10471 - Knowledge in Islam

the question

To what extent is Islam concerned with knowledge?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Allah created man and provided him with the tools for acquiring knowledge, namely hearing, sight and wisdom. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And Allâh has brought you out from the wombs of your mothers while you know nothing. And He gave you hearing, sight, and hearts that you might give thanks (to Allâh) [al-Nahl 16:78]

Islam is the religion of knowledge. The first aayah of the Quran to be revealed enjoined reading which is the key to knowledge. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Read! In the Name of your Lord Who has created (all that exists).

He has created man from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood).

Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous.

Who has taught (the writing) by the pen.

He has taught man that which he knew not” [al-‘Alaq 96:1-5]

In Islam, knowledge comes before action; there can be no action without knowledge, as Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“So know (O Muhammad) that Laa ilaaha ill-Allâh (none has the right to be worshipped but Allâh),

and ask forgiveness for your sin, and also for (the sin of) believing men and believing women" [Muhammad 47:19]

Allah warns every Muslim against speaking without knowledge, as He says (interpretation of the meaning):

"And follow not (O man, i.e., say not, or do not, or witness not) that of which you have no knowledge. Verily, the hearing, and the sight, and the heart of each of those ones will be questioned (by Allâh)" [al-Israa' 17:36]

Emphasizing the status of knowledge and the scholars, Allah calls upon the scholars to bear witness to His Oneness, as He says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Allâh bears witness that Lâ ilâha illa Huwa (none has the right to be worshipped but He), and the angels, and those having knowledge (also give this witness); (He always) maintains His creation in justice. Laa ilaaha illa Huwa (none has the right to be worshipped but He), the All-Mighty, the All-Wise" [Aal 'Imraan 3:18]

Knowledge and fear of Allah may be attained by knowing His signs and creation. The knowledgeable are those who know that, hence Allah praises them by saying (interpretation of the meaning):

"It is only those who have knowledge among His slaves that fear Allâh" [Faatir 35:28]

The scholars occupy a noble status in Islam, and which is higher than the position of others in this world and in the Hereafter. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Allâh will exalt in degree those of you who believe, and those who have been granted knowledge" [al-Mujaadilah 58:11]

Because of the importance of knowledge, Allah commanded His Messenger to seek more of it. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"and say: 'My Lord! Increase me in knowledge'" [Ta-Ha 20:114]

Allah praises the scholars, as He says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Say: ‘Are those who know equal to those who know not?’ It is only men of understanding who will remember (i.e. get a lesson from Allâh’s Signs and Verses)” [al-Zumar 39:9]

Those who have knowledge are the quickest of people to understand the truth and believe in it:

“And that those who have been given knowledge may know that it (this Quran) is the truth from your Lord, so that they may believe therein, and their hearts may submit to it with humility”

[al-Hajj 22:54 – interpretation of the meaning]

Islam calls us to seek knowledge. The Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) made seeking knowledge an obligation upon every Muslim, and he explained that the superiority of the one who has knowledge over the one who merely worships is like the superiority of the moon over every other heavenly body. He said that the scholars are the heirs of the Prophets and that the Prophets did not leave behind dinars and dirhams (i.e., money), rather their inheritance was knowledge, so whoever acquires it has gained a great share. And he (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said that seeking knowledge is a way to Paradise. He (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever follows a path in the pursuit of knowledge, Allah will make a path to Paradise easy for him.” (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, Kitaab al-‘Ilm, 10)

Islam calls us to learn all kinds of beneficial knowledge. Branches of knowledge vary in status, the highest of which is knowledge of sharee’ah, then knowledge of medicine, then the other fields of knowledge.

The best of all branches of knowledge are the sciences of sharee’ah through which man comes to know his Lord, and his Prophet and Religion. This is the knowledge with which Allah honoured His Messenger; He taught it to him so that he might teach it to mankind:

“Indeed, Allâh conferred a great favour on the believers when He sent among them a Messenger (Muhammad) from among themselves, reciting unto them His Verses (the Qur’ân), and purifying them (from sins by their following him), and instructing them (in) the Book (the Quran) and

Al-Hikmah [the wisdom and the Sunnah of the Prophet (i.e. his legal ways, statements and acts of worship)], while before that they had been in manifest error”

[Aal ‘Imraan 3:164 – interpretation of the meaning]

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “When Allah wishes good for a person, He makes him understand the religion.” (Agreed upon. Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 69)

Concerning the matter of paying attention to the Quran and learning and teaching it, the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “The best of you is the one who learns the Quran and teaches it.” (Agreed upon. Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 4639)

There is no goodness in knowledge which is not confirmed by action, or words which are not confirmed by deeds:

“O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do?

Most hateful it is with Allâh that you say that which you do not do” [al-Saff :2-3]

The ummah needs knowledgeable people at all times and in all places. A nation without knowledge and scholars will live in illusions and sink in darkness and if a person learns what Allah has prescribed, then whoever conceals this knowledge and deprives the ummah of it, Allah will place on him a bridle of fire on the Day of Resurrection, and he will deserve to be cursed, except for the one who repents. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Verily, those who conceal the clear proofs, evidences and the guidance, which We have sent down, after We have made it clear for the people in the Book, they are the ones cursed by Allâh and cursed by the cursers.

Except those who repent and do righteous deeds, and openly declare (the truth which they concealed). These, I will accept their repentance. And I am the One Who accepts repentance, the Most Merciful” [al-Baqarah 2:159-160]

Knowledge brings a great reward. The one who points the way to something good is like the one

who does it. When the knowledgeable person dies, his reward with Allah does not cease when he dies, rather it continues to increase so long as people benefit from his knowledge. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “When a man dies, all his deeds come to an end except for three – an ongoing charity, beneficial knowledge or a righteous son who will pray for him.” (Narrated by Muslim, 1631)

If the scholar spreads his knowledge among the people, he will have a reward like that of those who follow him. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever calls people to right guidance will have a reward like that of those who follow him, without it detracting from their reward in the slightest, and whoever calls people to misguidance will have a burden of sin like that of those who follow him, without it detracting from their burden in the slightest.” (Narrated by Muslim, 2674)

Proper understanding of Islam is one of the best of good characteristics with which a Muslim may be honoured, as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “When Allah wishes good for a person, He makes him understand the religion.” (Agreed upon).

Reading Quran, learning it and teaching it, are among the best deeds, as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “There should be no envy (hasad) except between two people, a man to whom Allah has given (knowledge of) the Quran, so he recites it night and day, and a man to whom Allah has given wealth, so he spends it (in good deeds) night and day.” (narrated by Muslim, 815)