

In the name of Allah, the most gracious, the most merciful

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF

REVELATION, RATIONALITY, KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH

By

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Introduction

I think that this book is a giant in the history of **religious philosophy** and could be considered as the greatest work in its field in later part of the twentieth century.

The author has dealt with **two very important points** in this book with ample evidence to support his arguments. **Firstly**, it is shown that how important is the **role of revelation in development of knowledge** and also that how limited knowledge can be if based solely on human capacity of reasoning and even how risky it can become at times. **Secondly**, **Quran being the peak of revealed guidance from God is an immense source of knowledge** and if appropriately used to guide us and our scientific effort, it could lead to far better understanding of nature. The consequent progress would not just create more information mainly for the purpose of development and economic wealth but a world that is also at peace, in a global meaning of the word.

PART I of the book briefly refers to **various scholarly and philosophical attempts to understand the connection between logic and revelation in relation to development of knowledge**. Some emphasize rationality with a view that truth can only be reached through reason. Some speak about revelation as the prime source of knowledge. Others consider human 'inspiration' as the principle source of all understanding. Then there are supporters of 'mysticism' amongst both believers as well as non-believers emphasising on the role of abstract phenomena. There are even those who use linguistic variation to make the discussion more complicated rather than providing answers, the 'pseudo-philosophers'. Finally there have also been some who support a combination of these factors. However one phenomenon that has been repeatedly throughout history is that human attempt to explain religion has usually lead to splitting people into smaller factions and rarely has it had the effect of uniting people. The task of uniting people, particularly in the name of religion, has only been successful to any

significant degree if carried out by those who are appointed by God ie the prophets and their successors.

Another important question raised regarding development of knowledge is the question of what can be attributed as 'eternal truth'. The author postulates that the term 'eternal truth' may not only be a reference to unchangeability of the information but also to the understanding of causality and purposefulness of a phenomenon. Knowledge of the radiation of the sun with its heat and light attributes may seem eternal from the perspective of a human life span or even from the life span of development of life on earth but in terms of the creation of stars and their life span, their conversion to black holes and supernovas, it is certainly not eternal. However if one tried to understand the purpose of why the sun radiates, this will be eternal truth for the purpose of radiation as whenever this information about the nature of the chemical reactions in the sun is applied in given circumstances, it should produce the same results of radiation. And if the role of solar radiation is understood in the scheme of development of life and therefore the consciousness of life and the consequent possibility of reaching Godly attributes through spiritual growth, then this knowledge becomes eternal as it begins to fit well even with an understanding of the purpose of creation of life. Hence we see that when we develop our understanding of 'how' and 'why' rather than just 'what' the knowledge tends to achieve an eternal status.

Our faculty to adjudge information whether it is relative or fundamental, transient or constant, local or universal or simply whether the information is just true or false, is based on rationality. However we see that human reasoning has produced science that was only to be changed after passage of time, again on the basis of further reasoning acquired during that period, and the process goes on. Even though it may be rightly argued on the basis of this observation that our understanding of the phenomenon is improving with time but it is equally arguable that human capacity to reason on its own is not enough for it to lead to knowledge that can be reliably or consistently considered as eternal truth.

There is, however, a perspective that is constant and eternal, the perspective of the Divine; knowledge from where should also have the eternal consistency. This is the perspective of the Creator of all existence. Of course this argument depends on the existence of a Creator God and also on the presumption that God

communicates with human beings and reveals knowledge to them. If these two aspects can be demonstrated with enough evidence, then we can understand that source of knowledge for mankind is greatly strengthened to a degree that would not be possible if based on human reasoning alone and without revelation playing a role in it.

In the **PART II** of the book the author has rendered another invaluable service to mankind. He **summarises various religious philosophies and demonstrates how in their original form they were so much in harmony with each other and the Quranic philosophy.** He further states that these philosophies have a rational basis to their original form, and why would it not be so, as Quran has taught us that all of them stem from the same God and for the same purpose of guiding mankind towards achievement of a higher moral status. Some historical insight is also provided into how and why these philosophies were adulterated during the course of time. The author has touched on various Islamic Schools of thought, development of the main European socio-religious philosophies, the Greeks (here also providing some evidence that one of the great Greek philosophers, Socrates, was extraordinarily above others in his own moral integrity, in his strength for taking a stand for the truth and in his service to the concept of a Creator who has carried the process of creation with inherent wisdom and that He guides mankind through process of instilled understanding amongst selected of the men; therefore making it likely that Socrates himself was a prophet of God) and then moving on to some Asian religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism and Zoroastrianism.

The author tackles the question of why there is suffering in the world in a manner that leaves the reader in acceptance of and somewhat reassured about this painful reality. It is described as lack of happiness rather than an independent entity, just like shadow is lack of light and not an existence on its own. Experience of suffering is an individual's reaction to relative change in circumstances while experiencing loss. At other times it can even be retribution to our acts like, for example, carelessness with principles of healthy living can lead to ill health. Similarly carelessness with moral principles that if observed lead to peace and contentment would have the opposite effect and therefore suffering too. Another important point explained is the role of suffering in growth. Life developed to higher forms as a result of a process of losing the less developed forms. This is actually a transition from life forms less aware

of their surroundings and with lesser capacity of psychic and emotional experience including that of suffering, to life forms that are more aware of their surroundings and therefore more intense psychic and emotional awareness including heightened sense of loss and suffering. In our daily life, it is well known that sense of 'satiety' leads to inertia while need leads to effort towards improvement. Effort is generally in proportion to the experienced need, the need to change the state of suffering to that of more 'comfort'. Hence the issue seems to be of a choice between there being a system without suffering but without growth potential and one with lot of potential for growth but through an inherent process of suffering. It appears that there is no third choice!

PART III deals with the arguments against existence of God by the so-called 'secular' scholars of the modern times. The author comments that the arguments of the modern sociologists are based on their own perspective of the social psychology rather than actual historical facts and that history of development of human thought in early periods is obscure, unrecorded and virtually non-existent. He also states that most such arguments are based on the presumption of non-existence of God making the argument questionable right from the beginning as the result is presumed before the analysis is made. Evidence from 'human nature' is missing in such arguments which can be the only reliable instrument in assessing thought processes. For an example when the sociologists cite greed as a factor in development of religious thought the author refutes this argument by examples of sacrifice of unparalleled degree by those who stood for the cause of religion and unity of God and with historical evidence of their shunning all options of worldly gains. Then he goes on to effectively refute further arguments with examples from history of socio-religious movements and with particular reference to the concept of Godhood amongst Aboriginals of Australia. He also makes the point that secularism is commonly misunderstood as a manifestation of atheism while in fact it is more a factor of tolerance to various perspectives, including various religious perspectives, in a society.

In the **PART IV nature of revelation is discussed.** It is compared to various forms of human psychological experiences. The essential link of rationality with revelation is described on the basis that for an enquiry to bear true result not only the 'source' of information needs to be true but also the inner self of the enquirer and the method of enquiry needs to be based on truth. The

message demonstrates that Islam is the religion of Truth and Truth is the religion of Islam. That is why Quran calls itself as 'guidance for the righteous (truthful)' in 2:3. According to a source quoted in the book there are about 750 verses in Quran urging Muslims to make use of reason to understand nature and thus reach their understanding of the Creator, in contrast to just 250 verses about legislation. Misunderstanding about the belief in the unseen (Quran 2:4) is removed by explaining that this does not imply blind faith or imposition on others without reasoning but that it refers to reaching a state of belief in the entities that may not be experienced by the basic human senses, but can still be understood through wisely employed faculty of reasoning, logic and deduction.

The author refers to two Quranic principles that provide strength to the platform on which the relation of rationality and revelation can be understood. These are the principles of Al-bayyinah, vividly manifest truth, and Al-qayyimah, the everlasting teachings that stand the test of time by always remaining valid. Al-bayyinah is seen in its best form in all the Divine messengers, in their personality, in the amazing moral strength with which they relate to people around them and deal with opposition and injustice. This principle is confirmed, to even the ordinary, once the mission of the prophet is visibly accomplished by the creation of a society around him of a moral standard very much higher than those who had not followed the prophet. The second principle, Al-qayyimah is seen in the core of all religions and refers to those common teachings that have been passed on by all Divine messengers. These teachings constitute a sense of absoluteness about what is inherently good in human behaviour and facilitate its further development. It is the consequent common human experience of this goodness that provides a confirmation of the absoluteness of such teachings. It is these two principles that determine that there can be no contradiction between the word of God, the revealed teachings, and the act of God which is the nature, the creation. And finally it is this harmony between the word of God and the act of God which bridges the apparent gap that many think exists between rationality and revelation. A society that has developed on the basis of knowledge emerging through this bond between revelation and rationality is likely to be progressive both, scientifically and spiritually. Without either of these the concept of progress remains incomplete and any apparent growth begins to falter sooner than people sometimes even realise.

At this stage the book picks up certain categories in which the human knowledge has progressed and examines them in light of the Quranic teachings.

Regarding cosmology the knowledge revealed in the Quran mentions several aspects which have been only recently discovered through the process of scientific enquiry. Some of these facts are the origin of universe from singularity and its creation by a splitting process, nicknamed Big Bang, 21:31, currently ongoing expansion of the universe, 51:48 and the ultimate collapse of the universe, 21:105. The last verse goes on to say that the process will be repeated, an option that scientists have not even begun to entertain with any conviction yet. Quran also mentions the motion of our planet earth, 27:89, orbits of celestial bodies and their positions in space determined by gravitational force, 31:11, 21:34, that the sun and the moon have a specific role to play for mankind and that they have a limited life span, 13:3, 31:30, and that even the sun is not stationary but is in motion, 36:39; to mention some.

Quran has mentioned about the definite presence of extra-terrestrial life, 42:30, and that it is very possible that man will one day be brought into contact with this life. Food for thought is therefore provided for the scientists working in this field!

Principles of the science of entropy are discussed to determine that creation cannot be eternal but is finite; the only eternal being is the Creator, 55:27-28, and is also the prime cause of all creation, 2:118.

PART V then takes on the **subject of origin and evolution of life on earth**. Quran presents the scenario of step by step development of life forms with planned wisdom behind it rather than chance being the determining factor behind each step. Stages relating to the role of dry earth, water, stages of transformation of clay from wet to dry conditions and fermenting organic material in the clay are all specifically mentioned, 3:60, 6:3, 55:15, 15:27,29,34. Dependence on heat energy of the earliest known life forms, archaebacteria, 15:28, 55:16, and the specific role of photosynthesis in development of energy and organic molecules from inorganic molecules at the stage when atmosphere was not loaded enough with oxygen, asexuality of earlier life forms then turning to sexualised reproduction, 7:190, have also been mentioned in Quran. Principles of 'Natural Selection' and 'Survival of the Fittest' are discussed in light of Quranic revelation and a clear distinction is made between the

perceived role of chance and a planned process of selection by the Creator, 28:69, 56:58-74. Specific examples are mentioned in the Quran in this respect like the one of development of speech in the humans 55:4-5. Knowledge is also revealed about stages of development of human foetus, 16:79, and this has been shown to be precisely correct as our scientific knowledge has progressed.

Here the author reminds the reader that they are of course at liberty to draw their conclusion regarding compatibility between Quranic revelation and outcome of contemporary research in science but argues that this compatibility is strong evidence to support that the Creator of nature is the same as the 'author' of Quran and that He does communicate with humans and that our scientific endeavour can be facilitated immensely if we work in accordance with the word of God.

Another very intriguing issue discussed is that of sidedness where Quran (and the conduct of Prophet Mohammad *pbuh*) have ascribed specific significance to right and left of the human body and guided us to preferably use right hand for all clean and 'good' things. Some recent scientific findings are mentioned in this context that demonstrates the phenomenon of sidedness in nature. These relate to spin of electrons, neutrinos and antineutrinos consequently determining the chemical properties of the molecule, similarly the shape of crystals of certain compounds depending on sidedness of the spin in their molecules, effect on light polarization of the molecular sidedness of the substance that the light is passing through, climbing direction of certain plants in contrast to others etc.

Another subject raised at this stage is about the future of life on earth. Quran refers to two possibilities. First is the possibility of development of humans of better intelligence and with improved capacity to comprehend nature and therefore able to live in better harmony with it, 70:41-42. The other possibility is of human race being replaced with another creation of a different nature on earth, 76:29, 14:20-21. On the other hand resurrection of man after death is defined as a continuum of his life on earth, 31:29; the latter is mentioned in a different capacity to the former and the two are not considered the same phenomenon. The author argues that to mention with such clarity about future of life on earth in spite of there still being no serious scientific methodology to examine such options is a clear distinction of the Quran.

PART VI of the book begins with magnificent and rational evidence for the following two points: first, the existence of an all-knowing Creator and, second, that Quran is a book directly revealed by the Creator and without any human contribution to its text. It is argued that given the well recognised limitations of the human capacity it is impossible for the human mind to develop knowledge that is all encompassing. Therefore if Quran speaks of knowledge that is on one hand clearly beyond the human capacity and on the other it is demonstrated to be true with passage of time, then both these points ie the existence of an all-knowing Creator and that He is the original source of Quranic knowledge, become understandable facts.

Further examples are quoted from the Quran relating to various areas of knowledge. These contain historical knowledge and knowledge about the future that had not become even remotely foreseeable by human understanding at the time it was revealed. Amongst them is knowledge relating to exodus of Prophet Moses *pbuh* from Egypt and the destruction of the Pharaoh's army while informing us about his own body being saved as an example for those who may want to learn from this event, 10:91-93, and archaeologists discovering the mummified body millenniums later. There were prophecies relating to future part of life of Prophet Mohammad *pbuh* himself; about his exile from Mecca and the difficulties he was to face during this period including the battles and the ultimate success and return to Mecca, 28:86, 17:81, 30:3-6, 54:45-47, 33:11-14. They all came true during his life. Then there is knowledge about distant future from the time of revelation; discovery of earth's hidden loads, metals and fuel, 84:4-6, 99:2-3; significance of archaeology and its relation to development of knowledge, 82:5; development of means of transport so the world would shrink for its dwellers, 81:5, 81:8; geographical trends like meeting of the oceans, as we see them joining with canals like, Suez and the Panama, 25:54, 55:20-21, 81:7; establishment of a state in Palestine of the 'children of Israel' who will gather there from all over, 17:105; abundance of published material and era of spread of knowledge through written material, 81:11, 96:4-6; flying becoming possible for humans and our attempts to explore space and limits to human success in this endeavour, 77:2-5, 81:12, 37:9-10, 55:34-36; warfare with firepower and the horrific destruction of nuclear warfare, 81:13, 104:2-10, 44:11-12, 77:30-34; genetic engineering and human attempts to 'change nature' and its consequences, 4:119-120, spread of infectious epidemics as a consequence of ignoring

God's guidance, 27:83, and the relation of this prophecy to the sign of plague and the truth of the Promised Messiah *pbuh*; would be only some of the examples of the revealed knowledge which was completely unknown to mankind at the time Quran was revealed in early 7th century.

These examples are used as an argument to support the idea that the Creator of nature and the Author of Quran are the same entity. It also lends weight to the argument that there is wisdom in religious guidance and that such guidance is in perfect harmony with nature, even beyond what we may be able to comprehend even with our best scientific understanding at a given time.

At this stage it is important to note, argues the author, that though Quran provides this knowledge with great precision it does not assume the role of a mere scientific instructor but that it draws our attention towards the importance of revealed material as an immense source of knowledge and also towards the cause and effect relation between human behaviour and the society that develops from it. All this knowledge from Quran reminds us through very rational accounts and with true examples from history that if morality is maintained to the aspired standards it can lead to great benefit to mankind resulting in a very refined society abounding in justice and peace. On the other hand if standard of morality is of a lower degree then the society suffers from chaos and anguish in proportion to the deviation from the high standards. Quran shows the path and it is up to the people to follow it to their benefit.

This benefit is not only related to individual behaviour and its impact on the society but also to collective behaviour of nations as a whole. Arrogance of mighty 'mountain-like' worldly powers is described in the Quran along with the statement that if inappropriate attitudes are not changed voluntarily for the better then it is only through consequence of doom that they become able to respond to the humble calls towards the ways of God, 20:106-109, a lesson that human history has also taught us.

PART VII is related to **revelation and prophethood in the era after Quran and Prophet Mohammad *pbuh***. It has been God's way to send prophets for guidance of mankind and to consider that this blessed process has stopped now is like considering God 'stopping to function'. All major religions are expecting a reformer in the present era on the basis of prophesised revelation, and the only way

this can be realised with a positive and unifying impact on all humanity is that there is one reformer for all mankind and that too under the umbrella of the all-encompassing and the final version of all revealed guidance from God. This is the claim God makes about Quran in its text. The status of the reformer by its definition can be nothing else but of a prophet as he was to be chosen by God Himself and that he was to be guided by God (role of Al-Mahdi) through the process of revelation to lead mankind towards reformation (role of Al-Messiah). This is exactly what a prophet is. As there is to be no new teaching after Quran the prophethood of this reformer has to be subordinate to the prophethood of the Seal of All Prophets, Prophet Mohammad *pbuh*. There have been subordinate prophets in the past and therefore this is no new concept but a method known to be employed by God to facilitate revival of major teachings at the stage when its followers had drifted away from it.

The author has challenged some of the leading attempts to justify the end of the process of prophethood after Prophet Mohammad *pbuh*. It has been argued by some that presence of a perfect book and a perfect teacher should be enough for the Muslims to achieve spiritual heights but the author counter argues that neither theoretically nor historically is this actually true. The decline of the Muslims, since after the initial period following Prophet Mohammad *pbuh*, is definite evidence in favour of this point. Followers of all prophets in the past had gradually drifted away from the true spirit of their teachings and then follower prophets were sent by God to revive the true spirit again. Why should this blessing from God be not applicable to the teachings of the Khatam-ul-nabiyyeen, the Ultimate Prophet, Mohammad *pbuh*?

The author also challenges the misconception about 'return' of Prophet Jesus *pbuh*; return of an 'older' prophet is still a prophet coming after Prophet Mohammad *pbuh* and therefore no different to the coming of a new prophet. In fact the new prophet is born within the umbrella of Islam and a complete subordinate to Prophet Mohammad *pbuh* but 'returning' Prophet Jesus *pbuh* would be a prophet of Israelites and someone who was not originally commissioned by God to teach Quran!

Continuity of revelation is fundamental to ongoing and unshakeable belief in God. Rational investigation is not enough for this purpose. Promise of revelation for the future is mentioned in the Quran very clearly, 2:187, 18:111, 41:31-32.

To conclude I quote the author, '...when religion is interpreted without rationality, when faith is divorced of reason, all that they give birth to, are myths without legitimacy and legends without substance. Mindless trustees of faith succeed only in making a mockery of Divine wisdom.'

And to quote the author once again, 'Revelation enlightens belief, illuminates the soul and blows breath of life into faith....What the sun is to day, a prophet is to religion....Bring to an end prophethood, block the passage of revelation, and call it a doomsday! Nothing will remain but stark death!'

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