

# Lecture No. 28: The Islamic concept of knowledge and education

## (Module 1(118): Introduction to the Knowledge)

**The Concept of Knowledge in the Greek Period:** There was a tendency among the Greek philosophers to give the name of knowledge to the concept formed in the mind about anything, whether it is about something real or against reality. If that concept reaches the point of confirmation, then it is called knowledge, and if there is doubt or illusion, it is still called knowledge.

**Islamic Concept of Knowledge:** Islam rejected this concept of knowledge. According to Islam, the light of knowledge eliminates ignorance, illusion, and doubts. That is why knowledge is defined as: "Indeed, knowledge is the quality by which ignorance, doubt, and suspicion are removed from a living person."

The consensus of the scholars is that there is a firm and final understanding of something where ignorance is eliminated, there is no hesitation or doubt, and this is called knowledge.

**Sources of Knowledge:** There are four sources of knowledge;

**1. Five Senses:** It includes the following five senses.

- i. Sense of hearing (the ability to hear with the ears)
- ii. Sense of sight (the ability to see with the eyes)
- iii. Sense of touch (ability to touch with hands)
- iv. Sense of smell (ability to smell through the nose)
- v. sense of taste (ability to taste with the tongue)

All these senses have specific and limited scope. No sense can perceive anything beyond its limits and scope.

**2. Intellect:** Observation, experience and knowledge gained through the senses provides light to intellect. The intellect analyzes this information. **Intellect also has five parts:**

- i. Hiss-e-Mushtarik (حس مشترك)
- ii. Hiss-e-Wahima (حس واہمہ)
- iii. Hiss-e-Mutsarifa (حس متصرفہ)
- iv. Hiss-e-Khayal (حس خیال)

v. Hiss-e-Hafiza (حس حافظہ)

The scope of the intellect is bound to the five senses. The thing that does not come within the scope of the senses cannot be perceived by the intellect.

**3. Intuition:** There are many facts and sciences in this universe which do not come within the limits and scope of the external senses and intellect. Allah Almighty has also given man an inner power and a source of knowledge to observe these unseen facts and events that will appear in the future, which is called intuition. Not everyone can achieve this. For this, physical and spiritual purity is necessary. Like senses and intellect, the scope of intuition also falls in the physical universe.

There are five corners of intuition which are called Lataif-e-Khamsa (لطائف خمسہ):

i. Latif-e-Qalb (لطیف قلب)

ii. Latif-e-Rooh (لطیف روح)

iii. Latif-e-Ser (لطیف سر)

iv. Latif-e-Khafi (لطیف خفی)

v. Latif-e-Akhfie (لطیف اخفی)

**4. Revelation:**

The knowledge obtained from the above three sources is indefinite. All of them are limited in scope and prone to error. The knowledge obtained through revelation is definite knowledge in which there is no room for any kind of doubt. In the Holy Qur'an, Allah has clearly described three ways of revelation:

وَمَا كَانَ لِنَبِيٍّ أَنْ يَكَلِّمَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَّا وَحْيًا أَوْ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ أَوْ يُرْسِلَ رَسُولًا فَيُوحِيَ بِإِذْنِهِ مَا يَشَاءُ (الشورى، 51:42)

And every man does not have the faculty that Allah should speak to him (directly) except by Revelation (He bestows upon some the holy status of Prophethood), or (should speak) from behind a veil (as He spoke to Musa [Moses] on Mount Tur of Sinai), or by sending some angel as a messenger to reveal with His permission what Allah may will. (In any case, the medium and mediation of the communication of Allah's Word for mankind is none but the Prophet and the Messenger.)

This verse reveals three forms of revelation:

1. **Revelation to Heart:** (directly speaking into the hearts of the Prophets. This can happen both in the waking state and in the dream state)

2. **Direct Revelation from God:** (The direct speech of Allah to His Prophet, such as He said to the Prophet on the night of Ascension and to Hazrat Musa “(AS) on Mount Sinai (طور سيناء))
3. **Revelation through Angel:** Revelation through an angel (sometimes the angel is not seen, only the voice is heard, sometimes the angel appears in human form, sometimes the angel is seen in his original form and only the prophets can see him.)

## (Module 2(119): Importance of Knowledge in Islam)

No other religion in the world has emphasized the pursuit of knowledge as much as Islam. The importance of knowledge in Islam can be gauged from the fact that the first revelation that Allah revealed to the beloved Prophet (PBUH) was to encourage the acquisition of knowledge.

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ﴿١﴾ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ﴿٢﴾ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ﴿٣﴾ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ﴿٤﴾ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ﴿٥﴾ (العلق 1-5:96)

(O Beloved!) Read (commencing) with the Name of Allah, Who has created (everything). He created man from a hanging mass (clinging) like a leech (to the mother's womb). Read, and your Lord is Most Generous, Who taught man (reading and writing) by the pen, Who (besides that) taught man (all that) which he did not know. Or Who imparted to (the most eminent of) mankind (the chosen Prophet Muhammad [blessings and peace be upon him] without using any pen) the whole knowledge that he was not aware of before.

Similarly, many other verses in the Holy Quran show the importance and excellence of knowledge.

يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ (المجادله 11:58)

Allah will raise those in ranks who believe from amongst you and who are given knowledge.

قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ (الزمر 9:39)

Say: ‘Can those who have knowledge and those who do not be alike?’ So only the wise do receive the admonition.

The Prophet (PBUH) also drew us to the importance of knowledge in his hadiths:

إِنَّ الْعُلَمَاءَ وَرَثَةُ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ (ابو داود، 3641)

"The scholars are the heirs of the prophets."

وَإِنَّ الْعَالَمَ لَيَسْتَغْفِرُ لَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ (ابوداود، 3641)

"And verily all the things of the earth and the sky pray for forgiveness for the scholar." "

مَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ بِهِ خَيْرًا يُفَقِّهْهُ فِي الدِّينِ (صحيح بخارى، 71)

"Whoever Allah intends for good, He bestows upon him the understanding of religion."

**Importance of Seeking Knowledge in Islam:** Acquiring knowledge is very important in Islam. Allah says:

فَسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ (النحل:43)

So, ask the people of the message if you do not know.

The Prophet (PBUH) said:

مَنْ سَلَكَ طَرِيقًا يَطْلُبُ فِيهِ عِلْمًا سَلَكَ اللَّهُ بِهِ طَرِيقًا إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ (الترمذی:2682)

"Whoever takes a path (whether long or short) to gain knowledge of religion, Allah guides him to the path of Paradise."

Another hadith is:

طلب العلم فريضة على كل مسلم (ابن ماجه، 224)

"Acquiring knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim (male and female)."

### **Importance of Teaching Knowledge (Education):**

Education means "to teach someone knowledge". Just as it is important to learn knowledge, it is also important to teach it to others. One of the duties of Prophethood is that he (PBUH) teaches people the Book and wisdom.

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ \* وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ (الجمعة:2:62)

He is the One Who sent a (Glorious) Messenger (blessings and peace be upon him) amongst the illiterate people from amongst themselves who recites to them His Revelations and cleanses and purifies them (outwardly and inwardly) and teaches them the Book and wisdom. Indeed, they were in open error before (his most welcome arrival).

The hadith says:

أَنَا بُعِثْتُ مُعَلِّمًا (ابن ماجه، 229)

"I was sent as a teacher."

In the following verse, Allah Almighty has encouraged a group of Muslims to learn the knowledge of religion and teach it to their people:

وَمَا كَانَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لِيَنْفِرُوا كَافَّةً ۚ فَلَوْ لَا نَفَرَ مِنْ كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ مِنْهُمْ طَائِفَةٌ لِيَتَفَقَّهُوا فِي الدِّينِ وَلِيُنذِرُوا قَوْمَهُمْ إِذَا رَجَعُوا إِلَيْهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَحْذَرُونَ (التوبة:9:122)

And it is not possible for all the Muslims to set out (together). So, why should a party from within every group (or tribe) not go forth in order that they may acquire deeper knowledge (i.e., thorough understanding and insight) of the Din (Religion), and warn their people when they return to them so that they may guard themselves (against a life of sins and disobedience)?

When the Prophet (PBUH) sent Hazrat Mu'adh **حضرت معاذ** (RA) to Yemen, he said to him: "If Allah guides a person through you, he is better for you than the world." "In this way, the Prophet (PBUH) said:

ان الدال على الخير كفاعله (سنن ترمذی، 2670)

"He who guides to goodness, (in reward) is like the one who does good." "

On one occasion he said:

لا حسدَ إلا في اثنتين: رجل آتاه الله مالا، فسلَّطه على هلكته في الحَقِّ، ورجل آتاه الله حِكْمَةً، فهو يَقتضي بها ويُعلِّمها (صحيح بخاری، 1409)

"Envy is only permissible for two people. One is a person to whom Allah has given wealth and has been fully enabled to spend it (wealth) in the path of truth, and the other is one to whom Allah has given wisdom and through it he judges and teaches. "

In these verses and Ahadith, the Qur'an and hadith have given great importance to knowledge, acquiring knowledge and teaching knowledge.

### (Module 3(120): Status of different kinds of knowledge in Islamic perspective)

#### Types of knowledge:

1. Useful knowledge
2. Useless knowledge

#### 1. Useful Knowledge:

According to the Islamic concept of knowledge, any knowledge that is useful in this world or in the hereafter is beneficial for the possessor of knowledge and other creatures. Wherever the importance and excellence of knowledge is mentioned in the Qur'an and Hadith, it refers to knowledge of benefit. The Prophet (PBUH) prayed to Allah Almighty for beneficial knowledge in these words:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ عِلْمًا نَافِعًا، وَرِزْقًا طَيِّبًا، وَعَمَلًا مُتَقَبَّلًا (ابن ماجه، 925)

"O Allah, I ask You for beneficial knowledge, pure sustenance and acceptable actions (in the sight of Allah)."

Beneficial knowledge includes all the beneficial religious and worldly sciences such as Quran, Hadith, Fiqh, Language, Medicine, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Mathematics, Political Science, Social Sciences, Economic Sciences, Spiritual Sciences (Ethics and Sufism), etc. Allah Almighty has described an attribute of His righteous servants in the Qur'an:

وَيَتَذَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ (آل عمران: 191)

give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying

## 2. Useless knowledge:

Any knowledge that is harmful or useless to the owner of the knowledge or anyone else from a religious or worldly point of view is called useless knowledge. These sciences have been condemned by Shariat (شريعت). The Prophet (PBUH) has sought refuge with Allah Almighty from knowledge that is not beneficial.

اللهم إني أعوذ بك من علم لا ينفع ومن قلب لا يخشع ومن نفس لا تشبع ومن دعوة لا يستجاب لها (مسلم، 6906)

O Allah! I seek Your refuge from knowledge that is not beneficial, from a heart that does not fear (or is not satisfied with the remembrance of Allah), from a soul that is not satisfied (i.e., greedy and not content with what Allah has given) and with this supplication that does not reach acceptance.

These sciences include knowledge of magic, knowledge of talismans (علم طلسمات), science of astrology, etc. The people of Bani Israel learned magic with the intention of harming others, Islam condemned it as illegitimate. In Islam, it is permissible to learn astrology for navigation. The aspect of astrology through which the scholar predicts the future is disliked and forbidden in Islam.

## (Module 4(121): Islamic view of women's education)

Before Islam, women were deprived of basic rights. They were considered the property of father before marriage and of the husband after marriage. They have no personal life and no personal rights. Instead of giving good education and training to the girls, they were buried alive. In such a situation, Islam gave respect to women in the society. Along with other rights, women were also given the right to get education. In the Qur'an and Hadith, wherever learning and teaching of knowledge is discussed and the excellence of scholars is described, both men and women are meant. Because in the Qur'an, wherever the masculine form is used, in its meaning includes both men and women.

وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ (البقرة: 43)

‘And establish Prayer’

The masculine form is used in this verse, but prayer is ordered for both men and women. This is the case in the verses where the excellence of knowledge and scholars is described. The Prophet

(PBUH) has declared the education and training of women as important and necessary as that of men. In Islamic society, it is not appropriate for a person to give a lower status to a girl than a boy and ignore her education and training. It is narrated from Hazrat Abu Saeed Khudri RA that the women came to the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and pleaded: The men have gone ahead of us in getting benefit from you. So, fix a day for us. The prophet (PBUH) fixed a day for them. On that day, he would meet them and advise them and tell them the commandments of Allah.” (Sahih Bukhari, 101)

The Prophet (PBUH) said: “Whoever has a daughter and he teaches her good manners and gives her good education and expands favours on her that Allah has given him, that daughter will become a barrier and a screen for him from Hell. (Tabarani, Al-Majam al-Kabeer, 10447)

This hadith shows how important good education and training is in the good upbringing of a daughter. On another occasion, the Prophet (PBUH) said: “Whoever has a slave girl, he teaches her manners and educates her, then set her free and marries her, there is a double reward for him.” (Ibn Majah, 1956).

In this hadith, two-fold reward has been announced for the education of a slave girl, so how much reward will there be for the education of a free woman and especially a daughter, in Islam. After these commands, how can one say that women's education is against Islam?

## **(Module 5(122): Scholarly Services of Muslim Women)**

**Scholarly Role of Muslim Women in the Early Periods of Islam:** The way Islam opened the ways of knowledge for women, women became prominent in education in the early centuries.

In the early days of Islam, five women knew how to read and write: Hazrat Umm Kulthum RA, Hazrat Aisha RA Bint Saad, Hazrat Maryam RA Bint Muqdad, Hazrat Shifa RA Bint Abdullah and Umm Al-Momineen Hazrat Aisha Siddiqa RA. Hazrat Hafsa RA used to learn calligraphy from Hazrat Shafa RA. Hadhrat Shafa' herself narrated that "I was sitting next to Sayyida Hafsa when the Prophet (PBUH) came there and said to me: Why do you not teach this one the spell for skin eruptions as you taught her writing." (Abu Dawud, 3887) It was the result of these attentions of the Prophet (PBUH) that a number of Companions of the Prophet (PBUH) became interested in Islamic sciences and performed significant services in preserving and forwarding these sciences.

1. The greatest name among them is Umm al-Momineen Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqa (RA). She was a Hafizah and a commentator of the Quran. 2210 hadiths of the Prophet (PBUH) have been narrated from her. She guided the Companions by deriving solutions to jurisprudential problems in the light of the Qur'an and Hadith. She lived for fifty years after the death of the Prophet (PBUH) and was a cause of conveying the teachings of the Prophet (PBUH) to a large group of Muslims. The number of her disciples in companions and their successors is in the thousands. Hazrat Urwa bin Zubair RA says that "I have not seen anyone better than Hazrat Aisha RA, a scholar of Qur'an, a scholar of obligatory teachings of Islam, of haram and halal, jurisprudence, poetry, Arab history and genealogy." (Mustadrak Hakim)

2. Umm Al-Mu'minin Hazrat Umm Salama (RA) was an expert in Islamic jurisprudence. After Hazrat Ayesha (RA), the services of Hazrat Umm Salama (RA) in the knowledge of hadith and jurisprudence are the most prominent. She issued three hundred and seventy-eight fatwas. She established an institution in her home where she taught Qur'an, Tafsir, Qir'at, Fiqh and Hadith.
3. Hazrat Hafsa (RA) was Umm al-Mu'minin, a Hafizah and scholar of the Qur'an. During the reign of Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddique RA, when the Quran was preserved in book form, Hazrat Hafsa RA was among the companions who investigated and verified the Quranic verses written on various stones and barks.
4. Umm al-Mu'minin Hazrat Umm Habiba RA played a prominent role in the tradition of Hadith. He narrated 65 hadiths directly from the Prophet (PBUH).
5. Hazrat Fatimah bint Qays RA was also one of the companions of Prophet (PBUH), an intelligent, capable, and learned woman. She was the wife of Hazrat Osama bin Zayd RA and lived near the house of the Prophet (PBUH). She used to memorize the hadiths of the Prophet (PBUH) which she heard in the Prophet's Mosque.

Among other female scholar companions the names of Hazrat Asma bint Abi Bakr RA, Hazrat Maimunah RA, Hazrat Fatima Al-Zahra RA and Hazrat Umm Ayman RA are prominent who played a role in the promotion of Islamic sciences.

The exceptional interest in the education and teaching of the female Companions gave birth to numerous female scholars during the period of the successors (تابعين), some of whom are listed below:

1. Dara (درة), the daughter of Hazrat Saeed bin Al-Museeb RA, remembered all the hadiths narrated by him. His father married her to one of his students. A few days after the marriage, when her husband started going to Hazrat Ibn Al-Museeb's scholarly assembly, his wife said, "Sit down; I will teach you the knowledge that Hazrat Saeed RA has."
2. The daughter of Imam Malik bin Anas RA remembered his book of hadith, Muta, completely.
3. Hazrat Fatima bint Munzer RA who was the granddaughter of Hazrat Asma RA. She was a great Muhaddithah (expert of Hadith and its sciences) and jurist of the era of the successors (Tabi'een). She narrated many hadiths from her grandmother.
4. Hazrat Nafisa Bint Al Hasan RA had knowledge. She rendered great services in Tafsir and Hadith. When she went to Egypt from Madinah people started coming to her from far and wide to learn knowledge. Among her students are the great jurists Imam Shafi'i and Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal. During the Abbasid era, women were very interested in knowledge. Women's study circles were organized in homes, mosques, madrasas, gardens, and other places. The women of the royal family themselves patronized women's education.
1. Zubaydah Khatun, the wife of the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid, gave free time to more than a hundred of her slaves only to study the Holy Qur'an.



2. Zumard Khatun, the sister of the ruler of Damascus, Mulk al-Daqaq, had established a seminary for the education of women under the name of Madrasa al-Khatuniyyah al-Baraniyyah (مدرسة الخاتونية البرانية).
3. Maryam, the wife of Sultan-ul-Mulk al-Muzaffar of Yemen, established a seminary in which she provided education to poor and orphaned girls.
4. Fatima bint Muhammad Samarkandi was very famous in Hanafi jurisprudence. Her father was a famous jurist. Whenever a petition came, he would consult his daughter, who would prepare a reply that would be signed by both father and daughter. Later, Fatima was married to her father's student, Alauddin Al-Kasani (علاء الدين الكاساني), who is famous in the entire scholarly world for his work Al-Bada'i al-Sana'I (لبدائع والصنائع). When describing a problem to Al Kasani, there was a doubt, Fatima would correct him, and he would accept it.

Apart from the academic field, the names of many women are prominent in the scientific world, some of which are mentioned below:

1. Zubaydah bint Jafar al-Mansur was a famous scientist of her time and the founder of a very extensive project to build wells and service stations along the routes of pilgrim caravans from Baghdad to Mecca.
2. Al-Ajlia (العجليه) was an engineer who built an astrolabe in Halb. (An astrolabe is an instrument used by astronomers to make astronomical measurements.)

It was the peak time of Islam when the intellectual status of women was very high. But as time passed, Muslims moved away from religious teachings. This led to the downfall of Muslims. Due to ignorance or lack of knowledge, in many places, women were kept away from education on the pretext of observing the veil, etc. However, in Islam, the veil for women is only for going out of the house. If it was intended to be kept in the house, there was no need to issue the command of the veil. When women moved away from knowledge, the education of generations started suffering.

**Education for Women and the Role of Women in Modern Times:** Just like every era, in the present era, numerous institutions are engaged in efforts regarding the education of women. The trend towards acquiring education among Muslim women has increased a lot. Currently, the highest number of Muslim women in the United States have a college degree which is 42% of the total women. While only 29% of total American women hold a college degree. Countless women have and continue to serve in the most important positions and professions after receiving higher education. This list is so long that it is not possible to mention all these women here.

Islam has never closed the door to knowledge for women but has always encouraged it. The true thought of Islam seems to refute the thought that tried to close the avenues of knowledge for women.