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For those who Reflect

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# For those who reflect

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# For those who Reflect

The Quran lays great stress on observation skills that God has granted humans and the ability to reflect on these observations. In fact it condemns those who fail to utilise these magnificent faculties that God has bestowed upon us all as a blessing. The Quran declares in no ambiguous terms:

*“They have hearts with which they fail to understand; and they have eyes with which they fail to see; and they have ears with which they fail to hear. They are like cattle - indeed, even more astray. Such are utterly heedless” (7:179)*

The ability to observe and get information is thus the basic difference between humans and insensitivity. The Quran further elaborates:

*“Do they, then, not reflect on the Qur'an? Or are there locks on their hearts” (47:24)*

*“Surely the worst of beasts in God's sight are those that are deaf and dumb and do not (use) reason. (8:22)*

*“No one can believe except by God's leave And God lays abomination on those who do not use their understanding”. (10:100)*

This is to emphasize the principle that the bestowal of all these blessings is in the power of God alone: therefore none can acquire or bestow on anyone any blessing without the permission of God. However, the verse points out clearly that the above principle is not applied blindly and irrationally so as to bestow the blessing of faith on or withhold it from anyone without any rhyme or reason, but it works according to a system which is based on wisdom.

## **Observation and Information-First Stage**

God bestows this on anyone who uses his common sense properly in search of the truth, for God provides for such a person the means of attaining it in proportion to the sincerity of his intention and the extent of his exertion and grants him its correct knowledge required for faith. But He throws the filth of ignorance, deviation, wrong thinking and wrong doing on the one who is not a seeker after the truth and does not use his common sense properly because of his prejudices, or does not use it at all in search of the truth.

This is the very first level of human intellectual development wherein a man or woman begins to reflect by keen observation of our surroundings and starts to make sense of the information that he or she gathers through these observations and inquisitive endeavours.

A hierarchy of five perceptive-cognitive functions is suggested through hearing, sight, thinking, remembrance, and certainty in order to achieve a successful observation and reflection.

## **Knowledge: Second stage**

The next stage of developing our capability of reflection is called knowledge. Knowledge is the ability to differentiate between useful and useless information from our observation skills. The Quran describes the ability to acquire knowledge as the basis to attain God awareness:

*“Those truly God conscious among His servants are those who have knowledge” (35:28)*

*"God will raise up, to (suitable) ranks and (degrees), those of you who believe and who have been granted knowledge. And God is well-acquainted with all you do." (58:11)*

*"There is no one worthy of worship but He: That is the witness of God, His angels and those endowed with knowledge, Standing firm in Justice (or maintaining His Creation in Justice). There is no God but He, the Exalted in power, the Wise." (3:18)*

So who are these people of knowledge whom the Quran calls Ulama and are endowed with such insight? Let us read the verse detailing it:

*"Have you seen that God causes water to fall from the sky and produces therewith fruit of diverse hues, and among the hills are streaks white and red, of diverse hues and others raven-black. And of men and beasts and cattle in like manner diverse hues. It is the 'Ulama – men of knowledge – among His servants who (reflecting upon the magnitude of the creation and the Divine laws governing it) feel awe and are wonder struck" (35:27-28).*

We find in these verses a clear reference to generic sciences. The men of knowledge are, therefore, those who have acquired knowledge of these natural phenomena, that is, they are the men whom we now call scientists. The sphere of work of the 'Ulama is the science of man and nature. It is obvious that the "Muslim 'Ulama" or religious scholars of other religions have since long, relinquished their proper object of study and have applied their keen intellect to matters of far less importance.

Absorbed in matters relating to ritual and ceremonial acts, which are the adjuncts of institutional religion, they could not spare the time to observe and study nature as they had been commanded to do by God. Instead of ranging over the wide expanse of the world of nature, their mind moved in a narrow circle with the result that it has lost its vigour and flexibility. It is high time they turned their attention to the proper object of study – the signs and portents of God.

Once a person acquires the ability to sift the useful and helpful information from the unfathomable chaos of information-especially in our day and age of information explosion- he/she becomes capable of making better judgement in all aspects of life and has thus managed to complete the second level of intellectual development.

### **Understanding/Insight: 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage**

The next phase is to gain the ability and capability of knowing how to utilise the knowledge of useful things gained after keen observation and proper sifting of the information. God has given each one of us a brain, and He lets us use it in any way we choose. Quran has used the title Ulul Albab for people of understanding. They are the people who not only have a brain, but are gifted in knowing how to put it to its correct use. They don't need to have the signs of Quran drilled into them by constant repetition. All they need is to look at the sky– and they can read in its vastness, its seamless beauty, the presence of One God who is Merciful, the Best Creator, the one who is Beautiful and loves artistry and beauty, the Subtle.

*“Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for Ulul Albab”.*  
[3:190]

These people reflect on the signs all around us and exclaim loudly:

*“Our Lord, You did not create this (universe) aimlessly; exalted are You [above such a thing]; then protect us from the punishment of the Fire. (3:191)*

These are the ones who are the cream of the society and uphold the truth and justice in the societies:

*“Those who fulfil the covenant of God and do not break the contract, And those who join that which God has ordered to be joined” (3:20)*

*“He who knows that the Book which has been sent to you from your Lord is the Truth, is he like him who is blind to that truth? It is only people of understanding who take heed” (13:19)*

Paying heed to the truth and reality is the greatest of qualities to have. It is this very quality that makes us a humane individual, for rejecting facts is the quality of a very deviant person. Those who pay heed to the message that has been sent down by God, and accept His Messenger, are really very fortunate people. This is why their conduct in this world is quite different from those ignorant people who are blind to its merits: and so is their ultimate end in the Hereafter.

*“Here is a Message for mankind: Let them take heed therefore, and let them know that He is (no other than) One God. Let men of understanding take heed” (14:52)*

Understanding the realities and truths of life help bring an individual close to his creator and instils in him or her a great desire to look beyond the obvious and seek the truth with utmost objectivity and free from all traces of bias. This is what has been mentioned in a saying by the Prophet pbuh:

*“If God intends goodness for someone, he gives him understanding of Deen (His system of life)” (Bukhari)*

When an individual achieves this level it is but natural that he or she should aspire for the next one which is the highest level of intellectual development.

## **Hikmah/Wisdom: Highest level**

This is the top most level of intellectual development and the highest pinnacle of reflection for an individual. Quran calls this Hikmah and the best word to describe its meaning in English is wisdom.

*“He grants wisdom to whom He pleases; and he to whom wisdom is granted receives indeed a benefit overflowing; but none will pay heed (to this)but men of understanding” (2:269)*

'Wisdom' signifies sound perception and sound judgement. The purpose of this statement is to point out that one who is possessed of wisdom will follow the right course of action. Wisdom is the ability to say or do the right thing at the right time and place. It includes the ability to know when not to say or do a thing. Thus a person possessing wisdom has traversed the magnificent journey from the very first stage of keen observation, moving onto the stage of gaining useful information and converting that into knowledge. Next he or she has passed on to the stage of understanding- the stage wherein he gains the capability of what to do with the useful knowledge and once possessed with that has managed to know the wisdom behind all creation, nature, laws and human nature itself. This is what bestows on him the ability to use discretion in the application of knowledge and understanding thus being conscious of its implications on a particular time, place and person.

It is in the praise of such people that the Quran has mentioned:

*“He it is Who has sent down to you the Book: In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); they are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meanings except God. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord:" and none will take heed except men of understanding” (3:7)*

*“Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the night and the day; in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the benefit of mankind; in the rain which God Sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds, and the clouds which they Trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth;- (Here) indeed are Signs for a people that are wise” (2:164)*

The Quran calls out to the wisdom of people to reflect in order to reach a proper and well informed conclusion based on evidence instead of conjecture:

*“He has made subject to you the Night and the Day; the sun and the moon; and the stars are in subjection by His Command: verily in this are Signs for men who are wise” (16:12)*

*“And from the fruit of the date-palm and the vine, ye get out wholesome drink and food: behold, in this also is a sign for those who are wise” (16:67)*

*“We have revealed for you (O men!) a book in which is a Message for you: will ye not then understand?” (21:10)*

*“God it is He Who has subjected to you the sea, that ships may sail through it by His Command, and that you may seek of His Bounty, and that you may be thankful, And has subjected to you all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth; it is all as a favour and kindness from Him. Verily, in it are signs for a people who think deeply” [45:12-13].*

This refers to reflecting upon the signs in the universe such as the heavens, the earth, mountains and rivers; that also includes reflecting upon one’s own self and how one was formed and created, as God, may He be glorified, says:

*“And on the earth are signs for those who have Faith with certainty, And also in your own selves. Will you not then see?”* [51:20-21].

*“(This is) a Book (the Qur’an) which We have sent down to you, full of blessings that they may ponder over its Verses, and that men of understanding may remember”* [38:29].

The Quran further elaborates:

*“And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the mind, one will be questioned about all these”* (17:36)

This verse encourages us to think before we decide. We should think about anything that is a guiding element in our life. What you work at, what set of beliefs you hold on to, any movements you join and so on. There are consequences to all of our actions and the choices we make! Not just for us, but for others. If you do not know or understand why you are doing it, do not do it. In terms of specifics, the Qur’an is greatly deserving of deep consideration.

About 750 verses of the Quran exhort its readers to study nature, history, the Quran itself and humanity. The Quran mentions hikmah or wisdom 20 times, and 10 of these are immediately preceded by kitab, which is a reference to divine scripture — primarily the Quran, but also other revealed scriptures preceding the Quran (3:42).

The value of hikmah in the Quran is underscored in a verse: When God bestows hikmah on someone that person is indeed granted an immense source of goodness (2: 269).

In another verse, the Quran praises those who listen to the word and follow the best of it (or the best interpretation thereof) (39:18).

Our thinking processes enable us to reach conclusions, make decisions, and solve problems constantly. However, a detailed study of the Quran reveals that these terms allude to a more rigorous form

of thinking, which in today's terms can be equated to "critical thinking".

"Critical thinking is that mode of thinking – about any subject, content, or problem – in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skilfully taking charge of the structures inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them." Furthermore, "critical thinking is self-guided, self-disciplined thinking which attempts to reason at the highest level of quality in a fair-minded way.

Quranic verses expand on this form of "thinking" throughout by asking mankind to observe, seek knowledge, reflect, and ask questions and to ultimately connect the dots by using the faculties of human reason. Other similar terms used in the Quran in various contexts can best be translated as "to reason", "reflect", "ponder", etc.

The Quran reminds us:

*"And He has subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the heavens and on earth: Behold, in that are Signs indeed for those who reflect".*  
(45: 13)

It further reminds us of the temporary and illusive nature of our life and makes us reflect on our aim and purpose in this life:

*"The example of the life of this world (which has enamoured you into becoming heedless to Our signs) is that of water that We sent down from the heaven which causes the vegetation of the earth, which sustains men and cattle, to grow luxuriantly. But when the earth took on its golden raiment and became well adorned and the owners believed that they had full control over their lands Our command came upon them by night or by day, and We convened it into a stubble, as though it had not blossomed yesterday. Thus do We expound the signs for a people who reflect" (10:24)*

It explains the purpose of reflecting and using our cognitive abilities to reach conclusions as:

*“[This is] a blessed Book which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammed], that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded” (38:29)*

The phrase “reflect upon the Qur’an” which appeared in the previous verses implies making the effort to comprehend the meaning, the significance and the purpose of the verses of the Qur’an, and then implementing their teachings in one’s life. By doing so, we enable the Qur’an to guide us, correct our behaviour, amend our moral values, and improve the way we deal with ourselves and with others.

Reflection is a vital step in becoming aware of what is going on around us and drawing helpful conclusions from them. It is a golden key to open so many doors to the deeper meanings of experience. Prophet Muhammed pbuh points out the merits of reflection in following hadith:

*“No act of worship is as meritorious as reflection (tafakkur). So reflect on the God’s bounties and the works of His Power.”*

He also said:

*“True reflection an hour is better or more meritorious than one whole year of voluntary physical worship.”*

Reflection is the human heart’s light, the spirit’s nourishment, the essence of knowledge, and the heart and light of the Islamic way of life. Reflection is the light in the heart that allows us to discern what is good and evil, beneficial and harmful, beautiful and ugly. Again, it is through reflection that the universe becomes a book to read and study, and the verses of the Qur’an disclose their deeper meanings and secrets more clearly.

Without reflection we are no different than the animals. The Quran alludes to this reality in the following verse:

*“And certainly We have created for hell many of the jinn and the men; they have hearts with which they do not understand, and they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear; they are as cattle, nay, they are in worse errors; these are the heedless ones”.* [7-179]

We, humans have been blessed with the faculties of intellect and higher brain function than the animals therefore the obvious expectation is that we will reflect and make this reflection a very important part of our daily routines. If, however, we choose to be ignorant and live for the fulfilment of our base desires and needs only we will certainly reduce ourselves to below the level of cattle- for the cattle do follow their instinct and thus fulfil their expected role!

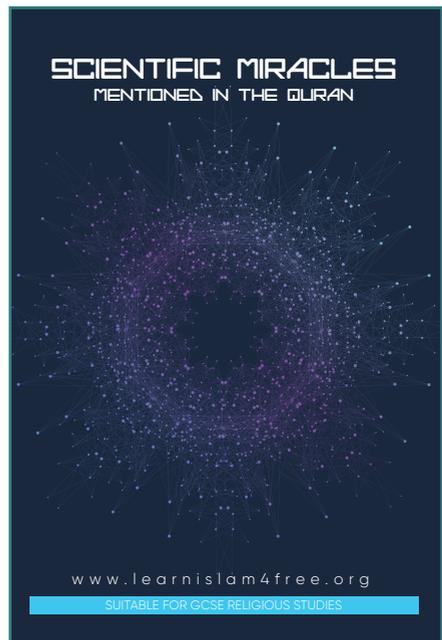
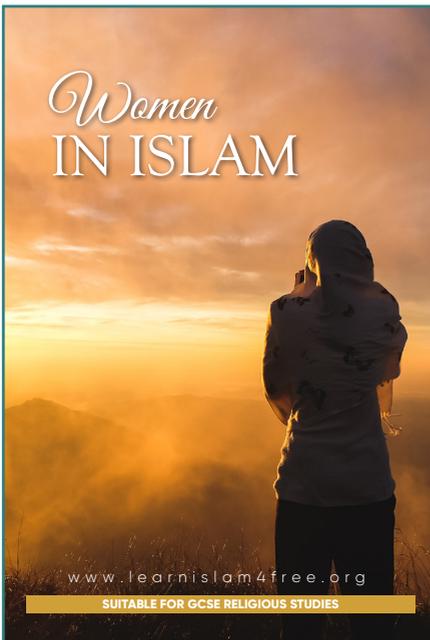
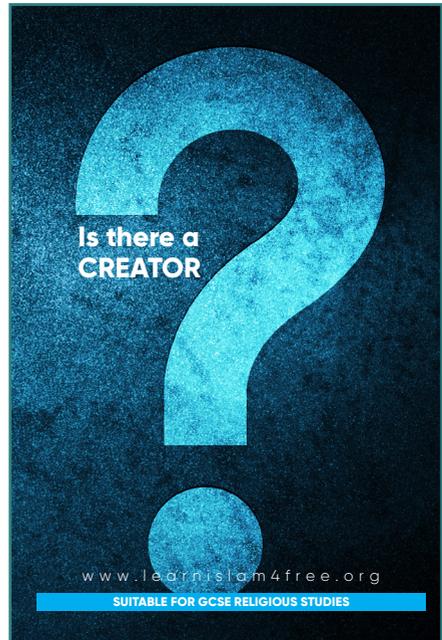
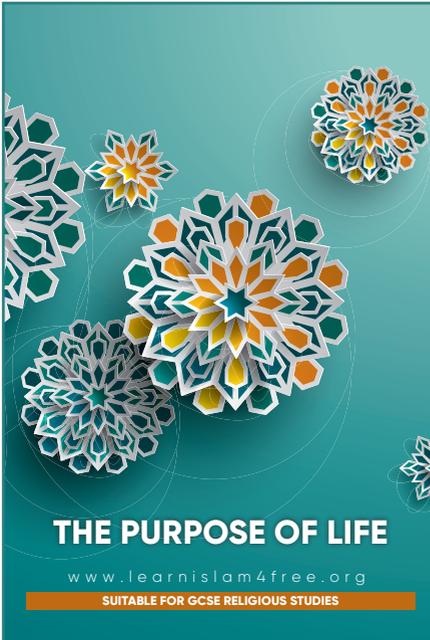
Reflection, deep thinking, analytical approach, critical thinking pattern and a very keen sense of observation is what makes us real humans and the crown of al creation.

The Quran invites us to take this beautiful and fulfilling journey with an open mind in order to seek the truth and nothing but the truth as Prophet pbuh used to pray every day:

“My Lord show me the true nature of things, as they really are (not as I want to see them)”

This should be our guiding principle in arriving at any conclusions that we draw!

## OTHER ESSENTIAL READINGS



## Booklets

1. The Quran
2. The Book That Shook The World
3. World's First Written Constitution
4. The Sharia Law
5. The Purpose Of Life
6. The People Of The Book
7. What Is Islam?
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