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THE INTELLECTUAL, ETHICAL, AND, SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS
OF THE ISLAMIC THOUGHT

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Departmental Honors Thesis

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THE ISLAMIC THOUGHT

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INSPIRATION

“A fundamental aim of Islamic education is to provide children with positive guidance which will help them to grow into good adults who will lead happy and fruitful lives in this world and aspire to achieve the reward of the faithful in the world to come.

To know what precisely is meant by 'good adults' requires an understanding of the Islamic concept of the human being.”

J. Mark Halstead

ABSTRACT

The intellectual inquiry and acquisition of knowledge have always been integral to Islam, right from the first revelation recorded by the *Qur'an*. This paper aims to examine how the origin, role, and purpose of intellect have been understood in Islamic thought from its inception and through its subsequent evolution. It further aims to discuss the role and purpose that intellect and ethics ought to serve in the faith and lives of contemporary Muslims. Muslim philosophers based their ideas on teachings of the *Qur'an* and teachings of Prophet Muhammad. They utilized their intellect to share this significant knowledge with their contemporary intellectuals to further human reasoning and inquiry at large. In Islamic thought, Intellect and ethics go hand in hand. A crucial objective here is to determine the essential meaning of Jihad, so as to establish a sound intellectual basis for ethical behavior. Understanding the role that intellect can and should play in a Muslim's life holds the key to resolving crucial problems that contemporary Muslims face, such as the rise of various forms of fundamentalism and misconceptions of Jihad. I hope to show that Islamic ethics and spirituality grounded in conscientious intellectual inquiry can be instrumental in counteracting and overcoming ignorance and unwarranted violence.

KEYWORDS: knowledge, ethics, Intellect, Islamic thought, revelation, ignorance, divine, righteousness, jihad

If you wish to dwell in the meadow of mercy and blessing,
Graze on knowledge and action today.
Moisten the seed of action with knowledge,
For the seed will not grow without moisture”
(*Diwan-e-Nasir Khusraw*)¹

INTRODUCTION

The present paper first examines certain themes in the *Noble Qur'an*. The research aims to demonstrate that the *Qur'an*, the most sacred scripture of the Muslims, enjoins believers to use their intellect and hone the capacities for ethical judgement and action towards humanity. The paper will highlight the role of *al-aql* or intellect in Islam and its ethical dimension. Additionally, it will examine the role that intellect plays within the mystical dimension of Islam; here, it will showcase the instrumental role of intuition, *ma'arifa*, gained through divine knowledge. I hope to present my findings through detailed accounts of the Qur'anic verses on the role and purpose of intellect (*Al-'Aql*), Prophetic teachings and sayings (*hadiths*) of Muhammad (peace be upon him) , as well as the esoteric (*Batini*) aspect of faith of Islam through the intellectual and spiritual teachings of Shia Imam and fourth Caliph of Islam, Ali Bin Abi Talib.²

The *Qur'an* invites its readers to employ wisdom (*hikma*) and reason when exhorting others towards God's way:

¹ Alice Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw-The Ruby of Badakhshan* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 85.

² Ali bin Abi Talib was cousin and son in law of the Prophet as well.

“Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way. Lo! thy Lord is best aware of him who strayeth from His way, and He is Best aware of those who go aright.” (*Qur’an* 16:125)

In the light of such *Qur’anic* teaching, I aspire to bring forth intellectual and thoughtful dialogue and research to highlight the ethical and spiritual dimension of Islam as a faith and way of life for the believer, both in outwardly(*zahir*) and inwardly (*batin*)forms of action. This includes the discussion on the accountability of mankind, the vicegerent of God, mentioned in the *Qur’an*. Furthermore, an attempt is made to highlight the Qur’anic worldview: Acquisition and understanding of divine knowledge, the intellectual pursuit to make wise, moral choices, and, the ethical actions to improve the socio-religious milieu around us.

The first sections of this research paper focuses upon the revelation of the *Qur’an*, as a source of intellectual and spiritual knowledge to guide the way of life of a believer in Islam. Etienne Gilson, a French philosopher and scholar in discussing Averroes as a thinker and philosopher of Islam, praises the *Qur’an* in his book as ‘a truly miraculous book.’ He states:

Averroes did not consider religion as merely a rough approximation to philosophical truth. It was for him much more. It had a definite social function that could not be fulfilled by anything else, not even philosophy.

Such is the exact meaning of the texts where he praises the Koran as a truly “miraculous” book. I see no reason not to take that word seriously. The more convinced Averroes was of the absolute superiority of philosophical knowledge, the more baffling must have been to him the existence of such a book, a book both wholly unphilosophical and more effective than philosophy itself in raising barbarians to the level of morality.³

Gilson highlights the impactful role of the *Qur'an* as a book of morals and social behaviors in the context of 7th century Arabia. In his view, its positive moral impact surpassed the appeal and impact philosophy could have upon the uncivilized and greedy tradesmen and tribal community of Pre-Islamic Arabia. As much as I appreciate Gilson's praise and respect for this Godly revelation, I am also uncertain about his praise for the medieval scholar, Averroes, that he was mystified about this text being both, “wholly unphilosophical,” and, ‘more effective than philosophy. In Islam, “virtues rests on choices that are made in the light of revelation and the capacity for discernment with which human beings are endowed.”⁴ If philosophy, or, *kalam* is concerned with epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics, it requires the intellectual and moral knowledge in

³ Etienne Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Age* (New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1938), 50-51.

⁴ Aryn B. Sajoo, *A Companion to Muslim Ethics* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 3.

understanding the nature of things in life. In this sense, it is unconceivable to accept the *Qur'an* as unphilosophical, because the revelation in this book is a reflective and thoughtful dialogue to bring such discussions. In the *Qur'an* “an intuitive sense of what is right and good, with broad guiding principles and examples”⁵ is present through the idea of the God, Allah, as a Just (*A'adil*) and Kind(*Rahman*) Creator (*Khaliq*), and His mercy encompasses all.

The *Qur'an* does not only contain the themes of a just and civilized community, but also, it is filled with a plethora of messages on knowledge of creation and intellectual inquiry. Thus, the subsequent sections focus on the concepts of intellect, ethics, and spirituality in Islam, in the light of the *Qur'anic* teachings and various scholarly commentaries. Included in the early revelations of the *Qur'an* are significant allegorical and symbolic messages. For example, a profound indication and encouragement is present towards the pursuit of the intellectual understanding:

“Indeed, in the creations of heavens and the earth, and the alteration of the night and day are signs for those of understanding.” (*Qur'an* 3: 190)

In the above verse, the word *Ayah* (in Arabic), which means ‘sign’ is used to relate to the process of intellection in understanding the secrets and the metaphysical aspect of this universe. The audience is referred to ‘those of understanding:’- They are enjoined to use their intellect and apply their moral reasoning to understand the symbols

⁵ Ibid., 4.

that induce intellectual activity; symbols that must be engaged through the intellection. One of the ninety-nine names of Allah, mentioned in the *Qur'an*, is *Al-Hakim*, which means “The Wise and All-knowing”-The pinnacle of wisdom (*Hikma*), and the One, who bestowed (*Al-Wahab*-another name of Allah) men with the light of knowledge. Another name of God and attribute mentioned in the *Qur'an* is *An-Nur*: The Light. verse in the *Qur'an* mentions:

“Light upon Light.” (*Qur'an* 24:35)

This light of intellectual and spiritual knowledge is present in each living creature, including the human being, whom God made His vicegerent. In fact, the revelation itself is given the similitude of this light-The light of guidance:

“We have made the Qur'an as a light, with which We guide.” (*Qur'an*: 42:52)

M. R. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen has eloquently stated:

“Real Islam is a deep and unquestioning trust[*iman*] in God and the realization of the truth (*haqiqah*).”⁶

As he explains, revelation is an original source of knowledge and believers are the holders of mind and reason. What constitutes a religious life is a “threefold aspect”: It starts with the very first layer of “*islam*,” which means to surrender or trust in the one God. Second comes the belief – “*iman*”, from the heart (*qalb*). The last and most

⁶ M. R. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, *Islam and World Peace: Explanations of a Sufi* (The Fellowship Press, 2004). In the ‘Foreword’ of this book, Annemarie Schimmel of the Harvard University wrote.

prominent outlook is towards goodness in action – “*ihsan*” towards the creation.⁷ Azim Nanji, comments that In Islam, “individuals become trustee through whom a moral and spiritual vision [of God] is fulfilled in personal life.” He further notes that Islam governs and “the *Qur’an* affirms the dual dimension of human and social life.” The individual is accountable for his spiritual and religious obligations towards the creator and responsible for his moral actions towards the creation. Thus, in this regard, “Islam embodies a total way of life.”⁸

Revelation - Knowledge and Man as the Guardian

“The *Qur’an* is the tissue out of which the life of a Muslim is woven; its sentences are like threads from which the substance of his soul is knit.”

Ideals and Realities of Islam-Sayyed Hussain Nasr

The *Qur’an* is filled with “inspiration and guidance to all mankind.” (*Qur’an* 10:57). It contains the historical and religious accounts of many prophets and, “it proclaims itself the revelation of the God of Abraham, God, of Moses, and God of

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Azim Nanji, “Islamic Ethics,” *Global Religious Vision* 4, no.1(2003): 82.
<http://iis.ac.uk/islamic-ethics>

Jesus.”⁹ The *Qur’an* consists of chapters (*surahs*) and verses (*ayahs*). The Arabic word, “*ayah*,” literally means “sign or portent.”¹⁰ The word *ayah* is mentioned as an evidence or proof of the truth which God has sent down (*Surah al-Jathiyah*).

The first *Qur’anic revelation* to the Prophet of Islam in 610 C.E. introduced the idea of knowledge with its very first word, namely, “read” (*Iqra*). If anyone hears this poetic “recitation”, he or she “cannot help notice- and – admire.”¹¹ It goes to indicate that Allah has taught the human beings with the Divine inscription:

Read: In the name of thy Lord Who createth,
Createth man from a clot.
Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous,
Who teacheth by the pen.”

(*Qur’an* 96:1-4)

It is important to note that in the above Qur’anic passage, the theme of the creation of man is placed alongside the theme of how Allah confers knowledge.

Additionally, this first revelation to the Prophet Muhammad mentioned formerly did not

⁹ Omid Safi, *Memories of Muhammad* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2010), 63.

¹⁰ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (Harper Collins Publishers, 2015), 1597.

Nasr is an Iranian and an Islamic philosopher, who is currently teaching Islamic Studies at George Washington University.

¹¹ Omid Safi, *Memories of Muhammad* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2010), 63.

address only the Islamic community, but also, the entirety of humankind. What it brings forth is the important relationship of human beings with knowledge.

To understand the creation of mankind and divine knowledge, it is important to reflect and apply intellectual inquiry to the verses of the *Qur'an* itself. Filled with divine guidance, these *ayahs* are equated with the idea of truth or *al-haqq*, which removes falsehood from the earth (17:81). According to Nasr, in *The Study Qur'an*, this phenomenon of *ayah* is referred in the *Qur'an* in the context of creation and the Creator¹². Allah says in the *Qur'an* that mankind has been created in the exalted state:

“We have certainly created man in the best of stature.” (*Qur'an* 95:4)

There is another verse in which Allah says:

“We have made them to excel by an appropriate excellence over most of those whom We have created.” (*Qur'an* 17: 70)

Human beings are created as *Ashraf Al-Makhlooqaat*, the superior to all the creation, due to their capability to reason and understand. The superiority confers humans not with authority, but, rather, a great sense of responsibility. Human beings are custodians of the trust (*Amana*) of Allah. This responsibility consists of fulfilling ethical, religious, and social responsibilities towards Allah's creation, while exercising the intellect in the light of knowledge (*'ilm*) of revelation. In another place in the *Qur'an*

13. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (Harper Collins Publishers, 2015), 1597.

where cosmos and creation are mentioned, human beings are given higher honor as well as responsibility to bear the trust, or, *Amana*:

“Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant.” (*Qur’an* 33:72)

What we have here is the guardianship of a trust which calls for responsibility towards the cosmos and every creation within. Although sadly, as the verse laments, humans in their injustice and ignorance, have not borne their responsibility well. Allah mentioned in the *Qur’an*, in the Chapter 2, *The Cow*, that he created mankind as His deputy, and His representative (*khalifa*) in the world, as it mentions here:

“And when thy Lord said unto the angels: Lo! I am about to place a viceroy in the earth.”

Due to the heightened stature of man as *Ashraf al Makhlooqat*, the best of creation, and being the *Khalifah*, the representative of God, human beings are called upon to use their intellect. Numerous *ayahs* mention intellect or *al-‘aql*, alongside with the notion of sign or evidence. For example, God states:

‘Thus Allah makes clear his signs so that you may use your intellect.’ (*Qur’an* 2:142)

In the same chapter, *surah-al-baqarah*, verse 30, the representation of vicegerent

on earth is mentioned in the context of authority:

“And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority." They said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?" Allah said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know.”

With authority comes the responsibility to exercise one’s intellect in order to understand the signs of God in the context of creation. Another beautiful revelation describes the process and characteristics of this superior state:

“By the soul and (by) Him who made it perfect, and then inspired it to understand what is wrong and what is right for it, truly is successful the one who purifies (his soul).”

What Allah mentions in numerous verses mentioned above, is this idea that He is appointing His *Khalifah* or representative on the earth who is endowed with intellect, to 1) understand Allah’s signs present in the creation, and, 2) apply the wisdom (*hikma*), (gained from this knowledge), in the highest regard and best conduct to lighten the path for humanity.

AL ‘AQL-INTELLECT IN ISLAM

Kindle the candle of intellect in your heart
And hasten with it to the world of brightness;
If you want to light a candle in your heart,
Make knowledge and goodness its wick and oil.

Diwan-e-Nasir Khusraw

Within the discourse of the Greek Orthodox mystical tradition, reason is defined as the “conceptualizing and logical faculty-Lower order than spiritual knowledge [and , it] does not imply any direct apprehension or perception of the inner senses.”¹³ Intellect, on the other hand, is “the highest faculty, provided it is purified-inner essence of created things [and] dwells on the depth of soul-innermost aspect of heart.”

William Chittick, also comments on the classical Islamic philosophical and mystical texts, and describes the usage of *al- ‘aql* as a verb. He notes that intellect may imply a restrictive state of reasoning, until unless it is active in the search of knowledge. However, he explains that human intellect, *‘aql*, ‘binds’ in the sense of restricting or limiting; there are limits to what human intellect can know, whereas God’s truth is unlimited:

The root meaning of 'aql is 'to tie', 'to bind'. Hence 'intellect' implies limitation and constriction. Knowledge acquired through it limits and defines the ineffable Truth, which ultimately, in its very Essence, remains

¹³ G.E.H Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, eds., *The Philokalia* (London: Faber & Faber, 1979), 362. This definition is found in the Glossary of the book.

Non delimited (*mutlaq*) and Unknown (*majhiil*). In this sense, the word 'aql can perhaps best be translated as 'reason', in order to indicate that it refers to a means of acquiring knowledge which is limited to the purely human plane and cannot go beyond .¹⁴

However, Chittick also refers to the saying of the Prophet that 'the first thing created by God was the Intellect'. He suggests that human intellect embodies the characteristics of the "Greatest Spirit' (*al-riih al-a'zam*) and the 'Supreme Pen' (*al-qalam al-a'l*)" of the divine. Thus, in this sense, 'it possesses a full and direct knowledge of God.'¹⁵

According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, perhaps, the distinction between reason and intellect is largely forgotten by the speakers of the western languages. He further notes that in Arabic, "a single term, *al- 'aql*, is used to denote both reason and intellect," but, the faculty of reasoning is considered to be dependent on the higher domain of the intellect. Nasr sheds further light on the Islamic idea of the act of intellection and states:

"*Al- 'aql* in Arabic is related to the root '*ql*' which means basically to bind. It is that faculty which binds man to God, to his Origin. By virtue of being endowed

¹⁴ Chittick, William C. "Mysticism versus Philosophy in earlier Islamic History: The Al-Tūsi, Al-Qūnawi correspondence." *Religious Studies* 17, no. 01 (1981): 89-9.

¹⁵ Ibid.

with al-‘aql, man becomes man and shares in the attribute of knowledge, *al-‘ilm*, which ultimately belongs to God alone.”¹⁶

Nasr further asserts that there is a tendency in the western languages to equate ‘*aql*, intellect, with reason. Once human reasoning is tied in the relationship with divine knowledge, it enhances its state of intelligence, reflecting on the exoteric (*zahir*) and esoteric (*batin*) forms of knowledge. This contingency of human reasoning upon the ‘*aql*, or, intellect aids man to reach the full potential and the best of the creation (*ashraf-al-makhlooqaat*).

This differentiation between reason and intellect shows the intellectual ascension from human intelligence to the Divine knowledge. In essence, ‘*Aql*, or human intellect has the potential to understand the unlimited truth of God, provided this gift of reasoning is deepened and enhanced by the divine knowledge present in revelations and the signs present in the creation.

According to Nasr, every being is essentially endowed with intellect. In discussing the thought of Ibn Sina, he observes:

“Ibn Sīnā distinguishes between the Active Intellect (*al-‘aql al-fa‘‘āl*) which is

¹⁶ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. "Intellect and Intuition: Their Relationship from the Islamic Perspective." *Islam and Contemporary Society* (1982): 36-46.

universal and independent of the individual and the intellectual function within man. This is called material or potential intelligence (*bi'l-quwwah*).¹⁷

Nasr maintains that once human beings obtain the knowledge present in their surroundings, in nature and in the interactions with other forms of knowledge, it results in the cultivation and understanding of “the first intelligible forms [which are] placed in the soul,” from the Divine. The next stage of knowledge is the ‘habitual intelligence (*bi'l-malakah*)’. He states:

As the intelligible becomes fully actualized in the mind, man reaches the level of actual intellect (*bi'l-fi'l*) and finally as this process is completed, the acquired intelligence (*mustafād*). Finally above these stages and states stands the Active Intellect (al-‘aql al-fa‘āl) which is Divine and which illuminates the mind through the act of knowledge (5).¹⁸

Following the discussion of Chittick and Nasr, it is viable to highlight the relationship between intellect and intuition. Chittick maintained that according to ‘the Peripatetic philosophers, such as Avicenna, al-Kindi, and al-Farabi,’ man can understand

¹⁷ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. "Intellect and Intuition: Their Relationship from the Islamic Perspective." *Islam and Contemporary Society* (1982): 36-46.

¹⁸ Ibid.

the “realities of things” and attain “ultimate truth” without the mystical and scriptural knowledge and experience. However, their intellectual inquires support the premise that “the very act of acquiring knowledge entails a kind of illumination by the Active Intellect (*al-'aql al-fa"al*).”¹⁹

Seyyed Nasr notes that the *Qur'an* draws attention to ‘the central role of [intellect] *al-'aql*, and of intellection (*ta'aqul or tafaqquh*)’ in a believer’s mundane life and also, in the process of salvation of the soul- the escape from the material aspect of the world and the connection with the divine. He refers to the following verse of the *Qur'an*, where Allah says:

“We have made our revelations clear to those who understand.” (Qur'an 6:98)

Man is gifted with intellect to decipher the outward (*zahir*) and inward (*batin*) aspects of nature and God’s messages via revelation. In the *Quranic* view, creation itself serves as the signpost of reflective thinking. Nasr elucidates that intellect and intuition are closely related. Intuition to him is “participation” in understanding the knowledge (*ilm*) of God’s word and signs present in creation. To understand fully the relationship between human intellect and intuition, it is essential to highlight that revelation serves as the cradle of knowledge and illuminates the believer. A path, as Nasr states:

In the religious sciences the function of the intellect is seen only in light of its

¹⁹ Ibid.

ability to elucidate the verities of revelation. It is revelation which is the basic means for the attainment of the truth, and it is also revelation which illuminates the intellect and enables it to function properly. This wedding between revelation and the intellect makes it in fact possible for the mind to “participate” in the truth by means of that “act” or “leap” which is usually called intuition and which is inseparable from the faith which makes knowledge of the truth possible.²⁰

Thus, divine revelation and active use of intellect enables one towards the path of intuition. The *Qur'anic* text actively encourages the reader to ponder and reflect on the use of intellect, often by using phrases like ‘would you not reason?’ or ‘Do you not use your intellect?’ The purpose is to point towards the utilization of intellect for deciphering and acting upon the signs present in the scripture about physical sciences and ethics. Below is a verse, where ‘*aql* or intellect occurs in the verb form, such as: *ta'qilun*, *aqalu*, and *ya'qilun*, in which intellect is mentioned in the context of an action. In chapter 2, verse 242, Allah clearly mentions:

“Thus Allah makes clear his signs so that you may use your intellect (*la allakum ta'qilun*).”

²⁰ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. "Intellect and Intuition: Their Relationship from the Islamic Perspective." *Islam and Contemporary Society* (1982): 36-46.

In another verse, Allah declares that he reveals in the sacred language of Arabic, so as to better enable humans to use their intellect in understanding His guidance:

“Indeed, We sent it down as a *Qur'an* in Arabic, so that you may use your intellect” (HQ; 12:2).

The sacred knowledge of the *Qur'an* was the crux of the search of Muslim scientists and philosophers. Knowledge and intellect were cherished in societies, especially at its glorious periods, during the Fatimid Dynasty [909 C.E.] and the Moorish Spain and Andalusian period [711-1300 C. E.]. For example, Al Khwarizmi [780-850 C.E.], the scientist of algorithms, and Ibn Haytham (965-1039 C. E.), the founder of optics as a field of study, and above all, Ibn-Sina/Avicenna, the father of *Canon of Medicine (Qanun fi'l-tibb)*, all contributed to the glory and intellectual advancement of that era. Numerous educational institutions, libraries and hospitals from ‘Andalusia to Cairo and Baghdad’ were established during the Islamic Golden Age, 8th through 13th centuries. The Muslim scholar Fazlur Rahman mentions in *Major Themes of the Qur'an* that at the time of the conquest of Saladin (1137-1193), the founder of Ayyubid dynasty, he recovered 1.6 million books in the libraries of the old Fatimid dynasty (909-1171) in Cairo, which included over 18,000 manuscripts on the subjects of science²¹I draw

²¹ Aryn B. Sajoo, *Muslim Ethics: Emerging Vistas* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2004), 61. Aryn Sajoo is a lecturer on civil society, human rights, and Islam at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver.

attention to these historic Islamic figures and their scientific and intellectual contributions to highlight that Islamic values of acquiring knowledge and employing the knowledge to promote learning and developing intellectual capacity are essentially grounded in the moral landscape of the *Qur'an*. Historically, Islamic civilizations has promoted acquisition of knowledge and the inquiry into nature. This intellectual growth, benefitted not only Muslims, but also the Jews and Christians, who lived with and around them. These civilizations observed the principles of tolerance and pluralism.

Omid Safi, accentuates the similar point that intellectual inquiry and its application are essential and inseparable for a believer of Islam. It is a divine command and ethical responsibility to use knowledge to better one's self and, to improve the community and society at large. However, as Safi laments:

According to this reading of Islamic history, Islam had one genuine opportunity to assimilate the admirable qualities of Greek philosophical and scientific traditions (most crucially, its rationalism). [It] made a serious venture in this direction (hence the glorious period of Islamic philosophy and science of the ninth and tenth centuries was prompted by a massive translation movement from Greek into Arabic), but ultimately reverted to its original stock of ideas and practices unaffected by any cultural or civilizational influences (like Greek rationalism) that

did not bear the divine stamp of approval.²²

Dr. Aynn Sajoo, comments on the development of Muslim Ethics in the light of ‘the spiritual and the intellectual fraternity’ present in the 10th century Arabic fable or literature, *Rasa’il* (Epistles), and, discusses this guardianship of the divine trust. He explains:

“The Qur’an’s constant challenge to apply intellect and faith to reading, interpreting and acting upon its passages gave birth to an empowering ethos, in which Muslims were encouraged to see themselves not merely as pawns in a cosmic game, but as important players.”²³

Sajoo highlights the impact of these Muslim contribution on the subsequent scientific inquiries which embraced Islamic intellectual thought process, as he states:

The intuitive sense of right and wrong (*taqwa* in the Qur’an, which summons it time and again) required rationality as much if not more, than piety. That is manifest in the literally hundreds of books authored by Muslim philosophers such as al-Kindi(795-866), al-Farabi(870-950) Ibn-Sina/Avicenna(980-1037), Hamid al-Din Kirmani(d. ca.1020), and the prime neo-Aristotelian, Ibn-

²² Safi, Omid. *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism* (Oneworld Publications, 2003), 104.

²³ Aynn B. Sajoo, *Muslim Ethics: Emerging Vistas* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2004), 59.

Rushd/Averroes(1126-98), who gave birth and ascendancy to an intellectual culture that shaped law, ethics, the sciences and the arts.²⁴

Nasir Khusraw (c. 1004-77) served as a Fatimid representative and missionary of the Shia branch. His philosophical and poetic teachings describe that the holistic purpose of Islamic knowledge and intellectual values is to awaken the mind and soul to acquire *haqq* (truth), which is also referred to as God, both in Arabic and Persian.²⁵ Eric Ormsby comments on Islamic literature and comments that for Khusraw, ‘liberation lies in the knowledge.’ And, to become an enlightened believer through knowledge and the intellect means to be “better human beings.”
through good conduct.²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., 60.

²⁵ Eric Ormsby, Literature,” in *A Companion of Muslim Ethics*, ed. Aryn B. Sajoo (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2004) ,64-65.

Ihsan & Taqwa - Goodness and Righteousness of a Believer

“And, those who with their lives bore witness to the truth, and the righteous ones;
and what a beautiful friendship it is.”

(Qur'an, 4:69)

Hitherto it has been my constant endeavor to bring to light the association that exists between intellect (*al- 'aql*) and knowledge (*al- 'ilm*). The proceeding discussion will emphasize the stature of ethics in Islam, through the teachings from the Qur'an, to emphasize the importance of the ethical behavior and action, because ‘those who are endowed with insight are mindful.’²⁷

Codes of ethics have always played an instrumental role in shaping societies with moral obligations towards its inhabitants, while stressing the universal truths of justice, fairness, and goodness. A. Siddiqui observes:

“Philosophical ethics draws its resources from human reason and human experiences and does not take account of the role of faith. Religious ethics draws its resources from revelation: "the sense of God's presence..." or the sense of God's guidance becomes the guiding principle of ethics in Islam. Nonetheless, both philosophical [and] Islamic ethics face the same set of questions: what acts

²⁷ The *Qur'an*; *Surah al-Ra'ad*, 13: 19)

are right and what acts are wrong? What values should be pursued? How should society go about making ethical decisions posed by new challenges? The comparable word for ethics in Islam is *Akhlaq*, and this is construed as morality.”²⁸

A good example of the ethical worldview of the *Qur’an* can be seen in the chapter 17, verse 31 through 39, where ‘eight moral injunctions’²⁹ are given to the followers. These forbid killing, adultery, and, cruelty to the orphans and the poor are sin and evil to God. On the other hand, commitment to piety, humility and, fulfillment of command of God are the signs of ethical understanding.

Majid Fakhry, in his book, *Ethical Theories in Islam*, discusses Ibn Rushd’s (Averroes) philosophical thinking concerning Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic tendencies. Fakhry’s explanation below, is an explanation of what it means to be a “Just man.” He suggests:

“ Platonic account of justice, as an inward virtue of the soul or state, is modified

²⁸ Siddiqui, A. (1997). Ethics in Islam: Key concepts and contemporary challenges. *Journal of Moral Education*, 26(4), 423-431. Retrieved from <https://proxy.lib.utc.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.utc.edu/docview/232578400?accountid=14767>

²⁹ Kabir Helminski, *The Book of Revelations* (CA: The Book Foundations, 2005), 181.

in the commentary [of Ibn Rushd]³⁰ on Nicomachean Ethics V, 1129b 25f. to correspond to the Aristotelian notion of universal, ‘common justice’ as a ‘perfect virtue’, not confined to oneself, but extending to our dealings with our neighbor, since it is the mark of the perfectly just man to exercise his virtue in himself as well as in (his dealings with) others.”³¹

The manifestation of virtues, such as, truth and justice through ethical actions towards others is a teaching which is similar in all monotheistic faiths of the world. From the advent of Moses’ stand for the truth, against the tyranny of the Pharo, to the Golden rule of Jesus, and, to the life and teachings of kindness of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, we find a common theme of a just community- one which depicts modes of ethical behaviors and co-operation towards everyone.

Toshihiko Izutsu, suggests that Islamic moral principles taught by the Noble Qur’an can be understood as three layers of meanings:

“The first one is concerned with the “Divine Ethics,’ of the creator towards His creation, which contains the ‘Names of God’, such as ‘Merciful, Benevolent, Forgiving’, and ‘Just.’ The second category contains the kind of ethics which defines man’s relationship with the Divine: Man acting in an ethical way towards God’s ‘commands and

³⁰ Majid Fakhry, *In The Ethical Theories of Islam*, (Leiden: Netherlands: 1991),88-92.

³¹ Ibid.,

prohibitions.’ Moreover, the third group describes the man to man relationship. This means, applying ethical teachings of the Qur’an in the daily interactions with the members of the community, so that ‘the social life of the individual is ruled and regulated by a certain set of moral principles.’³²

Islam, the community of more than 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, commands its followers to believe with conviction and goodness of the heart. A follower in Islam is a *muslim*, and a believer is called a *mu’min*. A Muslim is the one who submits to the will of the One God, His prophets, the scriptures, and the last day of judgment. The *Mu’min* is the one, who not only believes in the teachings of Islam from the heart, but also completes his submission through wise and ethical actions in the light of those teachings. The Qur’an, the Divine inspired scripture of the Muslims, says:

“When the hypocrites come to you, [O Muhammad], they say, "We testify that you are the Messenger of Allah. And Allah knows that you are His Messenger, and Allah testifies that the hypocrites are liars. They have taken their oaths as a cover, so they averted [people] from the way of Allah. Indeed, it was evil that they were doing. That is because they believed, and then they disbelieved; so their hearts were sealed over, and they do not understand. (*Surah-al-Munafiqun* 63:1-3)

³² Toshihiko Isutzu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur’an* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1914), 235.

It is noteworthy to ponder on the terms, “evil they are doing,” their hearts were sealed, and “they do not understand”: These *ayahs* refer to the state of submission by non-believers, who initially accepted Islam with their tongue, but did not embrace it from the heart. In other words, their intentions were not honest, rather pretending to be faithful. One of the indications presented here is that they have not opened their hearts and minds to the reality of Islam: Submission coupled with utter belief.

Responsibility is placed on the believers, the *mu'mins*, to act in a just way and to beware of their actions. In the *Qur'an*, acting virtuously is referred as *Taqwa* – Righteousness. Allah says:

“We have certainly created man in the best of stature;

Then We return him to the lowest of the low,

Except for those who believe and do righteous deeds, for they will have a reward uninterrupted” (*Qur'an* 95:4-6).

The idea of belief and righteous deeds is mentioned in the *Qur'an* at least 200 times³³, emphasizing the importance of what is a ‘good deed’ in the sight of the Divine. The following verse explains that the reading and understanding of the revelation is about the improvement of one’s own character before one preaches it to the social community:

³³ Ayn B. Sajoo, “Introduction: Roots & Branches” in *A Companion of Muslim Ethics*, ed. Ayn B. Sajoo (I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2004), 2.

“Do you order righteousness of the people and forget yourselves while you recite the Scripture? Then will you not reason?” (*Surah-al-Baqarah* 2:44)

While explaining here the purpose of the word *taqwa* on the basis of its meaning- protection from evil doing, Siddiqui also suggests that the role of *taqwa* is to guide the believer to act wisely in order to achieve a state of God-righteousness. He states:

“This word is derived from the Arabic root word w-q-y, meaning "to protect", "to preserve". In another grammatical formation *Taqwa* means, "to protect oneself from possible danger or attack". This means "to be careful". The *Qur'an* uses this word in the moral sense where it encourages human beings to be vigilant against moral peril. The *Qur'an* encourages a person to avoid things which are prohibited or are of a dubious nature. It is a very comprehensive term. The function of *taqwa* is to provide a person with the right tools to discern between right and wrong.”³⁴

In cosmopolitan ethics, all human beings belong to a single community and thus, one should care for the others as a good Samaritan. The same message has been revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, to share with mankind that, in the sight of Allah, the most valuable human being is who acts with a right attitude:

“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and

³⁴ Siddiqui, “Ethics in Islam: Key concepts and contemporary challenges” *Journal of Moral Education*, 26(4), 423-431.

made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). **Verily the most honored 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)

When the Qur’an was revealed, it addressed the social needs of the given society in Arabia and its surrounding regions. Its teachings functioned as a compass of ethical behavior and “traits of character or *akhlaq*” to encourage righteous behavior. Sajoo comments on the essence of the Islamic value system:

“It is incumbent upon the believers to deal with each other in the spirit of the Islamic ethos, which is referred as ‘*akhlaq*,’ values of compassion, charity, wisdom and solidarity,”³⁵ to maintain the highest stature in front of God as His vicegerent.

According to the *Qur’an*, in the sight of God, the believer, following the path of righteousness, is clearly superior to an evil doer:

“And not equal are the blind and the seeing, nor are those who believe and do righteous deeds and the evildoer. Little do you remember. (*Qur’an* 40:58)

³⁵ Aryn B. Sajoo, *Muslim Ethics: Emerging Vistas* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2004), 1

Islam's commitment to teaching its followers to live life in a righteous manner can be once again evidenced by the *Quran*'s insistence on ridding "usurious practices in the mercantile community of Mecca and Medina," which did not align with Islam's beliefs and values of working hard and treating others fairly.³⁶ Unfair and unjust behaviors and practices were deemed unacceptable, whereas, ethics, *akhlaq* is given high importance. The righteous are rewarded not only because they believe and submit to the will of Allah, but also, because they make wise moral judgements and perform good actions.³⁷ At numerous occasions in the *Qur'an*, Allah gives righteous believers the good news that they will dwell in spiritually peaceful and heavenly realms:

"And give good tidings to those who believe and do righteous deeds that they will have gardens [in Paradise] beneath which rivers flow...." (Qur'an, 2: 25)

In other verses of the *Qur'an*, where the term word 'reward' is mentioned to emphasize the importance of righteousness for Allah. Also, we find that righteousness is coupled with knowledge and wise action:

"And when he [Musa/Moses] attained his full strength and was [mentally] mature, We bestowed upon him judgement and knowledge. And thus do We reward

³⁶ Amin Sajoo, "Pluralism, Intolerance, the Quran," *The American Scholar* 71, no. 1 (2002): 52-60.

³⁷ Toshihiko Isutzu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1914)

the doers of good.” (Quran 28:14)

Not only the reward from Allah is mentioned for those who act morally and ethically, but, their status is deemed very high in the sight of Allah, as it is stated in the Qur’an:

“Indeed, (the) most noble of you near Allah (is the) most righteous of you.”

(Quran 49:13)

In another passage, the *Qur’an* emphasizes the value of *taqwa* or righteousness by explaining the actions through which such status can be achieved:

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteous is the one who believes in Allah and the last day and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and the beggars and for (the emancipation of) the captives, and keeps up prayer and pays the zakat, and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in time of conflict - these are they who are true and these are they who are the pious.

(*Qur’an* 2-177)

Fazlur Rahman describes moral obligation as one of the central themes and messages of the *Qur'an*. He states:

“Although both God consciousness and the conviction of the Last Day are powerful and persistent themes in the *Qur'an*, there is no doubt that belief in God and human accountability play a strictly functional role there. The central concern of the *Qur'an* is the conduct of man. Just as in Kantian terms no ideal knowledge is possible without the regulative ideas of reason (like first cause), so in *Qur'anic* terms no real morality is possible without the very regulative ideas of God and the Last Judgement. Further, their very moral functions require that they exist for religiomoral experience and cannot be mere intellectual postulates to be ‘believed in.’”³⁸

The wisdom received from the revelation is incomplete without action. It is then *taqwa* (righteousness) which enlightens the believer's path. Alice C. Hunsberger in her biographical work, *The Ruby of Bakhshan*, presents the story and philosophical teachings of the 10th/11th century scholar of the Fatimid Dynasty, Nasir Khusraw. Based on Khusraw's work, *Wajah-Din*, Hunsberger explains as follows Khusraw's notion of a righteous person:

“All things have two sides, knowledge and action, or theory and practice. ... When

³⁸ Rahman, Fazlur, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago press, 1984), 135.

both are combined in one person, we call him religious(*din-dar*), just as when a being is made up of body and soul.... The practice of body is like the body and its knowledge is like the soul. The religion of someone who practices its rites without understanding is dead (*jan na-bashad*)....Nasir holds that practice without knowledge is better than knowledge without practice, just as a corpse is better than nothing (WD,71).”³⁹

Hansberger asserts that the teachings of this mystical ‘*Din-dar*,’ or, religious follower, Khusraw is very much concerned with knowledge and action. In his view, just as creation (evidence) cannot exist without the Creator (truth), knowledge does not have any purpose if not fully realized through actions. These acts are real tests of the submission to the Divine. And, this submission is incomplete without good deeds, or *ihsan*. As, the *Qur’an* states:

“Yes [on the contrary], whoever submits his face in Islam to Allah while being a doer of good will have his reward with his Lord. And no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve.” (*Surah-al-baqarah*, 2:112)

In Sufi traditions of Islam, the word, *ihsan* means, “doing what is beautiful,” and, it is related to the word *husn*, “beauty,” or “goodness.”⁴⁰ Reza Shah Kazemi describes the

³⁹. Alice C. Hunsberger, *The Ruby of Bakhshan* (p 87-88)

⁴⁰ Reza Shah-Kazemi. *Justice and Remembrance-Introducing the spirituality of Imam*

prophetic tradition of *ihsan* in the light of “the crucial relationship between worship and virtue, spirituality, and ethics, between devotion to the Creator and goodness to creatures.” The narrative of the hadith (of Gabriel), or saying, of the Prophet Muhammad, is of a rich, intellectual appeal. Angel Gabriel appeared in human disguise and, asked him: O Muhammad, tell me about submission (*al-islam*),’ and, Muhammad replied that *islam* means to testify to the monotheistic nature of the divine and the prophecy of Muhammad as the messenger of God. Then the angel asked about the subsequent layer of understanding of the religion: He asks, ‘tell me about faith [belief], *al-iman*? Prophet replied that it means accepting from the heart the true reality of God’s existence, the scriptures, the messengers of the past and the present, the Last Day, and the accounts of good and bad deeds. The last question asked of Muhamad was about the Good-*al-ihsan*. Upon Gabriel’s inquiry, Prophet explained that ‘It is to worship God as you see Him, and if you see Him not, yet, truly he sees you.’⁴¹

The whole idea of good and beauty in the Qur’an is the ‘vision of divine beauty,’ which inspires the believer to act in the best way. In The *Quran*, it is mentioned:

’Ali (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 78-79.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Kazemi explains in the footnotes that this hadith is strongly attested by both Sunni and Shia sources.

“Indeed, Allah is with those who fear Him and those who are doers of good.

(16:128

Hence, the *ihsan* of Allah is the gift to mankind for being *hasan* -a doer of Good. Seeing and spreading beauty throughout the creations, including fellow beings is an act of worship to Allah. Therefore, the mere term ethics, *akhlaq*, now has a higher standard of divine morality, which can be witnessed in the fruits of *ihsan*:

“Is the reward for good [anything] but good?” (*Qur’an* 55:60)

Once again, the exoteric (*zahir*) and esoteric (*batin*) meanings of the divine knowledge of *ihsan* are established in the individual and communal actions. As Nasr states, “by the function of [*ihsan*], ‘man is able to penetrate into the inner meaning of the religion.’”⁴²

PROPHETIC TEACHINGS- I’LM (KNOWLEDGE) & MA’RIFA (GNOSIS)

“If there were an artist in the world who could portray pure moral states, the Prophet’s picture emerges as most interesting, attractive, and significant.”

Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*.

⁴² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Life and thought*.

“You can deny God [temporarily], but you cannot deny the Prophet!” - Omid Safi thus quotes the poetic expression of the Pakistani mystical poet and a Muslim philosopher, Muhammad Iqbal, to share the highest levels of praise for Prophet Muhammad as a model human being and an ideal Muslim. The *Qur'an* makes known to all the believers that, “you have, indeed, in the Messenger of God, a Lovely Example”⁴³

Muhammad is referred as the man of ‘exalted character’ (surah 68). When the Prophet received the revelation, he conveyed to the unbelievers, this knowledge (*ilm*) with a forbearing, patient, and merciful attitude. The *Qur'an* urges followers to behave with the virtues of forbearance and humility, or, *hilm*. Thus, Muhammad “inspired positive action[s],” control over “anger, and, ‘remain[ed] calm in the most difficult circumstances,” instead of succumbing to the *Jahiliyyah* spirit.⁴⁴

Jahiliyyah means the period of ignorance, in the context of the pre-Islamic Arabia, where female infanticide, ‘violent and explosive irascibility , arrogance, tribal chauvinism’⁴⁵ was at play. Armstrong stresses that the Prophet of Islam made tireless efforts to stand up for the truth and to oppose the injustice, arrogance, and greed which had corrupted the pagan society. She points out that *Jahiliyyah* was not a historical period of moral ignorance, rather, ‘to a state of mind that caused violence and terror.’⁴⁶ Below, we find the striking contrast between the pagan *Jahil* and Muslim *halim* (who acts with

⁴³ Quran, 33:21

⁴⁴ Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad*, 68.

⁴⁵ Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006) 205.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

patience and forbearance):

“The pagan Arab's principal social allegiance was to his tribe, whereas the Koran replaces this tribal solidarity with kinship by faith. The pagan Arab was arrogant, irascible, and when provoked merciless—in short, he was a *jahil*, a child of *jahiliyah*, the vehement and willful human pride unchecked by heaven-imposed restraint. The Muslim must ideally be humble, gentle, and reasonable (*halim*, the direct opposite of *jahil*).”⁴⁷

Fazlur Rahman beautifully cites the example of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (p.b.u.h.), as a model and pinnacle of ethics for the entire community of believers. He asserts that Muhammad's experience in the cave of Hira yielded in not only destroying the polytheistic concept for him, but, the encounter, Rahman describes, encouraged Muhammad to pursue a “sustained and determined effort to achieve socioeconomic justice” which he intended would establish “a community for goodness and justice in the world”. Muhammad hoped for a community centered around “an ethically based sociopolitical order ‘under God’” which would ensure that moral values “cannot be made and unmade by man at his whim or convenience and should not be misused or abused for the sake of expediency”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Nemoy, Leon. *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 60.1 (1969): 69-71.

Nemoy refers to semantic analysis of a number of ethico-religious Koranic terms: Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*. Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966. (McGill Islamic Studies, I). Xii, 284 pp. 80.

25. Rahman, Fazlur. 1984. *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago press.

Through the scriptural knowledge and the conduct of the prophet Muhammad, the virtues of tolerance towards other beliefs and communities were grounded to share the reality of God-consciousness, “a reality which transcends all systems of belief.” The revelation mentions that the Prophet guides the follower through wisdom:

“It is He who has sent among the unlettered a Messenger from themselves reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom - although they were before in clear error.” (*Qur’an*, 62:2)

Encapsulating knowledge from revelation, piety through good behavior, and wisdom to contemplate on the ‘signs’ (ayahs) of the creation, the *Qur’anic* teachings encompass a “universal vision of religion,” The *Qur’an* a holistic approach to life, one which includes social, religious, intellectual, and, spiritual guidance. The social and religious fabric, in its exoteric (*zahir*) sense, is woven with ethical behavior and piety in action, grounded on knowledge gained from revelation and prophetic teachings. On the other hand, the intellectual and spiritual dimension, in its esoteric (*batin*) essence, takes the believer into the knowledge to attain closeness to God and transcendence.

There are several accounts where the Prophet emphasized the acquisition of knowledge, even if one has to travel far to lands. In one of his *hadith* he is mentioned to have said that “knowledge” is a form of worship.⁴⁹ Another *hadith*, narrated by a

⁴⁹ J. Mark Halstead, “An Islamic Concept of Education,” *Comparative Education* 40, no.

companion of the Prophet, Abu Hurayra (quoted by Ibn “Abd Al-Barr), is noteworthy where he mentions that “Knowledge is better than worship, and the foundation of religion is piety.”⁵⁰

In a validated *hadith* of Prophet Muhammad, quoted by Al-Bukhari, there are “two kinds of knowledge”: One which is directly transmitted through prophetic teachings and revelations and, the other which ‘exceeds the limited capacities of reason.’⁵¹

Knowledge of the cosmos or the creation through signs present in the revelation of the *Qur’an* is one form of the knowledge, and the other knowledge is the insight of the Creator, God. Ibn al ‘Arabi states that the second kind of knowledge is the pronouncement of the prophetic saying that Allah has created Adam [the first man] in His image⁵². And, the Qur’anic reference that “Allah taught Adam His names, All of them.” (2:31)

According to Ibn Taymiyya’s epistemology, “true knowledge” was only revealed to the prophets from God, through what he calls “revealed religion”. The knowledge attained through these revelations “is further sustained through remembrance (dhikr),”

4, *Philosophy, Education and Comparative Education* (2004), 517-529
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4134624> Accessed: 04-04-2017 17:50 UTC

⁵⁰ Tayeb Chourief. *Spiritual Teachings of the Prophet* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2011), 96.

⁵¹ Ibid., 92.

Narrated by Abu Hurayra and Quoted by Ibn “Abd al-Barr.

⁵² William C. Chittick, *In the Search of the Lost Heart*, 104.

which would be further augmented through contemplation (*tadabuur*). These practices of “rational reflection, remembrance, and contemplation are thus all regarded as expressions of a concept of reason that does not rely on Hellenic deduction,” but rather display Islam’s insistence on using an inductive method when reading the Quran. Muhammad Arkoun categorizes the themes of intellectual reflection and contemplation as “to be aware, to penetrate, to understand and to meditate.” He asserts that essentially, these “activities,” bestowed upon men, are a fundamentally important aspect of “divine intellect.”⁵³

The following *Qur’anic* verse establishes an interesting relationship between intellect, *al- ‘aql* and the heart of a Mu’min, *al-qalb*:

" Did they not walk on the earth with hearts to use their intellect and ears to listen? It is not the eyes that become blind, but the hearts in their chests." (22: 46).

We discussed about the function of intellect via the knowledge; how [does] the heart, *al-qalb* serves as the agent of intellect?

The very first divine experience of Muhammad was in the cave Mt. Hira, when he received the first revelation of the Qur’an. The next level was the ultimate spiritual ascension to heavens to witness ‘highest degree of manifestation’ of God, the *mi’raj* or spiritual journey undertaken by him. In Sufism, or mysticism of Islam,

⁵³ Muhammad Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam of Today*, 36.

this journey is a path. The path is the next level after *Shari'ah*, and, it is called *Tariqah*. *Shari'ah* matters are concerned with Islamic laws which provides a framework of the exoteric (*zahir*) aspects of Islamic society. In the *Tariqah* practices, the heart and the soul or the esoteric (*batin*) dimensions are important over the physical aspects of human body. Human thought, or more so, wisdom (*hikma*), nurtured through revelations, serves as the guide post to spiritual experience of a follower. Contemplation, reflection, and connecting with the Divine are the contents of the *Tariqah* practices. Thomas Merton equates this mystical dimension to the act of contemplation:

“Contemplation... is a spiritual wonder. It is a spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. ...It is a vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent, and infinitely abundant Source. It is above all awareness of the reality of that Source. It knows the Source, obscurely, inexplicably, but with a certitude that goes beyond reason and beyond simple faith.”⁵⁴

Syed Nasr maintains that the heart is the place to receive direct experience, while the mind or reasoning has the capacity of indirect knowledge. He refers to the hadith of the Prophet:

⁵⁴ Thomas Merton, *Choosing to Love the World*,

“Blessed is he who makes his heart grasping.” While The Quran and hadith both provide knowledge to the heart, it is as if the heart is the carrier, or, ‘seat of the knowledge.’

This knowledge is the “higher forms” of knowledge, and it ascends from sensual to spiritual experiences. Nasr beautifully states:

“The mind is a reflection of the heart., the center of the microcosm. The Islamic doctrine of Unity (*al-tawhid*) has been to embrace all modes of knowing into complimentary.... the gnosis of the purified heart which is ultimately none other the unitive and unifying knowledge of the One, and the most profound realization of Unity [of God], which is the Alpha and Omega of the Islamic revelation.”⁵⁵

One of the ninety names of Allah is “*ahad* -The One”; this quality of God is only realized in the heart of a believer (*mu'min*). In essence, the heart of Islam, *ihsan*, or beauty of conduct in the eyes of the Divine, enables us ‘to see beauty in every cosmos of the creation’, and which Prophet Muhammad referred as, the “Throne of the Infinitely Good and Compassionate.”

⁵⁵ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. "Intellect and Intuition: Their Relationship from the Islamic Perspective." *Islam and Contemporary Society* (1982): 36-46

SPIRITUALITY AND KNOWLEDGE of ALI B. TALIB

Infuse your heart with mercy, love, and kindness for your subjects...either they are your brothers in religion or your equals in creation.”⁵⁶

-From a letter written by Ali ibn Abi Talib (d.661)

Ali Bin Abi Talib, the fourth rightly guided caliph of Muslims and the first Shi'i Imam, was also the cousin and son in law of Prophet Muhammad. Additionally, he was the first male to accept the message of Islam among the Prophets' family members. To understand the knowledge 'Ali possessed and preached on virtues and intellect, it is important to understand his status in the eyes of the Prophet. Moreover, an inspection of Ali's life's events helps appreciate his impact in shaping the Islamic society, in the light of his ethical and spiritual knowledge. As a Caliph of Islam and a patron of justice and piety, Imam 'Ali in his letter to his governor of Egypt, Malik al-Ashtar, gave instructions to treat everyone fairly and to act as a compassionate and equitable leader. In explaining the height of Ali's spiritual and intellectual status, Reza Shah Kazemi states that this letter is:

“As much a statement of ethics as of politics – not a discursive ‘system’ or a theory of ethics, to be sure, but, an inspiring expression of the spiritually ethos which the Imam embodied and radiated, and ethos that flows directly from the

⁵⁶ Aryn B. Sajoo, *A Companion to Muslim Ethics* (NY: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 12.

sources of the Islamic revelation.”⁵⁷

He instructed him to “infuse mercy, love, and kindness” for his subjects.⁵⁸

In Islamic thought, and “In Sufi belief, ‘Ali is considered one of the earliest spiritual masters, often regarded as the first link after the Prophet in the Sufi silsilah (chain).”⁵⁹ in terms of his command on spiritual knowledge. Several hadith traditions describe Prophet’s close relationship with “Ali, of which few are mentioned here:

In a hadith tradition, mentioned by Khasa Nas’i, Prophet had said: “Truly ‘Ali is from me, and I am from him. And, he is *Wali* [master] of the believers after me.”⁶⁰

In another hadith by al- Hakim al- Nisaburi Mustadrak, Prophet said: “If I am the city of Knowledge and ‘Ali is the gate, so whoever desires knowledge, let him enter the gate.”⁶¹ If someone is a seeker of true knowledge of Allah, the way is through Ali and his knowledge.

The Qur’anic revelation contains some part which are not straightforward and require depth of knowledge and wisdom (*hikma*). Prophet played the role of deciphering meanings of such *ayahs* to the community. “In one saying [add which hadith of Prophet]

⁵⁷ Reza Shah Kazemi, *Justice & Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam ‘Ali* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2006), 81.

⁵⁸ Seyyed Hossien Nasr, *The Heart of Islam* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), 250-253.

⁵⁹ Dictionary of Literary Biography Volume 311 Arabic Literary Culture, 500-925.

⁶⁰ Reza Shah Kazemi, *Justice & Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam ‘Ali* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2006), 18.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

attributed to ‘Ali, there is a reference to the Prophet as the first of those who were taught by God the science of *Ta’wil* [interpretation], and that he, the Prophet in turn taught ‘Ali the same. According to the Prophet, as noted earlier, “Truly “Ali is with the *Qur’an*, and the *Qur’an* is with ‘Ali.”⁶²

Among the most notable texts of ‘Ali on is his book of sermons and letters, *Nahj al- Balagha*, the peak of eloquence. Kazemi states:

“The *Nahj al- balagah* and other compilations of ‘Ali’s words cover a broad spectrum of themes. Some of the topics addressed are religious and ethical, including exhortations to virtues such as truthfulness, gratitude, and patience; expositions on the transitory nature of the world and the inevitability of death; benefits of living a modest and temperate life; the importance of learning and the nature of true knowledge....A balance between rationality and doctrine as sources of knowledge and ethics can be perceived in his words.”⁶³

Imam and caliph, Ali bin Abi Talib led a pious life. Despite the courage he showed towards an enemy of Islam during battles, he never allowed vices and emotions, such as, anger and pride, to overpower the Islamic ethics of forgiveness and compassion. In *Mathnawi, Book I*, Rumi describes a story of battle when Ali was faced with the powerful enemy. When Ali was about to defeat the warrior he was fighting, the warrior,

⁶² Reza Shah-Kazemi. *Justice and Remembrance-Introducing the spirituality of Imam ‘Ali* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 25

⁶³ IBID. 75.

out of hatred, spat on Ali's face. Ali immediately got up from his sitting position on the warrior's chest. The warrior, out of shock, inquired of Ali about such response. Ali told him that first when he was fighting the warrior, it was for the sake of truth (*haqq*), and in the way of God. After, the warriors' disrespectful treatment with spit on his face, Ali realized that it will be out of anger and personal disgrace, if he kills the warrior, and not for the sake of fighting injustice with Islam. Rumi in his poetic charm, narrates Ali's courageous and ethical act as:

“I am the Lion of the Truth, not the lion of passions,
My action is witness to my religion,”⁶⁴

The Qur'an also speaks about treating everyone with justice and fairness (4:58).

In his guidance to his followers and believers of Islam, Ali demonstrated his views as follows:

“Know O' creatures of Allah! That piety is a strong house of protection while impiety is a weak house.....Know that the stings of sin is cut by piety and the final aim is achieved by conviction of belief.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam* (NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), 265.

⁶⁵ Sayed Ali Reza, *Peak of Eloquence: Nahjul Balagha*, (Elmhurst, NY: Tarique Tarsile Qur'an, Inc.), 320.

Intellectual Jihad & Moral Struggle-A Shared Vision

He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed, in that are signs for a people
who give thought. (*Qur'an* 30:21)

In the West, there exists an insufficient understanding of the intellectual dimension of Islam. Part of the ignorance is due to the limited scope and extent to which Islam is covered in the curricula of high schools and colleges. Better knowledge of the historical and intellectual heritage of Islam is to be highly desired in order to face the 'clash of ignorance.' Syed Nasr, discusses this challenge and states:

“The goal or attempt is to provide necessary means or lens with which to combat the follies and inanities of the modern world-the fashions of the day- and to un mask that systematic ignorance - ‘learned ignorance’ which passes today for wisdom.”⁶⁶

The unmasked ignorance needs intellectual light and tolerant behaviors among communities of interpretation. Wisdom prevails when the real meaning of ethics and social consciousness is invited into daily lives of Muslims and the People of the book. The dichotomy between learned ethics and applied moral choices causes a discrepancy in the universal idea of ‘good life.’ Siddiqui describes contemporary issues of ethics and,

⁶⁶Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. "Intellect and Intuition: Their Relationship from the Islamic Perspective." *Islam and Contemporary Society* (1982): 36-46.

explains that moral education is considered as the paramount aspect of Islam:

“The problem rises when we study *Akhlaq* vis-a-vis ethics. In western vocabulary the terms "ethics" and "morality" have different origins; one derived from the Greek ethos, "ethics", and the other derived from the Latin mores or "morals". Both mean habits or customs, but the distinction in European thought and language has been maintained. One is what is "commonly felt and done" [morals] as opposed to what is "appropriate and rational" [ethics]. In Islamic thought, the predominant feature is knowledge of morality (*ilm-ul-Akhlaq*), i.e. what we could call the "science of ethics" ⁶⁷

As Sajoo states, “The training and the cultivation of the intelligence is one of the aims of practical ethics.”⁶⁸ Moral teachings are incomplete without good actions towards fellow mankind. The Qur’an outlines the definition of morality:

“Indeed, Allah orders justice and good conduct and giving to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded.” (*Qur’an* 16:90)

⁶⁷ Siddiqui, A. (1997). Ethics in Islam: Key concepts and contemporary challenges.

Journal of Moral Education, 26(4), 423-431. Retrieved from

<https://proxy.lib.utc.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.utc.edu/docview/232578400?accountid=14767>

⁶⁸ Aryn B. Sajoo, *A Companion to Muslim Ethics*, 59.

Islam spread through different lands, cultures and faiths; from Arabia to China and expanded to Europe and South Asia. The journey of this faith crossed boundaries while spreading the monotheistic teachings. Allah mentioned the people of faith (*mu'mineen*) as “a single brotherhood.” Believers from the monotheistic community are envisioned by the principle of *Taqwa* - The highest level of nobility, guiding to embrace the diversity of mankind:

“O humankind! We created you all out of a male and female and made you into nations and tribes, that you might come to know each other. Truly, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is mindful.” (*Qur'an* 49:13)

This means that it is incumbent upon a follower to be ‘mindful’ in his treatments of

fellow beings, including tolerance towards diverse languages, customs, and socio-religious backgrounds. Courtesy to the people of other faiths is further explained like this:

“O’ who you have faith! when you go forth in God’s cause, use your discernment and do not, out of a desire for the fleeting gains of this worldly life, say to anyone who offers you a greeting: “You are not of the faithful!” (*Qur'an*, 4:94)

Notice that respect and sensitivity, or rather, wise judgment is asked upon the faithful in his or her dealings with the people of other beliefs. The *Qur'an* also reads:

“Surely, those who believe (in the Qur’an and call themselves Muslims), and

those who are Jews, and Christians and the Sabians; whoever acknowledges God, The Day of Accountability, and does acts of reformation – their reward is with their Sustainer. For them shall be no fear from without, nor shall grief touch them from within.” (Quran, 2:62)

In displaying such close connections between the monotheistic beliefs in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the goal is to highlight that these ‘people of the book’ are instructed throughout in the revelations to maintain high moral values and to follow the Golden rule in their lives. Karen Armstrong reminds us about the tradition and transmission of prophetic knowledge from one to another.

“The *Qur’an*, however, has a positive view of both Judaism and Christianity and constantly asserts that Muhammad did not come to cancel out the faiths of “The People of the Book.” You cannot be a Muslim unless you also revere Abraham, David, Noah, Moses, and Jesus..”⁶⁹

Similarly, Jewish author, Lezley Hazelton describes her experience of reading the *Qur’an*. She spent three months delving into the historical background of the *Qur’anic* verses and the meaning behind various statements. She states:

“The fact that few people do actually read the *Qur’an* is precisely why it’s so easy to

⁶⁹ USC, Religion Dispatches, Interview with Karen Armstrong, July, 2009.

<http://religiondispatches.org/interview-with-karen-armstrong/>

quote, that is, to misquote phrases and snippets taken out of context in what I call the ‘highlighter version,’ which is the one favored by both Muslim fundamentalists and anti-Muslim Islamophobes.”

Both in Meccan and Medinian periods, Prophet Muhammad’s life exemplified *jihad*. It was struggle against oppression and unjust behaviors of the pagans and polytheists of Arabia. In a larger sense, *Jihad*, for him was to stand up for the truth of God and the struggle towards the welfare of the community. As a pillar (*arkan*) of Islam, *Jihad* means “a struggle,” or “a striving.” “In its primary connotation,” it means to struggle with one’s own “sinful obstacles” of the soul. Aslan asserts that the word *jihad* in the Qur’an is always used with the phrase ‘in the way of God,’ because it is guiding you to do *jihad* over your immoral beliefs and actions on the path of Divine closeness. “Holy War” is not the proper translations of the term *Jihad*. There have been historical instances where socio-political situations to struggle and participate in defensive warfare with the enemy, to defend the poor and oppressed, is given importance close to a lesser *Jihad*.⁷⁰ Upon his return from the battle of *Badr*, Prophet “uttered an important and oft-quoted maxim: ‘We are returning from the Lesser *Jihad*(the battle) and going to the greater *Jihad*’ (to reform their own society and their own hearts).”

Armstrong clarifies these notions of *Jihad* and war and, portrays the Prophet as the *khalifah* (vicegerent) of God and the exemplar of true *Taqwa* (nobility):

⁷⁰ Reza Aslan, *No God but God*, (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2005), 81.

“As a paradigmatic personality, Muhammad has important lessons, not only for Muslims, but also for western people. His life was a jihad: as we shall see, this word does not mean “holy war,” it means “struggle.” Muhammad literally sweated with the effort to bring peace to war-torn Arabia, and we need people who are prepared to do this today.”⁷¹

The word *Jihad* in the *Qur'an* is mentioned in the context of striving towards good actions. Allah Guides who struggle with good intentions:

“As for those who sincerely strive for Us, We shall most certainly guide them onto paths that lead unto Us: for, behold, God is indeed with the doers of good.” (*Noble Quran*, 29:69)

While believers of Islam, along with other communities, struggle to tackle issues of modernity, globalization, and misconceptions, the values of tolerance and pluralism can bring possible dialogue amongst different communities. It is ‘a struggle against the flaws of the “other,” as the Qur’anic worldview promotes the idea of tolerance - all nations and cultures as ‘one community.’ (Qur’an, 21:92). Safi also, suggests the sharing of knowledge to understand each other as a pressing need of our time:

“Whether our goal is learning to share the one planet or trying to dominate other

⁷¹ Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006), 7.

parts of the world, we cannot do without intimate knowledge of one another. For that reason alone, it might be said that our age calls for resources that introduce us to one another.”⁷²

Conclusion

The *Holy Qur'an* is not only a book of historical facts and stories from the past, but, more importantly, it teaches about the universal truths of life. It is concerned with the reality of nature and daily life, including social, religious, spiritual, and, ethical dimensions. This divine knowledge serves as a shining lamp which lights the path of a follower, and guides a *muslim* to improve as a *mu'min* to reach transcendence.

Commenting on the role and purpose of education in Islam, Mark Halstead remarks:

“The social and moral dimension of education in Islam is therefore eventually a matter of coming to understand and learning to follow the divine law, which contains not only universal moral principles (such as equality among people, justice and charity), but also, detailed instructions relating to every aspect of human lives.”⁷³

⁷² Omid Safi, *Memories of Muhammad: Why the Prophet Matters*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2010), 32.

56. An Islamic Concept of Education: J. Mark Halstead Source: *Comparative Education*, Vol. 40, No. 4, Special Issue (29): Philosophy, Education and Comparative Education (Nov., 2004), pp. 517-529 Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4134624> Accessed: 04-04-2017 17:50 UTC

In Islam, acquisition of knowledge (*ilm*) is intertwined with faith (*iman*) of the heart and good deeds (*ihsan*). Fazlur Rahman asserts that the *Qur'anic* view consists of God's orders to Prophet Muhammad to pray to Him to increase his knowledge through the guidance of Allah. The verse reads:

“So high [above all] is Allah, the Sovereign, the Truth. And, [O Muhammad], do not hasten with [recitation of] the *Qur'an* before its revelation is completed to you, and say, "My Lord, increase me in knowledge."(*Qur'an* 20:114)

The life of the Prophet of Islam is an exemplar of such principles and morals. Rahman further comments on the function of such divine knowledge:

“A knowledge that does not expand the horizons of one's vision and action is truncated and injurious knowledge. But how can one have knowledge of the “ends” of life- that is of higher values- without knowing actual reality?”⁷⁴

523-524. J. Mark Halstead is Emeritus Professor of Education, University of Huddersfield, UK.

43. Rahman, Fazlur. 1984. *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago press: 1984),134-35.

Rahman suggests that modern Muslim thinkers have a responsibility to raise and maintain the higher standards of moral action within the societies they live in. Understanding the reality of this divine guidance, which concerns the daily life of a follower, is crucial in contemporary times. When the *Qur'an* sets higher standards of morality on a believer, it expects not only the 'lip service' of the *Qur'anic* verses in the *madaras* (Islamic educational institutions), but also, calls for ethical action inspired by this knowledge of faith of a Muslim. Safi points out that it is crucial for progressive Muslims to develop an attitude and sense of '*Islam bi la Hudud*- an Islam without borders, which stands on universal values of multi-culturalism and pluralism. He remarks on the myths associated with Islam, of a violent and conservative one, instead of a progressive and just faith of Prophet Muhammad:

“We call for the rejection of the narrow and exclusive mindset and siege mentality that have robbed us of the channels of communication and cooperation that we desperately need. We call for the rejection of a dialectical approach to the Other which can only frame the other in the negative terms as the enemy (or potential enemy) that has to be greeted with suspicion and fear.”⁷⁵

As mentioned earlier, the *Qur'an* is a book which is filled with the light of guidance for mankind- a light which removes darkness of ignorance and fear of

⁷⁵ Safi, Omid. *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*. Oneworld Publications, 2003. 331-32.

dogmatism. It is referred to as ‘the Book of blessing,’ so ‘that people of insight might take them to heart.’⁷⁶ The knowledge from God is revealed for the people of understanding to apply this guidance intellectually to cultivate conviction in their hearts and to learn “true lessons of spiritual life.”⁷⁷ This means that “God’s light within us is sanctity and wisdom.”⁷⁸ Human beings are, as the bearer of wisdom, provided they exercise mindfulness – conscious of their duties towards others while making appropriate choices. God enjoins those “who are endowed with insight” to “repel evil with good.”⁷⁹ This shows close connection between wisdom, gained from revelation and goodness in action. Basically, “harmony between the two principles -contemplation and action, being and doing, theory and practice, ideal and reality”⁸⁰ - is the philosophical proof of the submission (*Islam*).

Sajoo also, believes that one should find significance within Islam’s commitment, throughout the course of its history, to recognizing the importance of its underlying moral and ethical values, which speaks to “the diversity of Islam’s heritage of ethical thought and life”.⁸¹

In the end, I would like to close with the Islamic worldview of ‘good life’ shared

⁷⁶ Kabir Helminski, *The Book of Revelations*. Bristol, England: The Book Foundations, 2005. 265

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ ibid. 378

⁷⁹ Kabir Helminski, *The Book of Revelations*. Bristol, England: The Book Foundations, 2005), 147

⁸⁰ Reza Shah Kazemi, 73

⁸¹ Azim Nanji, *Islamic Ethics*, 79.

by Mark Halstead. He beautifully comments that in Islam, the human beings are endowed with ethical, intellectual, and spiritual knowledge to:

(a) to accept the obligations of divine stewardship; (b) to seek to take on the divine attributes such as hikma (wisdom) and 'adl (justice) which have been clarified through divine revelation; (c) to strive for the balanced growth of the integrated personality, made up of the heart, the spirit, the intellect, the feelings and the bodily senses; (d) to develop their potential to become insan kamil (the perfect human being); (e) to allow the whole of their lives to be governed by Islamic principles, so that whatever they do, however mundane, becomes an act of worship.⁸²

Accountability to the aforementioned principles is “a purely individual affair.”⁸³

However, these principles are rooted in the social conscience of Islam. They bind humankind to the fellow brothers in creation. Like the *Qur'anic* teachings on Righteousness, Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, also suggest that the “ethics of generosity and compassion” are constructive ways to improve conditions for all. They

⁸² J. Mark Halstead “An Islamic Concept of Education,” *Comparative Education*, Vol. 40, No. 4, Special Issue (29523-524. Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4134624> Accessed: 04-04-2017 17:50 UTC

introduced an indigenous tradition of *Ubuntu*, an archetype for God's mercy through man:

“A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others... for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that they belong in a greater whole. They know that they are diminished when others are humiliated, diminished when others are oppressed, diminished when others are treated as if they were less than who they are.”⁸⁴

The ideal man and the best creation-the *khalifah* of God is a believer, who ‘takes on the characteristics of God and attains the nature of the absolute’ by forming his life and his environment on the principles of nobility. In the hope of the liberation and well-being of all and, to perfect his relationship with the Divine, it is incumbent upon the believer of Islam, struggle to improve personal intuition and contemplation is not sufficient. What is equally necessary is to strive against “hardship, hunger, deprivation and torment.” with the hope of the liberation and well-being of all, in the “furnace of intellectual and social struggle.”⁸⁵

69. Aryn B. Sajoo. *A Companion to Muslim Ethics* (New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers. 2010), 156.

70. Ali Shariyati, *On the Sociology of Islam*, 123.

Glossary of Arabic Terms

- *A'adil*: The Just
- *Akhlaq*: The noble values and behaviors
- *Amana*: Trust
- *An-Nur*: The Light (name of Allah)
- *Ar-Rahman*: The Merciful (name of Allah)
- *Ashraf Al-Makhlooqaat*: The highest of the creation
- *Aql*: Intellect of 'soul and mind' - 'to tie with' (Reason is one layer of Intellect).
The reflective capacity of human beings.
- *Ayah*: Sign- the verses of Quran
- *Batin*: The inner or esoteric form
- *Hadith*: The teachings of the Prophet Muhammad
- *Halim*: The one observes forbearance

- *Haqiqah*: The ultimate truth
- *Hikma*: Wisdom (Judgement to differentiate) –divine and bestowed to prophets and messengers
- *Al-Hakim*: The Wise and All-knowing (Name of Allah)
- *Ihsan*: Beauty and Goodness
- *‘Ilm*: Knowledge (often of and through Revelation)
- *Iman*: Belief/Faith
- *Islam*: Submission/Surrender
- *Iqra*: ‘Read
- *Jahil*: The ignorant , one who denies the truth
- *Jihad*: Struggle (with one’s self or *nafs*)
- *Kalam*: *falsafah* or Philosophy
- *Khalifah*: Vicegerent-Representative
- *Khaliq*: The Creator
- *Ma’arifa*: Intuition & Gnosis (to reach the truth of God)

- *Mu'min*: One who believes (from the heart)
- *Muslim*: One who submits/surrender
- *Qalb*: Heart
- *Shari'ah*: Islam Law
- *Surah*: Chapters of the *Qur'an*
- *Taqwa*: Righteousness
- *Tariqah*: The Divine Path
- *Tassawuff/ Sufism*: Mysticism in Islam
- *Tawhid*: Unity of Divine (root word *Ahad*- one of the names of Allah)
- *Wali*: Friend, Successor
- *Zahir*: The outward form

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