

Concept of Knowledge in Islam: A brief Review of Said Nūrī's

Risāle i- Nūr

Mohammad Iqbal Rather*

Abstract

The term *ʿilm* (Knowledge) has met ample deliberations in diverse discourses as an Islamic concept besides appearing very frequently both in *Qurʾān* and *ḥadīth*. *ʿilm* derived from the root word *ʿ-l-m* means the cognitive understanding of a particular thing and thereafter its acquisition. Inquisitive seeking and search for knowledge is the prime duty assigned to the Muslims (*Talab al-ʿilm*). The terms like *ʿilm*, *ḥikmah*, *maʿrifah*, etc—and their verbs and verbal derivatives, time and again—find their representation in the *Qurʾān*, that further adds to the characteristic beauty of *ʿilm*.

Maʿrifah is used for knowledge which mostly cannot be held by the heart after it has been perceived. When a person perceives that thing, or when he ascribes to it the attribute which subsist within it, it may be said he posses *maʿrifah* (knowledge). *Maʿrifah* in *Bedīʿuzzamān*'s thought emerges from Islam. *Maʿrifah* is knowledge which designates a thing together with all its qualities as something different from everything outside it. *Marʿifatullah* (Knowledge of God) leads to purity of heart and struggling with the soul, so that level of purification is attained that the senses and reason could not attain on their own. In *Bedīʿuzzamān*'s thought, *Maʿrifah* is one of the fruits of belief (*ʿīmān*), and is considered to be one of the results of being on the straight path in religion.

The purpose for the sending down man to this world and the wisdom implicit in it, consists of recognising the creator of all beings in Him and worship Him. The primordial duty of man and the obligations incumbent upon him are to know God and believe in Him, to affirm His existence in submission and perfect certainty. According to *Said Nūrī* belief in God can only become certain and true by being founded on knowledge of the true object of worship. According to him the foundation, source, light, and sprit of all true knowledge is knowledge of God, and its essence and basis is belief on God. In *Bedīʿuzzamān*'s thought the worship, servitude to God taught by many verses of holy *Qurʾān* is only realised by recognising God and loving Him.

In this context, this paper as a humble attempt will bring to limelight the concept of knowledge in reflection to *Risāle i- Nūr* of *Bedīʿuzzamān Said Nūrī*, whether, it may be his concept of integration of religious knowledge with scientific knowledge or the *Maʿrifah* (knowledge of God) in recognizing God.

Keywords: Knowledge; Islamic Epistemology; *Said Nūrī*; *Risāle i- Nūr*.

The *Risāle i- Nūr* consists of the works written by *Bedīʿuzzamān Said Nūrī* (1877-1960) for the purpose of propounding in all its details the Islamic view of existence,

* PhD research Scholar, Department of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.

which is total and all-embracing. *Said Nūrī's* keen intelligence, creative imagination, his genuine sincerity before almighty Allah, and besides his wide knowledge of Islamic culture, his comprehensive learning in many sciences, as well as his unsurpassed capacity and the faculty for profound reflective thought paved the way for him to write his magnum opus *Risāle i- Nūr* which is in one hundred and thirty parts.¹ The philosophy of *Said Nūrī* was revolving round the *Qur'ān*. He did not take history as his source, which represents man's material interests and ambitions on the face of the earth. He tried to find a way to build a new society based on Islamic ideals.²

With these writings, *Bedī'uzzamān* opened up a new, direct way to reality (*ḥaqīqat*) and Knowledge of God which he described as the highway of the *Qur'ān* and way of the Companions of the Prophet *Muhammad (PBUH)* through the 'legacy of Prophethood,' which gains for those who follow it 'true and certain belief'. He did not ascribe the writings to himself, but said they were the rays shining out from its truths, proceeding from the *Qur'ān* itself.³

Knowledge of God

Before discussing "*Said Nūrī and the Concept of knowledge in Islam*" with a special focus on the "Knowledge of God", it is necessary to make it clear what Islamic concept of knowledge is? There are many definitions describing the nature of knowledge, but what is of relevance here is the epistemological definition, since it is important to understand what the Islamic epistemological context involves and implies. Perhaps its greatest implication lies in its effect upon our vision of reality and truth and our research methodology; our intellectual scope and practical application in planning for what is called 'development', which all bear upon our understanding of education.⁴ Knowledge is the awareness of a thing with reference to its reality.⁵

The very first revelation of the *Qur'ān* based on five verses contain the note of knowledge. Man knew nothing but now he was blessed with knowledge. He started knowing (the reality of the things). He was brought to light from the darkness and deep ditch of ignorance. It was light of awareness that was conferred upon him.

Knowledge is, in truth, a journey towards light and awareness:

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ... عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ

Proclaim! (Or read!) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created, Created man, out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood: Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful He Who taught (the use of) the pen, Taught man that which he knew not.⁶

Knowledge means to be aware but only that awareness becomes knowledge in the real sense which brings divine gnosis and nearness to Allah.⁷

Said Nūrī appeared at a time of great difficulties, when severe need was felt for a leader who would secure the strength to develop the means of understanding life, and would provide all the means to advance man. In that situation, *Nūrī* understood that Islam holds a place of its own in the world of existence and its life too holds a position different to that perceived by the West.⁸

Western thought insists that there are numerous theories and understandings that the European mind, that is, the human mind has produced. Some of these have taken the form of pragmatism, romanticism, Marxism, positivism, secularism, liberalism, and democracy. Another point that we should be aware of is that these

theories and ideals emerged as a result of the western mind endeavouring to adopt a way of life where religion has no part to play.⁹

Conception (*taṣawwur*) dominates the theory of knowledge in Western thought, and is founded on a knowledge, the source of which is reason or the sense. This form of conception was not born of modern age, but is the product of ancient idol-worship.¹⁰ Thus, it was observed that rationalistic tendencies increased to such a degree that they encompassed the field of nature, the manifest world, the supernatural realm, the world of unseen, and the area of morality and values. Likewise in practical life, the inclination was towards materialism, and the aim in working became pleasure and personal interest. A person studying this, therefore, has to note in particular that *Said Nūrsī's* understanding of *ma'rifah* is not a theory like those of *Al-Fārābī* (870-950 C.E.) and *Ibn-Sīnā* (980-1037 C.E.), but a basic matter affecting man's conduct in life.¹¹ *Nūrsī* in his book *Sozler (The Words)* writes:

This strange world must have someone to regulate it, and this orderly country must have a lord, and this fine town, an owner, and this finely made palace, a master builder. We must try to know him, for it is understood that the one who brought us here was He; If we do not recognise Him, who will help us?¹²

The purpose for sending of man to this world and the wisdom implicit in it consists of recognising the Creator of all beings and believing in Him and worshiping Him. The primordial duty of man and the obligation incumbent upon him is to know God and believe in Him, to affirm His existence and unity in submission and perfect certainty.¹³

For man, who by nature desires permanent life and immortal existence, whose unlimited hopes are matched by boundless afflictions, any object or accomplishment other than belief in God, knowledge of God and the means for attaining these, which are the fundament and key of eternal life, any such object or accomplishment must be regarded as lowly for man, or even worthless in many cases.¹⁴

The *Qur'ān* is definite and clear on the question of knowledge. It claims with absoluteness that knowledge of the manifest as well as of the hidden belongs to God:

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَا تَأْتِينَا السَّاعَةُ قُلْ بَلَىٰ وَرَبِّي لَتَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ عَالِمِ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْهُ مِثْقَالُ ذَرَّةٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا أَصْغُرُ مِنْ ذَلِكَ وَلَا أَكْبَرُ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ

The Unbelievers say, "Never to us will come the Hour": Say, "Nay! but most surely, by my Lord, it will come upon you;- by Him Who knows the unseen,- from Whom is not hidden the least little atom in the heavens or on earth: Nor is there anything less than that, or greater, but is in the Record Perspicuous"¹⁵

Qur'ān does not preclude the possibility of Knowledge of man.¹⁶ The *Qur'ān* emphasises the innate nature of all knowledge, which is bestowed by God Himself.

The *Qur'ān* says:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنِ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things¹⁷

'*Ilm*, the knowledge is the basis of Islam. 'Islam' connotes submission, recognition, surrender and obedience to the will of Allah. This will of Allah can be known through Knowledge, '*Ilm*'.¹⁸

In Nūrsi's thought, *ma'rifah* is one of the fruits of belief (*īmān*), and is considered to be one of the results of being on the straight path in religion. While *Mar'ifatullah* (knowledge of God) leads to purity of heart and struggling with the soul, so that a level of purification is attained that the senses and reason could not attain on their own. It is because of this that from beginning to end the *Risāle i- Nūr* speaks of "Knowledge of God" for which the phrase "recognising God" is also used. It shows us the way that will take us to knowledge of God.¹⁹

Without question, belief in God can only become certain and true by being founded on knowledge of the true object of worship. It is clear that the servant's level is directly proportionate to such knowledge. Belief is an affirmation where by the servant's heart achieves stability and certainty it neither falls into doubt, nor feels the need to wander in order to find its sustainer. When the heart feels this assurance and attains stability in divine unity (*Tawhīd*) and admits that He is man's sustainer and Man is His servant and that there is no god other than Allah, then the servant will worship none other than Him.²⁰ Regarding the affirmation of Divine unity, *Bedī'uzzamān* says:

[T]he true affirmation of Divine unity which, through seeing on everything the stamp of His power, the seal of His dominicality, and the inscriptions of His pen, is to open a window directly onto His light from everything and to confirm and believe with almost the certainty of seeing it that everything emerges from the hand of His power and that in no way has He any partner or assistant in His Godhead or in His dominicality or in His sovereignty, and thus to attain to a sort of perpetual awareness of the Divine presence.²¹

God is greater than everything in respect of power and knowledge, for He has knowledge of all things—with all-encompassing knowledge necessary to His Essence. Nothing can be hidden from His knowledge because of the mystery of its presence and witnessing and all-encompassing luminosity; existence necessitates universality, and the light of knowledge encompasses all the world of existence. Yes, the balanced order, and regular balances, and general, purposeful wisdom, and all-embracing, particular favours, and the well-ordered decrees, and fruitful determining, and specified appointed hours of death, and the regular sustenance, and the wise skills, and the adorned solicitude, and the utterly perfect order, harmony, arrangement, proficiency, and balance, and absolute distinction with absolute ease all point to the all-encompassing knowledge of the One All-Knowing of the Unseen.²²

The knowledge of God gained through theology does not afford a complete knowledge and a complete sense of the divine presence. However, when gained through the method of the *Qur'ān* of Miraculous Exposition, it affords both complete knowledge and a total sense of the divine presence. God willing, all the parts of the *Risāle i- Nūr* perform the duty of an electric lamp on that light-filled highway of the *Qur'ān* of Miraculous Exposition. The knowledge of God attained by the Sufi way is deficient to the same degree in relation to the knowledge obtained through the meaning of the legacy of Prophethood directly from the All-Wise *Qur'ān*.²³

It is because of this that from beginning to end *Risāle i- Nūr* speaks of "knowledge of God" for which the phrase "recognising the God" is also used. It shows us the way that will take us to the knowledge of God.

There are numerous “instructors” (*ma‘ārif*) to guide man, so that he may carry out his duty of worship, which may be done in fitting manner only through knowledge of God. In the *Risāle i- Nūr* these instructors, who make known to man his sustainer, are gathered under four main headings:

- 1) The Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH), in whose person was brought together the “knowledge” of all the Prophets;
- 2) The *Qur’ān* which is the supreme expression of the truth taught by all the revealed scriptures;
- 3) The universe, which includes all creatures; and
- 4) The conscience, as man’s “conscious nature” which is like the centre of all his senses, having the capacity to recognize God.

Despite the fact that there are numerous “instructors”, acquainting man with his sustainer in respect of worship, the true aim of the journey in this world, the four discussed here are universal instructors. These are:²⁴

1. **Muhammad (PBUH)**

The first of the universal instructors who describe our sustainer to us and acquaints us with Him is Muhammad, the reason for the world’s creation. It is Muhammad who provides convincing answers, accepted to all uncorrupted minds. He is an articulate proof.²⁵ We should listen to him for what he says solves the riddles of the universe and makes known to us our sustainer. For he uncovered the perfections of the universe and set forth the purpose of the creation of the beings. He was addressed by all things in a way appropriate to the aim of their creation and showed it to us. He then proclaims that universal and absolute mercy with all his acts and states.²⁶

If we listen to Muhammad’s (PBUH) supplications, in them he makes our sustainer known to us; he seeks eternal happiness, he seeks immortality. He turns ones face from transitory world to the eternal one, and everyone who listens to him, hears his entreaties to meet him. He seeks eternity because he wants to be in the eternal one’s presence for ever. He sees all human beings as mirrors, mirrors in which are to be seen all the sacred Names of our creator, and their true everlasting beauty. He directs our supplications to our sustainer, who is described by the Names, and makes Him known to us through His Names.²⁷

The *Risāle i- Nūr* teaches us to listen to Prophet Muhammad’s words as words that deliver the universe from meaninglessness, gain importance for it, and impart existence and life to things, and illuminate them. Thus God’s messenger becomes a teacher in men’s eyes, a teacher of *ma‘rifah* (Knowledge). At the heart of everything he teaches, is the affirmation of the divine unity; there is recognition of one creator, which directs us to worship Him alone.²⁸

The duty of people of consciousness and intelligence in this world, everything of which our sustainer created full of art and purpose, is to ponder over His beauties reflected in the art and to proclaim them wonderingly. It was *Muhammad (PBUH)* who performed this duty, which is described in the *Risāle i- Nūr* as the basis of

worship, most perfectly. In this respect, all the words and acts of *Muhammad (PBUH)* are seen in the *Risāle i- Nūras* words and acts making known our sustainer; and is announced as the chief of the “the sphere of worship”.²⁹

2. *The Qur'ān*

The *Qur'ān* is another universal instructor, all of which have great importance and are inseparable from one another. *Qur'ān*, being “the guide” of the *Risāle i- Nūr*, holds an endless importance.

The *Risāle i- Nūr's* way may be summarised as demonstrating the *Qur'ān's* truth under the guidance of the *Qur'ān* and from this point of view its definition of the *Qur'ān* is extremely meaningful:

The *Qur'ān* which comes from God's infinite knowledge, is a translation of the universe, which appears as a vast book. All the beings in the vast universe are signs of creation, translating them into a language the man can understand. The *Qur'ān* is the pre-eternal translator of the mighty Book of the Universe; the post-eternal interpreter of the various tongues reciting the verses of creation; the commentator of the book of the Worlds of the manifest and the Unseen; the revealer of the treasures of the Divine Names hidden in the heavens and on the earth; the key to the truths concealed beneath the lines of events;...; it is the sun, foundation, and plan of the spiritual world of Islam; the sacred map of the worlds of the hereafter; the expounding word, lucid exposition, decisive proof, and clear interpreter of the Divine Essence, attributes, Names, and functions; it is the instructor of the world of humanity;...; it is a revealed scripture resembling a sacred library which offers treatises suitable for all the various ways and different paths of the all the saints and the veracious ones and the wise and the learned, which is appropriate for the illuminations of each way and enlightens it, and is suitable for the course of each path and depicts it.³⁰

The *Qur'ān* has come from the Greatest Name, and from the highest degree of each Name, it is God's Word in regard to His being Sustainer of All The Worlds; it is a Divine decree through His title of God of All Beings; it is an address in the name of the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth; it is a conversation in respect of absolute dominicality; it is a pre-eternal discourse on account of universal Divine sovereignty; it is a notebook of the favours of the Most Merciful from the point of view of all-embracing, all-encompassing Divine mercy; it is a collection of addresses at the start of which are certain ciphers in respect of the tremendousness of Divine majesty; and through its descent from the comprehensiveness of the Greatest Name, it is a holy scripture full of wisdom which looks to and inspects all sides of the Sublime Throne.³¹

The *Qur'ān* is a revealed scripture which contains in summary the books of all the prophets, whose times were all different, the writings of all the saints, whose paths are all different, and the works of all the purified scholars, whose ways are all different. Its six aspects are all brilliant and refined of the darkness of doubts and scepticism; its point of support is certain heavenly revelation and the pre-eternal Word; its aim and goal is self-evidently eternal happiness; its inner aspect is clearly pure guidance; its upper aspect is necessarily the lights of belief; its lower aspect is undeniably evidence and proof; its right aspect is evidently the surrender of the heart and conscience; its left aspect is manifestly the subjugation of the reason and intellect; its fruit is indisputably the mercy of the Most Merciful and the realm of Paradise; and its rank and desirability are assuredly accepted by the angels and man and the *jinn*.³²

This is the eloquence of the *Qur'ān*, which is at the degree of miraculousness. Its eloquence is a wonderful eloquence born of the beauty of its word-order, the perfection of its conciseness, the marvels of its style, its singularity and pleasantness, the excellence of its expression, its superiority and clarity, the power and truth of its meanings, and from the purity and fluency of its language, which for more than 1400 has challenged the most brilliant men of letters of mankind, their most celebrated orators, and the most profoundly learned of them, and invited them to dispute it. It has provoked them intensely. And although it has invited them to dispute it, those geniuses, whose heads touch the skies in their pride and conceit, have been unable to so much as open their mouths to do so, and have bowed their heads utterly humiliated.³³

The *Qur'ān*, therefore, invited the Arabian orators of that time to reply to even one of the shortest of the *Suwar* (sing. *Sūrah*). It challenged them with the decree of

وَأَن كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّثْلِهِ وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مَن دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ
And if ye are in doubt as to what We have revealed from time to time to Our servant, then produce a *Sūrah* like there unto; and call your witnesses or helpers

(If there are any) besides Allah, if your (doubts) are true.³⁴

While describing our maker to us, the *Qur'ān* puts forward proofs in two different ways. One of these is “the proof of wisdom and purpose” (*dalīl-i 'ināyat wa ghāyat*). In brief this proof is the fact that, as the perfect order of the universe shows, faultless art is exhibited in creation and wise purpose and benefits. This proves the makers intention and wisdom, and refutes definitively the notion that it was created by chance. For there can be no perfection and intention without will and choice.³⁵

The *Qur'ān's* second proof is the proof called “*dalīl-i ikhtira*”. Unconscious, lifeless, simple causes could not be the creator of beings, all of which are miracles of power and wondrous works of art leaving everyone in amazement. Causes are themselves created, and cannot bring beings into existence anew and create them. God, the possessor of absolute power, gave all species of creatures being appropriate to their innate capacities and particular to their species, thus making each a proof of Himself. In its verses that mention creation and giving of existence, the *Qur'ān* points out that the true effective agent is God alone and that causes have no true effect, and it establishes this proof in people's minds.³⁶

3. The Book of the Universe

The first, and most direct and shortest way, leading to knowledge of God, the highest point of perfection man can reach, is the way of the *Qur'ān*. In fact, the *Qur'ān* teaches how we can address ourselves to the other three ways. For instance, with many of its verses, the *Qur'ān* invites man to consider “*how beings are created*.” It makes known the Creator of the heavens and earth and all they contain as an All-Glorious One possessing absolute knowledge, absolute power, and absolute will. It points out that nothing can be a partner to God.

The *Risāle i- Nūr* describes the universe as a vast book or a vast human being (macroanthropos). Each word of this book, and even each letter, is created so miraculously that infinite power sufficient to create the whole universe is necessary in order to create even the minutest particle in exactly the right place. Life connects one thing with everything else. There is an order in the universe which embraces all beings and ties each single being to all the other beings as though

weaving a web for each. It is a compounded impossibility to suppose that blind, simple, lifeless, natural causes which are themselves in need of being made and do not know where they are going and why, are the cause of this perfect order.³⁷

While presenting the universe as vast, universal evidence for Divine unity, the All-Wise *Qur'ān* most frequently uses evidence that the mass of people will understand easily. Examples of this are the earth, sky, stars, moon, rain, water, clouds, the bee, the ant, and the wind. The *Risāle i- Nūr* has also adopted this method and style. In accordance with the *Qur'ānic* approach, which may be summarized as “demonstrating Divine Oneness within Divine unity,” it shows that all beings from minute particles to the stars are brilliant proofs of the existence of the Necessarily Existent One, Who possesses absolute power.³⁸

4. The Conscience

The fourth instructor describing our Sustainer to us and making Him known is man's conscience, known as “man's conscious nature,” which has been deposited in his self as a trust.

Man's needs encompass the whole universe. They exceed it even. Man has intense need for life after death, and all his senses want immortality and eternity. However, on his own he does not have the power to meet any of these needs. And such power is not to be found in anything else, since everything is created like himself. Man has been decked out with extremely fine senses, and all the time feels the need to find a point of support in the face of his obvious impotence. He sees, in fact, that his life, youth, senses, the food which he enjoys eating, his clothes, in brief all the bounties bestowed on him, are day by day being lost to him, that they are leaving him. He can find no power in himself to prevent their departure. He longs for his youth not to depart, for those he loves not to abandon him, but he can do nothing apart from desiring these things. In the face of this helplessness, his conscience hopes for a point from which it can seek help, a support from which it can find strength.³⁹

The *Risāle i- Nūr* sees man's need for both a support and point of assistance as part of the order in the universe, and says that in this way two windows have been entrusted to the conscience. It says concerning the conscience that from these two windows, which it calls “the point of support and point of assistance”, “perpetually manifest knowledge of the All-Glorious Maker in man's heart.” “Even if the eyes of the mind are closed, those of the conscience are always open.”⁴⁰

Man has been decked out with truly fine senses. It is understood from the sensitive, perfect, universal senses and abilities given to man that he is the most perfect fruit of the universe. One who does not believe in a Creator is compelled to ascribe beings to blind chance. The uncertainty posed by chance and coincidence is opposed to the nature of the conscience, which is in need of a point of support and a point of assistance. The conscience rejects such an understanding.⁴¹

The *Risāle i- Nūr*, in every part of which the truths of belief are elucidated and proved to the intellect, refers to the conscience so that man will perceive the reality of these truths in his own self as well. Man's innate being and his conscience, are a window to the mind. The conscience is used as a unit of measurement, and after making it confirm a truth, the heart, the centre of the emotions, finds satisfaction.

For “the conscience does not forget the Maker; even if it denies its self, it sees Him (the Creator). It thinks of Him, and is turned to Him”.⁴²

The conscience performs a function of great importance in making known our Sustainer. In the *Risāle i- Nūr*, it is described as a place of transit where the World of the Unseen and this Manifest World come together and where the thoughts and inspirations from those two worlds meet.⁴³

The *Risāle i- Nūr* likens the conscience to the laws of nature. That is, “the essential nature of things does not lie.” When a handful of water freezes, the inclination to expand in its nature necessitates that it takes up more space. It expands even if it is in an iron container and it splits the iron. Strong iron cannot prevent what the water’s nature necessitates. Inclinations such as this are the appearances and manifestations of the commands related to creation which God has laid down with His will.⁴⁴

The creation of the world is subject to the law of being perfected. As for man, since he is the one of the parts and fruits of the world, there is in him too an inclination to be perfected and a desire for progress. This inclination grows and flourishes through the assistance of the meeting of minds and conjunction of ideas. The conjunction of ideas expands through the sources of perfectness. And the sources of perfectness fertilize the seeds of the physical sciences from the loins of creation in the ground of the nursery of the times. The seeds grow and develop through gradual experience.⁴⁵

As was seen, the knowledge reached through revelational knowledge and its interpretation and by applying its method exactly is knowledge. Being based entirely on revelation, its aim is the same as that of revelation. Its aim and purpose is not to acquire knowledge about the universe, like the physical sciences. What we understood from the above verses was that the concept of knowledge in the *Qur’ān* is used to refer to both the knowledge brought by revelation, and the knowledge man may obtain from revelation, and the knowledge man may obtain about the universe (which here we defined as the physical sciences.) Thus we may claim that we have arrived at these three most general categories of knowledge from the *Qur’ānic* angle.⁴⁶

Man came into this world to be perfected through knowledge and supplication. In respect of nature and potentiality, everything is tied to knowledge. And the basis, source, light, and spirit of all true sciences are knowledge of God, and their uttermost essence, belief in God.⁴⁷

This way, which the *Risāle i- Nūr* has taken directly from the All-Wise *Qur’ān*, is the shortest way taking man to knowledge of God. It neither submerges him in the veils of causes, nor opens the door to being forced to deny the universe. There is “a sense of the Divine Presence” on this *Qur’ānic* way of the *Risāle i- Nūr*, and its result is “worship in the presence of the One sought.” But in order to gain this capacity, that is, for the believer to feel himself in God’s presence at all times and in all places, he is not compelled to deny the creatures that exist, saying that the universe is imaginary or does not actually exist. That is to say, the *Risāle i- Nūr* found in the *Qur’ān* a more general, safe, and short way, which surpassed the way of the followers of the Unity of Existence, in order to gain “a constant sense of the Divine presence.” Similarly, the *Risāle i- Nūr* does not embark on a way contrary to the inborn nature of things in order to always be aware of the Divine presence, the way

of the followers of the Unity of Witnessing, which was to cast the universe into absolute oblivion and to forget beings or suppose they do not exist.⁴⁸

Man was created to know his Creator, the Sustainer of All the Worlds, and to worship Him alone. Although there are numerous “instructors” making known the Creator as the purpose of creation, four of these are known as “universal instructors” in the *Risāle i- Nūr*, because they include all the others.⁴⁹

The *Risāle i- Nūr* says that “everything has many aspects that give onto God like windows and discusses the universe as a window opening onto knowledge of God. Thus it explains to those it addresses how this window should be looked through and what may be seen from it here and now.⁵⁰

According to the *Risāle i- Nūr*, the reality of everything looks to the manifestation of one of God Almighty's Names, and is bound to it, and is a mirror to it; whatever beauty is apparent in each, it is due to the Name; the Name requires it to be thus. Whether or not the thing is aware of it, in the view of reality the beauty is demanded. And from this truth, the tip of a most mighty ‘Law of Beauty and Making Beautiful’ is apparent.⁵¹

It is clear that *Said Nūrī* considered that we possess all the implements necessary for *ma'rifah*, and that we should use them for this purpose. In the *Twenty-Sixth Word*, he writes:

If you want knowledge of reality and true wisdom, gain knowledge of Almighty God. For the realities of beings are rays of the Divine Name of Truth and the manifestations of His Names and attributes. The reality of all things, whether physical, non-physical, essential, non-essential, and the reality of all human beings, is based on a Name and relies on Its reality. Things are not merely insignificant forms without reality.⁵²

If we study *Nūrī's* Words carefully, we shall grasp his conception of using the mind, senses, and heart, and that this way may easily convey a believer to knowledge of God.

It is to be observed that the effort of numerous Islamic thinkers to expound the question of *ma'rifah* has been within the framework of this conception. The majority of them have been united in the view that *ma'rifah* is based on the senses, the mind, sight, and revelation.

Conclusion

In this paper a humble endeavour has been made to bring to lime light the phrase “knowledge of God” which is ambiguous in English, since it may have God as either the subject or object of knowing.

This general conclusion shows clearly that the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* give importance to knowledge (*ilm*) as knowledge without distinguishing between different sorts of knowledge. However, whether science, or philosophy, or technological knowledge, if it has not been qualified by revelation, it means it has not risen to the level of *Qur'ānic* enlightened knowledge. Enlightened knowledge is knowledge which revelation has infused with belief, and in the Islamic framework, is a level which all sorts of knowledge have to reach. The opposite of this knowledge is ignorance. However knowledgeable a person is, and of whatever knowledge he is informed to the very highest degree, if he does not reach this level of knowledge, his knowledge is the equivalent of ignorance and harmful to mankind. That is to say, knowledge that is not enlightened by revelation causes harm to people rather than benefit.

It is understood from this that in the Islamic context, if knowledge is indifferent towards life and the living of it and it is not qualified, it is considered unimportant. Only, it should be repeated that since being qualified adds a moral dimension, all these warnings about unbeneficial knowledge should be heeded by man. For it is again man who produces useless knowledge.

Since those who seek knowledge are happy with what they do, the angels overspread them with their wings. Whatever there is on the land and in the heavens, and even the fishes in the seas, pray for forgiveness for those with knowledge. The superiority of the learned over the one, who worships, is the superiority of the moon (due to its light) over the other stars. The scholars are the heirs of the prophets. For the prophets left not riches and possessions as their legacy, but knowledge. Let those who desire to acquire this, hasten after it gratefully.

In *Risāle i- Nūr* much has been talked about the concept of knowledge and in various ways, “Without the light of the heart the light of the mind will not shine; so long as the two lights are not combined, all is darkness.” The following fact, emphasized strongly by *Bedī‘uzzamān*, throws light on the subject: “The sciences of religion are light of the conscience.” For the sciences of religion are the product of revelation, and they illuminate the heart as a result of the relationship between revelation and knowledge. And the great need of the enlightened heart for knowledge being stated indicates the attitude towards the knowledge we have called enlightened knowledge.

This qualified knowledge, which we may call “enlightened knowledge”, is not merely a mental state which is combined with God’s absolute knowledge, which comes with revelation, it is at the same time an existential level of existence tied to practice, reflecting conduct and a way of life. It is because of this that a Muslim scholar cannot be unbiased towards His knowledge; His knowledge necessitates that he acts in accordance with it, and it is also his duty to seek the knowledge which he has to act in accordance with.

Notes and References

¹ Muhsin ‘Abd al-Hamid, *The Theory Of Knowledge In The Qur’ān According To Risāle i- Nūr*, retrieved from <http://www.iikv.org/academy/index.php/sympeng/article/view/959/1329> (accessed on 15th of December, 2013)

² *Ibid.*

³ Retrieved from <http://Nürsistudies.com/mod.php?lng=&ctgid=who-is-bediuzzaman-said-Nürsi> (accessed on 18th December, 2013)

⁴ *Syed Muhammad Naqīb Al-‘Attās*, *The Concept of Education in Islam*, (The Key Note Address Delivered At “First World Conference on Muslim Education, Held in *Makkah al-Mu‘azzamah* in March 1977.), p. 5

⁵ Dr. Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, *Islamic Concept of Knowledge* (Pakistan: Minhaj-ul-Quran Publications Lahore, 2007) p. 17

⁶ Abdula. Y. A., *The Meaning of The Holy Qur’ān*. (New Delhi: Farid Book Depot, 1998), 96:1-5 (all the translations in this paper have been taken from this translation of the holy *Qur’ān*. so here after it will cited as *Al-Qur’ān*)

⁷ Qadri, *op.cit.*, p. 23-24

⁸ Ahmad ‘abd al-Rahim al-Sayih, *Horizons of Knowledge in the thought of Bediuzzaman said Nürsi*, retrieved from <http://www.iikv.org/academy/index.php/sympeng/article/view/892/1115> (Accessed on 3rd of January, 2014)

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Bediuzzaman Said Nürsî, *The Words* [Eng. Trans. Sukran vahide] (Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 2008), p. 287

¹³ Bediuzzaman Said Nürsî, *The Rays* [Eng. Trans. Sukran vahide] (Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 2007), p. 125

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Al-Qur'ān*, 34: 3

¹⁶ Dr. Muhammad Maruf, *Islamic Theory Of Knowledge*, retrieved from <http://www.allamaiqbal.com/publications/journals/review/apr96/7.htm> (Accessed on 2nd of January, 2014)

¹⁷ *Al-Qur'ān, op.cit.*, 2:256

¹⁸ Sayyid Muḥammad Yunus Gilani, *Knowledge an Islamic Weapon*, (Kashmir: Institute of Islamic Thought, Srinagar, 2002), p. 4

¹⁹ Al Sayih, *Op.cit.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ The Word, *op.cit.*, p. 300

²² The Rays, *op.cit.*, p. 609

²³ Bediuzzaman Said Nürsî, *The Letters* [Eng. Trans. Sukranvahide] (Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 2008), p. 388

²⁴ The Words, *op.cit.*, p. 243, also see Ali Mermer, *The Ways To Knowledge Of God In The Risāle i- Nūr*, retrieved from <http://www.iikv.org/academy/index.php/sympeng/article/view/899> (accessed on 18th December, 2013)

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Mermer, *op.cit.*,

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ The Word, *op.cit.*, pp. 376-77

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 377

³² *Ibid.*, p. 378

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Al- Qur'ān*, 2:23

³⁵ Mermer, *op.cit.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Bediuzzaman Said Nürsî, *The Flashes* [Eng. Trans. Sukranvahide] (Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 2009), pp. 171-72

⁴⁵ Mim Kemal Oke, *Islamic Knowledge In The Information Age And Bediuzzaman*, retrieved from <http://www.iikv.org/academy/index.php/sympeng/article/view/921/1144> (accessed on 3, January 2014)

⁴⁶ Alparslan Acikgencan, *Evaluation of The Risāle i- Nūr From The Point of View of Knowledge And The Categorization of Knowledge*, retrieved from <http://www.iikv.org/academy/index.php/sympeng/article/view/900/1123> (accessed on 3, January 2014)

⁴⁷ Oke, *op.cit.*

⁴⁸ Mermer, *op.cit.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *The Words*, *op.cit.*, p. 690

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 579

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 488-89