustration.

The Holy Quran has drawn attention to three types of knowledge: knowledge by way of certainty of inference, knowledge by way of certainty of sight, and knowledge by way of certainty of experience. As we have already explained in the commentary of the Surah Takāthur, knowledge by certainty of inference is that a thing should be known not directly but through something through which it can be inferred, as by observing smoke we infer the existence of fire. We do not see the fire, but see the smoke and because of it we believe in the existence of the fire. This is certainty by inference. Then if we see the fire, this, according to the Surah Takāthur in the Holy Quran, would be certainty by sight. If we were to enter into the fire, our knowledge would have the quality that the Holy Quran names certainty by experience. There is no need to write

out the Surah Takāthur again. We have set out all this already and we refer our listeners and readers to that exposition.

It should be known that the source of the first type of knowledge, that is to say knowledge by the certainty of inference, is reason and information. God Almighty sets out in the Holy Quran that the dwellers of hell will affirm:

224 وَقَالُوا لَوْ كُنَّا نَسْمَعُ أَوْ نَعْقِلُ مَا كُنَّا فِي أَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ

That is, those who go to hell will say if they had exercised their reason and had approached the consideration of religion and doctrine sensibly, or had listened to and read with attention the speeches and writings of the wise and the scholars, they would not have been condemned to hell. This is in accord with another verse where Allah, the Exalted, says:

225 لَا يَكْفِيكَ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا

That is, to say, God Almighty does not require human beings to accept anything that is beyond their intellectual capacity, and only sets forth such doctrines as are comprehensible by men, so that His directives

224. And they will say, 'If we had but listened or possessed sense, we should not have been among the inmates of the blazing Fire.' (The Holy Quran, al-Mulk 67:11)

225. Allāh burdens not any soul beyond its capacity. (The Holy Quran, al-Baqarah 2:287)

should not impose upon man that which he is not able to bear. These verses also indicate that one can obtain the certainty of knowledge by inference through one's ears also. For instance, we have not visited London and have only heard of it from those who have visited it, but then can we imagine that all of them might have told a lie? Or, we did not live in the time of Emperor Alamgir, nor did we see him, but can we have any doubt that Alamgir was one of the Moghul emperors? How did we arrive at that certainty? The answer is, through the continuity of hearing about him. Thus, there is no doubt that hearing also carries one's knowledge to the stage of certainty by inference. The books of the Prophets are also a source of knowledge through hearing, provided there should be no contradiction in the account that is heard. But if a book claims to be revealed and there are fifty or sixty versions of it, some of which contradict others, then even if a party might have held that only two, or three, or four of them were accurate and that the rest were spurious or fabricated, this would be no kind of proof which could be made the basis of any sure knowledge. All those books would be rejected as unreliable on account of their contradiction and could not be held to be a source of knowledge; for knowledge is only that which bestows a sure understanding, and a collection of contradictions can bestow no certain

understanding.

The Holy Quran is not confined merely to knowledge gained through continuity of hearing, it contains well reasoned arguments which carry conviction. Not one of the doctrines and principles and commandments that it sets forth is sought to be imposed merely by authority; as it has explained, they are all inscribed in man's nature. It is called a Reminder as is said:

وَهَذَا ذِكْرٌ مُّبْرَكٌ <sup>226</sup>

Meaning that the Blessed Quran does not set forth anything that is new but is a reminder of that which already exists in man's nature and in the book of nature. At another place it is said:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ <sup>227</sup>

Meaning that Islam does not try to inculcate anything by compulsion, but sets forth reasons in support of everything. The Quran possesses a spiritual quality that enlightens the hearts, as it says:

شِفَاءٌ لِّمَا فِي الصُّدُورِ <sup>228</sup>

Meaning it is a healing for that which afflicts the

226. And this is a blessed Reminder (The Holy Quran, al-Anbiyā' 21:51)

227. There should be no compulsion in religion. (The Holy Quran, al-Baqarah 2:257)

228. A cure for whatever *disease* there is in the hearts, (The Holy Quran, Yūnus 10:58)

minds. Thus it is not merely a book that has been transmitted through generations, but comprises reasoned arguments of a high degree and is charged with shining light.

Thus, intellectual arguments which have a sound basis undoubtedly lead a person to the certainty of knowledge by inference. This is indicated in the following verses:

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لآيَاتٍ  
 لِلَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَمًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُؤْبِهِمْ  
 وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا  
 سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ ۝ 229

That is, when wise and sensible persons reflect on the structure of the earth and the heavenly bodies and ponder over the alternation of the day and the night, they discover therein reasons in support of the existence of God. Thereupon they seek divine help for greater enlightenment and they remember God standing, and sitting, and lying on their sides, whereby their intellects are sharpened and their

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229. In the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alternation of the night and the day there are indeed Signs for men of understanding; Those who remember Allāh while standing, sitting, and *lying* on their sides, and ponder over the creation of the heavens and the earth: "Our Lord, you have not created this in vain; *nay*, Holy are You; save us, then, from the punishment of the Fire. (The Holy Quran, Āl-e-'Imrān 3:191-192)

pondering over the structure of the earth and heavenly bodies impels them to affirm that this firm and orderly system could not have been created in vain but is a manifestation of divine attributes. Thus, confessing the Godhead of the Creator of the universe, they supplicate: Lord Thou art Holy above being denied and being attributed imperfect qualities. Safeguard us, therefore, against the fire of hell; meaning that a denial of God is very hell itself and that all comfort and delight proceed from Him and from His recognition. He who is deprived of the recognition of God abides in hell in this very life.

## The Nature of Human Conscience

Human conscience is also a source of knowledge which has been named human nature in the Book of God, as Allah, the Exalted, has said:

فَطَرَتِ اللّٰهُ اٰتِيَّ فَاَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا <sup>230</sup>

That is, follow the nature designed by Allah, the nature according to which He has fashioned mankind. What is the impress of that nature? It is to believe in God as One, without associate, Creator of all, above birth and death. We have described conscience as a source of knowledge by certainty of inference though,

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230. *And follow* the nature made by Allāh—the nature in which He has created mankind. (The Holy Quran, ar-Rūm 30:31)

apparently, in this case the mind does not travel from one type of knowledge to another as it does on the observation of smoke to the inference of fire, and yet here also there is a very fine type of transference, which is that God has invested everything with a particular quality which cannot be described in words, but towards which one's mind is directed immediately upon observing that thing or contemplating it. That quality is inherent in everything as smoke is inherent in fire. For instance, when we contemplate the Being of God Almighty and consider what it should be, whether God should be born like us and should suffer and die like us, instantly thereat our heart is tormented and our conscience trembles and indignantly rejects any such idea and cries out that the God, upon Whose powers all our hopes are centred, must be free from all defects and must be Holy and Perfect and Powerful. The moment we think of God, we perceive a perfect relationship between God and Unity, even exceeding that which subsists between fire and smoke. Therefore, the knowledge that we gain through conscience is knowledge at the stage of certainty through inference. But there is another stage about it which is called knowledge through certainty of sight. That is a degree of knowledge when there is no intermediary between us and that of which we have gained knowledge. For



instance, when we perceive a good or bad smell through our sense of smell, or perceive the sweetness or saltness of something through our sense of taste, or perceive the warmth or coldness of anything through our sense of feeling, all such knowledge is, as it were, certainty through sight.

With regard to the Hereafter our knowledge arrives at the degree of certainty by sight when we receive direct revelation and hear the voice of God through our ears, and behold the true and clear visions of God with our eyes. Without a doubt we are in need of direct revelation for the purpose of achieving such perfect understanding for which our hearts hunger and thirst in our beings. If God Almighty has not provided the means of such comprehension for us in advance then why has He created this hunger and thirst in our hearts? Can we be content that in this life, which is our only measure for the Hereafter, we should believe in the true and perfect and mighty and living God only on the basis of tales and stories, or should depend upon understanding or reason alone, which understanding is still defective and incomplete? Do not the hearts of true lovers of God desire that they should enjoy the delight of converse with the Beloved? And should those who have given up everything in the world for the sake of God and have devoted their hearts and lives to Him, be

content with repining in a dim light without beholding the countenance of that Sun of Truth? Is it not true that an affirmation by the Living God: I am present; bestows such a degree of understanding compared with which the self conceived books of all the philosophers amount to nothing at all? What can those so-called philosophers who are themselves blind teach us? In short, if God Almighty designs to bestow perfect understanding upon His seekers then He has certainly kept open the way of converse with them. In this context God, the Glorious, has taught us the supplication in the Holy Quran:

231 اِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ۝ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ

That is, O God guide us to the path of steadfastness which is the path of those on whom you have bestowed your favours. Here by divine favours is meant heavenly knowledge by way of revelation and visions that are bestowed directly upon man. At another place it is said:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنْتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ ۝ 232

That is, upon those who, having believed in God, continue steadfast, descend God's angels reassuring

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231. Guide us in the right path—The path of those on whom You have bestowed *Your* blessings, (The Holy Quran, al-Fāṭiḥah 1:6-7)

232. *As for* those who say, 'Our Lord is Allah,' and then remain steadfast, the angels descend on them, *saying*: 'Fear you not, nor grieve; and rejoice in the Garden that you were promised. (The Holy Quran, Ḥā Mim as-Sajdah 41:31)

them: Fear not, nor grieve, and rejoice in the paradise that you have been promised. Here it is clearly stated that the righteous servants of God receive revelation from God at times of fear and grief and angels descend upon them to reassure them. At another place it is said:

لَهُمُ الْبُشْرَىٰ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ<sup>233</sup>

That is, the friends of God receive glad tidings in this life through revelation and converse with God and will also have the same experience in the Hereafter.

## Meaning of Revelation

It should be kept well in mind that revelation does not mean that an idea should arise in the mind of a person who sets himself to ponder over a thing as, for instance, a poet having thought out half a verse seeks the other half in his mind and his mind suggests the other half. This is not revelation but is the result of reflection, in accordance with the law of nature. When a person reflects upon something good or bad, a corresponding idea arises in his mind. For instance, one person who is pious and truthful composes verses in support of truth, and another one, who is wicked and

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233. For them are glad tidings in the present life and *also* in the Hereafter—  
(The Holy Quran, Yūnus 10:65)

vicious, supports falsehood in his verses and abuses the righteous. Both these would, no doubt, write a certain number of verses, and it is quite possible that the verses of the one who is the enemy of the righteous and supports falsehood might be better than the verses of the other one, on account of his greater practice in writing poetry. So, if the arising of an idea in the mind should be accounted as revelation, a vile poet who is the enemy of truth and of the righteous and writes in opposition to the truth and has recourse to imposture, would be called a recipient of divine revelation. Many novels are written in excellent style and set forth altogether false but continuous well arranged tales. Then would these stories be designated as revelation? If revelation were to mean merely an idea arising in one's mind, a thief would also be called a recipient of revelation, for an expert thief often thinks out surprising ways of theft and robbery, and many clever plans of robbery and murder pass through his mind. Would all these unclean projects be called revelation? Indeed not. Such is the thinking only of those who are not aware of the true God Who comforts the hearts of His servants with His converse and bestows the understanding of spiritual knowledge upon those who are not familiar with it.

What then is revelation? It is the living and powerful

converse of the Holy and Mighty God with a chosen servant of His, or with one whom He designs to make His elect. When this converse starts in an adequate and satisfactory manner, being altogether free from the darkness of false concepts, and is not composed merely of a few inadequate and meaningless words, and is full of delight and wisdom and grandeur, then it surely is the word of God with which He designs to comfort His servant and to manifest Himself to him. Sometimes revelation is vouchsafed to a person by way of trial and is not equipped with full blessings. In such a case the recipient is put on his trial at this elementary stage so that having tasted somewhat of revelation he should order his life along the lines of those who are true recipients of revelation, in default of which he would encounter frustration. If he does not adopt the ways of the truly righteous he is deprived of the fullness of this bounty and is left only with vain boasting.

Millions of the virtuous have been recipients of revelation, but they were not of equal standing in the estimation of God. Indeed, even the holy Prophets of God, who are recipients of divine revelation at the highest level, are not equal in rank, as God Almighty has said:

تِلْكَ الرِّسَالُ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ<sup>234</sup>

That is, of these Messengers some have We exalted above others. This shows that revelation is pure divine grace and is not evidence of exaltation. Exaltation is according to the degree of truth, sincerity, and faithfulness of the recipient, which is known only to God. If revelation possesses all its blessed conditions it is also one of the fruits of such qualities. There is no doubt that if revelation takes the form that the recipient submits a question and God responds to it, and there is a sequence between question and answer, and the revelation is characterized by divine majesty and light, and comprehends knowledge of the unseen and true understanding, it is truly the word of God. It is necessary that divine revelation should be like a dialogue between two friends. Likewise, when God communes with His servant, and when the servant enquires concerning any matter, and in response to that he hears an address, which is sweet and full of linguistic excellence, in matters, in which his mind had not interpolated in the least, that dialogue and revelation can certainly be understood as Word of God. Such servant of Allah, is indeed, great in the sight of Allah; but this exceptional high status of being recipient of the Word of God, as a special favour from Him, which has the

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234. These Messengers have We exalted, some of them above others: (The Holy Quran, al-Baqarah 2:254)

quality of absolute clarity and purity, which is not bestowed upon anyone but those, who continuously progress in faith, dedication and righteous deeds. Also there is something extra to it which is beyond us to describe. True and holy revelation displays many wonders of the Godhead. Very often a brilliant light is generated and along with it a majestic and shining revelation is vouchsafed. What could be a greater bounty than this that a recipient of revelation should hold converse with the Being Who is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. God can be seen in this world only through converse with Him.

This does not include the condition of a person from whose tongue an idle word, or sentence or verse proceeds unaccompanied by any dialogue. Such a person is under trial by God, for God sometimes tries a slothful and neglectful servant of His in this manner that a sentence or a statement issues from his heart or tongue and he becomes a blind person not knowing whence the statement has proceeded, whether from God or from Satan. Such a one should implore *istighfār* in respect of such an experience. But if a righteous and virtuous servant of God should experience unobstructed dialogue with the Divine and should hear bright, and delicious, and meaningful, and wise, and majestic Divine utterances in a state of complete

wakefulness in the shape of question and answer at least ten times, that is to say he put a question and God replied to it and then in complete wakefulness he made another submission and God made answer to it, and he made another humble supplication and God replied to that. This should have happened ten times. If in the course of such dialogue God should accept his prayers and should instruct him in excellent insights and should inform him of coming events and should honour him repeatedly with His clear dialogue, such a one should be deeply grateful to God Almighty and should be more devoted to Him than anyone else, because God, of His pure grace, has chosen him from among His servants and has made him the heir of those faithful ones who have passed on before him. This bounty is most rare and is the height of good fortune. For him on whom it is bestowed everything else is utterly without value.

### **A Characteristic of Islam**

Islam has always produced persons of this rank. It is Islam alone in which God approaches a servant and holds converse with him and speaks inside him. He builds His throne in the heart of such a one and pulls him from inside towards heaven. He bestows upon him all the bounties that were bestowed on those before him. It is a pity that the blind world does not realise