

One hearing but many sights and hearts

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The Qur'an says that Almighty Allah as the Creator of man has bestowed on him the hearing, the sight and the heart. These senses, or faculties, are meant to make man knowledgeable, productive and responsible. With them, he is expected to understand himself, his physical surroundings and, with the guidance and help of the revelation, some of the most crucial metaphysical dimensions of the life reality in general.

These senses and their projected functions distinguish man, as the vicegerent on earth, from the rest of creation. They make him more relevant than others and his actions more impactful and more consequential. They also make him more accountable.

The Qur'an reminds: "And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing (*sam'*), the sight (*basar*) and the heart (*fu'ad*) - about all those (one) will be questioned" (al-Isra', 36).

Qalb, fu'ad and lubb

As a small digression, according to the Qur'anic vocabulary, there are two chief terms used for the heart: *qalb* and *fu'ad*.

The first is the general meaning of the heart. It is that biological organ upon whose proper corporeal and spiritual functioning a person's life depends. It is the essence and most important (inner) part of

something. It can also mean the mind ('*aql*) with which people reason. It is almost synonymous with it. The Qur'an points out that hearts are engaged in thinking processes, and can be conscious as well as blind (al-Hajj, 46).

Fu'ad, on the other hand, means the core of the heart (*qalb*), or the "heart" of the heart, so to speak. If *qalb* is the nucleus of the mind ('*aql*), *fu'ad* is the nucleus of *qalb*. It is more profound and more intense than *qalb*. It is the "burning side" of the latter. It is the place where the most significant emotions and the deepest forms of knowledge (enlightenment) take place and reside.

Fu'ad is the home of decision making. To it all processes lead, including the reasoning processes of both '*aql* and *qalb*, and those pertaining to the emotional fluctuations of *qalb*. *Fu'ad* is therefore often understood as ultimate human intelligence and consciousness.

That is why in the Hereafter, Hellfire will penetrate directly into the hearts (*af'idah*, plural of *fu'ad*) of evil-doers, on account of their *af'idah* being the focal points and repositories of all decisions (al-Humazah, 7). They were the prime causes of people's ranks and stations.

Also, the emotional dejection of Prophet Musa's (Moses') mother when she had to send her newly born Musa away, the Qur'an best describes in the following words: "And the heart (*fu'ad*) of Moses' mother became void and empty (of all thoughts and feelings except the thought of and feeling about Musa)" (al-Qasas, 10).

The hearts (*af'idah*) of the criminals on the Day of Judgment are likewise described as *hawa'* (air, nothing, void and empty from any useful thought, value and quality)" (Ibrahim, 43). If the mind can

undergo a corruption and bankruptcy of ideas, the heart too can undergo a corruption and bankruptcy of emotions. That connotes the nadir of one's ruin. If and when it happens, *fu'ad* is the arena of ordeals.

There is also the term *lubb*, which may remotely mean the heart as well. Nonetheless, *lubb* is more about the pure intellect as the highest and most discerning level of the mind and brain, than about the heart itself. It is about the highest consequence to which the union of the pure and properly functioning *qalb* and *fu'ad* eventually leads. The Qur'an mentions 16 times the concept of *ulul-albab* (people of understanding, or possessors of pure minds and intellects).

The hearing first, then the sight, and finally the heart

It is noteworthy that in the Qur'anic verse mentioned earlier (al-Isra', 36), the hearing is mentioned first. That is because the hearing is activated first in a human being. Before a child is able to see and think, it hears.

The hearing is the most important faculty. With a deaf person effective communication is extremely hard, which is not the case with the blind and even the dumb. Man is created to know and act. However, all that depends on the power and effectiveness of his hearing. Man is supposed to listen first and also most. The quality of his life depends on the quality of his listening and the quality of what and who is listened to.

Moreover, man is bidden to listen to the revealed guidance of his Creator most importantly, hence the hearing being mentioned first in the verse. The authority of Almighty Allah and His revealed knowledge is supreme. Only after that can man follow other modes of

knowledge acquisition, and only with the revealed knowledge on-board can other forms of useful knowledge be considered. The revelation is not only a form of knowledge, but also the Criterion for ascertaining other knowledge types.

The sight (*basar*) is mentioned after the hearing because, biologically, it is activated second. It is also a means by which a person establishes different and more direct contacts with the outside world. What he hears can now be better understood, systematically verified and further enhanced. A window of epistemological as well as ontological opportunities gets significantly wider thereby. A person gets empowered.

Finally, the heart (*fu'ad*) comes last, after the sight. That is so because discernible emotions and rational as well as consciousness-driven undertakings are the last things that mature in a person. However, such can happen only as a result of the functioning of the hearing and the sight. The quality and dynamism of the functioning of *fu'ad* is predicated on the quality and dynamism of the functioning of those two.

Here the word *fu'ad*, rather than *qalb*, is used for the heart because the seat of the final outcomes of human affections and of their cognizant along with premeditated actions, is intended thereby.

The hearing as a singular noun, the sight and the heart as plural ones

In the above mentioned verse (al-Isra', 36), each of the hearing, the sight and the heart is mentioned as a singular noun. The reason for this is that one's personal condition in this world and his personal accountability in the Hereafter are implied. It is man alone who is the

architect of his spiritual destiny, and he alone will be fully responsible for it. The singular form for the three senses indicates freedom, individuality and answerability. Everyone is unique in connection with those concerns.

However, when the Qur'an speaks about humankind as a whole, presenting a macro existential reality in the process, things are viewed differently.

The Qur'an says for example: "And Allah brought you out of the wombs of your mothers while you knew nothing, and gave you the hearing, the sight(s), and intelligence(s) (minds or hearts), so perhaps you would be thankful" (al-Nahl, 78).

The gist of this verse is repeated six times in six different contexts in the Qur'an. The emphasis is made in order to bring home the verses' critical message. However, in all of them a nuance is featured which tends to evade many students of the Qur'an. Even a great many translations are rendered inaccurate.

The hearing (*sam'*) is mentioned first and as a singular noun. That is so - and Allah knows best - because there is only one source of knowledge and truth, which is Almighty Allah. All other sources of knowledge are secondary, and they still belong to Him. Thus, there should be only one form of hearing and listening that is absolutely authoritative. That right belongs to nobody else but Allah and His Holy Words.

It is an Islamic tenet therefore to declare "We hear and we obey" whenever Allah's commands (knowledge) are communicated and "heard". As said before, this exclusive heavenly source is not merely to be listened to, but to be a point of reference as well. All other

secondary sources and authorities are to be regularly referred to it for the sake of their authentication and recognition.

Following the hearing, the sight and the heart are mentioned second and third respectively. They are mentioned as plural nouns, that is, sights (*absar*) and hearts or intelligences (*af'idah*).

That is the case because people naturally see different things in different aspects of the actual world. There are so many things to be seen differently. If hearing is knowing, then seeing is cautiously trusting (believing). It furthermore means validating. Interpretations of what is seen are also bound to be different, leading then to different stances and outlooks.

This is all normal, though, and constitutes a segment of existential moral laws. Allah the Creator of all said: "And if your Lord had willed, He could have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to dispute and differ. Except whom your Lord has given mercy, and for that He created them..." (Hud, 118-119).

Here legitimate disagreements in legitimate matters are implied, too. Jurisprudential and other *ijtihadi* (independent reasoning) differences are some of them. It is all too expected that certain dimensions of the single hearing will generate dissimilar implications when related to different life circumstances.

Tolerable differences in the domain of application (different sights and hearts, or intelligences) are inevitable. This should serve as a catalyst for developing a comprehensive code of ethics of disagreement. The lone hearing should work as an overseer of those differences in sights and hearts.

People are more easily fooled by optical (visual) illusions than by auditory (hearing) illusions. The anatomy of human hearing, or auditory system, is "extremely complex". It is "one of the human body's most complex and delicate sensory systems." While people can still "see" without vision, they cannot hear without hearing, or auditory perception.

The single hearing is like the single trunk and the common roots of a tree, while the multiple sights and hearts are like the multiple branches of the same tree. The branches can be trimmed, manipulated or removed altogether, if deemed inappropriate or malfunctioning, all in the interest of the health of the tree *en bloc*. But the roots and the trunk must always remain intact. They, in fact, comprise the tree. This is a principle of unity in diversity, i.e., the unity of fundamental sources and purposes, and the diversity of practical expressions and functions.

Inaccurate translations

The matter of the singularity of the hearing and the plurality of sights and hearts in the Qur'an is very important. More than a few vital issues depend on it. Nonetheless, due to its subtlety, not everyone pays close attention to it. Which is unfortunate, given the treasure of meanings entailed therein. As a result, when dealing with the six verses in question, scores of translations in different languages are rather imprecise, depriving the reader of a significant portion of knowledge.

For example, no major English translation of the Qur'an does justice to the verses. By and large, they are somewhat inconsistent throughout.

According to Sahih International, e.g., in *surah al-Nahl*, verse 78, all three senses are rendered in the singular form: "He made for you hearing and vision and intellect." Khattab and Malik in their respective translations follow suit. Most other translations (Pickthall, Asad, Yusuf Ali, Shakir, Mohsin Khan and Arberry) render the first two (the hearing and the sight) in the singular form, and only the last one (hearts or intelligences or affections) in the plural form. Bosnian and Indonesian translations, generally, also translate all three as singular nouns.

As another example, in *surah al-Mulk*, verse 23, the same three senses are translated in Sahih International as follows "...and made for you hearing and vision and hearts." The difference is that *af'idah* are now "hearts" (plural), but in the earlier *surah*, they were "intellect" (singular). Only Khattab and Arberry are consistent. Most of other translators' inconsistencies revolve around translating *sam'* (singular) as either "hearing" or "ears", *absar* (plural) as "seeing", "sight" or "eyes", and *af'idah* (plural) as "hearts", "feeling and understanding" and "intellect".

The issue is straightforward. The three God-given senses are to be translated in the singular form only when they are mentioned as such in the original Arabic text. However, they are to be rendered in the plural form if they are mentioned as such in the original text. In addition, there should be an accompanying enlightening commentary as to why the subject is like that. As explained earlier, there is a reason why the singular and plural forms are employed differently.

In passing, ears and eyes are not the hearing and seeing respectively. They are merely the organs of the hearing and seeing, same way as the heart (*qalb*) is the organ, or agency" of *fu'ad*.

The Qur'an affirms: "And We have certainly created for Hell many of the jinn and mankind. They have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear. Those are like livestock; rather, they are more astray. It is they who are the heedless" (al-A'raf, 179).

The importance of Arabic

All things considered, this is just the tip of the iceberg. The example clearly demonstrates how invaluable knowing Arabic and studying the Qur'an contingent on that knowledge for Muslims are. It is impossible for a person to be an exemplary Muslim if his relationship with the Qur'an is not passionate, continuous and reciprocal (that the Qur'an is not read, understood, internalized and acted upon).

To do so successfully the adequate knowledge of Arabic plays a vital role. For that reason were most non-Arab Muslims during the golden age(s) of Islamic civilization bilingual. They might have been of Turkish, Persian or Indian origins, but Arabic was their second language. They needed it, for it was the language of their Islam, their Qur'an and their Prophet's Sunnah. It was as important to them as their native languages.

Understanding and practicing Islam without knowing Arabic - as much as possible of course - may become too one-dimensional, too formalist, too uninspiring, and too dull. The beauty and depth of the Islamic message may remain elusive forever.

The enemies of Islam knew this all too well. Thus, whenever they could, they worked tirelessly on disconnecting non-Arab Muslims from the sources of their strength and identity, that is, from Islam, the

Qur'an and Sunnah, by alienating them from Arabic as a means of Islamic spiritual, ethical, cultural and even intellectual communication.

Even the Arabs were targeted as fervently - and as successfully - by encouraging the use of their endless local dialects, and by aggressively promoting the languages of their colonial masters. All this happened in the name of rebirth, modernity, cultural transformation and progress. As outlandish as it may seem, in some instances many Arabs became as estranged from the pure Arabic language as their non-Arab counterparts.

The desired results are obvious. Instead of understanding and studying in-depth the Qur'an with the aim of implementing it in the spheres of various life systems, most of today's especially non-Arab Muslims spend their whole life learning no more than the Arabic alphabet. They want to be able at least to read the Qur'an as it was revealed.

They are so obsessed about the matter, and to all that seems such a big deal, that rarely anybody raises the subjects of properly understanding the Qur'an and implementing it completely. Muslims are so handicapped that just knowing how to read the Qur'an, mechanically and superficially though, is deemed a success. The prospects of genuine knowledge and application remain farfetched. The same condition, however, during some earlier times would have been regarded as a serious spiritual weakness and a grim intellectual failing.

Undeniably, there is no future for Muslims without Islam, and no Islam as a complete cultural and civilizational force without pure Arabic. Muslims ought to become again bilingual, and if possible even trilingual, bearing in mind that this is the age of globalization whose soul is knowledge and information. That is the only way forward, and is the

only formula for truly leading the way. If only people in power would listen.