

**ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES ON KNOWLEDGE AND  
CIVILIZATION**

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## INTRODUCTION

This book is an essential guide for students and teachers of knowledge and civilization in Islam. It seeks to provide a bird's-eye view of the concepts of knowledge and civilization from the Islamic perspective. However, this is a reference book rather than an encyclopedia, hence it does not cover all the topics related knowledge and civilization. In particular, this book provides answers to the following fundamental knowledge-based and civilization-based questions: What is the Islamic perspective of knowledge and civilization? What is the relationship between knowledge, information and data? What is civilization and how it formed? What role is played by urban settlement in the formation of civilizations? What is the importance of knowledge to civilization? While much has been written on knowledge and civilization, more needs to be written. The book comprises of two sections; one on knowledge and the other on civilization. We begin our quest in this book with a look at the concept of reality and the relationship between epistemology, ontology and axiology.

Subjects covered in the first section include an evaluation of Plato's JTB account holds that knowledge is equivalent to "justified true belief," the Islamic concept of knowledge and its connotations, the relationship between data, information and knowledge, ways of knowing or methods of acquiring knowledge, the need for knowledge and its importance, man's duties to knowledge and the etiquettes of teachers and students of knowledge, etc.

The second part of this book provides insights into the meaning of civilization, its characteristics and development, role of religion in ancient civilizations, history of civilization, reasons for civilization, the role of Islam in the transformation of individuals and society, and the characteristics of the Muslim *ummah*, etc.

In this book, it is contended that: First, to have knowledge means to have a great deal of information and understanding of one or more subjects, such as having information and understanding of who Allah is. The reason why it is necessary to know Allah is because our love for Him and obedience to Him both develop as we gain a deeper understanding of Him.

Second, seeking knowledge should be given utmost importance. This is because, according to Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal, people require food and drink once or twice a day, but knowledge is necessary for every breath they take. As a result, their need for knowledge is more than their need for food and water.

Third, all knowledge is granted by Allah. He is *Al-'Alim* (the All Knowing), *Al-Hakim* (the All-Wise), *Al-Sami'* (the All-Hearing) and *Al-Basir* (the All-Seeing). Thus, one of the means to acquiring knowledge is *Du'a* (asking knowledge from Allah). The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) used to ask Allah for beneficial knowledge and seek refuge in Him from knowledge without benefit. From this it is understood that knowledge entails actions. Without actions, knowledge is without benefit.

Fourth, in Islam, knowledge is viewed as Allah's gift to mankind, the Jinn and angels. It is with the power of knowledge that mankind gains control and mastery over the world. Also, it is with knowledge that mankind knows Allah, loves Him, fears Him and glorifies Him. In other words, knowledge is a prior condition for *'ibadah*, i.e., worship of Allah.

Fifth, in the Islamic view, revealed knowledge is defined, among other things, as a set of beliefs, practices and injunctions revealed to mankind through Allah's Prophets and Messengers (peace and blessings be upon them).

Sixth, we cannot understand reality solely by looking at it from an empirical or scientific point of view. We must also consider the religious conception of reality.

Seventh, the terms “knowledge,” “information,” and “data” are distinct yet related. Knowledge is a broader concept than information and data, and information is broader than data.

Eighth, knowledge is the power by which mankind controls nature and achieves development.

Ninth, the aim of civilization is to provide mankind with the basic needs of life, both the spiritual and the physical.

Tenth, knowledge is one of the most important factors in the emergence and development of human civilizations.

Eleventh, the ultimate aim of civilization in Islam is *iqamat al-Din*, that is, establishment and implementation of Islam in its entirety. This includes the acquisition of knowledge about Islam, implementation of Islamic law, acting upon the Qur’an, inviting others to Islam with wisdom and beautiful words, protection of human rights and the environment, ensuring that Islam remains triumphant and strong, and safeguarding and enhancing the dignity of human beings.

This book is based on desk research and draws on primary Islamic sources, namely, the Qur’an and Hadith, as well as secondary works on knowledge and civilization from the Islamic and Western perspectives. Translation of the meanings of the selected verses from the Qur’an is based on ‘Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali’s *Translation of the Meaning of the Qur’an* except in a few places where other translations seemed more appropriate.

After reading this exposition of knowledge and civilization, one should be able to: (a) explain the meanings of knowledge and civilization from the Islamic and Western perspectives, (b) examine the interconnectedness of knowledge and civilization, the relationship between knowledge and information, and also the relationship between *‘ilm* and *taqwa*, *ma‘rifah*, *iman* and *hikmah*, (c) differentiate between the Islamic and Western perspectives of knowledge, (d) highlight some of the qualities of civilized people, and (e) appreciate the need for morality and religion in society.

We look forward to valuable comments and suggestions from the readers to help improve this effort. We hope that this book provides a framework for understanding the concept of knowledge and the concept of civilization from both the Islamic and Western perspectives.