



REALIZATION OF GOD

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

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First Published 2021

This book is an English translation of a chapter of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan's Urdu book entitled *Kitab-e-Ma'rifat*

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Printed in India

CONTENTS

Foreword	5
What is Maarifah?	7
Maarifah: The Goal of Mankind	8
Faith: Maarifah of God	10
The Discovery of the Divine Words	13
High Levels of Maarifah	14
The Philosophical Concept of God	17
The Heart and Mind	18
Purification of the Heart	22
Jihad Fillah	24
Taking Lessons	25
Intellectual Seclusion	27
The Intellectual Horizon	28
Levels of Realization	30
Reflection and Contemplation: Sources of High Realization	31
Remembering God Often	33
Intellectual Development	34
Reason and Human Nature Help in the Quest for Truth	35
Emotional Attachment with God	37
The Inner and Outer Aspects of Faith	39
The Meaningful Exception	40
Universe without God Unexplainable	41
The Price of Finding God	42
The Discovery of the Glory of God	44
The Journey of the Realization of God	45
Deep Realization of God	46
Faith: A Discovery of One's Relation with God	48
Realization of God: Discovery of One's Helplessness	49
The Purpose of Human Life	51
God-Realization: A Personal Discovery	52

God-Realization: A Creative Subject	54
The Universe: A Source of God-Realization	55
Scientific Discoveries Provide Spiritual Food	56
God-Realization: A Divine Gift	58
Learning Lessons from Mundane Occurrences	59
Reason-Based Discovery of God	60
Not Uncertainty	61
The Awakened Person	63
The Existence of God	64
The Virtue of Modesty	65
The Godly Personality	66
No Negative Thinking	67
The Discovery of the Existence of the Creator	68
Discovery of the Unseen God	69
Silence and God-Realization	71
Discovery of God's Majesty	72
Discovering God on Every Occasion	73
Uniqueness of a Human Being	74
God and Paradise	76
Self-Negation: A Means of Discovering God	77
Making the Discovery of God One's Personal Interest	79
Uncertainty about Oneself	80
An Obstacle in the Path of God-Realization	81
The Natural World Leads to God	83
Maarifah: A Life with God	84
Positivity: The Fertile Ground of Maarifah	86
The Light of God-Realization	87
The Living Discovery of God	88
The Difference between Ecstasy and God-Realization	90
Realization and Prayer	91
The Discovery of One's Ignorance	93
Make God Your Supreme Concern	94
The Form and Spirit of Religion	95

Foreword



Literally, *maarifah* means realization. In religious terms, *maarifah* means man's realization of God, his Creator. He awakens in him the profound conscious discovery of the reality of the creature and the Creator, the servant and the Lord.

Realization of God (*maarifah*) is the essence of religion. The position of *maarifah* in God's religion is that of the seed. Just as a seed grows gradually into a full tree, similarly *maarifah* shapes the entire personality of a person. Without *maarifah*, religion is reduced to a spiritless form. With *maarifah*, religion is like a lush green tree and without it, religion becomes like a dried up tree. If religion is the body, *maarifah* is its spirit.

Maarifah of God means that man discovers God by deep pondering upon and contemplation of His signs rather than by rumination upon His being. The source of the realization of God is, in the words of the Quran, reflection (*tafakkur* and *tadabbur*) (3:191). The attainment of God-realization by contemplation is entirely a function of the mind. In the human body, the act of thinking is done only by the brain. What is achieved by this process of thinking has been defined as God-realization.

Wahiduddin Khan

January 20, 2021
New Delhi





What is Maarifah?



What is *maarifah*? Literally, *maarifah* means realization. In religious terms, *maarifah* means man's realization of God, his Creator. He awakens in him the profound consciousness of the reality of the creature and the Creator and of the servant and the Lord. *Maarifah* is another name for conscious discovery. There is nothing mysterious about it. *Maarifah* of God means that man discovers God by deep pondering upon and contemplation of His signs rather than by rumination upon His being. (*Al-Mufradat fi Gharib al-Quran*, al-Raghib al-Isfahani, p. 331) This shows that *maarifah* relates not to knowledge alone but to reflection and deep thinking, yet, knowledge enables the individual to engage in deeper contemplation. When he focuses on *maarifah*, he engages himself zealously and in the cognitive process of finding the Creator, in His Creation. As a result of this deep personal striving he develops the personality of the realized soul.

One who has achieved this kind of *maarifah* becomes an extremely serious person. He looks at everything with deeper insight. He starts introspecting intensely in his worship, and behaviour, and in all his dealings. All these things begin to reflect this state of *maarifah* that he has achieved. He is able to converse with the angels.



He is interested only in those things which elevate his thinking on *maarifah*. He now lives in the rarified environment of *maarifah*.

Maarifah: The Goal of Mankind



Scholars have defined *maarifah* as being man's first obligation. It would be more precise to say that *maarifah* is the purpose of life. The life before death is the beginning of *maarifah*, and the life after death is the culmination of *maarifah*. In the present world, a person receives God's *maarifah* in the sense of a preliminary discovery. In the world Hereafter, he will receive God's *maarifah* in the complete sense. The truth is that *maarifah* is an intellectual process, which begins in this present world and will continue eternally in the world Hereafter.

Chapter 51 of the Quran tells us that man and the jinns were created for the worship of God alone (51:56).

The purpose of this creation was that man and the jinns should be granted the sublime ability to achieve the realization of God in the highest degree. Therefore, on the one hand, the jinns and men were given the elevated intellectual capability required for this great purpose, while, on the other hand, they were given all the external resources necessary for them to carry out this task.

Maarifah literally means realization of something in the perfect sense. *Maarifah*, in other words, may be called intellectual discovery. This discovery does not relate to any short-lived familiarity with the truth but is rather another name for a long journey.

The God that man is supposed to realize has such attributes as are alluded to in the Quran: "If all the trees on earth were pens, and the sea [were] ink, with seven [more] seas added to it, the words of God would not be exhausted: for, truly, God is Almighty and Wise." (*The Quran*, 31:27) The discovery of God who is so perfect, cannot be done in a short period of time. It is without doubt a journey which begins at a fixed point in time, but which is ultimately unending.

The *maarifah* of God does not mean that with the help of meditation we shall have glimpses of God's being in the world of imagination. Moreover, *maarifah* is not ecstasy. *Maarifah* is an enhanced state of consciousness which can be achieved solely by contemplation of the divine creation. According to the Quran, *maarifah* can be defined as a servant of God discovering God, the Lord of the worlds in all His Majesty and Glory to the extent that He becomes a centre of his love (*The Quran*, 2:165). And all his feelings of fear are associated with Him (*The Quran*, 9:18).

Love and fear are interconnected. When a servant of God engages in contemplation and discovers the Creator of the Universe in all His glory, in his heart he comes to acknowledge God to a limitless extent. Moreover, when he discovers the reality that the giver is God and that no one else can give anything to him, his



heart becomes filled with the fear that if he is deprived of God's blessings, nowhere, on the earth or in heaven, will he find any other refuge.

God has created man in the best of moulds (*The Quran*, 95:4). He has been granted all the intellectual capabilities by which he may achieve *maarifah* of the Lord of the worlds. Beside this, in the external world that is nature, all those elements are hidden which may assist him in this journey. Now it is man's task to discover these elements of *maarifah* in nature and experience such an elevated level of *maarifah* as will enable him to develop a divine personality.

Faith: Maarifah of God



Chapter 49 of the Quran addresses the believers thus: "The Arabs of the desert say, "We have believed." Say to them, "You have not believed yet; say rather, 'We have submitted,' for faith has not yet entered into your hearts.'" (*The Quran*, 49:14)

And then another verse in chapter 5 of the Quran describes believers thus: "When they listen to what has been sent down to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflowing with tears, because of the Truth they recognize. They say, 'Our Lord, we believe, so count us among those who bear witness. Why should we not believe in God and in the truth that has come down

to us? We yearn for our Lord to admit us among the righteous.' And for their words God will reward them with Gardens through which rivers flow, wherein they shall abide forever. That is the reward of those who do good." (*The Quran*, 5:83-85)

By studying both these verses, we learn what constitutes faith. Those fortunate souls who are recognized and accepted in the Hereafter by God will be ushered into Paradise, where they will live in a world of unending happiness and comforts.

The first thing that God desires is that faith should enter in one's heart (*The Quran*, 49:14). Just mouthing some words is not an act which will earn God's acceptance or which will establish the utterer of those words as a believer. Words which fall from the tongue are, in fact, only a verbal expression of the acceptance of faith.

To God, the truly desirable faith is that which so penetrates to the innermost recesses of one's heart, that it becomes the most important part of one's consciousness. It is from this that a person's spirituality begins to build.

From another verse, we learn that faith is another name for the realization of truth. That is, when man is truly able to realize faith and his Creator and is deeply aware of the fact that he is a helpless, powerless servant of God. When he reserves all greatness and all perfection for God, belief has so become a part and parcel of his personality that he surrenders himself before God. It is this deep experience of faith which is called *maarifah* or



realization. *Maarifah* is the beginning of faith. Unless faith becomes a deep realization, it has no value in the eyes of God.

One sign of this realized faith is that when man experiences it, then his eyes overflow with tears. This experience produces tremors in his inner being. There is a great spiritual turmoil within him and his tears testify to this inner revolution. Any so-called realization of truth which is not testified to by his tears has no value in the eyes of God.

Such faith is no simple matter. In its reality, it is a universal acceptance of the truth. It is as it were to witness the divine reality before actually seeing it. It is to accept it voluntarily before the time comes when one shall have to accept it as a matter of compulsion. It is to bear witness to the All-Powerful God, testified to by the angels at every moment at the universal level.

Faith is, in fact, acceptance of the Hereafter as well as this world. It is to become more desirous of the blessings of the Hereafter than the blessings of this world. Those who proved to be desirous of this with all their hearts, minds and souls are the ones who will enter the eternal gardens of Paradise where they will reside without ever wanting to leave it. (*The Quran*, 18:108)

The Discovery of the Divine Words



What is realization, or *maarifah*? Realization is to recognize God in the unseen. That is, one is able to see God without actually seeing Him. Realization means, in fact, that man has psychological experiences of the presence of God.

Everything has a price. And the attainment of realization of God also has its price. This price is basically for man to tear down the element of doubt and see the higher reality. Only those can succeed in doing so who can save themselves from all kinds of distraction and apply themselves with total dedication to the attainment of realization. Everything which takes one away from the focus of attaining the highest reality, comes under the heading of distraction. This includes all kinds of negative feelings, for instance, hatred, bias, pride, the feeling of superiority and the following of desires, etc.

Man's mind has been given unlimited potential. It is not there for nothing. It is not meant to remain idle. It is for man to open up his mind and to discover the divine reality. According to the Quran the words of God are immeasurable (31:27). There is no limit to them. Similarly, the potential in the human mind is also unlimited. It is believed that the number of particles in



the human mind are equal to all particles in the entire universe. Man has been granted this extraordinary capability so that he may use it to attain the Highest Reality—that is God.

The truth is that the favourite activity of the people of Paradise will be to keep eternally discovering the unlimited wonders of God. The present world is, in fact, for the purpose of preparing man for this unlimited activity in Paradise. The greatest happiness in Paradise is that of the attainment of realization. This journey to attain realization will eternally continue. Besides that, other material blessings in Paradise will be on account of God's magnanimity. (*The Quran*, 41:32)

High Levels of Maarifah



The Quran tells us that man was created so that he might worship God. In the words of the Quran, “I created the Jinn and mankind only so that they might worship Me.” (51:56) In this verse the worship of God means the realization of God. Discovery of the realization of God is without doubt the highest destination of anyone's intellectual progress. The noblest is he who can attain this level of realization. There are three kinds of such realization. The experience of realization of the first and second kinds has become a reality in history. So far as the realization of the third kind is concerned, the

prospect of it becoming a reality has become achievable only in the 20th century for the first time in history.

The experience of the first kind of discovery was achieved by the prophets. This experience happened at the level of what is seen (*ruyat*). It is described in the Quran in this verse: “We showed Abraham our Kingdom of the heavens and the earth, so that he might have certainty of faith.” (*The Quran*, 6:75) The words regarding the Prophet of Islam are similar. “And certainly he saw him descend a second time.” (*The Quran*, 53:13). This kind of realization is attainable at the level of the seen. This realization is reserved solely for the prophets.

The second level of realization is at the level of the discovery of one’s helplessness. Man discovers his total helplessness as compared to the all powerfulness of Almighty God. In this way he achieves the realization of God. This has been aptly described in these words attributed to the 4th caliph Ali: “I discovered my Lord by the shattering of my ambitions.”

The third kind of realization is at the voluntary or optional level. That is, man possessing total power, discovers the Majesty of God and voluntarily surrenders himself before Him. This is no doubt the most difficult thing to do. When the philosophers and the theologians engaged in such discussions as ‘when God is almighty then man’s position is only of total helplessness,’ they concluded that the concept of man having power is only imaginary.



For the third kind of realization which is at the voluntary level, man had no previous point of reference by which he may understand this kind of realization. Therefore, he could not even imagine it. And what is not imaginable is not discoverable.

In present times the discovery of dark matter has for the first time given a point of reference in this regard. This discovery tells us that about 95% of space is filled with bright stars, but their brilliance is not visible, for the gravitational pull of black holes is so great that they are holding back their brightness and don't let it shine forth. This discovery is a divine demonstration. This demonstration in the form of a physical event tells us that for the powerful God it is also possible that He may withhold his Almighty power for some creatures. Therefore, to make human power real, God has temporarily withheld His power in relation to man. In spite of the absolute power of God, man has been given freedom in the real sense till Doomsday. This discovery is a reference point which makes possible the attainment of the third kind of realization. Now it has become possible that man may discover his helplessness. And afterwards with this point of reference (of black holes) he may discover that, despite his absolute helplessness, he may have total power or freedom for a limited period of time in this world. After this discovery what he has to do is to consciously surrender himself to God fully in spite of having total freedom. This is undoubtedly the most difficult thing to do. In this man has to live with two diametrically opposite things—on the one hand, total helplessness and on the other, total power. One

who can develop his consciousness to the extent that he may live with two such opposites, is the person who can attain realization of this third kind. This realization is not impossible for man. Man naturally has this capability of being able to live as a mixture of opposites. This has been expressed by a western thinker, Walt Whitman, in these words: I am large enough to contain all these contradictions.

The Philosophical Concept of God



According to the concept of monism found in Aryan religions, God has no form. He is a formless God. That is, He has no independent being or existence. Everything which appears in this world is an expression of this God who has no being or no existence. This is indeed the philosophical concept of God. Philosophers generally conceptualize God in this sense. They use the word spirit, or idea, for God. This philosophical concept has become a part of the belief of the Aryan religions.

This concept of a non-existent God is entirely based on unjustifiable speculation. In the real sense, there is no basis to any argument to support this. The most significant point is that the universe that we experience in the form of creation does have a form in the full sense.



It would be illogical to say that God who was just a spirit, or idea, who had no Being, created such a diversity and multiplicity of forms. God is one who has the qualities or attributes of creation, and, in the spirit or idea, the quality of creation does not exist. Therefore, *prima facie*, this notion stands rejected.

In the world which has been discovered by science, everything is composed of atoms. Therefore, it is said that, in the study of science, we find the proof of oneness in the universe, that is, uniformity amidst exceptions in all material things. But this argument is not right. There is certainly a uniformity in material elements in the universe, and what has been created by the composition of these material elements. There is an extraordinary design in it, and design can only be a creation of the Mind. It cannot be a creation of some formless spirit.

The Heart and Mind



In ancient traditional times, the heart was regarded as the source of purification and realization (*maarifah*). But modern scientific research has proved that the human heart is just a pumping organ which causes the blood to circulate. *Maarifah* and purification are, therefore, mind-based, rather than heart-based. Here the question arises about the significance of certain verses



in the Quran which attribute *maarifah* and purification to the heart. The answer is that the Quran does not refer solely to heart; it repeatedly refers also to the mind: for instance, “We have made it an Arabic Quran, so that you may understand.” (*La’aallakum taqilun*) (43:3) “This is a blessed Book which we sent down to you (Muhammad) for people to ponder over its messages and for those with understanding to take heed.” (38:29) And, “... in this there are signs for men of understanding.” (20:54) And, “...is there not in this strong evidence for a man of sense?” (89:5) The word used in these verses of the Quran is *aql* (mind). This being so, the question arises as to how to explain these two differently worded sets of Quranic statements. In this case, according to the rules of grammar, one will be subordinated to the other. The way to apply this principle is to see in whose favour is the additional evidence, and then this additional evidence should be taken in its literal sense and the other will be subordinated to it. In this discussion of the heart and mind, there is additional evidence in favour of the mind, as discovered by modern science. That is why the verses which refer to the mind, will be taken in their literal sense, while the verses which refer to the heart will be taken in a purely figurative sense. In this way, both the words—“heart” and “mind”—as used in the Quran will be held to be synonymous. There are some who hold that the heart has the capacity to think. That is, it is a thinking organ of the human body. But this is just a fallacy. Their claim is allegedly based on a physiological study which shows that there is a link between the heart and mind. But this claim is clearly fallacious. Of course,



there is a kind of link between the mind and the other organs of the body. But this link is not a cognitive one. It exists only in a purely physical sense. The truth is that all the organs of the body act under the direction of the mind. None of the organs function independently of the mind. The error of this argument lies in the fact that an ambiguous word, that is, communication, has been used to define this link. The right word to express this matter is direction, not communication. The difference between the two is that the act of direction is unilateral while the act of communication is bilateral. The word “direction” tells us that the mind unilaterally issues directions to the organs, whereas communication means that this activity between the mind and organs of the body is bilateral.

In the above argument, first of all the word “communication” was used for contact, then it was concluded that the heart was a thinking organ, whereas there is no scientific basis for such a supposition. The great loss occasioned by this error was that those who believed in the concept of heart-based God-realization were deprived of wisdom, for they were seeking wisdom in the heart, whereas wisdom did not stem from the heart at all. It is to compensate for this lack of wisdom that religionists (those who believe in one religion or the other) resort to concocted stories to make their point.

Man is a thinking animal. All of man’s activities are controlled by thought. It is believed that man’s personality is shaped by his thinking. It is this thinking faculty which is called the mind. These are the words—synonyms—for the mind that occur in the Quran: *Aql*,



Lub, Fuwad, Hijr, Nuha and *Qalb*. “Heart” is generally taken in the sense of a major organ of the body, but in addition to this, the word heart is also used in the sense of the mind (*aql*). The most standard dictionary of Arabic *Lisan al-Arab* says that “heart” (*qalb*) is also used in the sense of ‘the mind.’ Farra Nahvi, a grammarian, corroborates this with an allusion to the thirty seventh verse of the fiftieth chapter of the Quran. “There is truly a reminder in this for whoever has a heart, whoever listens attentively.” (*The Quran*, 50:37) In the Arabic language ‘heart’ is often used for ‘mind’. For instance, “You had no heart (on such and such occasion).” That is, you had no mind. (*Lisan al-Arab*, *Ibn Manzur*, vol. 1. p. 687) The truth is that the greatest thing man possesses is the mind. The words “heart” and “mind” are used synonymously with the only difference being that the word *aql* is used for “mind” in its literal sense, while the word ‘heart’ is used for the mind in a literary sense. In present times, it has been proved that the heart is only the centre of the circulation of the blood, while the mind alone is the centre of thinking. But due to literary usage, even today we use such an expression as wholeheartedly, and not whole-mindedly. This is true also for other languages.

The subject of the Quran is not anatomy: its subject is guidance to man. Guidance is totally related to reason and understanding. This being so, wherever the Quran uses the word “heart”, in terms of the subject of the Quran, it is to be taken in the sense of mind or reason.

When the word “heart” (*qalb*) has two meanings, one as is generally understood in the sense of heart and the



other in the sense of *aql* (mind) then in such a case the meaning of *qalb* (heart) used in the Quran, would be determined in relation to the subject of the Quran. In this case *qalb* in the sense of the heart will not be applicable. *Qalb* in the Quran will apply to the mind or reason. This is an accepted principle of grammar. This is applicable in both cases, in the Quran as well as in other literature. For instance, if a book written on the subject of anatomy uses the word “heart”, then heart will be taken in the sense of an organ of the body and not mind.

On the contrary, when the Quran uses the word “heart”, it will be taken in the sense of the mind. In every language one word often has several meanings. Each meaning is relative to its context. For instance, the word *deen* in Arabic has several meanings. In chapter 1, verse 3, for example, the Quran has used it to mean the Day of Judgement, while in chapter 42, verse 13, the word *deen* has been used in the sense of religion.

Purification of the Heart



Chapter 26 of the Quran tells us that only those will be held deserving of Paradise in the Hereafter who come to God with a sound heart. (26:89) In this verse, “heart” does not indicate an organ, in the physiological sense. It means rather the psyche.



Zahhak, the well known commentator has explained *qalb* ('sound heart') to mean 'pure heart'. (*Tafsir al-Qurtubi*, vol. 13, pp. 114). That is, an uncorrupted heart. One who guards his nature of impurities, by successfully combating conditioning of his environment and thus succeeds in deconditioning his mind, will attain to God-realization. Such persons alone will be saved who come to God with a sound heart. (*The Quran*, 26:89)

The truth is that everyone is born with an upright nature. But when they fall under the influence of their environment, their nature systematically becomes tainted. To free oneself from external influences and restore one's nature to its original state, one must engage in introspection. This objective introspection guarantees that a man will return to having an upright nature or a sound heart. Those who reach God with a sound heart will be held deserving of being ushered into the eternal world of Paradise. (*The Quran*, 26:89)

A sound heart or sound mind can be achieved by an intellectual struggle. One who engages himself in such a struggle becomes serious in the best sense of the word.

He develops the ability to discover the truth in a jungle of ideologies and conflicting information. He develops the ability to analyze all such information with total objectivity. He is able to look at things from the right angle. This is called having a sound heart or unimpaired judgement. This high level of ratiocination is achieved through great striving on a high intellectual plane.



Jihad Fillah



In Chapter 29 of the Quran, there is a verse which says: “We will surely guide in Our ways, those who strive hard for Our cause, God is surely with the righteous.” (29:69). In this verse, there are no such expressions as “*Jihad fi-sabeelillah*” (*jihad* for the cause of God) but rather the word is “*Jihad fillah*” (*jihad* in God). That is, there is striving hard not for the cause of God, but striving hard in God. Chapter 29 was revealed before the emigration to Abyssinia (5 A.H). That is why, it is clear that, in this verse the word *jihad* does not mean *qital*. Similarly, here ‘*jihad*’ cannot mean the practical following of divine commands, because no such word is used here. In this verse, what is attainable from *jihad fillah* is called guidance, that is why, in this verse, *jihad fillah*, would mean something which could be linked with guidance.

The fact is that, in this verse of the Quran, *jihad* means *jihad-e-fikri*, meaning “thinking *jihad*” or “intellectual *jihad*”, that is thinking about God, thinking (*tafakkur*), reflection (*tadabbur*) about God, trying as much as possible to attain the realization of God, increasing one’s faith through continuous study and observation.

Realization is the beginning of faith. It means trying to recognize God through the observation of His



creation. By reading or studying the word of God, one can receive spiritual food from it continuously, thus converting one's daily experiences into divine insights. Observation of this kind is possible through total concentration, and such concentration is, of course, a great intellectual struggle.

“We will surely guide in Our ways”, refers to the path of guidance. That is, the minds of the seekers of truth will open up more and more, new lines of thinking will develop, new aspects of realization of God will become clear to them. Just as God's being is unlimited, similarly, His realization is also unlimited. Those who strive hard to realize God through contemplation and observation will be fit to receive the blessing of this unlimited realization. This intellectual jihad has been called *jihad fillah* (jihad in God) in this verse.

Taking Lessons



When a person attains realization of truth, his thinking becomes God-oriented. It happens naturally then that he becomes a serious person. One aspect of this seriousness is characterized by the learning of lessons. A number of different words have been used in the Quran to express this. For instance, *tazakkur* (39:9), *itibar* (23:21), *tawassum* (15:75), etc. Similarly, in the Hadith, too, we find such words, as the Prophet once



observed: “My silence should be the silence of thinking, my observation should be for learning lessons”. (*Musnad al-Shihab al-Qudha’i*, Hadith No. 1159)

The realization of faith or truth is, in itself, a thing of this nature. What is realization of faith? That is for man to discover the Creator by pondering upon His creation and finding the unseen world in the seen world. In the words of the Quran, he discovers inner realities through the signs of God. That is to say, over and above external vision he develops the capacity for insight.

Pondering or reflection or deep thinking becomes second nature for the believer. This is effectual everywhere. Having such a temperament makes him remember God continually. Every day, he discovers something which increases his conviction in faith, whereas other people see only the outward realities. The believer, due to his temperament, can see the realities beyond outward appearances. The processes of reflection and contemplation do not require a particular place or solitude. These processes continue at every moment in the minds of the believers. Even amidst a crowd he is engaged in deep thought. (*The Quran*, 24:37)

Learning lessons is spiritual food for a believer. For the believer, if material food is a source of physical strength, then learning lessons has the position of spiritual food. Without material food, the body cannot be healthy. Similarly, without intellectual food, spirituality cannot develop.

Intellectual Seclusion



Itikaf is the Islamic practice of staying in the mosque for a certain number of days, devoting oneself to worship, and staying away from worldly affairs.

One kind of *itikaf* is that which is practised in the mosque during the month of Ramadan. This is mentioned in the Quran in the second chapter (2:187). The second kind of *itikaf* is what may be called intellectual seclusion.

According to a number of traditions, the Prophet of Islam used to reflect most of the time. This is what is meant by intellectual seclusion, that is, deep thinking in silence.

Itikaf of the mosque is of a limited period. On the contrary, intellectual seclusion is unlimited. The companions of the Prophet used to engage in intellectual seclusion. (*Shama'il al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 225) Some examples have been mentioned in Islamic literature. For instance, after the death of Abu ad Darda Ansari, someone asked his wife what special worship her husband engaged in. His wife, Ummud Darda, replied: *Attafakkur wal itibar*. That is, thinking and taking lessons. (*Hilyat al-Awliya*, vol. 1, p. 208)



This intellectual seclusion is referred to in the Quran by these words: *Tafakkur*, *tadabbur*, *tazakkur*, *tawassum*, *taaqul*, etc. All these words mean thinking deeply on everything. This action of thinking is extremely important. It is by thinking that all noble qualities are produced, for instance, wisdom, realization, intellectual development, increase of faith, discovery of deeper meaning, etc.

This intellectual seclusion is extremely important for a believer, but there is one necessary condition for it, and that is to save oneself from all kinds of distractions. Without this, intellectual seclusion is just not possible. The truth is that, intellectual seclusion is another name for continuous intellectual activity. By this intellectual activity, we achieve what is called in the Quran, an increase of faith. (*The Quran*, 8:2) If there is no intellectual activity, there is no increase in faith.

The Intellectual Horizon



There are several planes upon which the intellect functions. We can say that there are many different levels. But higher truths can be experienced by only those individuals who have a high intellectual horizon. Those with a lower intellectual horizon cannot be acquainted with higher realities. The same is true of faith.

This is illustrated by the interactions of some of the companions of the Prophet, Umar ibn al-Khattab (d.



23 AH), Maaz ibn Jabal (d. 18 AH), and Abdullah ibn Rawaha al-Ansari (d. 8 AH). As recorded in the books of Hadith these men used to have conversations about God with one another and they would say that they were doing so in order to increase their faith. Once Abdullah ibn Rawaha asked a companion to come and have faith for a moment. The companion who was with him became angry. He said: "Are we not believers?" Then in anger, the companion went to the Prophet and said: "O Messenger of God, have not you seen how Abdullah ibn Rawaha wants to believe for a moment even after we have believed in you?" The Prophet replied: "May God have mercy on Ibn Rawaha, he likes such meetings as even angels envy." (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 13796)

Faith in God (*iman billah*) or the initial stage of faith in God is attained after the recitation of the words of the *kalimah*. But *iman* is something which goes on growing. Therefore the Quran has likened *iman* or faith to a plant which keeps growing. "Do you not see how God compares a good word to a good tree? Its root is firm and its branches are in the sky, it yields its fruit each season with its Lord's permission." (*The Quran*, 14:24-25) When a believer thinks about God, when he studies this subject, when he observes the universe from this angle, throughout his contemplation, his faith in God keeps on increasing, he continues to discover God's high attributes and he keeps gaining in conviction again and again. Such are the believers who undergo the experience of *iman billah* (faith in God) on a higher intellectual plane.



Levels of Realization



In ancient times, man could see only with the naked eye. At that time, man thought in a very limited way about the sky. By observation with the naked eye, it was calculated that there were not more than 5,000 small stars in the sky. But later, for the first time, in 1609, the Italian scientist Galileo (d. 1642), observed the sky through a telescope. Then, it was learnt that the stars of the sky were much greater in size as well as in numbers than had appeared to the naked eye. Galileo's telescope was a very small one at the early stage. Subsequently, there was a great deal of progress in this field.

A large telescope with a diameter of 200 inches was fixed in 1949, on Mount Palomar in California (USA). By means of this telescope, it became possible to observe the heavenly bodies of very large distance. Then, in 1990, the US developed the Hubble Telescope. It is a planetary telescope launched in space which constantly moved around 400 miles above the earth. It has a special type of telescope and camera. This system continuously sends the received information and images from space to the ground station. The Hubble Telescope has greatly increased man's knowledge of space. It is a matter of material observation. Just as there are different levels of human observation of the material world, there are also



levels of God-realization, meaning that there are also different levels of man's realization of God. One should constantly strive to increase his level of realization. That way, there is no limit to God's splendour. Similarly, there is also no limit to the realization of God. It is according to the level of realization a person attains, that his status will be determined in the Hereafter in Paradise, neither less nor more than that.

Reflection and Contemplation Sources of High Realization



Inevitably, a high level of realization is achieved only through elevated thinking. Regarding God's words and God's Creation, the more one thinks deeply, the more one will attain to deeper realization. The formula of *maarifah* is, in short—the more profound the thinking, the higher the degree of realization.

Many expressions have been used in the Quran to describe this deep thinking, for instance, *tadabbur* (reflection), *tawassum* (introspection) or *taaqqul* (reason). All these relate to different aspects of deep thinking, such as reflection, introspection, taking lessons, analysis, etc. In truth, everything in this world, whether great or small, has a source of thinking. If things are not taken in the simple sense, but rather, as subjects of reflection, then on reflecting with seriousness, everything becomes



a source of realization. For instance, man walks on the earth daily but he does not think about it. If he thinks about it, this walking will become a treasure of *maarifah*.

Walking on the ground is apparently a simple thing, but, in reality, it is an extraordinary event. This incident of walking is a unique miracle of the Creator. This walking is possible only because of the diverse things which are coordinated in our support including the earth's gravity which gives us our balance and the pressure of the air all around our bodies. This pressure of the air is equal to 8 kilograms per square inch on our bodies, and this pressure on the whole body is about ten thousand kilograms. When man walks on the earth, oxygen is being continuously supplied, the sun in the vastness of space, brightens our paths. In this way, there are innumerable factors which directly or indirectly support us. Only with their help is it possible for man to walk on the earth and successfully reach his destination. There are many such factors in our world and when we reflect on all these things, it becomes the greatest means to the attainment of high *maarifah* or discovery of God.

Remembering God Often



I once penned an article entitled ‘Realization—The Purpose of Humanity’. Almost immediately after it appeared in print, (*Al-Risala*, September 2010) a reader called to say: “I liked this article very much. Now I have a question: What is the definition of realization? How can a person be certain that he has achieved what in religion is called realization?”

My answer was that it had been defined in the Quran, with the injunction: “Remember God often.” (33:41). Realization is actually the discovery of God. When someone has achieved the level of realization in the discovery of God, he experiences an elevated intellectual revolution. Now God alone becomes his primary concern. Such a person remembers God in the morning and in the evening, and, God being in his thoughts at all times, he enters into discussions about Him. This becomes the most obvious focus of his existence.

If a person finds something that he considers to be a very big thing, it is just human nature to talk too much about it. He gets so much pleasure in remembering that thing that he wants to think and talk about it all the time.



This is also true of the realization of God. When a person realizes God at the level of discovery, it takes possession of his mind. It is a natural desire if he thinks and speaks about it and even in seclusion he keeps reflecting on it. When a person is in this situation, it is proof that he has received the divine food which is said to be realization.

Intellectual Development



Intellectual development is undoubtedly the most important requirement of a human being. Through it, a man becomes perfect. Through it, a man succeeds in converting his potential into actuality. Through it, man elevates himself from the level of the animals and reaches the level of humanity. It is possible only through intellectual development that a man may become God's desired person in the real sense.

Intellectual development is not something new. This is exactly the same thing for which the phrase "increase in faith" has been used in the Quran (48:4). The beginning of belief starts with the discovery of truth. Reality is not a limited thing. There is no end to its vastness. Having faith means that man has started his journey into the realm of universal immeasurability. This journey continues, constantly marked by new discoveries. It



has a beginning but it has no end. Increase in faith or intellectual development are two ways of describing this process. These differ in wording but in terms of their facts, they are one and the same. Faith can languish without ever-increasing journeys. But in the ongoing quest for truth, faith becomes a living thing.

When a person is born, very soon thereafter his physical development begins. This evolutionary process makes a child a full grown man. This is likewise true of intellectual development. Intellectual development also begins immediately after birth. But there is a difference between that and physical development. There is a known limit to physical development, but there is no known limit to intellectual development. Just as there is no limit to reality, there is no limit to intellectual development.

Reason and Human Nature Help in the Quest for Truth



The most important thing that every person needs is to achieve the realization of God, for there is nothing greater than this realization. In the acquisition of this realization, the parts played by reason and nature are equal. Neither of these two things is sufficient in itself for the acquisition of God-realization.



God-realization is a process, the first step of which is to go on the quest for truth. The course this takes is guided by reason, but reason in itself is not enough.

Reason or mind can lead a person only to probability. By rational thinking, one theoretically grasps the fact that God very probably exists. The next level is that of conviction, and the mind alone does not lead anyone to conviction. There is only one way to arrive at conviction and that is through one's nature. Every person receives his nature as a gift of birth. God has fully inculcated consciousness of Him in human nature, just as mother's love is innate in everyone. Through reason, man arrives at theoretical realization, and through his nature, man arrives, with certainty, at the realization of the truth.

A person's innate nature assists in the building up of conviction provided that he does not allow himself to succumb to different types of distractions. Distraction throws a veil over his true nature. In this way, his nature is not able to perform its real task. At present, causes of distraction have greatly increased, for instance, mobile phones, shopping, parties, family functions, business engagements, etc. Today, people are usually very far away from true realization of God. For them, God is just a formal belief, not a discovery. The reason for this is distraction. The price of realization is for a person to completely save himself from all kinds of distractions. Without paying this compulsory price, no one will be able to attain to the realization of God.

Emotional Attachment with God



It is a very strange tragedy that, in the entire history of humanity, no one except for a few chosen people have been able to discover God's Majesty. That is why in all that time, what has least been found is the high realization of God. High realization of God is equivalent to appreciating the majesty of God. When man failed to discover the majesty and greatness of God, it was inevitable that he would never achieve a high level of realization.

Man by his internal nature wanted a God who is Greatest of the Great and Who is the only one who has no partner. As a matter of human psychology, man wants a God of unbounded greatness. Since man, in past history, has not been able to discover such a God of limitless glory, he has not been able to establish an elevated relationship with God. He has believed in God in a formal way by observing rituals but he has not found a God who becomes all in all for him, whom he loves the most, and whom he fears the most.

What is the reason for this happening? It was because, in ancient times, man would see that there were many things which appeared great. For instance, the sun, the moon, the oceans and the mountains, etc. Moreover, in ancient times, there were many great emperors who



made the claim of being the greatest Lord. (*The Quran*, 79:24) In the same way, there were living or dead saints who appeared great to man. So man placed them on high pedestals. In ancient times, there were many such things which appeared great to man. It is this deceptive greatness which has been thus deplored in the Quran: “My Lord, they have led so many men astray!” (14:36).

In ancient times there were many such different objects of greatness which dominated man’s mind. This being so, in spite of believing in God, people could not discover the greatest and the noblest being in the form of God. Man demonstrated his belief in God ritualistically, but he had never attained any high level of realization of God. That is why we find that the believers in God failed to make God their sole concern. They were unable to establish that superior connection with God’s being which may be described as emotional attachment. In this matter there is no exception in Muslim history.

This is why for the last thousand years, Muslim writers have written a large number of books without—according to my knowledge—having produced any worthwhile book on the subject of the high level of realization of God and the majesty of God. This story has been brought to an end for the first time by modern science. What modern science did for the first time was to place all human or non-human greatness in a non-divine perspective. In this way modern science has already travelled the initial half of the journey of *maarifah*. Now it is possible that man, by his reflection and deep thinking, may complete the final half of the

journey and may discover and realize God in the highest form.

The Inner and Outer Aspects of Faith



There are two parts of the divine religion. One part of it may be called realization, and the other part obedience to commands. Although, both are equally important, just as soul and body are equally important for the human personality, there is a difference between realization and obedience to commands. That is, realization is central to the faith, unlike obedience of commands which is the relative part of the faith.

These two parts of religion have been mentioned in this hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad said: “Each verse of the Quran has an outer portion and an inner portion.” (*Sahih ibn Hibban*, Hadith No. 75)

In other words, one aspect of the verse of the Quran is in its lines and its second aspect lies between the lines. In the light of this hadith, the realization of faith is the name of the realization of religion while the commands of religion denote its external structure.

Let us examine the legal aspect of faith, which entails the recitation of these words: “There is no god but God and the Prophet Muhammad is the messenger of God.” One who utters these words has, according to religious



law, become a believer but as far as the realization of faith is concerned, it does not depend just upon the recitation of such words. The realized faith can be achieved only through an intellectual revolution, and not just by mouthing some words.

The Meaningful Exception



There are many different things in the universe, without there being any uniformity in them. Indeed, in every part of it, there are exceptions. These phenomena in being exceptions are the proof that there is a great Creator of this universe. They are the proof of intelligent intervention, and intelligent intervention is the proof of an intelligent Creator.

For instance, the solar system is an exception in the vast universe. The planet earth is an exception in the solar system. The proportionate size of the earth is an exception. The rotation of the earth on its axis is an exception. The life support system on the earth is an exception. Life on earth is an exception, and so on.

These are the different exceptions that are found in our world, but they are not simply exceptions, but rather meaningful manifestations of divine instrumentality. They are proof of the fact that there is a God. He created this world according to His creation plan, He adopted the method of uniformity in things wherever He wanted



and made some things distinctive and exceptional of other things wherever He wished.

For instance, there is uniformity in the structure of living bodies but along with this, every person has a different genetic make-up. The fingers of every person's hand are similar, but the thumb impression of each person is different. These exceptions in general are actually the proof of an intelligent creation and not the result of blind chance.

Universe without God Unexplainable



Albert Einstein is regarded as the greatest scientist of the 20th century. He was born in Germany in 1879 and died in the US in 1955. In 1921 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics.

Albert Einstein made a profound study of the physical world. In his studies, he found that the universe had an extremely meaningful existence. Unlimited meaningfulness is immanent in every aspect of it. What is the source of this wisdom or meaningfulness which is inherent in the universe? Einstein discovered unlimited wisdom in the universe but he could not discover the Wise Being behind it. He exclaimed:

“The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious.”



Another saying of Albert Einstein is: “The most incomprehensible fact about nature is that it is comprehensible.”

Why are scientists faced with this difficulty? It is because they have succeeded in discovering the meaningfulness of the universe, but have failed to discover the Creator of this meaningful system. That is why they wonder, when the meaningfulness of the universe is observable, why the Creator of this meaningfulness is unobservable. Where is the wise Creator?

The truth is that without belief in God, the universe is rendered meaningless. It is belief in God alone that makes the meaningfulness of the universe understandable.

The Price of Finding God



A high level of realization of God is actually the greatest asset a person can have. It is, in fact, high realization of faith which makes it possible for a person to be different from animals. Achieving a high level of realization is just as possible as achieving anything else. The only condition is that one should pay its price. Without paying the necessary price, no one gets anything in this world and the same applies likewise to realization.



What is the price of a high level of realization? It is simply to make it the primary concern in your life and regard all other things as secondary. The man and woman who will pay this price will definitely reach the level of high realization. Those who do not pay this price will not be able to reach to this level regardless of how many good deeds they did.

The fact is that, repeatedly a person finds himself torn between two demands, the demands of faith and the demands of the world. On such occasions, if man ignores the demands of faith, and bows to worldly demands, even if he does this only once, such an attitude becomes the cause for his ruin. In this way, Satan gets the chance to stop man's journey of realization and push him backwards. This is the reality which has been mentioned thus in the Quran:

“When any evil suggestion from Satan touches those who fear God, they are instantly alerted and become watchful; but the followers of devils are led relentlessly into error by them. They never desist.” (7:201-202)

The reality is that, the journey of faith is a continuous journey. Even if a person stops for just a single day, his journey will be retarded for many years.



The Discovery of the Glory of God



When the famous American Boxer, Muhammad Ali (d. 2016) won the title of World Heavy Weight Champion, he said: “I am the king of the world”.

This is more or less the situation of every man and woman. Individuals are concerned only with their own glory. Nobody has discovered the glory of God.

The existence of the human being is a miracle of creation. A person should recognize his existence as an evidence of divine glory. But the condition of man is such that he sees only self glorification in his existence. He cannot discover the glory of God therein. This is actually the greatest tragedy of human history.

The famous French philosopher, Rene Descartes (d. 1650), is renowned for having said: “I think, therefore, I exist.” This is a matter of self-discovery. But the most important thing is that a person must discover in his own existence the existence of God, so that he may say: “I am, therefore, God exists.”

This is the beginning of divine realization. The human being at first discovers the existence of God in the form of his own existence, after this discovery, endless doors of discovery open up for him. Every new discovery goes on increasing his realization and his awareness. Unlimited treasures of realization keep



unfolding before him, until he reaches the highest level of conviction and realization of God.

The Journey of the Realization of God



When a government officer, without reason and without taking permission, fails to report for duty over a prolonged period, that is officially considered as a break in service and seriously affects the officer's seniority, even if he had already worked for twenty years in.

This is also true of the journey of the realization of God. If you start a journey of realization and for a long time continued to follow it, but then you make an excuse to temporarily stop this journey, this stop will not just be a temporary matter but will rather become equal to a break in realization, which means you shall have to go back to the point where you started your journey of realization of God.

Reality opens up to a person and then he goes on the journey of realization. But then on the way, some exigencies force him to stop his journey, for instance, family requirements, demands for materialistic advantages and the demand of personal matters, etc.

On such occasions, the traveller should not turn such types of demands into excuses for himself. He should continue the journey of realization by ignoring all other



issues. One who does so will reach his destination while the man who made excuses about unnecessary demands will have a break in realization.

This is a very serious matter. The voyager on his way towards truth must never make such a mistake, otherwise he will suffer such harm as can never ever be compensated for.

Deep Realization of God



Chapter 4 of the Quran has this to say: “Believers, believe in God and His Message and in the Scripture He sent down to His Messenger.” (4:136). Verse 14 of chapter 49 of the Quran offers a commentary on the authenticity of belief. “The Arabs of the desert say, ‘We have believed.’ Say to them, ‘You have not believed yet; say rather, We have submitted,’ for faith has not yet entered into your hearts.” (49:14).

From this we learn that belief does not come about by the mere mouthing of words, you have to invite belief to enter your heart and then enshrine it therein. Belief should become a part and parcel of your whole personality just as dye becomes totally mixed into water. This is graphically expressed in chapter 2: “Ours is the dye of God, and which dye can be better than God’s.” (2:138). In another sense, this can be expressed as turning your belief into belief plus. That is, simple faith should



be developed into a faith based on deep realization of God. In the Quran this has been called “adding faith to your faith” (48:4). That is, intensifying your faith. There are two ways of doing so: accepting the revelation of the verses and acknowledging what the signs in the universe indicate. We learn from the Quran that, for a true believer, pondering upon the verses revealed by God becomes a means of realization of the truth (5:83). Furthermore, according to the Quran, by pondering or reflecting on the signs scattered throughout the universe, it becomes clear that what the Quran has to say is the truth and that “God encompasses all things.” (41: 53).

From the study of the Quran and Hadith, we learn that there are two categories of faith, or the realization of truth—initial realization and high or sublime realization. In this respect, Paradise is also separated into two broad divisions (55:62). For those who have achieved a high degree of realization, they are alluded to thus: “Those to the fore shall be the foremost.” (56:10), and for those who have a lower level of realization the words used are: “Those on the Right, how fortunate are those on the Right!” (56:27). These are the two categories of the realization of truth. There is no other such category.



Faith

A Discovery of One's Relation with God



Hazrat Anas ibn Malik (d. 709) says that once a person came to the Prophet and asked him: “O Prophet of God, which action is superior?” The Prophet replied, “Realization of God.” The man again asked, “O Prophet of God, which action is superior?” The Prophet again replied, “Realization of God”. Then that person said, “O Prophet of God, I am asking you about action and you are telling me about knowledge.” The Prophet said, “A small action with knowledge benefits more, while a greater action with ignorance does not benefit at all.” (*Jami’ Bayan al-Ilm wa-Fadlihi*, Hadith No. 214)

In this tradition, by “knowledge” is meant realization of God. In this way, small or greater does not mean small or greater in quantity, but rather that action which is performed with God-realization, or inner spirit, is the true action. The action which is bereft of God-realization, or inner spirit, is of no value.

The truth is that Islam begins with the discovery of the existence of God and the discovery of one's relation with God. Another name for this discovery is faith in God. Whenever one receives this kind of faith, it necessarily begins to express itself in his life. One's thinking, one's speech, one's behaviour, one's worship, everything is a

reflection or an expression of this discovery. The truth is that one's level of God's realization equals one's Islam, and the level of one's conscious discovery equals the level of one's external action.

God-realization is the spirit of Islam, it is the life of Islam. It makes one's Islam a living thing. The action done with God-realization is like a green tree, whereas any action without God-realization is like dried up wood.

Realization of God Discovery of One's Helplessness



What is *maarifah* or realization of God? It is, in fact, a discovery of one's helplessness in relation to God. We must learn that God is Almighty and man exists in the state of total helplessness. When this discovery becomes a part of human thinking, penetrating to the innermost recesses of one's psyche is genuine realization. Once a devoted father wrote a letter to his dear son addressing him thus: "O Moon, brightening the deepest recesses of my heart." When such sentiment is engendered in relation to the Lord of the World, this is true realization of God.

When you study the Quran and reach this verse: "If all the trees on earth were pens, and the sea [were] ink,



with seven [more] seas added to it, the words of God would not be exhausted.” (31:27). While studying this in the Quran, your heart trembles with tempestuous feeling. You think that if God in His Omnipotence is at one extreme, man in his helplessness is at another extreme. At that time you exclaim with tears in your eyes: “O God, just as Your attributes will never come to an end, so also will the words of God never be exhausted. In the same vein, my helplessness with respect to You is of an extreme degree.”

This is the ultimate extent of the discovery. It is on reaching this point that a person forms a picture of the final extent of his helplessness as compared to the omnipotence of God. This is the acme of human consciousness, the experience of which no creature other than a human being can ever experience. This is the point at which all the stars, planets, mountains and seas begin to envy man. This experience for any believer is like a very great and noble discovery. And another name for this superior discovery is *maarifah*. This superior form of realization can come to no one other than a human being in this vast universe.



The Purpose of Human Life



This verse of the Quran, ‘I created the jinn and mankind only so that they might worship Me’ (51:56) has been explained by Abdullah ibn Abbas, a companion of the Prophet of Islam, as meaning that ‘worship’ here means realization of God. That is, man has been created by God for His realization. The same has been expressed in a tradition, in these words: “I was a hidden treasure, I wished to be known, so I created Man.” (*Kashf al-Khifa*, Hadith No. 2016).

The truth is that man’s life is a journey of *maarifah*, from beginning to end. The initial part of this journey is spent in this present world, while the final and eternal part of it will be spent in the world Hereafter. *Maarifah* is an unlimited ocean. It is desired for a person that he be the voyager on this infinite intellectual and spiritual journey in the pre-death period as well as in the post-death period.

The Quran tells about the present world in these words:

“He has given you all that you asked of Him.”
(14:34)

This means that the real purpose of a human being is to pursue the journey of God-realization, while for his material survival, he has been provided with all those



things which are called the life support system. The life of the Hereafter is also, in fact, the life of *maarifah*. The journey of *maarifah* which primarily began in the life of this world, will also continue in the world of the Hereafter in its higher form. In the Hereafter, man will have the opportunity to see his Creator directly, to participate in His gatherings and to speak to Him. However, man will live as a guest of God in the Hereafter. Whatever man received in this world on the basis of need will likewise be given to him in the Hereafter on the basis of his desires and all his desires will thus be fulfilled. (*The Quran*, 41:31)

God-Realization A Personal Discovery



The Quran consists of more than six thousand verses, the longest of which is verse 282 in chapter 2. This verse concerns debt, and the necessity to put it down in writing, and it also gives commands in this regard in great detail.

The case of *maarifah* is treated quite differently, in that the Quran mentions *maarifah* but does not give any details of it. The root word of *maarifah* is 'arafa'. Nearly seventy derivatives of *maarifah* appear in the Quran but details of it are not mentioned anywhere. For example, this verse of the Quran, "When they listen



to what has been sent down to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflowing with tears, because the truth they recognize,” (5:83) shows only that a group of people heard the Quran and realized the truth it conveyed. But this statement in the Quran does not clarify exactly what this realization was which was attained by this group.

By comparing the above two verses of the Quran, a significant fact comes to light: God-realization is not some juristic issue which can be described in a specific language. God-realization is something that is achieved on the basis of self-discovery. This shall either be a self-discovered reality, or not be a discovery at all. For *maarifah*, God has chosen the same method for its seeker, as is called the discovery method in the field of education.

The truth is that *maarifah* is discovered by one through his own thinking and contemplation. In other words, *maarifah* is a creative subject rather than a traditional (*taqlidi*) subject. To achieve God-realization, a creative mind is required. *Maarifah* or God-realization is achieved after a long intellectual struggle. It is self-discovery. *Maarifah* is not attained through any set, specific course, which one may learn from another human being through *taqlid*, or the traditional way.



God-Realization: A Creative Subject



There is no set course for attaining realization of God. It is not that one who begs for it will automatically achieve realization. Such thinking is a diminution of realization of God. The truth is that realization is a creative process. It takes an original mind to attain God-realization. Realization is a tempestuous experience. One achieves such realization through personal discovery. What is achieved through the utterance of ritual formulae may induce some kind of psychological state but it cannot be true God-realization. The realization of a God Who “manifests Himself in a new state every day” (55:29) cannot be had by blindly following any particular set course.

What is called creative thinking in secular terms is, in religious terms, called *ijtihadi* or creative thinking. *Ijtihadi* or creative thinking means discovering the hidden meaning in the statements of the Quran. The discovery of such meaning is possible only through *ijtihadi* or creative thinking. This same thinking opens the door to an elevated realization of God.

The Quran tells us that it has been revealed as a divine book, so that one may ponder over its verses. (38:29). This reflection based on such contemplation is the other name for God-realization. In the attainment

of creative realization, the Quran has the status of a book of guidance. The basic principle of realization has been laid down in the Quran. To discover the hidden meaning by contemplation in consonance with this basic principle is a matter of individual judgement. The door of elevated realization opens through this creative process.

The Universe A Source of God-Realization



The Quran describes the power of God, in these words:

“When He decrees a thing, He need only say, ‘Be!’ and it is.” (36:82)

According to this Quranic verse, His power is so boundless that within moments He can bring anything into existence. But the history of creation proves that God did not take that course. According to modern scientific discoveries, the age of the present universe goes back fifteen billion years. God, first of all, made a composition of all the universal particles which came to be called the super-atom. An explosion, called the Big Bang took place in the super-atom and the condensed particles dispersed and spread into the vastness of space. These particles took the form of stars and planets. After



this the solar system was formed, wherein the present earth was structured. Liquid water came into being after the mixture of two gases, hydrogen and oxygen. Then plants and animals came into existence. Finally, man was created and began to live on this earth.

If this entire phenomenon had taken place as a miracle of creation all of a sudden, it would have been only a cause of bewilderment for man and not any cause for contemplation. The Creator, instead of creating the universe in a short period of time, created it through a long process. Many factors were involved in the creation of the universe. In this way, it became possible for man to contemplate on the universe and discover the universal laws. With this, the universe became a source of eternal *maarifah* or God-realization for man. It became possible for a person to ponder day and night over the hidden creative process of the universe. Similarly, man may go on discovering the divine creative miracle without ever ending his journey of *maarifah* or God-realization.

Scientific Discoveries Provide Spiritual Food



Mentioning the “Words of God” (31:27) the Quran tells us that these words of God are so numerous that their enumeration would never cease. What are these words of God? There is nothing mysterious



about them. Rather, these refer to the mysteries of the universe. Modern science, in its reality, is another name for discovering these words of God.

The history of modern science is spread over 500 years. During this period, scientists have discovered many things in accordance with natural or physical laws. With the invention of the telescope and the microscope, the scope of discoveries has broadened greatly. The truth is that modern science in its nature, is the science of *maarifah* (God-realization). It has opened a great treasure of God-realization for the believers.

Here by science we mean popular science, and not technical science. On this subject, simple and easily understandable books are available in every language. The truth is that the greatest source of achieving *maarifah* is contemplation on the creation of God. Supporting data is always required for contemplation. Before the developments of science, very limited data were available on this subject. Now science has provided a huge library of unlimited data for the seekers of *maarifah*. Now, it has become possible for such seekers to pursue their journey endlessly. At every moment they may receive the spiritual food of *maarifah*. The process of spiritual development can go on within them continuously and never stop even for a single moment until the day they die.



God-Realization: A Divine Gift



Man is in need of countless things, but he cannot create a single one of them. All these things are unilateral gifts from God to man. If God did not bless a person with these gifts, he would face utter ruination.

This is that aspect of human life from where the realization of God begins. When anyone consciously discovers what his exact position is, he becomes the recipient of divine blessing and inspiration. When such consciousness is developed within a person, a perfect bond is established with God, after which he continuously receives divine inspiration. In such a person, the process of God-realization starts taking place. If man for his part does not create any obstacle, the process of God-realization will progress continuously within him till it reaches its culmination.

Maarifah, in essence, is a divine gift. Any person, who receives this gift of *maarifah* will be deserving of the gift of Paradise. *Maarifah* is a worldly gift to the seeker by God, while Paradise is an eternal gift in the Hereafter.

The Quran tells us that the people of Paradise will be on the seats of truth (54:55). This shows that what makes a person most undeserving of Paradise is a lie, a direct lie or an indirect lie. Any person who refrains from all such types of lies will be deserving of entry

into Paradise. God-realization makes a person, a man of truth and the truth becomes the means of taking a man to Paradise.

Learning Lessons from Mundane Occurrences



One quality of the godly person described in the Quran is the willingness to learn lessons (15:75). Learning lessons means recognizing some internal qualities from external signs. One who is able to learn lessons from things and experiences, can derive spiritual food therefrom. The ability to learn lessons is extremely necessary for the attainment of *maarifah*. One who does not have this capacity will certainly never attain to *maarifah*.

On one page of a 60-page magazine, published in 2010 by Australian Education International, a large-scale world map on the one hand shows India in white and on the other hand, at a distance of one thousand miles, it shows Australia in green. Indian youths are addressed in this Indian map with these words, “You are here.” The caption on the map of Australia reads, “Your future is there.”

On seeing this map, all of a sudden it comes to mind that man today is in a world prior to death, while his



eternal future lies in the world after death. The present world is not one where one should be concerned with seeking one's future. The future lies rather in the world Hereafter which will come later. It is the intellectual acceptance of this fact which leads to the transformation of material events into spiritual experiences.

We can learn lessons from everything in this world. If a man's mind is awakened, he will receive the nourishment of *maarifah* through his ability to learn lessons.

Reason-Based Discovery of God



The source of the realization of God is, in the words of the Quran, reflection (*tafakkur* and *tadabbur*). (*The Quran*, 3:191) The attainment of God-realization by contemplation is entirely a function of the mind. In the human body, the act of thinking is done only by the brain. What is achieved by this process of thinking has been defined as God-realization.

In ancient times, there were groups of spiritual persons who held that the source of realization of God was the heart, and it was due to this concept that the method of meditation, by focusing on the heart became prevalent. But this concept does not relate to divine religion. This concept derived from the concept of monism. Those who believe in monism cherish the belief that God is



in-dwelling. He is lodged in one's heart. But all these theories are based on supposition. There are no real arguments in support of them.

With reference to the heart, the Quran uses the word “understanding” (*fiqh*) (7:179), but this word “heart” is used only as a metaphor. It is not used in the actual physical sense. Those who have done research in the functioning of the heart have come to the conclusion that during the circulation of the blood there is communication between heart and mind. But this does not prove the theory of a thinking heart, because such communication takes place between all of the organs and the mind. According to modern medical studies what has been proved is that communication does take place between organs but that neither the heart nor any other organ besides the mind possesses the ability to think.

The truth is that all the organs of the body are subservient to the brain, and in this, the heart is no exception.

Not Uncertainty



In the 9th verse of Chapter 6 of the Quran, a divine law is laid down on the matter of guidance. This is called the law of *iltibas* (doubt). This signifies that there is an element of doubt in everything. This law is for the



purpose of putting man to the test. One who can tear off this veil of doubt will arrive at the truth and those who are unable to do so will remain in doubt—a state which is irremediable, because there are no alternative mitigating factors.

The same is true also of realization of God. One who is the traveller on this journey of realization, will face such types of situations again and again, when he will realize that he is in between doubt and conviction. He wants to believe in one thing, but along with this there are also certain factors which lead him towards doubt. He wants to believe, but he does not or cannot believe. People often face such hesitancy. This situation is the greatest obstacle to the attainment of realization.

When an individual becomes the victim of doubt or when he hesitates, there are two possibilities for him—on the one hand, on the basis of reason, he feels that the thing at issue is absolutely correct by scientific standards, but, fettered by his traditional mindset, he remains in doubt, feeling that he could be wrong. Despite being well educated and logically sound, beset by vague doubts, he remains in a state of uncertainty.

This condition of uncertainty cannot become an excuse for anyone. It is necessary for the seeker of God-realization to free himself from this state of hesitation. He must give importance to knowledge rather than to doubt. He must emerge from his state of uncertainty. He must accept proven realities. This is mandatory for the attainment of realization.

The Awakened Person



According to a tradition: “The world is a prison for a believer and a Paradise for the unbeliever.” (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 2956)

People generally take this tradition in a material sense, that is, the believer does not derive comfort from the material things of this world, whereas the unbeliever takes comfort from and derives happiness from material things. The reality is that the believer has to live according to divine laws, whereas the unbeliever is not bound by such laws.

But this tradition has another meaning which is in accordance with higher realization. When a believer completes that revolutionary process of discovering reality by which he attains higher realization, the world then becomes for him like a psychological prison, as if he had come into a world that was not created for him, and where he can find no spiritual solace.

When such a believer attains high realization, he feels that his existence has lost all relevance—for he has no words by which to express his spiritual discovery, he has no such audience as can understand what he has to say, he has no such environment as is fit for him to live in in his state of realization.



Such an awakened believer always feels as if he is in a balloon, where nothing is commensurate with his spiritual level. This elevated feeling is the certificate of entry into Paradise for all human beings. When God sees them in such a situation, He tells His angels to admit them to Paradise, because He had created Paradise for such people. Paradise is meant for such people and such people are destined for Paradise.

The Existence of God



The realization of God is an intellectual discovery. No one can achieve realization just by repeating God's name or, by meditation, training himself to silently utter the word of God spontaneously with every breath or beat of his heart. Such practices are irrelevant to attaining *maarifah*. They have no connection or relation with the realization of God.

There is a tradition which tells us that: "God has created man in His own image." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 6227) There is also an Arabic proverb which says: "One who has recognized himself, has recognized his God also." (*Hilyat al-Awliya*, vol. 10, p. 208)

This is doubtless very meaningful. It means that just as a human being has an 'I' (a sense of being), in the same way God has an 'I' on a much larger scale. The existence of this consciousness (the 'I') in human beings



is an exception in the whole universe. While showing man's unique status, it also proves the existence of God. Because, if there is a small exception in this universe in the form of man, this is a sure proof of the existence of a very great exception: the existence of man necessarily offers proof of the existence of God.

This has likewise been expressed in the tradition—God has created man in His own image. That is, just as God has an exceptional existence, in the same way, human beings also have an exceptional existence in the universe. If a person ponders upon this exception, he will certainly discover God, he will call out—"I am, therefore, God is!"

The Virtue of Modesty



A Hadith Qudsi is recorded in these words: "God said: 'Pride is My Cloak and greatness is My robe, and one who competes with Me in respect of either of them, I shall cast into Hell.'" (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Hadith No. 4090)

This Hadith Qudsi, meaning sacred narration attributed to God and relating to Him, teaches us the importance of modesty. The truth is that man's relation with God is established at the level of real modesty. If there is any sense of his own greatness in a person, this relation with God cannot be established. The true



sign of real modesty is when one attains the state in which praise does not please him and criticism does not displease him.

One who is not truly modest, consciously or unconsciously, lives with a sense of his own greatness or importance. This kind of feeling is a veritable obstacle in establishing any relationship with God. The modest man, on the contrary, has the ability to fully accept divine inspiration. Whereas, where there is no modesty in the full sense, the immodest person, cannot be a recipient of divine inspiration.

The Godly Personality



According to a hadith “Be alert through the wisdom of the believer, because a believer sees by the light of God.” (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 3127)

In this hadith the wisdom of the believer means the wisdom of the realized person. It is a fact that one who has attained realization, becomes an unfettered person. He walks in the light of God, and no one has the power to extinguish the light of God.

One whose faith is at the level of *maarifah* to an extreme extent, becomes an aware person, in the sense that he experiences an intellectual awakening. He becomes a complex free soul. He develops the ability



to discriminate between right and wrong (*The Quran*, 8:29). In this way his thinking becomes profound and he develops the ability to foresee things.

Realization of God endows the individual with the virtue of disinterestedness in worldly things. This is called *zuhd* (abstinence). It is a person of such virtue as has been described in a hadith thus: “He is a servant of God, who has no interest in worldly things. God having planted wisdom in his heart, he speaks words of wisdom. God has shown him the evils of this world, and the remedy for them. God leads him in peace and security to Paradise, which is the home of Peace.” (*Shu‘ab al-Iman*, *al-Bayhaqi*, Hadith No. 10050)

No Negative Thinking



It is recorded in a hadith that you should not do tit for tat. That means that you should not mete out the same treatment to others that you receive from them. The course of action that you should take is that if anyone harms you, you should still do good to him. (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 2007)

Realization of God is attainable by those men and women who always engage in positive thinking. But experience shows that in the present world it is not always possible to have favourable circumstances. In



such a situation, there is only one formula for positive thinking. And that means being good to others whether their behaviour to you is good or bad.

Realization of God elevates only that heart which is totally free from negative thinking; such realization will never enter a heart which is not free of hatred, anger, and vengefulness. Man lives in a world where unpleasant experiences are commonplace. This is a law of nature. In such a situation, the only way for one who aspires to realization of God is to develop the ability to convert negative experiences into positive experiences, that is, he must continue to engage in positive thinking even in unpleasant situations. He has to develop the kind of high thinking which enables him to stave off the evil influences of the environment. This is the capacity which enables man to continue his journey of God-realization uninterruptedly.

The Discovery of the Existence of the Creator



The Prophet of Islam once observed: “God created man in His own image.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 6227). This means that man has been created as a natural exception in this vast universe. With his personal experience, man can understand that if a



natural exception is possible here, then a supernatural exception is certainly possible. The existence of man, makes the existence of God understandable.

The vast universe consists of innumerable stars and planets. Our earth has countless animals, but no human-like creation exists anywhere in the entire universe. A human being is a rare exception in the entire universe. If we ponder over this, it is not difficult to believe that, similarly, a Great Rare Exception might also exist. This is to discover an unknown fact through a known fact. This argument is completely scientific and logical.

The famous French philosopher, Rene Descartes (1596-1650) said: “I think, therefore, I am.”

The above-mentioned French philosopher, arrived at only a half-truth. He discovered himself, but he could not discover his Creator. Had he reflected further, he would have discovered the existence of God in the form of his own existence. His own existence would have become evidence for the existence of God. He would have discovered the Creator through the creation. He would have exclaimed: “I am, therefore, God is.”

Discovery of the Unseen God



John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), a British philosopher, writes in his autobiography (published in 1873) that



he had formerly believed in God as a matter of tradition. But once his father, James Mill, said something to him, which put an end to his belief in God. His father asked, "If God created man, who created God?"

Without doubt the greatest hurdle in achieving God-realization is that, whereas God is limitless, man's mind has its limits. The matter of *maarifah*, in actual fact, is to attempt to discover a limitless being by a limited being and believe in it with total conviction. This is *maarifah*. Without surmounting this hurdle, no one can be credited with attaining God-realization.

The discovery of God is different from other discoveries. For instance, gravity is also a subject of discovery. But this discovery relates only to science. On this basis, no one is going to receive eternal reward. But the discovery of God entitles the discoverer to a great reward. Those who have discovered God are destined to gain entry into Paradise. That is why a price has been set on the discovery of God. Without paying this price, no one can be given credit for discovering God. This price is that with his limited mind man must encompass a limitless Being and while engaging with the seen world, he should be able to discover the unseen God. God-realization is the name of this discovery, and Paradise is its reward.

Silence and God-Realization



Traditions tell of how the Prophet of Islam usually observed silence. (*Musad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 20810) Many traditions have been recorded on this subject. For example: “Hold fast to silence.” (*Sunan al-Darmi*, Hadith No. 2484).

“A believer is one who either speaks good or remains silent.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 6018).

“Anyone who observed silence, saved himself.” (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 6481).

“My silence should be contemplation.” (*Musnad al-Shihab al-Qudha’i*, Hadith No 1159).

Observing silence means not only to remain quiet but also to contemplate. When a believer remains silent, he will ponder on his Lord. This is *maarifah*, or the discovery and realization of God. Silence is the door to *maarifah*. True silence leads man to true *maarifah*.

Silence gives man the opportunity to save himself from distractions. It brings greater clarity to his experiences and observations. He transforms ordinary facts into meaningful facts. He travels from the outer world to the inner world. He establishes his contact with God and His angels at the psychological level. All these factors strengthen man’s God-realization. Contemplation is



the source of God-realization and without silence, the process of contemplation is not at all possible. Silence brings a person close to God. It provides the opportunity for him to achieve God-realization from the entire universe and this journey continues non-stop.

Discovery of God's Majesty



Muslim ibn Bashair says that Abu Hurayra wept during his illness. When asked as to what was making him weep he replied:

“I don’t weep for this world of yours. I weep rather for when I think that my journey is long and my provision is inadequate. And I feel I am on a hill top which is going to heaven and hell and I don’t know which way I will be led.” (*Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, Ibn Sa’d, vol. 4, p. 253)

These words of the Companion of the Prophet were an expression of a high level of realization of God. When man’s realization intensifies, his state becomes like that of the above-mentioned Companion of the Prophet.

What is meant by a high realization of God? It is that state in which a person discovers God in all His Glory and Majesty. When a person so discovers God, in his eyes his own existence becomes insignificant in comparison to that of Paradise. He comes to regard his



actions as valueless. He starts feeling that when he is presented before his Lord he will have nothing to offer. It is this feeling which makes him feel what is expressed by the words of Abu Hurayra. On the one hand, God being the most merciful, produces a feeling of hope in him but, on the other hand, when he sees how valueless his actions are, he starts feeling that he does not deserve to be rewarded. An insensitive person sees only his plus points while a sensitive person sees only his minus points. This is what separates the awakened soul from the unawakened soul.

Discovering God on Every Occasion



The fourth caliph of Islam, Ali ibn Abi Talib, said, ‘I recognized my Lord by failing to execute my will.’

This is a simple formula of *maarifah* or God realization. All men and women undergo such experiences daily when they realize that whatever they desired was not achieved. Sometimes this is a small experience and, sometimes a bigger one. Every such experience reminds a person of his limitations. Such experience tells man that he can desire, but the achievement of his desire is not in his control. Whenever any of a man’s plans is unaccomplished, it reminds him of the reality that he has his limits.



Whenever man reaches his boundary, he should realize that immediately after this, the boundary of God starts; whether it is a small experience, for example, letting something fall from one's hand, or a bigger experience, like a plan or an idea not being fulfilled according to one's own desire. If a person is intellectually awakened, he will discover God on every such occasion, and it will become a source of *maarifah* for him.

This is the simple way in which one can derive food for God-realization on all occasions. Whether one is educated or uneducated, rich or poor, a degree-holder or a non-degree holder, one undergoes such experiences everyday.

If a person awakens his mind and has the potential for contemplation, he will derive provision for *maarifah* or God-realization from every moment in his daily life. The fountain of *maarifah* will flow continuously in his heart and mind.

Uniqueness of a Human Being



The vast space consists of countless stars, planets and galaxies. It has a solar system, with many planets in it. Among them is an exceptional planet which is called the earth. There are uncountable creations on this earth. Out of all this huge number of creations, only a human being has certain unique attributes.



In this vast universe, a man stands on this earth and speaks in human words, saying: “O God, You are the Lord of the Universe! I have acknowledged You with all your Attributes and Greatness. I surrender myself to you with my entire existence.”

These human words reverberate in space. They are heard by every form of creation. Then the entire universe calls out: “Look, this man is enviable. God was ingrained in our nature, but man has discovered God on his own. We praise the Lord without having the power of speech, while man speaks and praises the Lord with words. We are subservient by compulsion while man has voluntarily surrendered himself. We established our relation with God at an unconscious level, while man has discovered Him at the conscious level and praises his Creator in words. We acknowledge the Creator in the state of the seen (*mashhud*) while man has acknowledged God at an unseen level. We are worshiping God by imitation only, while man worships God in a creative way. We demonstrate the greatness of God in unspoken words, while man expresses this by the power of speech. We praise our Lord in a limited way, while man praises God on an unlimited scale.”

This is a higher form of God-realization. Conscious God-realization of this kind can be attained only by a human being. These are the people of higher level of *maarifah*, who will be ushered into Paradise.



God and Paradise



Man is unique in having two faculties bestowed upon him—one, the faculty of thinking and the other, the faculty of enjoyment. If man utilizes both these faculties in a proper way, he will, on the one hand, discover the existence of God and, on the other, the existence of Paradise.

The phenomenon of thinking is an exceptional human attribute. The well-known French philosopher Rene Descartes observed:

“I think, therefore, I am.”

Similarly, we can say that the existence of the small thinker is a proof of the existence of the Big thinker.

The same is true of the sense of pleasure. On reflection, man should realize that his is a unique existence in the universe, exceptionally gifted as he is with the sense of pleasure.

The discovery of this reality is in itself a discovery of a greater reality. If a sense of pleasure exists in this world, then certainly the resources for its fulfilment must also be present because, in this world, there is a pair for the completion or fulfillment of everything. According to this general law of nature, there should certainly be present a pair for the sense of pleasure as well, that is,



fulfilment too should be possible in this world. This phenomenon is convincing evidence of the existence of Paradise.

Self-Negation A Means of Discovering God



Everything has its price. Without paying the price one cannot receive the things one desires. Similarly, realization of God also has its price, and this price is man's own being. Nothing less than that can be the price of realization of God. This is something that can be attained only at the cost of the negation of one's own self. If one is not willing to negate oneself, one cannot achieve realization of God.

One's own negation does not mean some kind of mysterious words counted out on the rosary. This can be done only through reflection and contemplation rather than by doing physical exercises in the name of spirituality. What is self-negation? Self-negation for man is to discover the Lord to the extent that his own existence in comparison to that of God becomes totally valueless.

Self-negation is achieved by developing such qualities as modesty, humility, acknowledgement, introspection, selflessness, simplicity, being God-fearing, having fear



of Hell and the desire for Paradise. These qualities cannot be produced by spiritual exercises: they can be produced only by a profound thinking process. This action of self-negation begins with the deep discovery of the divine truths and this continues till the last breath. Self negation is in fact another name for the discovery of reality. In reality, man is nothing. For him even an ordinary accident becomes unbearable. He cannot have any knowledge of anything with conviction.

Man at all times is in need of external resources. Any part of man's being (e.g., some major organs) can stop functioning. Man knows neither the reality of life nor the reality of death. Man desires many things but he has no power over anything. Man is apparently free but except for exerting his own will he has no freedom to control factors outside of him.

Another name for the consciousness of these aspects of human existence is self-negation, and it is this self-negation which is the greatest means of attaining realization of God. In one respect, self-negation means discovering God the Almighty and, in other respect, it means discovering oneself as a totally helpless creature.

Making the Discovery of God One's Personal Interest



Realization of God is unrelated to any romantic love for God. It relates to the deeper feeling in a person that his future depends solely on one God. He can have his beloved Paradise only when God gives it to him.

Similarly, one can save oneself from the dreaded hell only when God saves him. It is only when this kind of deep consciousness develops in one that the door to realization of God opens to him.

Realization of God is no philosophic concept. *Maarifah* is inevitably linked with personal interest. The attainment of a high level of such realization is possible only when man discovers it at an intellectual level; when he learns ideologically that nothing save this can be his real destination; when a person's mind is fully convinced of its veracity.

On the other hand it is also essential that a person's personal interest should be fully associated with the realization of God. In this matter he should develop a heightened sense of discovery to the extent that he starts feeling with great intensity that without the attainment of God's realization his existence will be rendered meaningless, his life will become desolate, all



his future prospects will be set at naught and he will be a failure in every respect.

Only when this is an individual's thinking, both theoretically or ideologically, and practically in all respects, does he become desirous of God-realization to the last extent that all the doors to it are opened immediately to him. No door remains closed to him. This is the way of God-realization. It is not possible to reach the goal of God-realization by any other path.

Uncertainty about Oneself



It is only when a person has the feeling that of all human beings he is the only one who has attained a high level of God-realization or that of all people he is the only one who is deprived of a high level of God-realization that he can actually reach a high level of God-realization. Yet no one can say with conviction that he has attained a high level of God-realization.

The reason for this uncertainty is that God-realization is not the name of any external course by which one might think that one has learned all that is possible for him to learn and that one has now attained God-realization. It is wholly an internal state and giving any verdict about an internal state is possible only for God, the Lord of the world. Anyone who is a seeker of God-realization cannot himself come to any such



conclusion. The high level of God-realization is, in fact, another name for the sublime discovery of divinity. Whenever God's servant reaches this high level, he feels that, in comparison to God, his position is zero. God is everything and he is nothing. This discovery tells him that in this matter the entire power of decision-making is in the hands of God. Man has no say in this matter. This discovery demonstrates that the entire matter is wholly unilateral.

Who are the people who may be said to have attained God-realization? They are those whose realization is confirmed by God. And God's decision will be made known only on the Day of Judgement and not even a second prior to that Day. This is why one who has done everything to achieve God-realization still has a feeling of uncertainty about it till the very last minute.

An Obstacle in the Path of God-Realization



A certain American scholar having studied Islam, once wrote a book on the subject in which he observed that the greatest concern of Islam was Allah.

This is one hundred percent true. The door to realization is open only for one who makes the one God his sole concern. This being so, the greatest obstacle



in the path of realization is man's failure to make God his sole concern. As far as the realization of God is concerned this is undoubtedly the most important thing.

In essence, one who makes something his sole concern never allows his attention to deviate from that thing. He goes to bed thinking about it and he gets up in the morning thinking the same thoughts.

That thing so dominates his mind that almost all other things get eliminated from his consciousness. Man thinks on that same topic. He speaks with others on that same topic. He reads about that same topic and he has discussions about that same topic, to this extent that his heart and mind find solace only by delving further into that same topic. He thinks of it both when he is alone and when he is in public, he does not fail to mention it whatever the occasion.

This is what it means to make something one's sole concern. The person who makes God his sole concern is destined to experience the realization of God. One who is not able to make God his sole concern will certainly never attain to the realization of God. It does not matter whether or not he repeats God's name on the beads of his rosary.

The real obstacle to the attainment of realization is man's holding something else to be greater than God. Considering someone greater is sometimes done consciously and sometimes unconsciously, but the result is the same, that is, failure to arrive at the high realization of God. Any man or woman who desires to



have an elevated realization of God shall have to pay this price of diverting his or her attention away from all other things and making the one God his or her only concern. In reality, it is a psychological sacrifice. Only one who is capable of making this sacrifice shall receive that divine blessing which is known as *maarifah*, or realization.

The Natural World Leads to God



The universe is a great library of *maarifah* or God-realization. Everything in the universe speaks of God-realization. This manifests itself in the form of the law of nature throughout the universe. If a person ponders over creation, he will find that every aspect of the universe is giving the lessons of God-realization.

The sun symbolically displays that *maarifah* or God-realization is that which enlightens the existence of man from the inner self to the outer self. The flowing river tells man to achieve God-realization in such a way that it flows as a spring in the soul. The lush green branches of a tree when swayed by wind convey the message to man to achieve God-realization in such a way that it becomes a thrilling experience for him. The chirping of birds tells man that discovering the wonders of God should happen in such a way that praises of God flow from his tongue. The greatness of the mountains silently



expresses the discovering of God in all His greatness and so on.

The same is true of the entire universe. Everything in the universe sends out the message of God-realization in natural terms as if the entire universe is a great library of God-realization. In the same way that a scholar enters the library and derives knowledge from books, a true human being receives the intellectual food of God-realization from the divine library of the universe.

The library of the universe is an unlimited treasure of *maarifah*. Every particle of the universe has the status of an encyclopedia of *maarifah*. Here the leaf of a tree enshrines a library of God-realization within it. This has been expressed thus by a Persian poet:

Barg Darakhtan-e-sabz, dar nazare-hoshiaar, har waraqe daftare ast marifat-e-kardgar. (The leaves of the green tree, to a wise man, serve as a great resource of the realization of the Creator.)

Maarifah: A Life with God



There is an Arabic proverb, “I do not know is half of knowledge,” that is, knowing our own unawareness is the starting point of knowledge. When a person learns that he does not know, the spirit of knowing is awakened within him. This spirit finally leads him to knowledge, and his unawareness becomes awareness.



The same is true of *maarifah*. Man must first of all discover that he lacks in *maarifah*, and only then will the search for *maarifah* begin within him and will finally bring him to *maarifah*.

What brings one to knowledge is the spirit of enquiry. This spirit is a must for *maarifah*. Man must first of all know that without *maarifah*, he is in the dark. With *maarifah*, it is like living in the light, while without *maarifah* is like living in darkness. Without *maarifah* man can only experience failure, in this world as well as in the Hereafter. *Maarifah* enables man to live on a higher plane. A man of *maarifah* is able to understand the realities as they are. *Maarifah* makes a man worthy of being in the company of angels. *Maarifah* enables man to receive divine inspiration. *Maarifah* makes a man perfect. *Maarifah* is the source of guidance in this world and the source of Paradise in the Hereafter.

Maarifah is the right beginning for a human being's journey in life. *Maarifah* is a means of leading an unaware man to a life of awareness. *Maarifah* enables man to lead a life with God rather than a life without God. It is possible with *maarifah* for man to discover his high potential and, with the help of God, make it an actuality. *Maarifah* enriches knowledge to the maximum and leads to the perfection of life.



Positivity

The Fertile Ground of Maarifah



For a plant to grow, fertile land is essential. Only on fertile land will it be possible for a plant to grow into a green tree. Such a development cannot take place on barren land. For a tree to grow, fertile land is indispensable. Fertile land is favourable for the plant, while barren land is totally unproductive.

The same is true of *maarifah*. *Maarifah* can take place only in such a seeker as has a noble personality. One who is not such a seeker cannot attain to *maarifah*. He has to have a positive personality. Conversely an unfavourable personality may be described as a negative personality. One who desires that the orchard of *maarifah* should grow within him should turn himself into a positive personality, whatever the cost.

A man with a negative personality is one who is of a reactionary disposition. He is one who succumbs to the influence of his environment. Because of his immature consciousness, he is easily influenced by external events. Such a person who is of a negative bent of mind can never receive the blessing of *maarifah*.

One with a positive personality, because of his mature consciousness, is able to rise above external



circumstances, and is able to form his opinions uninfluenced by external pressures. He will ultimately convert negative experiences into positive lessons.

By the grace of God, one endowed with a positive personality finds the opportunity to think along the right lines, and continues to discover *maarifah* so that the process of building a spiritual personality is ever ongoing. The attainment of *maarifah* is possible only on the basis of a positive personality.

The Light of God-Realization



A tube light in your office with no connection to the powerhouse will never shine. But the moment it is connected to the powerhouse, it lights up.

This material event is analogous to the spiritual reality which is called God-realization. If there is no contact between God and man, his existence will be devoid of God-realization. But when there is a connection between God and man, immediately, the heart and mind of a person is illuminated with the light of God-realization.

According to the Creation Plan of God, man's position in this world is that of a taker, whereas, the position of God is that of the Giver. Man in every respect is a needy creature. He cannot fulfil any of his own wants: it is only God who fulfils his every



requirement. This aspect of man's personality makes him feel helpless all the time.

This feeling of want is an integral part of a man's personality. Anyone who is consciously aware of this lacking will become a seeker, while one who is not aware of this shortcoming will always be suffering from a feeling of deprivation.

God-realization or *maarifah* is the answer to this want in a person, something he is born with. Nothing other than God-realization can ever fulfil this lacking in man. Just as a bulb does not light up without being connected to the power house, a man's life without *maarifah* remains unlighted, and nothing else can bring him enlightenment.

The Living Discovery of God



A Western commentator writes—"Every day when in the early morning the first ray of sunlight peeps into your room jump out of bed and say: 'Wonderful! What a bright new sun!'"

The realization of God Who is the Creator of sun, is without doubt, countless times greater than that of the sun. One who has discovered God, will discover God's splendour every morning and evening, his realization of God will become an endless journey of divine light.



Maarifah is not something inert like a piece of stone, *maarifah* is a growing thing like a plant. A tiny seed grows and grows until it develops into a tall green tree. The same is true of *maarifah*. The beginning of *maarifah* is from the acceptance of faith. Afterwards, through study and contemplation, this acceptance of belief keeps on growing until it becomes a full green tree of *maarifah*, rather it becomes a full orchard of *maarifah*. This development or growth of *maarifah* continues and does not end till one's death.

Maarifah is another name of the discovery of the wonders of God. God's wonders are countless, therefore the *maarifah* of God is also an unending journey. This journey continues eternally through new discoveries. Death is not an end to this journey. After death the believer's journey of *maarifah* will continue with much greater speed. The truth is that the most pleasant experience of the people of Paradise would be to live in the garden of *maarifah*, to breath in the air of *maarifah*. This would indeed be the greatest and most pleasant gift of Paradise.



The Difference between Ecstasy and God-Realization



Ecstasy and realization appear to be similar in meaning but, in reality, they are quite different from one another. *Maarifah* or the realization of God is a noble Islamic quality, whereas ecstasy is not related to Islam. Anyone may have this experience of ecstasy. But the truth is that, ecstasy has nothing to do with religion. Even music and dance can bring about a state of ecstasy in a human being.

Maarifah relates to conscious discovery. When a person engages in contemplation and discovers his Creator, then at the intellectual level, he discovers something spiritual (*rabbani*). This is called *maarifah*. *Maarifah*, in other words, can be called intellectual development. If intellectual development takes place in a purely natural way, it will inevitably take a person to the discovery of his Creator, and the conscious discovery of the Creator is another name for *maarifah*.

Ecstasy, on the contrary, is not something which takes shape on a conscious plane. It is a feeling or state. Such feelings can be produced by many things. They could be religious or non-religious in nature. *Maarifah*, on the other hand, awakens the capacity for deep thinking and contemplation in the person concerned, whereas ecstasy



only causes one to enter a trance-like state. Temporarily, a person feels himself in a tension-free state. A trance can give one a vague kind of thrill, but it cannot produce intellectual and spiritual development.

Maarifah brings about an intellectual awakening in the believer and brings him nearer to his Lord, whereas a trance makes it possible for a person to be lost in himself, unable to perceive the external reality. *Maarifah* increases insight, whereas a trance only leaves one in a state of unawareness. *Maarifah* is a conscious state whereas a trance only produces a thrill.

Realization and Prayer



Prayer (*dua*) is a natural utterance for one who has a spiritual bent of mind. But without realization prayer is only a repetition of words. The prayer that comes from a realized soul is prayer in the real sense. The prayer which is devoid of *maarifah* is little but lip service; it has no value. Prayer is a form of worship, and the real form of worship is one of which realization of God is an integral part.

Prayer is of two kinds. One is that which requests God to fulfil some need of the suppliant with reference to some personal problem he is facing and entreating God to provide a solution. For instance, one who is jobless prays to God to help him to get a job. This is



a common form of prayer. This prayer is rewarded according to the suppliant's sincerity. It depends upon God whether after hearing such a prayer He fulfils it there and then or He postpones it until later.

Another form of prayer is that in which the person praying projects his problem as the problem of God Himself. For instance, in ancient Spain, at a time when there had been a drought, the Muslim king, Sultan Abdur Rehman al-Nasir (d. 961 A.D.) said in his prayer to God: "This forehead of mine is in Your hands. Will you punish people because of me? You are the Ruler of all rulers (of earth). Nothing of mine lies hidden from You." (*Tarikh al-Islam*, Al-Dhahabi, vol. 25, p. 444). In this prayer during the drought the rains were held to be a matter of God's own mercy rather than the solution to the demands of man's needs. The implication of this is that God being the most merciful of all would not punish people if it was not their fault.

The first kind of prayer is uttered owing to human needs. But the second kind of prayer comes from the heart of a person with deep God-realization. The second kind of prayer is the result of the discovery of God at the level of realization. This kind of prayer comes out of the heart or mind of a person only when he has some special experience of God's nearness. There are many instances of this kind of prayer in the books of Hadith.



The Discovery of One's Ignorance



The journey of realization of God begins with 'la ilaha' (there is no god) and then it finishes with 'illallah' (but God). The individual must first of all become a seeker and later become a finder. It is this order of the journey of *maarifah* which applies to common man as well as to a prophet.

There is a saying in the Arabic language: *La adri, nisful-ilm* (Saying 'I don't know' is half of knowledge). First of all an individual has to discover his own ignorance, and then a spirit of enquiry is born within him. The greater his acknowledgement of his own ignorance, the greater is his spiritual and intellectual learning. It is a natural reality to which there is no exception.

Maarifah or the discovery of God is not something to be inherited that a father may give to a son and the grandson may receive from his forebears. *Maarifah* is ultimately something of a personal nature. Whenever anyone attains to God's realization, it will happen only as a result of personal effort. Without personal effort, no one can ever achieve *maarifah*. Whatever a person receives without personal struggle will be just a kind of traditional belief rather than a living *maarifah*.

Maarifah relates to the entire personality of the human being. *Maarifah* initially is achieved at an intellectual



level. Subsequently through a natural process, it pervades his whole personality. The attainment of *maarifah* for anyone colours his whole personality in its hue. No aspect of his life will remain unaffected by its influence.

The journey of *maarifah* is indeed one of discovery. This discovery continues during the whole of one's life. One who thinks that he has achieved perfect *maarifah* would in effect never have discovered *maarifah* at all.

Make God Your Supreme Concern



Most people talk frequently of *maarifah* without ever having attained it. The reason is that they want *maarifah* but they are not willing to pay the price for it, and in this world nothing can be achieved without paying the price. What man ought to do is that when he is not ready to pay the price for something he should not talk about it. For talking about something for which he is not willing to pay the price will mean that he is only mouthing words about *maarifah* without understanding its significance.

There is a saying in Arabic: "Knowledge gives you a part of it only when you give yourself to it completely." (Al Faqih wal Mutafaqqih, Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, vol. 2, p. 204) This is true of *maarifah*. The price of *maarifah* is that a person should give his all to it, that he should make



it his sole concern, that while going to bed he should think of *maarifah*, while getting out of bed he should think of *maarifah*. He should engross himself in it to the point of starting to dream of it. The price of *maarifah* is total surrender. One who does not totally surrender to *maarifah*, will find that the doors of *maarifah* will never be opened to him.

The Form and Spirit of Religion



There are two aspects of the knowledge of religion—one is the knowledge of the form (*masail*) of religion, and the other is the knowledge of the *maarifah* of religion. Commands or laws relate to the form of religion, whereas *maarifah* is related to the spirit of religion. To become religious both are essential. Knowledge of the commands and laws does not give man knowledge of *maarifah*, but if one acquires a knowledge of *maarifah*, he will certainly grasp the commands of religion. The journey of religion begins from *maarifah* and arrives at the commands and the laws. On the contrary, knowledge of the commands does not lead one automatically to *maarifah*.

What is *maarifah*? *Maarifah*, in fact, is man coming to discover the reality of life, finding the answer to his internal quest, and the right ideology of life. *Maarifah*, in a word, is internal revolution. When this internal

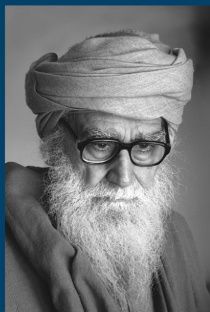


revolution is experienced by someone, his whole personality is transformed—his thinking, his speech, his behavior, his ambitions, his desires, his outlook on things, his criterion for accepting or rejecting something. All things in short, are colored by the hue of God.

After the acquisition of *maarifah* the personality of the believer manifests itself in different ways. One of these manifestations is in the form of worship. Divine commands relate to one of these manifestations. Such manifestations are essentially produced by internal change.

The role of commands is to define the right limits of these manifestations. The task of a reformer is to place the utmost emphasis on producing the inner spirit, that is *maarifah*. This is the natural method of reform. On the contrary, if only commands or laws are emphasized, this will amount to a shift of focus. With such a change, no desired result can be produced. In that case, by doing so, religion will become entirely based on laws, whereas religion should be based on *maarifah*.

Realization of God, *maarifah* is the essence of religion. God-realization is the spirit of Islam, it is the life of Islam. It makes one's Islam a living thing. The action done with God-realization is like a green tree, whereas any action without God-realization is like dried up wood. Islam begins with the discovery or realization, *maarifah* of the existence of God and the realization of one's relation with God. Another name for this discovery is faith, iman in God. Whenever one receives this kind of faith, it necessarily begins to express itself in his life. One's thinking, one's speech, one's behaviour, one's worship, everything is a reflection or an expression of this discovery. The truth is that one's level of God's realization equals one's Islam, and the level of one's conscious discovery equals the level of one's external action.



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1925-2021) was an Islamic scholar, spiritual leader and peace activist. Having founded *Centre for Peace and Spirituality International*, he was internationally recognized for his contributions to world peace. He authored over 200 books dealing with Islam's spiritual wisdom, the Prophet's non-violent approach, religion's relation with modernity and other contemporary issues. His English translation of the Quran is popular because its language is simple, contemporary and easily understandable.

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