

Part 4: The Relationship of the Qur'an to the Sciences

[Praise of Knowledge and the Stimulation of the Desire to Study](#)

No other revealed book praises and encourages science and knowledge as does the Qur'an and it is for this reason that the Qur'an names the age of the desert Arabs, together with their pagan cultures, before Islam as the "age of ignorance."

In over a hundred verses reference is made to science and knowledge in a variety of ways; and many of these verses praise the value of scientific knowledge. In 96:5 God indicates the favor he has done man by bringing him out of his state of ignorance. "***He teaches man what he did not know.***"

Likewise, we read in 58:11, "***God will exalt those who believe among you and those who have knowledge to high ranks,***" and in 39:9 God says, "***Are those who know equal to those who do not***" Besides the many verses in the Qur'an concerning knowledge, there are also countless traditions of the Prophet and the Imams on this subject which rank second only in importance to the Qur'an.

[The Sciences which the Qur'an Invites Men to Study](#)

In verses too numerous to mention, the Qur'an invites one to reflect upon the signs Of creation: the heavens, the shining stars and their astonishing celestial movements, and the cosmic order which rules over them all.

Similarly, the Qur'an urges one to reflect upon the creation of the earth, the seas, the mountains, the desert, and the wonders contained below the surface of the earth, the difference between night and day and the changing cycle of seasons. It urges mankind to meditate on the extraordinary creation of the plants and the order and symmetry governing their growth, as well as the multiplicity of the animal kingdom.

The Qur'an invites one to witness the interdependence of beings and how all live in harmony with nature. It calls upon man also, to ponder on his own make-up, on the secrets of creation which are hidden within him, on his soul, on the depth of his perception, and on his relationship with the world of the spirit.

The Qur'an commands man to travel in the world in order to witness other cultures and to investigate the social orders, history and philosophies of past people. Thus it calls man to a study of the natural sciences, mathematics, philosophy, the arts and all sciences available to man, and to study them for the benefit of man and the well-being of society.

The Qur'an recommends the study of these sciences on the condition that it leads to truth and reality, that it produces a correct view of the world based on an understanding of God.

Knowledge, which merely keeps a man occupied and prevents him from knowing the reality of his own existence, is equated with ignorance. God says in 3:7, "***They know only some appearance of the life of one world and are heedless of the Hereafter***" and in chapter 45:23, "***Have you seen him who makes his Desire his goal, and God sends him astray purposely and seals up his Heart and sets a covering on his Heart. Then who will lead him after God (has condemned him).***"

The Qur'an not only stimulates the desire for study but is itself a complete system of education of divine knowledge; it provides, too, a model for human behavior and thought. This complete way of life is called Islam, the way of submission.

The Sciences Particular to the Study of the Qur'an

There are many sciences devoted to the study of the Qur'an itself. The development of such sciences dates from the first day of Qur'anic revelation; over a period of time they were unified and perfected. Today countless books are available on these sciences, fruit of the labor of different researchers over the centuries.

Some of these sciences investigate the language and vocabulary of the Qur'an, and some the meanings. Those concerned with language are the sciences of correct Qur'anic pronunciation and reading (tajwad and qira'ah).

They explain the simple changes which certain letters undergo when occurring in conjunction with others, the substitution of letters and the places prescribed for breath-pausing, and other similar matters.

They also study the different ways the Qur'an has been written down and the several generally accepted ways of recitation, together with the three lesser known ways and the rarer modes of recitation. Other works enumerate the number of chapters and their verses, while others relate these numbers to the whole Qur'an.

They discuss the tradition of Qur'anic calligraphy and how it differs from the normal Arabic script. They

research, too, into the meanings of the Qur'an and the general division of subject matter, such as the place and circumstance of revelation, the interpretation of certain verses, the outward and inner meanings, the *muhkam* (clear) or the *mutashabih* (ambiguous), and the abrogating and the abrogated verses.

Others study the verses containing the laws (which, in fact, are part of what is known as Islamic fiqh or jurisprudence). Others specialize in the commentary of the meanings (already seen in a previous section of the book). Specialists in each of the different sciences have published numerous works on each subject.

The Sciences which Developed because of the Qur'an

The sciences of the din of Islam came into being at the beginning of the Prophet's mission and the revelation of the Qur'an, including laws governing the behavior and transactions of Muslims. Study of these sciences developed in the first century after the Hijrah although initially, not in any formal way. Since the Caliphs had prohibited the writing down of the tradition, they were handed down by word of mouth by the companions and their followers.

A small number of Scholars wrote on jurisprudence and on the science of the traditions at the beginning of the second century when the prohibition was lifted, allowing Scholars to record the traditions.

It was at this point that a number of disciplines came into being including the Science of Traditions and the Science of establishing the authority and sincerity of those men who transmitted it; the Science of analysis of the text of the traditions; the Science of the foundations of jurisprudence and jurisprudence itself; the Science of belief in the judgment after death and the after-life.

Even philosophy, which entered the Islamic arena via the Greek, and remained there for some time in its original Greek, took on the colour and beliefs of the people after a time.

Changes in the subject matter and the structure of disciplines took place such that today, amongst Muslims, all subject matter concerning divine gnosis is supported by proofs and reasons taken from the Qur'an and the traditions.

All these subjects were also studied as an integral part of the Arabic language: mastery of the science of verb declensions grammar, meanings of words, commentary and explanation, the art of metaphors and good style, and the philosophy and science of derived meanings allowed greater precision and clarity in the study of the Islamic Sciences as a whole.

Indeed what stimulated scholars to record and arrange coherently the laws of the Arabic language was the sense that they were serving God; love of Him drew them to a clarity and sweetness of style which in turn generated the Science of correct speech and composition.

It is thus related that Ibn 'Abbas, who was one of the commentators amongst the companions, explained the meanings of verses by taking examples of the vocabulary in question from Arabic poetry. He advised people to collect and learn Arabic poetry saying, *Poetry is the court of the Arabs (meaning the place where the finest language may be heard)*.

The famous Shi'ite scholar Khahl ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi wrote the book al-'Ayn on the subject of language and also described the science of poetic rhyme.

Many others also wrote on the same subjects. The subject of history was initially derived in Islam from stories of the lives of prophets, in particular that of the Prophet Muhammad, and the description of the course of past nations. To this basic material was added an account of the events during the period immediately following the appearance of Islam. All this was developed into a history of the world in the writings of such men as al-Tabari, al-Mas'udi, al-Ya'qubi and al-Waqidi.

The original reason the Muslims translated and transmitted the natural Sciences and mathematics from other cultures and languages into Arabic was the cultural stimulation given to them by the Qur'an. Many different Sciences were translated from Greek, Syrian and Sanskrit into Arabic.

Access to these sciences was at first available only to the Caliph (who was at that time leader of only Arab Muslims). Gradually they were made available to all Muslims and improved upon as research methods, structuring, classification and ordering of the subjects developed.

One of the main reasons the civilization of Islam, which formed after the death of the Prophet came to include a large part of the inhabited world (and which today numbers over six hundred million inhabitants), was the Qur'an.

We as Shi'ahs, however, deny that the caliphs and the kings who followed them had legitimate claim to the guardianship and execution of the law even though they expanded Islamic civilization, and do not fully agree with the way they explained the realities of Islam.

Indeed the light of wisdom which illuminated the world was from the light of the miracle of the Qur'an. The appearance and diffusion of the revelation caused a change in the direction of history and generated a chain of important events resulting in the progress and development of the culture of man.

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