

The Ulema—Who Are They?

Glossary of Terms:

The Quran was revealed in the Arabic language, the expression of which is neither poetry nor prose, but has its own unique style and rhythm. It has rare beauty and grandeur; it is sublime. To translate such a language into another and retain its spirit, beauty, force, and depth is just not possible. An attempt can be made to translate a piece of literature, but when it comes to the Quran, which is a charter of human rights—a constitution—one has to be absolutely certain that the actual meaning is not lost during the course of translation. In addition, each language has its own phrases, idioms, and expressions that are specific for its culture and values. It is not possible to translate a concept that exists in one culture into a single word of another language that does not even recognize that concept. This can be illustrated by Persian and Urdu translations—they retain Arabic words like *kafir*, *momin*, *mushrik*, *rahman*, *raheem*, *sabr*, *sawab*, *salat*, *zakat*, etc. These words were in use before the advent of Islam and so the Arabs knew what they meant. It is of paramount importance for the reader to know the meanings of these words because they convey specific Quranic concepts and a simple English translation would either be in Biblical terms, or out rightly contradictory to the spirit of the message. Finally, because these words are used repeatedly in the Quran, we have provided a glossary to more efficiently explain the concepts in their original form.

This glossary is based on the following universally recognized dictionaries of the Arabic language at the time of the Prophet (PBUH):

1. Lane, Arabic—English lexicon
2. Lisan-al-Arab
3. Taj-ul-Urus
4. Muhit-ul-Muhit
5. Raghیب, Mufriđat-al-Quran

DIN—this word has been used in various contexts, among them being ascendancy, sovereignty, management, conduct of affairs, ruling power, mastership, ownership, exercise of power, code of law, constitution, law of requital, an order. The Quran has described Islam as Ad-Din, which is generally translated as religion. However, in the light of the above meanings, it should be clear that this is not only incorrect, but distorts and negates the very meaning of din. Islam is not a religion (madhab), and it has never been described as one in the Quran. Islam is a way of life, a system, a code of law. In the external universe Islam signifies the Divine Order that governs life and the movement of the entire universe. The whole purpose of the Quran is to establish a universal order based on the Divinely ordained values of life. This is ad-din.

MADHAB—literally means way or course. This word does not appear in the Quran and in Islamic fiqh it stands for “school of thought”. It is usually translated as religion, and since Islam is described as a religion in English, the word madhab has come into use for it in Urdu as well. This is a fundamental fallacy—it goes against the very essence of Islam, which is a din, not a madhab.

HAQQ (and BAATIL)—usually translated as truth or right. According to Lane, its primary significance is the state of being just, righteous, truthful, real or factual; established or confirmed so as to be undeniable. These meanings make it clear that haqq does not fall into the domain of ideas or thoughts; rather, it stands for constructive results of beliefs which manifest themselves in tangible form and are in harmony with the changing needs of the times. No belief or theory relating to this world can be described as haqq unless its truth is established by a positive manifestation of its constructive potential. These results are permanent and unchanging.

The antithesis of haqq is batil. This does not merely stand for ideas or actions with destructive potential, but includes all thinking and conduct that do not lead to positive results. As haqq means something that is real and true, batil refers to something that may be imaginary and/or false.

EIMAN—to be convinced, to accept, to rely on, or to have confidence in something. This is usually translated as belief or faith, which implies acceptance without proof or argument, and without reference to reason, thought, knowledge, or insight. Faith is generally regarded as the negation of knowledge and reason. It has been said about Kant that, “he found it necessary to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith.”

According to the Quran, however, Eiman is not just belief, it is, in fact, what Kant calls knowledge. Eiman is synonymous with conviction and it is based on reason and knowledge. The Quran does not recognize belief that involves blind acceptance. It is true that Islam does include acceptance of certain things that cannot be explained through sense perception, but there is no reason to assume that these things do not exist. In fact, our reason and thinking would compel us to recognize the existence of such things. Eiman, according to the Quran, signifies conviction based on full mental acceptance and intellectual satisfaction. It gives one a feeling of *amn*—inner contentment and peace (notice that these words have a common root). Thus, Eiman means to believe, admit, or accept something, to testify to its truthfulness, to have confidence in and to rely on that belief, and to bow in obedience.

There are five fundamental facts stated in the Quran that one must accept in order to be a Muslim: belief in 1) Allah, 2) the law of *mukafat* and the afterlife, 3) angels (*malaika*), 4) the revelations, and 5) the messengers. Belief in Allah means not only to profess obedience but also to show it through one’s actions. Belief in the law of *mukafat* means to have conviction that every action has an inescapable consequence or reward. Angels are not the winged creatures so popularly depicted, but heavenly forces that carry out the laws of Allah governing the universe. They figuratively bow to Allah since they follow His orders, and they “bow” to mankind because we are able to study, manipulate,

and conquer them. Belief in the revelations and messengers implies not only believing in the historical details but also acknowledging that human intellect alone cannot safely reach the final destination of life; that guidance in the form of wahi delivered by the messengers is necessary to progress.

Therefore, a *momin* is one who has firm conviction and trust in the prevailing laws of the universe as well as the laws revealed through wahi. He/she accepts the truth in such a way that ensures his/her own peace and helps to safeguard the peace and security of humankind. Al-*momin* is indeed one of the characteristics of Allah.

KUFR—this is the negation of Eiman. It means to deny the truth, or to defy the laws of Allah. The root means to cover or conceal. *Kufr* means open denial, not hypocrisy. A *kaafir* has the decency to proclaim his/her beliefs, and so is not as damned as the hypocrite. The definition also includes concealing or withholding the means of subsistence that Allah has created for the good of all humankind, which are supposed to be freely available to everyone.

JAHANNAM—usually translated as hell, this word has been inadequately described in English terms. It is a Hebrew compound of the words *ji* and *hinnum*; meaning the valley of Hinnun. This was a famous valley situated in the south of Jerusalem where people were burned alive as a sacrifice to the idol Moloch. Jahannum, therefore, denotes a situation in which humanity is ruined. In Arabic, the word *jaheem* means to prevent; that is, it denotes a condition in which human evolution is prevented and life begins to stagnate instead of progressing. It is also a miser who prevents wealth from circulating. According to the Quran, life manifested itself in the human form after having gone through various stages of evolution. This is the final link in the evolution of life in this world. But life does not end with death; it continues beyond the dissolution of the physical body. The higher life that the developed personality is capable of living is called *jannah*. On the other hand, the not-so-developed personality thwarts its own future and lives in the infernal state of stagnation called *jahannum*.

Jannah and jahannum do not stand for places or localities; they denote different conditions of human life that have been described metaphorically. It should be clear that these conditions do not only relate to life in the hereafter—they have their beginnings in this world. A social order based upon Quranic foundations results in a heavenly situation: the necessities of life are available in excess and are secured in decent ways befitting human dignity. This brings true happiness and peace of mind. In contrast, a society based on laws other than Allah's will invariably lead to misery and collapse as has been so abundantly illustrated throughout history.

RABB—usually translated in English as lord. This is actually opposite in meaning to the true essence of the word. Rabb means one who enables something to grow and develop, eventually fulfilling its potential; to bring something to perfection. Nothing in the universe starts out being perfect; everything is born with potential that, when actualized, enables that object to become what it was designed to be—including humans. We are endowed with manifold potentialities that enable us to rise to the highest point of human

existence when fully developed. According to Arabic lexicons, Rabb means one who looks after something and beautifies it, keeps something in place, and continuously provides nourishment. The natural result of nourishment is greenery and growth; thus, evergreen trees (that maintain their greenery year round) are called *al-ribbatu*.

The process by which one fulfills his/her potential is called *rububiyat*. The Quran seeks to establish a social order under which the latent potential of every individual can be fully realized. This realization will include the sustenance and growth of one's body as well as one's mental and spiritual potential. This kind of social system is called the *rububiyat* order, and its establishment is the ultimate purpose of the *deen* of Islam.

TAQWA—the common English equivalent, piety, does not express the real meaning of the word. Deviation from the right path leads human beings to ruin; *taqwa* is the act of keeping them on the right path. Merely saving oneself from ruin is a negative virtue, and the Quran emphasizes the positive aspect of life. Therefore, *taqwa* means not only saving oneself from destructive forces, but also stabilizing one's personality through preservation and enforcement of the laws of Allah—in other words, taking a step in the right direction. *Waqqa* means to protect something from harm; in verse 2/24 Allah exhorts us to protect ourselves from the fire (*fattaqun naar*). A very illustrative example is of someone walking through a thorn bush. The thorns represent destructive forces that are ready to snag at the clothing of someone walking through. Those who have *taqwa* will save themselves from these thorns by gathering their clothes and walking carefully so that they do not get scratched by the thorns. *Ittaqullah* has been used numerous times in the Quran and means to follow and remain in harmony with the laws of Allah. In verse 5/2 it has been used as an antonym of *udwan*, or rebellion, disobedience.

Muttaqi (pl. *muttaqeen*) is a person who leads a life of *taqwa*, eschewing things that are injurious to their personalities and espousing the laws of Allah.

INTRODUCTION

The capacity to acquire knowledge makes human beings the most superior of creations. But what is knowledge? Who is entitled to be called a knowledgeable person (*ulema*)? What is the Quranic point of view on this? Before dealing with these fundamental questions, let us look at the historical perspective.

In the world of knowledge, the ancient Greek philosophers enjoyed a highly distinguished position. In fact, the history of humanity traces the beginning of knowledge and wisdom to ancient Greece. Socrates and Plato are the most prominent among the philosophers, and Socrates is considered the grandfather of all Greek philosophers. Plato, besides being Socrates' student, is the founder of an entirely new school of thought.

For Socrates, human beings were the only object of study while the universe was of no consequence. Plato went one step further and denied the very existence of the universe. For him, the real world was the "world of ideas" and the material world was

only a shadow of the real world. Since the perceivable world was not real, any knowledge gained from its study would also be unreal, and thus unreliable. Plato believed in the abstract only, and denied the concrete.

The Greek view of knowledge was mostly subjective, i.e., it belonged to human consciousness or the perceiving ego, and there was no objective test of the truth. There is no doubt that the ancient world produced some great philosophies at a time when human beings were comparatively primitive and governed more or less by suggestion. But we must not forget that these theories were the work of abstract thought, which cannot go beyond the systemization of vague religious beliefs and traditions, and they give us no insight into concrete situations of life.

MYSTICISM

This Platonic philosophy ultimately became the basis of Greek mysticism. Later on, the same philosophy took the form of Vedantic Theory (Hindu mysticism) in India. According to this philosophy, the world is nothing but an illusion (“maya”), or a dream dreamt by the god Brahma, or a drama (“leela”) being played out by the god Ishwar. Everything is a stage show, artificial and unreal. There is actually one Hindu god by the name of Nat Rajan, or the actor king.

This philosophy created a negative mental attitude towards the material world that caused many religious people to start despising it. Later on, this same philosophy found its way into Muslim thought, via Persian mysticism. Under its effect, the forward looking and progressive Muslim nation was brought to a miserable standstill.

The attitude of people towards the world before the revelation of the Quran was that this universe is unreal, an illusion, and any knowledge concerning it is presumption.

THE QURANIC CHALLENGE

The Quran challenged those speculative philosophies and demolished the very basis of Platonic theory:

“The creation of whatever is in the heights and depths of the universe and all that is in between is not without purpose. It is presumption on the part of Unbelievers who think the universe is not real. The result of denying such a great truth will be that all their efforts and achievements in life will end up in smoke.” (38:27)

The Quran uprooted the centuries old philosophy and brought to light the dehumanizing effects of this false concept. Here it is very important to note that those who believe the universe is not real and have a negative attitude towards it are referred to as Unbelievers by the Quran. It demarcates the Believers from the Unbelievers.

The Quran states that the negative attitude towards the material world brings hardship to human beings. Mysticism is the exemplar of such an attitude; instead of recognizing this world as a happy and vibrant place full of possibilities, mystics view it as a massive jailhouse in which inmates are serving time.

To reject the claim of those for whom the creation of the universe is merely a drama, the Quran says, “The creation of the heavens and the Earth and that which is between them is not a game.” (21/16) The creation is real. However, Allah does not expect these claims to be accepted without any scrutiny or investigation; on the contrary, these claims are based on reason and should be judged on the basis of discernment and insight. This is why “there are well explained facts for those who have knowledge.” (10/5)

THE QURANIC DEFINITION OF KNOWLEDGE

Now the next logical question arises: what is knowledge? The Quran says, “Do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. The hearing and sight and the heart—all of them shall have to answer whether personal inquiry was made concerning the matter.” (17/36) The words hearing and seeing refer to human senses and the Arabic word heart is also used to mean the mind. The following example illustrates the point of this verse: you hear a gunshot. It is followed by a scream and moans of pain. When you go to see what happened you discover that your best friend has been shot and you are consumed with feelings of vengeance towards the shooter. In this situation your feelings are backed by your first hand knowledge of the events. On the other hand, if you do not hear a gunshot and you do not see your injured friend, but you are consumed with hate anyway for some person you think may have committed a crime, you are acting on hearsay and not knowledge because your senses and mind were not involved in arriving at the conclusion. Thus the Quran strikes at the Platonic philosophy once again. Plato said that knowledge gained through the senses is not reliable, whereas the Quran is saying that anything not verified by the senses and mind cannot be regarded as knowledge. This shows how valuable sense-perception is in Islam. The Quranic concept of knowledge is objective and the knowledge of the non-ego is superior to that of the ego. The revelation of the Quran marked the birth of inductive intellect. Inductive reason alone allows the human being to become master of his/her environment. Islam has created and fostered the spirit of critical observation of outer experience by divesting the forces of nature of that divine character with which the earlier culture had clothed them. The important thing to note is that the Quran, for purposes of knowledge, fixes its gaze on the concrete and finite. It is also abundantly clear that the birth of the method of observation and experimental science in Islam was due not to a compromise with Greek thought but to a prolonged intellectual warfare with it.

THOSE WHO DO NOT USE THEIR SENSES

In view of the importance given to human senses and the mind, the Quran declares in the clearest terms that people who do not use their senses and their minds are not living their lives on a human level. They are in fact living on an animalistic level and are admonished: “Many among human beings have adopted a lifestyle that will lead them to hell. They have a mind but do not use it to think and reflect. They have eyes but do not see. They have ears but cannot hear. They are not human beings and are even worse than animals. They are neglectful.” (7/179) This verse also indicates that knowledge is only that which can be explained by the senses and the mind. Intangible, abstract matters have nothing to do with the senses. Observation of natural phenomena and the study of the universe, experimentation to discover the laws of creation, maintenance, and workings of the components of the universe are the applications of sense-perception. In modern terminology this is called scientific knowledge. As the Quran states, the pursuit of such knowledge is the duty of all believers (momineen).

THE FOLLOWERS OF ALLH’S LAWS

The Quran emphasizes the observation and study of natural phenomena and the laws of the universe. “In the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alteration of the night and day there are signs for people of understanding.” (3/189) These people are those who “whatever condition they are in, keep Allah’s laws in sight. They ponder the creation of the heavens and earth and after thorough observation and experiment, they declare on the basis of reason that O Sustainer! You did not create this universe in jest.” (3/190)

Here, as on other occasions, the Quran states something of paramount importance. It claims that nothing in the universe has been created without a purpose. There is nothing in the universe that is useless or that does not benefit mankind in some way. Lack of knowledge on the part of humans makes it seem as though there are pointless creations, and as a result of this ignorance all of mankind suffers. Thus, it is the duty of Muslims to substantiate this Quranic claim based on research and investigation. This is no easy task, and requires a vast network of laboratories and scientists and continuous research. However, people who make the effort will learn the laws that will enable them to conquer the forces of nature whereas those who do not will eventually lag behind and become weak and vulnerable.

SIGNS OF ALLAH

As mentioned above, it is the duty of the Muslim ummah to understand the laws of nature and utilize them for the benefit of mankind.

“There are signs for the believers in the heavens and the earth. In creation, and all the animals that He scattered on the earth are portents for the believers; and in the

alteration of night and day and the sustenance sent down by the sky that revives the earth after its death, and in the change of winds are hints for those who have sense. These are the revelations we have presented to you in truth. For those who will reject, what other truth can convince them?" (45/3-6)

Allah has stated in unambiguous terms that belief in Him comes through the study of nature and its laws. If studying natural law does not lead one to believe in Allah, then nothing else can. This astounding declaration illustrates the importance of studying natural phenomena. Real belief based on reason can only be achieved through this method.

SEEING ALLAH

Saying that Allah "reveals Himself" through natural phenomena is not a flight of fancy. The Quran explains this as well as the goal of human life and the purpose of following the laws of Allah. Everyone wants to "meet" or "find" Allah. The Quran says, "Allah is He who raised the heavens without any visible support, firmly in charge of the central control. He has subjected the sun and moon (to His laws), each one runs its course for an appointed time. He regulates all affairs, explaining things in detail, that you may believe with certainty in meeting your Rabb." (13/2) The Quran describes the setup of the universe and follows by saying that meeting with Allah is possible. It indicates that if you want Allah to reveal himself to you then you have to study the universe, scrutinize every object in it, and through observation and experiment, discover the laws governing this system. Thus all the mysteries of Nature will be unlocked one by one and you will gain insight into how Allah is sustaining this universe. *This* is what meeting and "seeing" Allah means. As far as the entity of Allah is concerned, He is beyond the comprehension of human minds, let alone sense-perception. Seeing or meeting Him does not refer to the physical sense, it means gaining knowledge of how the universe functions and is regulated by Him. It is clear that according to the Quran, only those who observe natural phenomena can know how Allah runs the universe. It is a long, arduous process which sometimes requires scaling the highest peaks of the Himalayas, diving to the bottomless depths of the Atlantic, bearing the scorching heat of the Saharan desert, and doing research in the bone chilling cold of the North Pole. This kind of research is only carried out by those who are not satisfied with what they know at present; those who look beyond the horizon and strive for more knowledge. The Quran says, "Verily, in the alteration of the night and day, and in all that Allah has created, in the heavens and the earth are signs for those who are devoted believers (muttaqeen)." (10/6)

WHO ARE THE DEVOTED BELIEVERS (MUTTAQEEN)

The verse mentioned above describes the muttaqeen. It goes on to say, "Those who expect not the meeting with Us, but desire the life of this world and feel secure therein, and those who are neglectful of our revelations are doomed people because of their negligence." (10/7) These verses offer a cause for the cyclical rise and fall of nations. Those who are satisfied with the status quo and do not strive for improvement and a better future are devoid of thought and action; they fall from grace and are left far

behind in the struggle of life. In contrast, those nations that work hard to develop new inventions and make new discoveries surge far ahead. Because of their initiative and well directioned hard work, nature rewards them by revealing its hidden treasures.

A LIFE OF DEPRIVATION

“Those who disbelieve in Allah’s revelations and in their meeting with Him, such are deprived of the means of sustenance—an extreme penalty.” (29/23) In this verse, being deprived of the amenities of life is considered a great penalty. For example, rivers of petroleum flowed under the desserts of Arabia but the people were content with their meager existence. They did not have the will, desire, or the knowledge to find and utilize this hidden gift of nature. As a result they were dependant on others for even the most basic of necessities. Western nations made the effort to discover and start pumping the hidden petroleum, and as a result the people of the region benefited and became prosperous. Many countries have great potential, but their people are happy with the status quo and prefer whatever is easily available, so nothing motivates them to work harder. As a result they are always one step behind, and in many cases dependant on, other nations. On the other hand, there are European nations with very little land but with so much production capabilities that they not only provide for local needs but they even manage to export surplus food. This is due to the fact that they are perpetually laboring in accordance with the laws of nature in order to take advantage of its hidden treasures. It is a divine law that the livelihoods of those who eschew the laws of Allah continuously diminish (20/124). This law is universal and there are no exceptions. Muslims have been shunning this law for centuries; as if this were not enough, we also have not put our senses to proper use and have been thus divested of these faculties. We have fallen into the category of those people whose “hearts, ears, and eyes have become useless, and they do not take heed.” (16/108)

Some people think that “meeting Allah” means being accountable to Him for our deeds after our death. Though in the context of the above mentioned verses this meaning is not appropriate, the fact remains that in order to believe in a meeting with Allah, observation and study of natural phenomena is vital. Life after death and accountability for actions is an essential part of our belief.

PROOF

In the above paragraphs the Quran has explained that:

- i) Knowledge is only that which can be verified by the human senses and mind,
- ii) Use of the senses means to observe natural phenomena, study the laws of nature, carry out consistent research, and experience the revelation of Allah’s laws that run the universe and provide systematic sustenance, growth, and development.

Such practice is the hallmark of believers in general and the duty of *muttaqeen* in particular. This is *zikhro-fikri i-khudawandi*, or following the laws of Allah. This

behavior brings to light the hidden secrets of the universe and on the basis of knowledge we can say to our Rabb, “You did not create anything in vain.”

This is not all that must be done. Allah has stated that there is testimony to the truth of Quranic claims in the form of signs provided by Him in the universe. “We will show them our signs in the farthest regions of the earth, and in their own minds until it becomes manifest that this is the Truth.” (41/53) As an aside, when the entanglements of truth in the intricacies of time can be sorted out through human knowledge and effort, only then will these claims become manifest. In this verse the word *anfus* (internal world) is mentioned along with *afaq* (external world), which shows that science is not confined to the laws of physics but encompasses all the social sciences as well, the latter of which have to be developed by practical research. History, psychology, and sociology are important in this distinction. With the passage of time the physical and social sciences will continue to reveal and confirm the claims made by the Quran. This is obvious since the Quran is the book of Allah and He sees everything all the time. “Is it not enough that Allah oversees all things.” (41/53) Whatever He reveals about the universe and objects within it is based on fact and is not a presumption. “Say, the Quran was revealed by Him who knows the secrets of the heavens and the earth.” (25/6)

It will be fitting to mention a book named The Great Design. A questionnaire was sent to a large number of scholars around the world asking whether each one felt that the universe was functioning according to a definite system, or whether it came into being accidentally and is being governed similarly. The answers were compiled into the above-mentioned book without any review or editing. All of the scholars reached the same conclusion based on their individual fields of research: that this universe is functioning in accordance with an established order designed by an all-knowing creator. They appreciate the order and discipline of the system but being oblivious of the Quran, cannot correctly identify the entity that is running such a harmonious and efficient system. However, they are observing His great system of sustenance (Rabubiyat) personally. With such a foundation it would be easy for these kind of scholars to discover the truthfulness of the Quran if someone presented it to them.

Maurice Bucaille, in his book The Bible, the Quran and Science, discusses various Quranic claims that are verified by modern scientific research.

People who have been unaware of these signs in the universe have their doubts about seeing proof of Allah. In fact they would not have to go very far to do so; the study of any object in the universe can provide evidence for the workings of Allah’s laws. The rabubiyat order is not tied to any one thing but encompasses the whole of the universe: “Indeed, are they in doubt concerning the meeting with Allah? It is He who controls all things.” (41/54)

WHO ARE SCHOLARS (THE ULEMA)

We have so far seen the Quranic definition of knowledge. By knowing this it is easy to figure out who, according to the Quran, is a knowledgeable person and what the term actually means. The Quran has even explained this fact so there is no confusion:

“Did you not ponder the rain that Allah caused to fall from the sky, with which we produce fruit of diverse colors; and among the mountains there are layers of red and white which differ in shade and type, some being dark in color. Similarly, humans and animals are of different colors and kinds. Among the followers of Allah and knowledgeable persons (ulema) are those who are awestruck by the greatness of Allah.” (35/27-28)

These two verses deal with different parts of the universe, different branches of nature, and different fields of science. Physics, botany, zoology, and the humanities are all touched upon. The knowledgeable persons are awestruck because their insight has convinced them of His power and Wisdom in controlling the universe perfectly. The Quran has referred to those people as ulema, and in modern terminology they are called scientists. These are the people who study nature and after observation and consistent experimentation, conquer the forces of nature. Allah has put the forces of nature under our control, but only those who know the laws can manipulate these forces. The only way to become one of the ulema is to acquire this knowledge.

THE ULEMA (MULLAHS)

After learning the Quranic definition of ulema, it is an interesting exercise to compare our current ulema with it. They do not know the fundamentals of natural sciences, and their knowledge is limited to theoretical discussions and verbal emendations. These discussions are mostly related to issues that have no bearing on the universe or the practical life of people. The curriculum of religious schools is spread over ten years during which students study logic, philosophy, rhetoric, grammar, literature, etc, most of which is outdated. They also learn about astronomy, geometry, and arithmetic, which are also outdated. It is curious to note that the study of the Quran is not included in the curriculum. A certain exegesis (Jilalain) is taught that consists of only synonyms of the Quranic words. In the last year of study an exegesis of the second chapter of the Quran is taught (Bazadi). This is the education upon completion of which they receive certification for becoming an aalim (knowledgeable person). Here is a case in point to illustrate just how much knowledge these people have:

When the use of loudspeakers was introduced in India before 1947, a fatwa was sought on their use for religious purposes. The president of the organization of ulema, Mufti Kafayat-ullah, wrote:

“The device, about which the opinion has been sought, has not been seen but it is heard that such a device, when it is placed in front of an orator and he speaks while facing it, the device absorbs the sound and then broadcasts it to such a distance that the sound would not reach even a quarter of the distance without the help of the device.” (Naqeeb, 10 Nov. 1941)

The Mufti then gave his verdict in favor of the use of loudspeakers. However, another aalim, Mufti Mohammad Shafee, a senior teacher in the religious academy of Deoband, published a verdict in a magazine in which the use of the devices for prayer was declared unlawful. He wrote that he did not know the nature of the device and how it worked. He sought information from the science teacher, Mr. Brij Nandan Lal of Alexander High School of Bhopal, and the teacher said, "Because of the use of electrical power I am hesitant to believe that the sound is original, and find it hard to deny it either because to prove otherwise is equally difficult." After this "exhaustive research" and on the basis on conjecture from a non-Muslim, a Muslim aalim decided that it was the decree of Allah and His prophet to forbid the use of loudspeakers. This illustrates nicely how ignorant the ulema are in matters natural and modern science; it is ironic that they still retain the ability to issue verdicts (fatwas) on them, however. In Pakistan not only is the expression of personal opinions a target, but law making has fallen victim to the same ignorant judgments.

CLARIFICATION OF A MISUNDERSTANDING

From the various explanations so far it is evident that, according to the Quran, the Mumineen, Muttaqeen, those who abide by and keep Allah's laws in sight, and those who have faith and long to "meet" with Allah, are people who study the universe and perform practical research on the objects therein as well as the forces of nature. The experience thus gained is called knowledge, and the Quran calls those who have this knowledge ulema.

At this point it comes to mind that European and North American nations are not Mumin and Muttaqi in the true sense of the words. While it is very important to acquire scientific knowledge, it is wrong to assume that just by doing so one can become a Mumin or Muttaqi. The critical factor is whether one uses the information according to the laws of Allah. So, there are two conditions in becoming a Mumin: to gain knowledge from nature, and to use it according to the injunctions of Allah. The Quran demands that "its system be accepted in its totality." (2/208) A nation that does not meet both of these criteria cannot be Mumin, and since Muslims fail regarding the first condition, we cannot claim to be Mumin. In addition, if we do not have knowledge of the forces of nature, we will not be able to use them as Allah has advised in the Quran. In contrast, Western nations do not fulfill the second criterion; thus, on a practical level, Muslims and western non-Muslims are in the same position.

In order to use the forces of nature in accordance with Allah's laws it is absolutely necessary to study the Quran because these laws are contained within it. Those who are firmly grounded in knowledge conduct affairs of the state according to Allah's injunctions because they know "if any fail to judge by the light what Allah has revealed, they are no better than the unbelievers." (5/44) As a result of rejecting the Quran, human society, in spite of its prosperity, turns its environment into a living hell. This progressive demise is evident in western culture. Despite all their scientific prowess they cannot find the right solution to human problems. Their senses and mind are not helping them, and about these kinds of nations the Quran says, "And we had firmly established

them in prosperity and power. And we endowed them with hearing, sight, a heart, and intellect. But of no avail to them were their faculties when they went on rejecting the commandments of Allah, and they were encircled by that which they used to mock.” (46/26)

If Western nations use the forces as well as the rewards of nature in Allah’s cause, the hell through which all of humanity is suffering would be transformed into a much sought after paradise. Those who are satisfied with the status quo and do not act according to Allah’s law of Rububiyat live a damned life. In contrast, people who have firm belief in the word of Allah and work constructively within Allah’s system are on the right path and enjoy gardens of lush verdure. They are concerned for each other’s well being and recognize that the universe has not been created in vain. Such a society will continue to expand until it encompasses the whole of humanity, and at that time everyone will acknowledge that Allah’s system of universal sustenance is superlative.

CONCLUSION

If we Muslims want to shape our society according to the Quran, then we must become competent researchers and scientists in every field of knowledge. Through observation and experiment in both the internal world (anfus) and external world (afaq), the forces of nature can be harnessed and then the rewards amassed can be used and distributed according to the laws given in the Quran. Only people with these characteristics are qualified to be called ulema. If we continue to hold our current distorted view of knowledge in Islam, not only will meeting with Allah be impossible, but we will not even be included in the category of living nations.