

Knowledge of the Prophets

Knowledge of the prophets through the channel of revelation originates from the limitless knowledge of God. Almighty Allah raised the prophets in order to convey the laws and programs of religion to human beings in a perfect way. They make efforts in guidance and hand over the causes of perfection and success to the people.

That is why the prophets are supposed to be aware of all the matters connected with religion, which the people might be in need of so that they may be able to fulfill the aim of Almighty Allah in sending them to humanity.

Allah, the Mighty and Sublime has not left the success giving program of religion as defective and ambiguous and does not deprive people from the path of perfection and proximity. Therefore there is no other way to guide and instruct the people other than the channel of prophets, hence they should be perfectly cognizant of all the programs of religion.

Sciences necessary for prophethood can be divided into the following:

1. Perfect recognition of God, His names and qualities;
2. Perfect recognition of the world of Purgatory (Barzakh) and its specialties; complete awareness of the circumstances of Judgment Day, accounting, scroll of deeds, balance of deeds, Paradise and Hell.
3. Complete cognition of human soul and spiritual diseases and the methods of prevention and cures of these spiritual diseases; identification of good and bad morals and the method of purifying the soul and discipline and perfection of the self.
4. Complete knowledge of all the laws and programs of religion, following which can guarantee the success of man in the world and the hereafter.

The prophet should have complete knowledge of all the above mentioned points so that he may be able to guide the people on the straight path of religion. If he himself is not having knowledge, how he would

be able to guide the people? Therefore, the God who sent prophets for the guidance of people, it is not possible that He should keep these prophets deprived of the necessary knowledge.

This point is mentioned in a number of verses of the Holy Quran. For example:

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ

“Certainly We sent Our apostles with clear arguments, and sent down with them the Book and the balance that men may conduct themselves with equity...” (57:25)

On another occasion He says:

وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ كُلًّا هَدَيْنَا وَنُوحًا هَدَيْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِهِ دَاوُدَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ وَأَيُّوبَ وَيُوسُفَ وَمُوسَى وَهَارُونَ وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ / وَزَكَرِيَّا وَيَحْيَى وَعِيسَى وَإِيلَاسَ كُلٌّ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ / وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَالْيَسَعَ وَيُونُسَ وَلُوطًا وَكُلًّا فَضَّلْنَا عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ / وَمِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ وَإِخْوَانِهِمْ وَاجْتَبَيْنَهُمْ وَهَدَيْنَهُمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ / ذَلِكَ هُدَى اللَّهِ يَهْدِي بِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَلَوْ أَشْرَكُوا لَحَبِطَ عَنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ / أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحُكْمَ وَالنُّبُوَّةَ فَإِنْ يَكْفُرْ بِهَا هَؤُلَاءِ فَقَدْ وَكَلْنَا بِهَا قَوْمًا لَيَسُوْا بِهَا بِكَافِرِينَ / أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ فَبِهِدْيِهِمْ اقْتَدِهْ قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ

“And We gave to him Ishaq and Yaqub; each did We guide, and Nuh did We guide before, and of his descendants, Dawood and Sulaiman and Ayyub and Yusuf and Musa and Harun; and thus do We reward those who do good (to others). And Zakariya and Yahya and Isa and Ilyas; every one was of the good; and Ismail and Al-Yasha and Yunus and Lut; and every one We made to excel (in) the worlds: and from among their fathers and their descendants and their brethren, and We chose them and guided them into the right way. This is Allah’s guidance, He guides thereby whom He pleases of His servants; and if they had set up others (with Him), certainly what they did would have become ineffectual for them. These are they to whom We gave the book and the wisdom and the prophecy; therefore if these disbelieve in it We have already entrusted with it a people who are not disbelievers in it. These are they whom Allah guided, therefore follow their guidance. Say: I do not ask you for any reward for it; it is nothing but a reminder to the nations.”
(6:84-90)

Prophets and the Knowledge of Unseen

Existing things can generally be divided into two groups. Hidden (unseen) things, called as the world of Ghaib and world of seen beings, which is called as the world of visibility.

Beings and things which can be perceived through the five senses are included in the world of visibility; like matter, body and generally all its effects and specialties, like colors, quantities, forms, foods, smells,

voices, softness and hardness, heat and cold and generally all matter and material things are included in this world of visibility. Things which man can perceive through his senses and about which he can gain knowledge.

World of the unseen is opposed to the world of visibility and all the beings that are beyond matter and materiality are included in the world of unseen. Like God, His names and qualities, angels, world of Purgatory (Barzakh), existing things of Barzakh, Judgment Day, Paradise and Hell, bounties of Paradise and chastisements of the hereafter; existences of these types are abstract things and they are superior to matter.

Therefore they are included in the world of unseen. That is why we cannot maintain contact with the unseen world with our senses and create knowledge about it. This understanding and intelligence of ours for the unseen world should have been obtained through a channel other than the senses, which in terminology is called as knowledge of unseen.

Through the five senses we can only maintain contact with the things of the world of matter and we gain knowledge directly or indirectly, although in those instances also our knowledge is limited and conditional. Our eyes see, but only those that which possesses a particular volume and which is at a particular distance and having some special conditions of space and time.

If that thing is very tiny or it is at a long distance of time or space from us or it is in darkness or there is something obstructing our view, it cannot be seen by us. Events of the period of Prophet Nuh (a.s.) or a thousand years after that cannot be seen by us. We cannot with the help of the tools of our knowledge get connected to those events directly.

They are unseen from us. Although they exist in the presence of God and He has knowledge of all of them; He encompasses all the existing things of the world of matter and the unseen. In the Holy Quran, He says:

عَلَّمَ الْغَيْبِ وَ الشَّهَادَةِ وَهُوَ الْحَكِيمُ الْخَبِيرُ

“Knower of the unseen and the seen; and He is the Wise, the Aware.” (6:73)

وَلِلَّهِ غَيْبُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

“And Allah’s is the unseen in the heavens and the earth...” (11:123)

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ غَيْبَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

“Surely Allah knows the unseen things of the heavens and the earth.” (49: 18)

ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهِ إِلَيْكَ

“This is of the announcements relating to the unseen which We reveal to you...” (3:44)

Is the knowledge of Unseen only for Allah?

At this point, a question arises: Whether the knowledge of the unseen is restricted only to Almighty Allah; or human beings can also become aware of it? Some intellectuals consider the knowledge of unseen to be restricted only to Almighty Allah and they have reasoned through verses of Quran, like:

وَعِنْدَهُ مَفَاتِحُ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْلَمُهَا إِلَّا هُوَ

“And with Him are the keys of the unseen treasures – none knows them but He...” (6:59)

وَيَقُولُونَ لَوْلَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَيْهِ آيَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِ فَقُلْ إِنَّمَا الْغَيْبُ لِلَّهِ فَانْتَظِرُوا إِنِّي مَعَكُمْ مِنَ الْمُنْتَظِرِينَ

“And they say: Why is not a sign sent to him from his Lord? Say: The unseen is only for Allah; therefore wait – surely I too, with you am of those who wait.” (10:20)

قُلْ لَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ الْغَيْبَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ أَيَّانَ يُبْعَثُونَ

“Say: No one in the heavens and the earth knows the unseen but Allah; and they do not know when they shall be raised.” (27:65)

قُلْ لَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ عِنْدِي خَزَائِنُ اللَّهِ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبَ وَلَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ إِنِّي مَلَكٌ إِنِّي أَتَّبِعُ إِلَّا مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ أَفَلَا تَتَفَكَّرُونَ

“Say: I do not say to you, I have with me the treasures of Allah, nor do I know the unseen, nor do I say to you that I am an angel; I do not follow aught save that which is revealed to me. Say: Are the blind and the seeing one alike? Do you not then reflect?” (6:50)

قُلْ لَا أَمْلِكُ لِنَفْسِي نَفْعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ وَلَوْ كُنْتُ أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبَ لَاسْتَكْثَرْتُ مِنَ الْخَيْرِ وَمَا مَسَّنِيَ السُّوءُ إِنْ أَنَا إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ وَبَشِيرٌ لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

“Say: I do not control any benefit or harm for my own soul except as Allah please; and had I known the unseen I would have had much of good and no evil would have touched me; I am nothing but a warner and the giver of good news to a people who believe.” (7: 188)

They have reasoned through the apparent meaning of these verses and have said: Knowledge of unseen is only with Almighty Allah and human beings are ignorant of it.

But through other verses it can be concluded that there are some human beings also have access to this knowledge of unseen. For example:

عَالِمِ الْغَيْبِ فَلَا يُظْهِرُ عَلَى غَيْبِهِ أَحَدًا / إِلَّا مَنْ ارْتَضَىٰ مِنْ رَسُولٍ فَإِنَّهُ يَسْلُكُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ رَصَدًا

“The Knower of the unseen! so He does not reveal His secrets to any. Except to him whom He chooses as an apostle; for surely He makes a guard to march before him and after him.” (72:26-27)

مَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيَذَرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَىٰ مَا أَنْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ حَتَّىٰ يَمِيزَ الْخَبِيثَ مِنَ الطَّيِّبِ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُطْلِعَكُمْ عَلَى الْغَيْبِ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَجْتَبِيٰ مِنْ رُسُلِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ

“On no account will Allah leave the believers in the condition which you are in until He separates the evil from the good; nor is Allah going to make you acquainted with the unseen, but Allah chooses of His apostles whom He pleases...” (3: 179)

ذِي قُوَّةٍ عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ / مُطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِينٍ / وَمَا صَاحِبُكُمْ بِمَجْنُونٍ / وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ بِالْأُفُقِ الْمُبِينِ / وَمَا هُوَ عَلَى الْغَيْبِ بِضَنِينٍ

“The processor of strength, having an honorable place with the Lord of the Dominion, One (to be) obeyed, and faithful in trust. And your companion is not gone mad. And of a truth he saw himself on the clear horizon. Nor of the unseen is he a tenacious concealer.” (81:20-24)

ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهِ إِلَيْكَ

“This is of the announcements relating to the unseen which We reveal to you...” (3:44)

From the above verses, it can be concluded that since the knowledge of unseen is itself restricted to the being of Almighty Allah and the way of access to unseen for human beings is closed, but the selected prophets are able to connect to the world of unseen through revelation and gain knowledge and learn about the realities of unseen.

On the whole it can be concluded from these verses that absolute unseen is restricted only to Almighty Allah since His being is unlimited and He has complete knowledge about seen and unseen world, so much so that even the prophets do not have this knowledge in the beginning, but since they have the capacity to receive revelation and get connected to the unseen world, through the assistance and grace of Almighty Allah they can maintain contact with unseen world and according to their own capacity and capability get access to the unending realities of the unseen world.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/prophethood-and-prophet-islam-ibrahim-amini/knowledge-prophets#comment-0>