

The Infinite Knowledge of Allah

(Verse 16)

قُلْ أَتَعْلَمُونَ اللَّهَ بِدِينِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

“Say (to the people O’ Muhammad): ‘Do you wish to teach Allah about your Din (complete way of life) whereas Allah knows all that is contained in the Heavens and all that is upon the Earth; and surely Allah has complete knowledge of everything.’”

The all-encompassing knowledge of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) over all of the creations of the world is referred to by various words and phrases in many places in the Qur’an. One such phrase which is employed is:

بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ...

“...complete knowledge of everything.”

This phrase has been mentioned in the above verse under discussion and has also been repeated in over twenty other instances in the Qur’an. This sentence and other such examples negate any sort of ignorance on the part of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) in relation to any affair of even the smallest size. The Qur’an has not stopped at this sentence and in other verses as well, the encompassing knowledge of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) has also been explained:

لَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْهُ مِثْقَالُ ذَرَّةٍ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ

“Not even the weight of an atom that is within the Heavens nor in the Earth is hidden from Him.”¹

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَخْفَىٰ عَلَيْهِ شَيْءٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ

“Surely there is nothing that is hidden from Allah whether it be in the Earth or in the Heaven.”²

وَعِنْدَهُ مَفَاتِحُ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْلَمُهَا إِلَّا هُوَ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَمَا تَسْقُطُ مِنْ وَرَقَةٍ إِلَّا يَعْلَمُهَا وَلَا حَبَّةٍ فِي ظُلُمَاتٍ الْأَرْضِ وَلَا رَطْبٍ وَلَا يَابِسٍ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ

“And with Him (Allah) are the Keys of the Unseen. No one knows them (the Secrets of the Unseen) except for Him (Allah). And He (Allah) knows all that is on the land and all that is in the seas and there is not even a single leaf that falls except that He has full knowledge of it and there is also not a single dry thing that is hidden in the darkness of the Earth, nor anything that is wet or dry, except that (all of these) are preserved in a Clear Book.”³

Is there a more expressive way that these (verses of the Qur'an) can explain the comprehensive knowledge of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) over all of the creations?

In one of his lectures, Amir al-Mu'minin `Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon him) has elucidated on the comprehensive knowledge of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) over all of His creations of the world in the following manner:

يَعْلَمُ عَجِيجَ الْوُحُوشِ فِي الْفَلَوَاتِ وَمَعَاصِيَ الْعِبَادِ فِي الْخَلَوَاتِ وَاخْتِلَافَ الْحَيَّاتَانِ فِي الْبِحَارِ الْغَامِرَاتِ وَتَلَاظُمَ الْمَاءِ بِالرِّيحِ الْعَاصِفَاتِ.

“He (Allah) knows of the cries of the beasts in the forest; the sins of the servants while they are in seclusion and the movements of the fish in the deep seas and the rising of the water by the tempestuous winds.”⁴

Proofs of Allah's Never-Ending Knowledge

Through various ways and methods available to them, the scholars and experts of Islamic Theology have proven the knowledge and wisdom of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) ranging from the smallest of creations to the phenomenon of the world, as well as the secrets of the creation, and of these, we mention two.

First Proof for the Comprehensive Knowledge of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He):

1. Without doubt, the designer of a machine has knowledge of even the most intricate workings of what he has manufactured. Is it possible to say that, “The manufacturer of a plane is unaware of a scientific or technical aspect of his design”? Or, is it possible that the author of an encyclopaedia would not know what the contents of his own work are?!

In our previous discussion, we elucidated on the fact that if the presence of a creation proves that there was a creator to bring that thing about; and similarly the characteristics of the thing created give witness to the specific characteristics of the creator who has brought the thing into being, then any time the created thing is studied in detail in relation to its blue-print of creation, size, organization and arrangement of creation, then without doubt it would have to be said that the creator of that thing must be one who possesses knowledge – such that through his extensive knowledge, we was able to bring about such a thing.

Therefore, seeing as to how all of the creations of the world – from the atoms to the stars in the sky – have all been created according to a set plan and certain organized conventional rules, and day by day mankind is discovering the unity and harmony of the Universe and is becoming more and more aware (of its surroundings), therefore we must say that the world of creation has taken its beginnings from a very Learned and All-Knowing source that has complete knowledge of all the particularities. Thus, He has created all of them in accordance with His pre-prepared plan.

The existing order of every leaf from all of the leaves in creation; of every atom from all of the innumerable atoms; every particle from the particles that make up the human being; every cell from amongst all of the cells of living creatures; every star from amongst the stars in the heavens – all point to the organization and order that exists and bears witness to the fact that the Creator of all of these things and all of their specifics that they possess, can only be the one All-Knowing (Allah). Therefore, it is impossible to think that the world of creation would come about without an All-Knowing Creator.

Guidance from the Qur'an on the First Proof

The Noble Qur'an has explained this proof in a very subtle manner and the creation of mankind has been used as the evidence of the knowledge of the Creator where it has been said:

أَلَّا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ خَلَقَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ

“What then does He who created (all), and He who is the knower of the subtleties – the Aware – not know (about His creations?)”⁵

In another verse of the Qur'an, it has been mentioned that Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) is closer to the human being than his own jugular vein:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ

“Unquestionably We have created mankind and We know what his soul whispers to him (the evil whisperings) and We are closer to him than his jugular vein.”⁶

دل من تا ز دوست سرشار است دائم از غیر دوست بیزار است

غایب از دیده و به در حاضر با چنین دلبری مرا کار است

*As long as my heart is filled with the love of my friend (Allah),
It will always be averse from those who are not my friends.
Absent from the sight (is Allah), however attentive in the heart,
I associate with none but such lovers (of Him).*

The eighth Imam, `Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha (peace be upon him) has taken the unity of creation and organization of the universe, as the proof of the knowledge of a Creator and has stated:

أَتَقَنَّ مَا خَلَقَ بِحِكْمَتِهِ وَوَضَعَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ مِنْهُ مَوْضِعَهُ بِعِلْمِهِ

“The world of creation has been made firm and solid through His plan based on wisdom and everything has been placed in its rightful place through His knowledge.”⁷

Second Proof for the Comprehensive Knowledge of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He):

2. Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) is the One who is everywhere (at all times) and has complete knowledge of all periods and all things.

The second proof for the vast knowledge of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) and His complete perception of all of the creations and events that are occurring in the universe – is the comprehensive knowledge of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) in relation to the origins and beginnings of the universe of creation and Him being unlimited and unrestricted.

The being which is unlimited and which is in all places at all times and sees all of the creations, is naturally more knowledgeable than anything else in existence. However, if such an entity was limited to the physical world and was imprisoned only to the limits of space, then it would not be possible for that being to have (complete) knowledge and be fully aware of all things.⁸

In summary: There is not a single material creation that is independent of the sphere of time and the radius of existence and every single creation that is under the cover and control of time is limited to that restricted sphere of time which it is contained in.

Thus, it is not possible that any creation can occupy a previous or future period of time, other than its own and without doubt a creation has no way of being acquainted with events that have occurred in the

past or in the future (through their own free will). However, if we were able to smash through the prisons of time and space and go into the sphere which is beyond time, then yesterday and today would have absolutely no meaning. Thus, time as we know it and the events that take place within it (both in the past and future) would be accessible to the person just as if the event was happening in his own present time.

Every single material creation maintains its existence in its specific place and fills a specific location and with this said, if something exists between him and something near to him, then this thing would be said as being close (to him); and if there was something that was a great distance from him, then it would be said that the thing is far (from him). However if a being was able to break through the prisons of time and was able to make himself needless of residing in a specific place and could place himself with a world higher than that of space, then for him there would be no meaning of something being close or far.

In order to make this point more clear, we relate the following examples:

Example 1: Imagine a microscopic insect that possess a limited field of vision walking upon a colourful rug. At any point in time, this insect can only see one pattern and one specific colour (that is in front of him) and has knowledge of only that one particular spot on the rug.

Thus, it has no knowledge of another spot which is out of the ability of his sight and therefore he is completely unaware of it. However a human being that is standing beside the rug and can see the complete rug with all of its colours and patterns – which is completely opposite to how the insect can see it – has knowledge of the complete rug.

Example 2: Imagine that we are sitting on the bank of a large river, along with a group of friends, watching the waves come in and are observing the movement of the water. At any single moment, we are witnessing a new wave and movement of water, however we do not have complete knowledge of all of the waves and all the water from where this river begins up to the sea where the river drains into.

The reason for this limited knowledge is because of the limited area that we are in which makes up the space which we occupy. If we were to go on a plane and fly over the river, then at that time we would be able to see many different sections of the river and we would also be able to see all of the waves and the flowing water that is in this river.

Example 3: Imagine once again that we are sitting in a small room which has only one small window through which we can see the outside world. All of a sudden, a caravan of camels carrying large loads passes by our room. From this small window, at any particular instance in time, we cannot see more than one camel. However a person who is on the roof of the house would be able to see the entire caravan at one time.

The condition of mankind in relation to the past and the future is the same as the person who is watching the caravan of camels through a small window. However the situation of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is

He) who is free from material essence and thus is not limited to place, and in addition does not have any sort of limit in relation to time and space is present everywhere and sees everything in creation, which can be compared to a person who is sitting on the roof of his house and thus, can see everything that is around him (though this even is limited for a human being).

Therefore, we must state that His essence is not limited, and His being is present in all places at all times, and He is not limited to time or place. Thus, there is not a single time or place which is free from Him. He himself bears witness that His comprehensive knowledge encompasses all creations, and all events that have happened in the past, and those that will come in the future, are known to Him.

The Knowledge of God in the Tawrat

The Qur'an elucidates on the complete, All-Encompassing Knowledge of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) as has been mentioned. In comparison however, it is worthwhile to take a look at the Tawrat and see how this book introduces God. In the Tawrat, we read the following:

1"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the **Lord** God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

4 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman.

5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. 8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the **Lord** God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the **Lord** God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the **Lord** God called to the man, "Where are you?"

10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

11 And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

12 The man said, "The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate

it.”

13 Then the **Lord** God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

14 So the **Lord** God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.

15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

16 To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

17 To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. 18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

20 Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. 21 The **Lord** God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. 22 And the **Lord** God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.”

23 So the **Lord** God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. 24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.”[9](#)

This is the God which the Tawrat introduces that when Adam hid in the garden, God had no knowledge where he was and thus, He was forced to call out to him that, “*Adam, where are you?*” This is the sort of God who does not know if Adam had eaten from the tree of wisdom; a God that forbids His servants from eating from the tree of knowledge and understanding; a God that fears that Adam will – without His knowledge – eat from the tree of perpetual life; a God that in order to stop Adam and his wife from reaching to the tree of everlasting life, hires Angels to be as police to guard the tree!

However, the God that is described in the Qur’an is One that has complete knowledge of that which is in the Heavens and the Earth; He also knows what is in the hearts of His creations and those of the desert `Arabs who claimed to have true faith in their hearts were told that:

...أَتَعْلَمُونَ اللَّهَ بِدِينِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ

“Do you wish to teach Allah about your Din (complete way of life) whereas Allah knows all that is contained in the Heavens and all that is upon the Earth...”

The God that the Qur'an introduces is completely opposite of the God that the Tawrat mentions and with complete clarity, the Qur'an states that:

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا

“And He (Allah) taught Adam all of the names...”

Thus, the verses of the Qur'an have introduced Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) as One who is completely free from all sorts of stinginess and miserliness in relation to teaching and educating His servants of the truths of the universe.

With this summary, the relation between the previous verse and the verse under discussion is clear and it is unambiguous that this verse explains the comprehensive knowledge of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) over everything that is hidden and the apparent phenomenon in creation and thus, nullifies the claims and assertions of the desert `Arabs.

- [1.](#) Surah al-Saba (34), Verse 3.
- [2.](#) Surah Aali Imran (3), Verse 5.
- [3.](#) Surah al-An'am (6), Verse 59.
- [4.](#) Nahjul Balagha, Khutbah 193.
- [5.](#) Surah al-Mulk (67), Verse 14.
- [6.](#) Surah Qaf (50), Verse 16.
- [7.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Volume 4, Page 58.
- [8.](#) In the upcoming sections, we will discuss further the issue of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) being free from the physical world and His being free from time and space.
- [9.](#) Genesis, Chapter 3 [The Fall of Man], extracted verbatim from the New International Version (NIV) of the Old Testament found on www.biblegateway.com [1].

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[1] <http://www.biblegateway.com>