

# The Innate Knowledge of God

By: Reza Berenjkar \*

**Abstract:** *Throughout the history of mankind, the belief in God has been the most popular tendency. The major reason for this belief is the innate knowledge of God. While calling the people to God, the prophets reminded them of this knowledge. After this intuition, they submitted and believed. Therefore, passing through the three levels of "ta'rīf" (acknowledging), "tadhakkur" (reminding), and "taslīm" (submitting), they reach the level of "belief". The innate knowledge is granted by God. It has been given to the people in the previous worlds like "the world of the spirits", or "the world of particles"; and they have been made to testify of God's Lordship. After entering this world, the humans have forgotten this knowledge; but the essence of that knowledge has remained in the heart of the humans, and they recall it in different conditions. The environmental factors can not destroy it. The holy Qur'an and the Islamic hadiths testify it.*

**Keyword:** *Heart, fiṭrat, the world of the spirits, the world of particles (dharr), ta'rīf, tadhakkur, taslīm, īmān (belief)*

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## Introduction

A brief look at the theoretical history reveals that the belief in God is the most popular among the beliefs. So, the question has always been why the people have such a belief. There are different answers to this question. Some of these answers are based on unsubstantiated preconceptions of some such sciences as psychology and sociology. Some also have tried to look at these facts from a phenomenological perspective, thus focusing on the preconceptions.

The most important motives for the belief in God are intellectual and innate, the latter of which has more significance.

A second look at the history shows that the people in different cultures and societies claim different understandings of the common human experiences. These understandings are sometimes called religious experiences. Among these understandings, the innate knowledge is the most popular.

Referring to the religious texts and the history of the divine religions, we see that the prophets called people to God by evoking that innate knowledge of Him. So, the prophets use the *tadhakkur* (reminding) to remind the people of God. After receiving the genial intuition of God, the people often submit and step the level of *īmān* (belief). Therefore, passing the three steps of "*ta'rīf*" (acknowledging), "*tadhakkur*" (reminding), and "*taslīm*" (submitting), the people receive the divine guidance and religious belief.

In monotheistic religions, recognition of God is presented not as something unknown and dubious which would require clarification and proof. From the viewpoint of divine sources, the secret of this matter lies hidden, more than anything else, in the knowledge of God which has ever since been deposited in

man's heart and life; a knowledge which is God's creation and referred to as 'instinct', that is "*al-fitra*" (in Arabic) in the body of Qur'anic verses and hadiths.

This gifted knowledge as well as lustrous guidance is reckoned to be the foundation of the divine religions. Analogized to the dereck of the tent (of religion), this divine gift bears the entire branches of knowledge, the practical commandments and moral teachings to a high degree so that in its absence, man would have failed to perceive the true divine knowledge.

*"I recognized You by Yourself and You guided and led me and called me towards Yourself. And if it were not for You, I would not have known You."*

<sup>1</sup> *Rather, without this introduction, one would have failed to attain knowledge of prophethood (Resalah) and mastership (Vilayah), too.*

*"O God! Do introduce Yourself to me, because if You do not make Yourself known to me, I will not be able to recognize Your messenger".<sup>2</sup>*

This innate knowledge is so basic and fundamental that even if some other acts of worship (like ritual prayers) are named as pillars of religion, it is because such worship causes man to return to her or his 'self' and reminds her or him of his innate knowledge. In fact, ritual prayer is nothing but remembrance of God and a means of ascension of a believer.

The discussion on (introduction) which has come down in the Qur'an and hadiths can be explained in two parts. The first part discusses the place where innate knowledge was gifted to

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<sup>1</sup> - *Mafatih al-Jinan*; Supplication of Abu Hamza al-Thumali.

<sup>2</sup> - *Bihar al-Anwar*; vol. 95, p. 326, hadith no. 2.

man as well as the time when man became the trustee of this divine gift. The second part concerns the outcome and consequence of the divine introduction (of God) and the reality and specifications of this knowledge.

## **Place of Introduction**

What is obvious on the basis of Islamic proofs is that before man's soul could find its entry into this world and get attached to the physical body, it had traversed another world, or rather worlds, and witnessed certain events and scenes and sustained in every stage the knowledge and the realities. All these play a fundamental role in man's worldly life as well as the life in the Hereafter.

In some of these steps, the human beings possessed the soul only like the world of the spirits, while in other places, man's soul possessed a special form and body as in the world of pre-existence. In these very worlds, at a very lustrous and holy place, all the human beings were bestowed with the divine grace and after receiving knowledge of God and free-will, they were thus questioned:

*"Am I not your Lord?" To which all replied: "Yes".*

Although with man's entry into this physical world, the specifications of this innate knowledge sink into oblivion; nevertheless, the origin and effect of this innate knowledge always accompanies man:

*"So, the knowledge (of God) was set in the human-beings and the place of derivation of this knowledge was forgotten by them; and soon they shall remember it".<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> - *Bihar al-Anwar*; vol. 5, p. 237.

This firm and enduring gnosis, like a firm pillar, is so fixed in man's existence that the very structure of "*Din - e - hanif*" (the orthodox religion) is based on it; a perpetual and fortified religion which owes its firmness more than anything else to the irresistible "*fitra*" (innate disposition).

In this regard, we shall now set forth a few verses and hadiths:

*"And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their backs, their descendants, and made them bear witness against their own souls:*

*Am I not your Lord? They said: Yes! We bear witness. Lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection: Surely we were unaware of this.*

*Or, you should say: Only our fathers associated others (with Allah) before, and we were an offspring after them: Will You then destroy us for what the vain doers did?"<sup>1</sup>*

The verse speaks about one of the stages of man's existence wherein God made the children of Adam bear witness to His Divinity; and this confession was taken lest the unbelievers and polytheists should say on the Day of Resurrection: Surely, we were heedless of God or would say that: "*Our ancestors were polytheists and so, we, too, followed their footsteps.*"

This verse proves that God the Exalted has made Himself known to all the human beings in such a manner that all have testified to His Divinity. This recognition and/or confession is the actual argument for all the human beings and is so clear

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<sup>1</sup> - The Holy Quran (7: 172-3)

that irreligious family and social environment cannot erase it fully.

For this reason, God argues with the polytheists and unbelievers on the Day of Resurrection and reject their aforesaid two excuses.

There are numerous hadiths in explication of this verse. These hadiths stress that all the human beings have witnessed the Exalted God through examination in the preceding worlds in such a manner that no doubt and skepticism existed in them about His Existence, and if it were not for this knowledge, nobody would have been able to recognize Him in this world.

The noteworthy point in these hadiths is that with regard to the numerous worlds, inference is drawn from this very verse. This shows that the divine covenant was taken in numerous worlds. Some of the hadiths specify that the covenant was taken in the world of spirits, while some other hadiths specify that this took place in the world of pre-existence, i.e. the stage where man's soul and body were together.

Another noteworthy point in these hadiths express that following the event of the divine covenant, the human beings have forgotten the stations. However, the original knowledge of God has remained firm in their hearts. Yet, in some other hadiths it is mentioned that God caused the (event of) examination to be forgotten, but He set firm the original confession in man's heart.

From these hadiths, it becomes obvious that the specifications of the stations and the place of divine introduction have been consigned to oblivion. Similarly, the exact form of this gifted knowledge, which is well known as (examination), is not present with man in this world. Rather, only the original recognition of God is present with him. In

subsequent discussions, this point will be discussed, in addition to the ways of remembering the innate knowledge. Now, we shall set forth a few hadiths wherein the above-mentioned points are discerned:

Zorareh said that he had inquired Imam al-Baqir (p.b.u.h) about the "Verse of Covenant", and the Imam replied:

*"Allah shall bring forth from the children of Adam, from their backs, their descendants until the Day of Judgment. They existed in the form of small particles. Thereafter, He manifested and introduced Himself to them. If this event had not occurred, nobody would have succeeded in recognizing their God."*<sup>1</sup>

Zorareh further inquired about the "Verse of Covenant", and the Imam replied:

*"The recognition of Allah remained firm in the hearts and they forgot the place of the covenant. A day shall come when they shall remember it. If it were not for this event, none would have succeeded in recognizing her or his Creator and Sustainer."*<sup>2</sup>

About the "Verse of Covenant", Imam al-Sadiq further remarked:

*"This was (examination) of Allah. Then, Allah made them forget the examination and made their confession firm in their hearts. And if it were not for this, none would have been able to recognize his Creator and Sustainer. And the proof of this*

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<sup>1</sup> - *Al-Kafi*, vol. 2, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> - *Al-Mahasin*, vol. 1, p. 376, hadith no. 826.

matter is the verse: "And if you ask them who has created you, they shall reply: Allah"<sup>1</sup>

There are numerous verses and hadiths concerning the preceding world and the events that have occurred in them.

These hadiths can be found mainly in discussions related to beliefs and even ethics and jurisprudence such as monotheism, prophethood, imamate, resurrection, hajj, invocation, soul and spirit, creation, and so on. One hardly comes across a discussion related to belief wherein this matter has not been discussed in some way or the other. [In this connection, I presented fourteen verses and some two hundred hadiths in another book, titled, *Fundamentals of Knowing God in Greek Philosophy and Divine Religions* and therein discussed a few of them.] Here, suffice it to mention the following three remarks:

1. The late Agha Buzurg Tehrani relates that the grand jurisprudent and historian Allama Amini, the author of *Al-Ghadir*, wrote a 150-page treatise on the exegesis of the Verse of Covenant and therein set forth nineteen verses and 130 hadiths, proving the existence of the world of pre-existence. Interestingly, after reviewing the chain of transmitters of these hadiths, he declares forty of such traditions to be terminologically sound, that is, hadiths whose transmitters are all just and belong to the Imamiah denomination.<sup>2</sup>

2. The renowned philosopher Sadr al-Mut'allehin Shirazi, who interpreted the world of spirits on the basis of his special type of philosophical thinking, reckoned the existence of the world of spirits to be among the necessities of the Shia faith.

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<sup>1</sup> - *Ibid*, p. 438, hadith no. 1015.

<sup>2</sup> - *Al-Dhari'a*, vol. 4, p. 323.



Moreover, he stated that there are countless hadiths in this regard. His exact words are as follows:

*"Man's soul preceded his physical body and to believe this, one does not need to believe in transmigration. In this regard, hadiths from the Shia sources are countless. Similarly, precedence of soul over body is amongst the essential beliefs of the Shia denomination; may Allah be satisfied with them."*<sup>1</sup>

3. After setting forth the topic about innate disposition, Beheshti interprets the Verse of Covenant and draws the following conclusion: "These verses refer to the conversation between God and the human beings, when the human beings have testified and confessed the divinity of God; and that He is the Regulator of the affairs. This testification prevents man from pleading any excuse before God on the Day of Resurrection (excuse of being heedless or being influenced by their fathers)." After that, he discusses the place of covenant and after reviewing the views of Hasan al-Basri and the Mu'tazilites, who denied the world of pre-existence, he accepts the world of pre-existence and remarks as follows: "Concerning this verse, it can be said that it refers to one stage of man's existence, where man has confessed God's divinity."

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<sup>1</sup> *Al-Arshiyah*; p. 23, ch. 2, section 8.

## Questions and Answers

Questions and Answers is an interactive part which is allocated to prepare all readers with the scientific and at academic answers to their questions.

### **First question:**

Information given in Islamic texts regarding virtues and position of Messenger of the God and Imams (religious leaders) credits these holy men with holding heavenly high positions.

Are the attributed positions and ranks fair?

Does belief in this information prevents us from following these honorable ones' examples?

The Almighty God says, to his messenger, in the holy Qur'an:

*"Say (truly I am a human like you; the only difference is that revelations from God come to me.)"*