

Qur'anic Imperatives on Acquisition of Knowledge

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The Qur'an puts the highest emphasis on the importance of acquiring knowledge. That knowledge has been at the core of the Islamic world from the very beginning as attested by Surah 96:1-5, which Muslims believe to be the first revelation received by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). It says: "Read - for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One who has taught (humanity) the use of the pen - taught '*insan*' (human being) what he did not know!"

The Qur'an describes the Prophet (pbuh) as an imparter of knowledge to others (Surah 2:151). His famous prayer was: "Allah grant me knowledge of the ultimate nature of things."

In Surah 39:9, the Qur'an rhetorically asks: "Can they who know and they who do not know be deemed equal?" and exhorts believers to pray for advancement in knowledge. Further, the Qur'an exhorts believers not to pursue that of which they have no knowledge since God will hold them accountable for actions which reflect a lack of knowledge.

About those who have knowledge, the Qur'an says: "God will exalt by (many) degrees those of you who have attained to faith..." (Surah 58: 11).

According to Qur'anic perspective, knowledge is a prerequisite for the creation of a just world in which authentic peace can prevail. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of the pursuit of learning even at the time, and in the midst, of war. It says: "With all this, it is not desirable that all of the believers take the field (in time of war). From within every group in their midst, some shall refrain from going to war, and shall devote themselves (instead) to acquiring a deeper knowledge of the Faith, and (thus be able to) teach their home-coming brethren, so that these (too) might guard themselves against evil." (Surah 9: 122)

Embodying the spirit of the Qur'an are some well-known *ahadith*: "The seeking of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim" (Baihaqi, *Mishkat*); "Searching for knowledge is compulsory for every Muslim male

and Muslim female (Ibn Majah). The attitude of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) towards acquiring knowledge can be inferred from the fact that after the Battle of Badr (624 AD), he employed several captives from the Quraish tribe to teach Muslim boys reading and writing - this service counted as their ransom. As Semaan pointed out: "Muhammad instituted learning as an incumbent duty upon his people and this established a definite educational policy for Islam." That the obligation to acquire knowledge was "a concept that possessed religious urgency and was ready to play a prominent role in a new religious movement" is testified by Rosenthal. Gulick expressed the belief that the knowledge-affirming *ahadith* which "have been widely accepted as authentic and...have exerted a wide and salutary influence...must assuredly have stimulated and encouraged the great thinkers of the golden age of Islamic civilization."

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