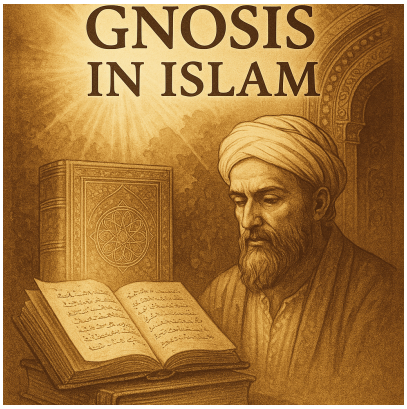

Gnosis in Islam: Philosophy, Theology, and Sufism in the Search for Ma‘rifah

Description

Introduction

The study of gnosis (*ma‘rifah*) in Islam has long stood at the intersection of philosophy, theology, and Sufism. Unlike ordinary forms of knowledge (*‘ilm*), *ma‘rifah* points to a direct and intuitive recognition of the Divine, an unveiling that transforms both mind and soul. This essay continues the intellectual journey initiated in *Wahdatul Wujud* (2013), expanding upon notes that could not be included in the earlier book. Here, the exploration deepens by tracing the epistemological paths—*‘irfani*, *burhani*, and *bayani*—while situating them within the broader intellectual history of both East and West.

At its core, gnosiology asks a fundamental question: what does it mean to know when knowledge is not merely discursive, but experiential? The classical Islamic tradition insists that the pursuit of knowledge cannot be separated from the pursuit of God. From the Qur’anic command to reflect on the signs (*?y?t*) in the self and the cosmos, to the teachings of the Sufi masters, knowledge emerges as a holistic process uniting intellect, revelation, and inner illumination.

This essay argues that *ma‘rifah* is the crown of Islamic sciences, the highest form of knowledge that integrates philosophy, theology, and spirituality into a unified vision. By examining figures such as Dh? ’n-N?n al-Mi?r?, al-Ghazz?l?, and Ibn ‘Arab?, and by engaging modern interpreters like William Chittick and Annemarie Schimmel, the discussion reveals how gnosis continues to shape Islamic thought and human understanding.

The sections that follow will not only trace the historical development of gnosis but also highlight its relevance in contemporary times. From debates with Western philosophy to the challenges of modern secularism, *ma‘rifah* emerges as a vital corrective, restoring depth and purpose to human knowledge. It is in this continuity—between intellect and spirit, reason and revelation—that gnosiology finds its true place in the Islamic intellectual tradition.

The Three Epistemological Approaches: ‘Irfani, Burhani, and Bayani

The emergence of the term in this study is the dominance of the wealth of gnosiology studies which leads us to one question: what is science when the three areas of scientific epistemology are combined? As for what is meant by three areas, namely ‘irfani, burhani, and bayani. However, intellectual exploration in Western philosophy can not be separated from knowing God, the universe, and the mind (Stumpf and Fieser 2008). Lately, philosophy has even tried to enter a new world: the body and mind. The effort to understand these matters has occurred in the West and the East. However, the more we look back at the context of intellectual history, the stronger the spiritual impulses that affect the intelligent become. Therefore, philosophers try to become prophets or Sufis before producing thoughts that affect humanity today.

When we consider the interplay between *‘irfani* (intuitive or spiritual knowledge), *burhani* (rational and demonstrative knowledge), and *bayani* (textual or scriptural knowledge), it becomes clear that Islamic epistemology does not operate in isolation from spirituality. Rather, it functions within a holistic framework where divine revelation, human intellect, and spiritual intuition intersect. This triadic epistemological model has been extensively studied in Islamic scholarship as an attempt to reconcile reason with revelation, and revelation with mystical experience. Each mode complements the others, creating a layered understanding of reality that is both rationally grounded and spiritually elevating.

The relevance of this triadic model becomes especially apparent when juxtaposed with Western philosophical traditions. While the West often emphasizes rational demonstration (*logos*) and empirical observation, the Islamic tradition reminds us that knowledge is incomplete without *‘irfan*, the direct experiential knowledge of God. Thus, the dialogue between East and West on epistemology opens an opportunity: to see whether rationalist traditions can learn from mystical traditions, and vice versa. Such engagement helps us understand science not merely as an accumulation of data but as a quest for wisdom (*hikmah*) that integrates body, mind, and soul.

In Islamic intellectual history, the three epistemological approaches also guided the development of disciplines. The *bayani* model produced the richness of *fiqh* and jurisprudence, anchored in scriptural authority. The *burhani* model produced theology and philosophy, where rational arguments sought to prove divine attributes and universal truths. The *‘irfani* model produced Sufism and mysticism, where inner purification was seen as a condition for true knowledge. Together, these epistemologies produced the golden age of Islamic civilization, where scholars could be jurists, philosophers, and mystics at once.

Moreover, when examined against the backdrop of modern science, the triadic model raises an important question: has contemporary knowledge become too fragmented? The pursuit of specialization in modern academia often neglects integration, leading to a form of epistemological disconnection. The Islamic tradition, however, insists on unity: all knowledge, regardless of method, ultimately points back to the Divine. Thus, the epistemological triad is not merely a historical construct but a possible remedy for modern intellectual crises.

Philosophy's recent attempt to re-engage with the body and mind further illustrates this point. Contemporary debates in phenomenology, cognitive science, and neuroscience echo what Sufi scholars articulated centuries ago: that the human being is an integrated entity, and knowledge cannot be reduced to mere abstraction. The recognition of embodiment, affectivity, and consciousness within philosophy is a move closer to what *'irfani* epistemology has always emphasized—knowledge through lived, spiritual experience.

Finally, the desire of philosophers "to become prophets or Sufis" underscores the human yearning for transcendence. Philosophy, theology, and mysticism all converge at the point of asking ultimate questions: Who am I? Who is God? What is reality? In this convergence, the epistemological triad offers not only an answer but also a method: use *bayani* to ground in revelation, *burhani* to refine through reason, and *'irfani* to experience through the heart. This holistic framework thus becomes a bridge between intellectual pursuit and spiritual realization, between science and gnosis.

The Quest for Gnosis (*Ma'rifah*) in Islamic Mysticism

One of these efforts, as stated above, is to seek a scientific foundation to know God. This is where the term gnosis comes in. In Arabic, it is known as ma'rifah. Scholars who study the spiritual world or Islamic mysticism often encounter this term. For example, after a person is in the syar?'ah, he enters the haq?qat (truth) area and finally to the ma'r?fah destination. As for the latter, Annemarie Schimmel's (1975, 43) explanation is as follows: "According to the tradition, Dh?'n-N?n formulated for the first time a theory of ma'r?fa, intuitive knowledge of God, or gnosis, as opposed to 'ilm, discursive learning, and knowledge; many sayings about "love" and "intimacy."

The concept of *ma'rifah* in Islamic intellectual history is not merely a technical term but the pinnacle of spiritual realization. Whereas *'ilm* signifies discursive, structured, and often externalized knowledge, *ma'rifah* points to an inner unveiling, a state of direct awareness of the Divine. In this sense, Sufism distinguishes between knowing *about* God through books and doctrines, and truly *knowing* God through experiential encounter. As Schimmel (1975) notes, *ma'rifah* was never meant to displace 'ilm, but rather to complement it by adding depth to human understanding of the sacred.

The stages outlined—*shar?'ah*, *haq?qah*, and *ma'rifah*—illustrate a spiritual pedagogy where outward practice serves as the foundation for inner truth. *Shar?'ah* disciplines the body and social life; *haq?qah* reveals metaphysical truths beyond appearances; and *ma'rifah* opens the heart to the ultimate intimacy with God. Scholars such as al-Ghaz?l? and Ibn 'Arab? later elaborated on these stages, suggesting that spiritual maturity is measured not by the amount of information one collects, but by the degree of divine intimacy one attains.

What makes *ma'rifah* fascinating is its dual role: it is both the goal and the method of mystical knowledge. To pursue *ma'rifah* is already to engage in practices—remembrance (*dhikr*), contemplation (*tafakkur*), ascetic discipline (*zuhd*)—that embody its reality. This is why early Sufi masters insisted that knowledge of God cannot be obtained in libraries alone but must be lived through acts of devotion. Here, gnosis is not a theory but a lived reality, a process of transformation that reshapes the seeker into an *'?rif*, or knower of God (Ernst 1997).

Comparisons with other mystical traditions highlight the universality of this pursuit. In Christian mysticism, figures such as Meister Eckhart spoke of *unio mystica*—a state strikingly parallel to *ma'rifah*. In Hindu philosophy, the concept of *jnana* represents liberating knowledge that transcends the intellect. By situating *ma'rifah* within this broader landscape of world mysticism, one recognizes that Islam participates in a universal human quest for direct divine encounter, while at the same time offering its uniquely Qur'anic and Prophetic path.

In modern contexts, *ma'rifah* challenges the reduction of knowledge to data or information. The contemporary obsession with measurable outputs often overlooks inner transformation. Yet, as thinkers such as William Chittick (2007) emphasize, knowledge in Islam is never value-neutral: its authenticity is judged by its ability to bring one closer to God. This criterion elevates *ma'rifah* above mere academic knowledge, reminding us that true understanding must unite mind and heart.

Therefore, the search for *ma'rifah* remains essential for Islamic thought today. It bridges the gap between intellectual inquiry and spiritual practice, between theology and devotion, between philosophy and worship. In this bridging lies the distinctive genius of Islamic civilization: knowledge is not an end in itself but a path to the Divine. Thus, the quest for gnosis embodies the essence of Islamic spirituality—knowledge that transforms, purifies, and ultimately unites the knower with the Known.

Dh?'n-N?n and the Early Development of Ma'rifah in Sufism

This expression implies that Dh?'n-N?n from Egypt (d.895) was the first scholar to define the concept of gnosis in Islam. 'The Sufi scholar lived during the time of B?yezid Bist?m? from Iran (d. 874), Yahya ibn Mu'?dh of Rayy (d. 871), and al-H?rith al-Mu??sib? from Iraq (857). In this era, it was stated that: "an outburst of creativity of Sufism, based on examination of internal spiritual states and extended speculation on moral, legal, and philosophical subjects (C. W. Ernst 1994, 5)." In other words, this era was an era where Sufis were at the main point of developing Islamic sciences. Or, spiritual events have contributed to the development of other sciences in Islamic history.

The figure of Dh?'n-N?n al-Mi?r? holds a pivotal place in the genealogy of Islamic mysticism. His articulation of *ma'rifah* provided an epistemological foundation that later Sufi thinkers built upon. Unlike theologians who sought certainty through dialectical reasoning, Dh?'n-N?n emphasized intuition and spiritual unveiling. His approach highlighted that the path to God is experiential, not merely argumentative. This perspective helped distinguish Sufism as a discipline in its own right within Islamic thought, while still remaining deeply connected to the Qur'an and Sunnah.

What is striking about the era of Dh?'n-N?n is its intellectual vibrancy. As Ernst (1994) notes, the ninth century represented a flourishing of Sufi creativity where spirituality was not divorced from philosophy or ethics. B?yezid Bist?m?'s ecstatic utterances (*shathiyat*), Yahya ibn Mu'?dh's theology of divine love, and al-Mu??sib?'s moral psychology all represent diverse yet interconnected attempts to articulate the lived reality of divine knowledge. Collectively, these scholars demonstrated that mysticism could inform not only religious devotion but also law, ethics, and metaphysics.

This period also coincided with the consolidation of Islamic sciences such as *hadith*, jurisprudence, and theology. Sufis of this generation were not isolated mystics but active participants in shaping the intellectual life of the *ummah*. Their focus on inner states (*ahwal*) and stations (*maqamat*) provided a

psychology of the soul that influenced disciplines ranging from Qur'anic exegesis to jurisprudential ethics. In this sense, the spiritual contributed directly to the rational and the legal, creating a holistic framework of Islamic knowledge.

Dh?'n-N?n's articulation of *ma'rifah* also anticipated debates that continue into modern times: how do we validate knowledge that comes from intuition or mystical experience? While rationalists might dismiss such claims as subjective, Sufi tradition argued that spiritual discipline creates reliability. Just as a scientist trains in method to ensure accuracy, the mystic disciplines the soul to ensure authenticity of vision. In this way, Sufism defended *ma'rifah* as a rigorous and legitimate form of knowledge, even if its tools differed from logic or empiricism.

Furthermore, Dh?'n-N?n's thought shows how Sufism bridged cultural and intellectual worlds. Living in Egypt, he was influenced by both Islamic and Hellenistic traditions. His notion of divine knowledge resonates with Neoplatonic ideas of illumination while remaining firmly rooted in Qur'anic revelation. This hybridity exemplifies the creative adaptability of Islamic thought: it could engage foreign philosophies without losing its distinctive orientation toward God.

Ultimately, the legacy of Dh?'n-N?n demonstrates that the early Sufis were not merely pietists but intellectual pioneers. By situating gnosis at the center of the Islamic intellectual project, they expanded the horizons of what counted as knowledge. Their integration of spirituality into epistemology set the stage for later giants like al-Ghaz?l? and Ibn 'Arab?. In this light, the ninth century was not just a mystical flowering but a critical moment in the history of Islamic civilization where knowledge was redefined in profoundly spiritual terms.

Ma'rifah, 'Ilm, and the Intellectual-Spiritual Tradition

This explanation indicates that the study of gnosis is the study of the mystical sciences. Meanwhile, the connection of the term gnosis can also be seen from the description of Carl W. Ersnt (1997, 28): When mystical knowledge was emphasized over traditional learning, the preferred term was ma'rifa or 'irf?n, meaning a particular knowledge or gnosis that transcended ordinary rationality. The possessor of this knowledge was known as an 'arif, or gnostic. The often-used terms are ma'rifah, '?r?f, 'irf?n. The root word of the term's derivation is 'arafa ('-r-f). If the term ma'r?fah is connected with the thought of Dh?'n-N?n above, it appears that this term refers to intuitive knowledge about God. Sufi scholars often use the term ma'r?fah All?h (knowledge of Allah). In mystical studies, this ma'r?fah level applies after the syar?'ah and haq?q?t levels. However, in Islamic studies, the term 'irf?n has often been found in scientific epistemological studies. So, the study of gnosiology is the study of knowledge about how to know God.

The distinction between *'ilm* and *ma'rifah* has long been debated in Islamic scholarship. *'Ilm* typically denotes structured, discursive knowledge derived from study, logic, and definition. *Ma'rifah*, however, signifies direct perception of reality through spiritual unveiling. Ernst (1997) clarifies that when Islamic scholars elevated *ma'rifah* above *'ilm*, they were not rejecting the sciences but acknowledging a higher plane of truth. This hierarchy suggests that reason alone cannot capture the fullness of divine reality without the complement of intuitive gnosis.

At the same time, the terms *'irfan* and *'arif* add nuance to this discussion. An *'arif* is not simply a scholar but a knower who has internalized divine reality. The concept of *'irfan*—which in later Islamic thought

often refers to esoteric philosophy—represents a systematization of mystical knowledge. By tracing the root *‘arafa* (“to know”), we see that *ma‘rifah* is less about accumulation of data and more about recognition, acknowledgement, and intimacy with God. This recognition transforms the knower’s entire being, unlike *‘ilm*, which may remain confined to the intellect.

The ordering of *shar?‘ah*, *haq?qah*, and *ma‘rifah* also shows how Islamic knowledge is envisioned as a journey. First comes obedience to divine law, then realization of metaphysical truth, and finally intimacy with God. These are not mutually exclusive but layered experiences. A jurist (*faqih*) grounded in *shar?‘ah* may advance to deeper *haq?qah* through reflection, and then reach *ma‘rifah* through purification of the soul. In this sense, Islamic sciences are not separate silos but stages in a transformative path of knowledge.

This framework had profound implications for Islamic civilization. Theologians, philosophers, and mystics often intersected in their quests, even when their methods diverged. For example, al-Ghaz?l? in *Ihy?’ ‘Ul?m al-D?n* reconciled jurisprudence with mysticism, insisting that both are incomplete without each other. Similarly, Ibn ‘Arab? in *Fut?h?t al-Makkiyya* articulated a metaphysical system where knowledge of God permeates every aspect of existence. These examples show that the interplay between *‘ilm* and *ma‘rifah* was not a marginal debate but central to the intellectual-spiritual tradition of Islam.

In modern academic settings, the tendency is often to separate “science” from “spirituality.” Yet, the Islamic tradition refuses such a dichotomy. Knowledge of God (*ma‘rifah All?h*) was regarded as the highest science, the crown above all other branches. Without this orientation, sciences risk becoming mechanistic or ethically hollow. The insistence on *ma‘rifah* ensured that Islamic epistemology remained grounded in purpose—knowledge as a means of worship and nearness to God. Thus, mysticism was not anti-intellectual but rather a safeguard against sterile rationalism.

Ultimately, the study of gnosiology (*‘ilm al-ma‘rifah*) underscores the unity of Islamic thought. It reminds us that rational, textual, and mystical paths are not in competition but in conversation. Each illuminates a dimension of reality, but only together can they reflect the fullness of divine truth. The intellectual-spiritual tradition of Islam therefore offers an integrated model for humanity: seek knowledge with the mind, verify it with the text, but realize it in the heart.

Al-Ghazzali and the Interplay of Knowledge and Ma‘rifah

In some studies, this pattern of exploration is often referred to as ‘science of ma’rifah. However, these two terms both contain the same meaning, namely science. Nevertheless, this study wants to be close to Allah more than that.

In the Ihy? al-‘Ul?m al-D?n, Im?m al-Ghazzali tells how the impact of this Sufi science on the development of sciences in Islamic history. The keywords are cleanliness of the heart and asceticism, which has led several ‘ulama to reveal Islamic sciences. In other words, before they succeeded in writing and developing their knowledge in various fields, the’ ulama first cleansed the soul, strengthened the heart, and performed zuhud from the world. Therefore, this ma’rifah becomes a critical phase in the scientific tradition for the ‘ulama. It can also be said that those who become ‘ulama are principally Sufis or ‘Uraf?s. In this way, gnosiology becomes the highest science in understanding the

spiritual and intellectual aspects of the founders of knowledge in the history of Islamic civilization.

The contribution of al-Ghazz?l? to the relationship between *‘ilm* and *ma‘rifah* is difficult to overstate. Often called *Hujjat al-Islam* (the Proof of Islam), al-Ghazz?l? sought to reconcile theology, philosophy, and Sufism within a unified framework. In his monumental *Ihy?’ ‘Ul?m al-D?n*, he argued that the sciences of the heart are as essential as the sciences of law. The purity of intention, sincerity, and ascetic discipline form the soil in which true knowledge grows. Without such preparation, even the most brilliant scholarship risks becoming sterile or corrupted by ego.

This emphasis on purification highlights the epistemological foundation of Sufism. Knowledge in Islam is not only cognitive but moral and spiritual. A scholar’s credibility is not simply measured by the number of books written or lectures delivered, but by the degree of transformation reflected in their character. Al-Ghazz?l?’s critique of philosophers in *Tah?fut al-Fal?sifa* was not a wholesale rejection of reason but a warning that without spiritual orientation, rationalism leads to arrogance and error. Thus, he restored balance by re-centering knowledge on God and the soul.

Moreover, al-Ghazz?l? illustrates how the sciences of the heart directly impacted the development of other Islamic sciences. Jurisprudence, for example, is elevated when the jurist approaches it with humility and devotion. Theology becomes more than argumentation when infused with spiritual awareness. Even philosophy, in Ghazz?l?’s framework, becomes a pathway to God when stripped of arrogance and grounded in revelation. In this sense, *ma‘rifah* is not an alternative to science but its completion, ensuring that every discipline serves divine purpose.

One of the enduring lessons of al-Ghazz?l? is his insistence on *zuhd* (detachment) as a precondition for knowledge. By detaching from worldly distractions, the seeker frees the heart to receive divine illumination. This principle resonates with the Qur’anic portrayal of knowledge as *n?r* (light) granted by God. Unlike information that can be memorized or transmitted mechanically, this light transforms the knower, producing wisdom (*hikmah*) that radiates to others. Thus, the sciences of Islam are not just intellectual constructs but spiritual legacies sustained by generations of purified souls.

It is for this reason that many ‘ulama throughout history were simultaneously scholars and Sufis. The integration of law, theology, and mysticism was not accidental but intrinsic to Islamic civilization. The likes of Jal?l al-D?n R?m?, Fakhr al-D?n al-R?z?, and Ibn Khald?n all bore traces of this synthesis, even when their primary fields differed. Their intellectual creativity was nurtured by the conviction that true knowledge requires alignment of mind, heart, and spirit.

Therefore, gnosiology, in the Ghazz?lian vision, is not an esoteric pursuit limited to a spiritual elite. It is the highest science because it safeguards the purpose of all other sciences: to know and serve God. Without *ma‘rifah*, knowledge risks fragmentation and misuse. With it, knowledge becomes worship, and scholarship becomes a form of spiritual service. This synthesis between knowledge and *ma‘rifah* remains one of the most powerful legacies of al-Ghazz?l? for both Islamic thought and global philosophy.

Chittick’s Explanation of Self-Knowledge and God-Knowledge

Meanwhile, Hamid Fahmi Zarkasyi’s (2010) study of the concept of knowledge in al-Ghazzali found that

this ‘ulama did not distinguish between the concepts of ‘ilm and ma’rifah. ‘Science is understood as “cognition (ma’r?fah) of a thing as it is.” Ma’rifah is defined as “knowledge (‘ilm) about individual things which is attained by definition (p.164).” These two definitions differ in the concepts of “something” and “as is” and “as defined.” Here ‘ilm works on one “thing,” while ma’rifah on several “things,” which can then be explained.

Here are examples are given: ‘ Ilm al-muk?shafah, ‘ilm al-Il?h?, ‘ilm al-ladunniy (Sa’ari 2007), which are part of ma’rifah. Some even mention it as “logical reasoning will not understand, for this sort of knowledge is solely dependent on divine intuition (al-kasfh al-il?hi); it is by that alone that one will know the roots of the forms of the world, in so far as they are receptive towards their ruling spirit (Arabi, 2001: 14.” In other words, ma’r?fah has a higher position than ‘ilm. It can even be said that the pinnacle of ‘ilm itself is to pursue ma’r?fah al-L?h. The distinction between ma’r?fah and ‘ilm, Chittick explains from the Prophet’s hadith about “who knows himself, then indeed he has known his Lord.” Here the word used is ‘arafa, not ‘ilm. Chittick (2007:21) explains as follows:

The saying does not employ the usual word for knowledge, ‘ilm, which often carries the connotation of learning or erudition without true understanding. Rather, it uses the verbal form of the noun ma‘rifa, which is often translated as “gnosis.” This word implies a direct experience and recognition of its true nature and the actual situation. The “gnostic” are those who achieve this sort of knowledge – direct, unmediated knowledge of self and God. Thus “gnosis,” the right translation, means simultaneous self-recognition and God-recognition.

The subtle distinction made here between *‘ilm* and *ma‘rifah* points to a profound epistemological hierarchy in Islamic thought. While *‘ilm* may stop at categorization and definition, *ma‘rifah* penetrates to the essence of things. Zarkasyi’s interpretation of al-Ghazz?l? reminds us that even the most rational definitions remain incomplete without divine illumination. The human intellect grasps the outlines of reality, but *ma‘rifah* enters its heart. This is why Sufis repeatedly emphasized that the goal of scholarship is not the production of texts, but the transformation of the self into a mirror of divine truth.

The examples of *‘ilm al-muk?shafah* (science of unveiling), *‘ilm al-ladunn?* (knowledge given directly by God), and *‘ilm al-Il?h?* (divine science) underscore the plurality of epistemologies within Islam. Ibn ‘Arab ?, for instance, taught that the highest truths are not accessible to rational deduction but only through divine disclosure (*kashf*). His assertion that only intuition rooted in purification can perceive “the ruling spirit” of existence (Arabi 2001) demonstrates the radical orientation of Sufi gnosiology: it privileges experiential reality over abstract speculation. This does not nullify reason but situates it within a higher framework where its limits are acknowledged.

Chittick’s commentary on the famous hadith—“He who knows himself knows his Lord”—is especially significant. The choice of the word *‘arafa* (to know intimately) rather than *‘alima* (to know factually) indicates that self-knowledge is inseparable from God-knowledge. To truly know oneself is to encounter the divine imprint within one’s being, the *fitrah* that testifies to God’s unity. This form of recognition cannot be achieved through external study alone but through inner reflection, ethical refinement, and spiritual discipline. Thus, gnosis is self-discovery and God-discovery simultaneously.

The distinction also highlights a critique of mere intellectualism. Chittick (2007) explains that *‘ilm* can degenerate into erudition without understanding, knowledge without transformation. This condition is not unique to Islam; it reflects a universal human tendency to substitute accumulation of facts for true wisdom. Gnosis, by contrast, involves direct recognition of reality as it is, unmediated by conceptual

veils. In this sense, it resonates with mystical traditions across cultures, where the highest knowledge is always described as experiential rather than theoretical.

From an educational perspective, this relationship between *‘ilm* and *ma‘rifah* suggests that Islamic pedagogy was never intended to be purely rationalist. The madrasa system, the khanqah (Sufi lodge), and scholarly circles were all designed to integrate intellectual learning with spiritual formation. This integration ensured that scholars were not only repositories of information but also exemplars of moral and spiritual refinement. It is this model that gave rise to the great *‘ulama* of the Islamic tradition, whose words still resonate today because they were spoken from hearts illuminated by *ma‘rifah*.

Finally, the synthesis of Chittick, Zarkasyi, Ibn ‘Arab?, and al-Ghazz?l? illustrates the centrality of gnosis in Islamic epistemology. Knowledge of God is not merely one discipline among others but the culmination of all disciplines. Philosophy, theology, and law may provide structure, but *ma‘rifah* provides meaning. Without it, knowledge risks becoming hollow; with it, knowledge becomes a path to transcendence. Thus, the hadith about self-knowledge remains an enduring reminder that the pursuit of truth begins within, where the human soul encounters the divine.

Western Philosophy and the Concept of the One in Plotinus

In philosophy, the product of thought, as stated above, seeks to know God, which includes a study that seeks to explain God through the power of reason (‘aql), mind, and clarity of human relations with the universe (verse kawniyyah). However, philosophers do not mention this searching pattern about God as part of the ma’r?fah al-L?h process. In religious studies, the names of God appear with various names and numbers (Syahrastani 2006) (Bouquet 1956) (Amstrong 2009) (Armstrong 1994). In Islamic studies, the ma’rifah al-L?h pattern intensifies after entering the Sufi area. Uniquely, almost all of the ‘ulama who produce ideas still being studied to this day are those who managed to enter the ma’r?fah al-L?h area. In other words, the ‘ulama themselves only produce authentic thoughts after they know Allah SWT.

The Greek philosophers did not start their study of God, starting from understanding the installation of the name of Allah into their minds and souls. In other words, they do not try to study Allah as part of the continuity of studies on shari’ah and haq?q?t. One of the philosophers from Egypt, Plotinus (204 AD), has the concept of God as the One (God Almighty). This is a summary of the thoughts of Platinus, a student of Ammonius Saccas in Alexandria:

The true changeless is God, about whom nothing specifically descriptive can be said except that he transcends or lies beyond everything in the world. For this reason, God is not material, is not finite, and is not visible. He has no specific forms – either as matter, soul, or mind – each of which changes any ideas or ideas of the intellect and, for this reason, cannot be expressed in any human language. He is accessible to none of the senses and can only be reached in a mystical ecstasy independent of any rational or feeling experience. For this reason, Plotinus spoke of God as the One, signifying thereby that is God there no complexity and that, indeed, God is Absolute Unity. The One represents, moreover, that God does not change. He is indivisible, has no variety, is uncreated, and is in every way unalterable (Stumpf and Fieser 2008, 108-109).

Plotinus’ formulation of the *One* in his *Enneads* represents one of the highest points of Neoplatonic philosophy. His conception of God as ineffable, beyond language and rational categories, bears striking

resemblance to mystical traditions, including those later articulated in Islamic Sufism. Yet, while Plotinus reached the idea of the *One* through philosophical reasoning and mystical ecstasy, the Sufi path situates the same reality within a framework of revelation, prophecy, and spiritual discipline. The overlap demonstrates that human thought, even outside revelation, gravitates toward the affirmation of a transcendent Unity.

The contrast, however, lies in the methodology. Greek philosophy operated through metaphysical speculation, striving to climb the ladder of abstraction until it reached the ineffable. Islamic Sufism, by contrast, begins with revelation and cultivates direct experience of God through purification of the soul. Both traditions describe ecstasy and transcendence, but the Sufi calls it *ma'rifah*, a gift from God that follows obedience and love. In this sense, Plotinus provides a philosophical analogue to mystical knowledge, but without the prophetic and scriptural anchoring of Islam.

The presence of Egyptian intellectuals like Plotinus also shows that the Mediterranean world was a shared space of philosophical and mystical inquiry. Alexandria, his intellectual home, was a melting pot of Greek, Egyptian, Jewish, and early Christian ideas. This pluralistic environment fostered debates about the nature of God, soul, and cosmos. When Islam later emerged in the same geographical region, it encountered and engaged with these legacies, integrating aspects of Hellenistic thought into its own theological and mystical frameworks. Thus, Plotinus can be seen as part of the pre-history of Islamic intellectual engagement.

In Islamic thought, especially in Ibn 'Arab?'s doctrine of *wahdat al-wuj?d* (Unity of Being), parallels with Neoplatonic ideas become visible. Ibn 'Arab?, however, grounds his vision firmly in Qur'anic revelation, distinguishing his metaphysics from the purely rational approach of Plotinus. Still, the resonance between the *One* and *al-A?ad* of the Qur'an cannot be ignored. This is why scholars such as Henry Corbin (1969) highlight the dialogue between Greek metaphysics and Islamic gnosiology, while cautioning against simplistic identifications. The philosophical pursuit of unity and the Sufi pursuit of divine intimacy meet at the level of spiritual aspiration, even if their languages differ.

For Muslims, as you noted, the theological affirmation of divine unity (*taw??d*) is already embedded in revelation, particularly in Surah al-Ikhl??. The long path Plotinus took to conclude God's indivisibility and changelessness is thus already revealed in the simplest Qur'anic verses. This does not diminish the achievement of Plotinus, but rather underscores the grace of revelation: what took philosophers centuries to speculate upon, revelation delivered directly to prophets. Here lies the fundamental difference between *falsafah* and *ma'rifah*: one ascends laboriously by intellect, the other descends mercifully through divine disclosure.

Ultimately, the engagement with Plotinus reminds us that human beings across civilizations are drawn to the search for unity. The *One* of Neoplatonism and the *Allah* of Islam point to the same metaphysical reality, though accessed by different means. For Islamic scholars, this comparison is not merely academic; it demonstrates that truth, when sought sincerely, converges toward the Divine. Yet, it also warns that without revelation, philosophical knowledge risks abstraction without guidance. The Sufi insistence on *ma'rifah* ensures that the encounter with the One is not merely intellectual but transformative, shaping the soul into a vessel of divine light.

Philosophers, Theologians, and Sufis in Pursuit of God

For Muslims, the views above will not have a substantial effect because theologically, adherents of the religions of the Prophet Ibrahim (Jews, Christians, and Islam) will admit that Allah is One and Only. The above statement can be found at all correlation in Surah al-Ikhl?s. However, why did the philosophers go to great lengths to reach that conclusion? Their rationale for deity? So, it is almost certain that almost all forms of science try to understand God. However, the method taken may be from various scientific viewpoints. In the Islamic tradition, nearly all theologians, philosophers, and fuqaha are experts in explaining how to know Allah.

It is just that sometimes the question of ma'rifah is often discussed in the study of Sufism. So those who already know and know Allah tend to be known as al-'?rif bi al-L?h or al-faq?r. These two terms indicate that people who have reached the degree of ma'r?fah tend to make themselves poor people. This term shows the breadth of knowledge about knowing Allah, but he still thinks that his position is still not rich. When he falls in front of Allah, he believes he does not exist and considers himself very lowly. So that what he wants from his poverty is the pleasure of Allah. Here the knowledge that comes out of the person is because of Allah. The blessing of ma'rifah means that a person gains knowledge directly from Allah, without sometimes studying it. Because the outpouring of knowledge is so strong, the jars of knowledge are occasionally unable to withstand the power of knowledge, so learning is like a flood that flows everywhere, like water. This condition shows that science directed at ma'rifah, in principle, leads to the problem of the nature of science itself. Then back again, after "meeting" (*al-kasfh al-il?hi*) with Allah as the caliph of Allah on earth.

The tension between philosophical reasoning and revealed certainty lies at the heart of the Abrahamic intellectual legacy. For Jews, Christians, and Muslims, the doctrine of divine unity is an article of faith revealed through prophets, not an abstract conclusion of metaphysics. The Qur'an affirms this most concisely in *Surah al-Ikhl??*: "Say: He is Allah, One." For Muslims, therefore, the elaborate rational proofs of philosophers often appear as a detour toward a truth already accessible through revelation. Yet, these rational endeavors nonetheless reflect the universal human longing to comprehend the Divine through intellect.

In the Islamic world, theologians (*mutakallim?n*) such as al-Ash'ar? and al-M?tur?d? developed sophisticated arguments to defend divine unity against heretical claims. Philosophers (*fal?sifah*), from al-Kind? to Ibn S?n?, employed Aristotelian and Neoplatonic frameworks to explain God as Necessary Being (*w?jib al-wuj?d*). Meanwhile, Sufis emphasized direct experience, insisting that ultimate certainty arises only from *ma'rifah*. Though differing in method, all these currents shared the same goal: to affirm and deepen the knowledge of God. This plurality of approaches enriched Islamic intellectual life rather than undermined it.

The titles *al-'?rif bi'Ll?h* (the knower of God) and *al-faq?r* (the poor one) highlight the humility of the gnostic. Attaining *ma'rifah* did not lead to pride but to recognition of one's utter dependence on the Divine. The Sufi concept of *faqr* (poverty) is not material deprivation but spiritual detachment, a realization that all existence belongs to God alone. As al-Qushayr? notes in his *Ris?la*, the true *faq?r* considers himself nothing before God, even when granted immense knowledge. This humility differentiates gnostic knowledge from the self-satisfaction of purely intellectual learning.

The metaphor of overflowing vessels captures the experiential nature of *ma'rifah*. Knowledge gained directly from God through *kashf* (unveiling) is so abundant that the human intellect can scarcely contain

it. Hence, the sayings of mystics often appear paradoxical or ecstatic, reflecting their struggle to express infinite realities in finite words. Al-Hall?j's famous declaration, "Ana al-?aqq" ("I am the Truth"), is one example: not a claim of divinity, but an overflow of divine presence overwhelming human speech. Such expressions testify to the intensity of gnostic knowledge, which transcends rational categories.

This emphasis on humility and poverty also illustrates the ethical dimensions of *ma'rifah*. Knowledge without moral transformation is incomplete. The Sufi gnostic manifests his knowledge not in argumentation but in service, compassion, and devotion. In this way, *ma'rifah* integrates epistemology with ethics, ensuring that the pursuit of God is inseparable from the pursuit of virtue. The theologian may defend doctrine, the philosopher may refine arguments, but the Sufi embodies divine knowledge through character.

Ultimately, the convergence of philosophers, theologians, and Sufis reveals the richness of Islamic approaches to God. Each path—rational demonstration, scriptural exegesis, and mystical unveiling—illuminates aspects of the Divine, though none exhausts it. Together, they point to a fundamental truth: that knowledge of God is inexhaustible, always expanding as the seeker draws nearer. In this convergence lies the genius of Islamic civilization, which refused to limit knowledge to one mode but embraced the multiplicity of paths leading to the One.

Modern Philosophy and the Challenge to Divine Knowledge

Humans in the modern era are increasingly trying not to understand the existence of God as the owner of this universe. For religious people, this problem is, of course, rare because those who seek to understand God tend to lead to their position as mystics eventually. Karen Armstrong notes that in the 19th century AD, philosophers or scientists, Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud, maintain that philosophical and scientific interpretations that there is no place for God." It appears that, if at the beginning of human life, they tried to use reason to understand God, then in the final era of human life, scientists even wanted to use logic to "kill" God. It is even stated that "Indeed, by the end of the century, a significant number of people were beginning to feel that if God was not yet dead, it was the duty of rational, emancipated human beings to kill him (Armstrong 1994, 346).

The modern era marks a dramatic shift in the intellectual landscape, particularly in the West, where the Enlightenment paved the way for secular rationalism. Whereas earlier thinkers like Descartes or Leibniz still integrated God into their philosophical systems, later figures such as Feuerbach and Marx regarded religion as a projection of human needs or as an instrument of oppression. Darwin introduced a naturalistic account of creation that appeared to challenge religious cosmologies, while Nietzsche's infamous proclamation of the "death of God" symbolized the cultural triumph of secularism. These currents collectively signaled an epistemological divorce between philosophy and theology.

Karen Armstrong (1994) captures the gravity of this transformation: what began as a quest to rationalize belief ended as an attempt to eliminate it. Freud's psychoanalytic theory further pathologized religion, treating it as an illusion born of human weakness. This modern intellectual rebellion was not merely a critique of specific dogmas but a systematic rejection of the very premise of transcendence. In this context, the pursuit of *ma'rifah* became marginalized, regarded as subjective or irrational in a culture that idolized empirical proof.

Yet, this rejection of God created its own crises. Nietzsche himself foresaw that the “death of God” would plunge humanity into nihilism, a void where values lose coherence. The attempt to construct meaning without transcendence has haunted modernity, evident in the existential despair described by Sartre or Camus. In contrast, religious traditions maintain that true meaning cannot be fabricated but must be received from the Divine. Here, Islamic gnosiology offers a corrective: by reintegrating knowledge of God, it restores orientation and purpose to human existence.

Interestingly, even within modern philosophy and science, cracks began to appear in the secular narrative. Thinkers like William James in psychology, or later phenomenologists such as Husserl and Heidegger, reintroduced the importance of subjective experience and transcendence. Contemporary physics, grappling with quantum indeterminacy and cosmological mysteries, inadvertently reopens questions of metaphysics that science once hoped to close. These developments suggest that the human quest for ultimate meaning cannot be permanently silenced.

For religious communities, especially in Islam, the modern challenge is twofold: to defend the intellectual credibility of faith in the face of secular critique, and to recover the depth of *ma‘rifah* as a lived experience. Muslim intellectuals such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr have argued that modern science must be re-sacralized, reintegrated into a worldview that acknowledges God as the source of all knowledge. This is not a call to reject science but to place it within a hierarchy where empirical inquiry is guided by spiritual wisdom.

Thus, while modern philosophy often positioned itself as an adversary to religion, it unintentionally highlighted the indispensability of transcendence. The inability of secular systems to provide lasting meaning underscores the necessity of *ma‘rifah*. Far from being obsolete, gnosis remains the antidote to modern alienation. It offers not only intellectual coherence but also existential fulfillment, anchoring humanity in a reality greater than itself. In this way, the modern “challenge” to divine knowledge becomes an opportunity to reassert its relevance in a fragmented world.

Homo Religiosus and the Human Search for the Divine

William C. Chittick explained that to be human … is to be a divine form. To be a religious form is to be divine self-expression within which every name of God – every real quality found in the cosmos, every attribute of the Real (al-Haqq)” (Chittick 2007, 20). Elsewhere, Karen Armstrong (1994:ixi) writes: “…study of the history of religion has revealed that human beings are spiritual animals. Indeed, there is a case for arguing that Homo sapiens is also Homo religious. Men and women started to worship gods as soon as they became recognizably human; they created religions at the same time as they created works of art.” These two statements imply that human activity leads to divine form and Homo religious. Therefore, the levels of understanding, starting from self-knowledge (self), nature (cosmos), and spirit (spirit), is an effort to strengthen humans not as animals but as divine forms (sacred forms). In Islamic tradition, it is known as fitrah. If there is human activity on the contrary, then the human is not human and does not show self-expression, which leads to al-Haqq.

The notion of *Homo religiosus* captures the universality of religious consciousness as a defining trait of humanity. As Armstrong notes, religion and art emerged simultaneously, both serving as vehicles of transcendence and symbolic expression. This suggests that spirituality is not an optional add-on but a

constitutive dimension of human existence. Chittick's assertion that humanity is a divine form reinforces this: to be human is to embody the attributes of God in microcosm. Thus, self-knowledge and God-knowledge converge in the realization that the human being reflects the cosmos and the Divine.

In Islamic thought, this truth is encapsulated in the doctrine of *fitrah*—the innate disposition toward God. The Qur'an (30:30) declares that God created mankind upon His primordial pattern. When humans act in harmony with their *fitrah*, they live as reflections of the Divine names. When they act contrary to it, they distort their humanity and fall into animality. Therefore, to be fully human is to be aligned with God, to actualize the divine form inscribed in one's being. Sufism calls this alignment *ma'rifah*, achieved through purification and remembrance.

The tripartite levels of understanding—self, cosmos, and spirit—mirror the Qur'anic emphasis on *?y?t* (signs). The self (*anfus*), the horizons of nature (*?f?q*), and the spirit (*r??*) all testify to God's presence (Qur'an 41:53). By studying oneself, reflecting on the universe, and attuning to the spirit, one encounters layers of divine reality. This is why Sufi masters often said that the entire cosmos is a book of signs waiting to be read by the seeker. Knowledge of God thus unfolds not only in sacred texts but also in the fabric of creation and the depths of the soul.

The category of *Homo religiosus* also challenges secular anthropology, which tends to reduce religion to social function or psychological projection. Mircea Eliade argued that even in the most secularized societies, the sacred persists in disguised forms. Rituals, symbols, and myths continue to structure human life because they respond to an irreducible need for transcendence. Islam affirms this by describing humanity as God's vicegerent (*khal?fah*) on earth, entrusted with reflecting divine qualities through stewardship, justice, and worship.

From this perspective, the denial of God is not neutrality but a distortion of human nature. If to be human is to be religious, then secularism represents not liberation but alienation. The human self cannot thrive without orientation toward the Divine, just as a plant cannot flourish without sunlight. This is why modern nihilism often produces despair and why spiritual revival movements continuously reemerge across history. The innate impulse toward transcendence resists suppression because it is woven into the very fabric of being human.

Ultimately, the recognition of humanity as *Homo religiosus* situates gnosiology within a broader anthropology. To study gnosis is to study what it means to be human in the fullest sense. Religion, philosophy, and art converge in this quest for divine form. By cultivating self-knowledge, reflecting on the cosmos, and awakening the spirit, humans transcend mere animal existence and fulfill their destiny as sacred forms. In Islamic terms, this destiny is to embody *fitrah*, to reflect *al-Asm?' al-?usn?* (the Beautiful Names of God), and to live as witnesses to the Real (*al-?aqq*).

Arrows of Gnosis: God, Macrocosmos, and Microcosmos

It can be stated that the study of gnosis is the center of all human scientific activities. The point is that the study of gnosiology is how to know, feel, and inform the experience of divinity in this universe (cosmos). The explanation above also shows that the scope is about divinity and how the human soul (nafs) can be recognized by humans themselves, known as self-awareness, self-expression, or knowing self. Likewise, the activity of gnosis is above the action of 'ilm,' which is as understood as

knowledge or science. Here the orientation of learning in humans directs there are several arrows. The first arc tries to enter the realm of God. The second arc tries to enter the universe (world of macro-cosmos). The third arc strives for nature within humans (world of micro-cosmos).

This triadic vision of knowledge highlights the integrative scope of gnosiology. The arrow toward God (*al-?aqq*) directs the human intellect and spirit toward the transcendent source of all being. The arrow toward the macrocosmos directs inquiry into the natural order, the vast signs (*?y?t*) spread across the heavens and earth. Finally, the arrow toward the microcosmos draws attention inward, to the depths of the self, which the Qur'an describes as a universe in miniature. Together, these three orientations prevent knowledge from becoming one-dimensional, ensuring that human inquiry remains balanced between transcendence, world, and self.

The arrow toward God is perhaps the most central, since it anchors the others in a transcendent reality. Without orientation toward God, the study of nature risks becoming materialist, and the study of self risks becoming narcissistic. Gnosis reminds the seeker that both cosmos and self are signs pointing back to their Creator. The Qur'an frequently couples reflection on creation with remembrance of God, teaching that the heavens and earth exist as mirrors of divine unity. Thus, the pursuit of science and psychology, in their deepest sense, are forms of theology when guided by *ma'rifah*.

The arrow toward the macrocosmos situates knowledge within the vastness of creation. Classical Muslim scientists such as al-B?r?n? or Ibn al-Haytham pursued astronomy and physics with the conviction that the cosmos reveals divine wisdom. Their inquiries were not merely technical but devotional, seeking to uncover the order that reflects God's attributes of wisdom (*?ikmah*), power (*qudrah*), and knowledge (*'ilm*). In modern times, cosmology and biology can likewise be reintegrated into this vision, so that empirical discoveries become part of a spiritual journey rather than detached data.

The arrow toward the microcosmos emphasizes self-awareness. Sufi teachings frequently remind seekers that "He who knows himself knows his Lord." The human being, as microcosm, contains within himself reflections of the entire cosmos and divine names. Psychological states, moral struggles, and spiritual unveilings are not private phenomena but revelations of universal truths. The exploration of the soul (*nafs*), therefore, is inseparable from the exploration of God and creation. This inner arrow ensures that knowledge does not remain external but penetrates to the heart of the knower.

These three arrows also reflect a dynamic pedagogy. A seeker may begin with study of self, move outward to study of the cosmos, and finally ascend toward God. Others may be drawn directly toward God through revelation, then confirm this truth by reflecting on self and cosmos. The arrows are not rigid stages but interrelated trajectories that constantly inform one another. The balanced integration of all three reflects the holistic epistemology of Islam, which resists fragmentation and insists that truth is one, even if accessed through multiple doors.

Ultimately, the arrows of gnosis remind us that all paths of knowledge converge on the same destination: the recognition of God as the ultimate reality. Whether one begins with self-reflection, scientific inquiry, or theological contemplation, the journey culminates in *ma'rifah*. This integrated vision challenges modern dichotomies that separate science, religion, and spirituality. In the Islamic tradition, they are all aspects of a single journey of knowing, each arrow contributing to the fullness of human realization.

The Kingdom of God, the Unseen World, and Human Existence

Between each of the above arrows are interrelated with each other. In the first arc, because of Allah's command to return to Him at the promised time, one must understand the Kingdom of God. This kingdom is in the unseen realm. So, the order to return to Allah understands the unseen world. However, it must be admitted that humans also come from the supernatural. Therefore, humans exist in both space and time, from nothing according to the world's estimates to nothing according to the world. In living life, humans will be in a position of space and time at the same time as all orders. As for in the realm of the unseen, the command does not function anymore because in its absence, actually humans still exist, while in the situation in the world, humans do not exist. In the supernatural realm, humans already exist and occupy space and time known as the spirit realm. Then the spirit is breathed into a mother's womb, then she comes out of her womb, becoming a form as part of the world's inhabitants, who occupy worldly space and time. However, after he lives in the estimation of the world, then humans will leave the body, and the spirit will return to Allah. In this context, humans already have a body in the spirit realm and return to Allah, according to practice, when he lives according to the estimates of the world.

The notion of the *Kingdom of God* situates human existence within a continuum that transcends worldly time and space. In the Qur'an, this is often referred to as *malak?t* or *ghayb* (the unseen), the invisible domain of divine authority. To live in awareness of this kingdom is to recognize that life on earth is but one stage of a longer journey. Birth, worldly existence, death, and return to God are not disconnected episodes but phases of a single reality anchored in the unseen. Gnosis, therefore, requires not only intellectual comprehension but also experiential readiness for this return.

The interrelation of space and time between the seen (*shah?dah*) and unseen (*ghayb*) realms demonstrates the dual existence of humanity. On the one hand, humans inhabit the physical cosmos, bound by material laws. On the other, they carry within them a spirit (*r??*) breathed by God, which belongs to the unseen. This duality explains the tension between worldly distractions and spiritual longing. Sufis teach that awareness of the unseen helps resolve this tension, aligning the human will with the divine command to return.

The description of the spirit's journey—from pre-existence in the unseen realm, through embodiment in the womb, into worldly life, and back to God—reflects a cyclical cosmology central to Islamic thought. The Qur'an (23:12–14) describes the stages of human creation, while verses such as (2:156) remind believers that "to God we belong and to Him we return." Mystics interpret this not merely as a doctrinal statement but as a gnosiological truth: life is a temporary exile, and true home lies in the presence of God.

This cyclical understanding also frames death not as annihilation but as transition. The departure of the spirit from the body is a return to the unseen kingdom where accountability and divine presence become manifest. The Prophet Muhammad's sayings about the grave as either a garden of paradise or a pit of hell emphasize that worldly actions shape the experience of this unseen realm. Thus, gnosis is not speculative but deeply practical: knowing God entails living in such a way that one's return is a return to mercy, not estrangement.

By situating human life within the kingdom of God, Islamic gnosiology challenges secular narratives that reduce existence to biology or social history. Instead, it insists that every human carries a transcendent origin and destiny. This awareness transforms daily life: work, family, and society become stages for cultivating the soul. The unseen kingdom is not disconnected from the seen but permeates it, much like the soul animates the body. To ignore this dimension is to live only half of one's humanity.

Ultimately, the recognition of the unseen situates gnosis at the intersection of cosmology, anthropology, and eschatology. To know oneself is to know that one's origin is divine, one's journey is through the world, and one's end is with God. The arrows of gnosis—toward God, cosmos, and self—converge here, where unseen and seen meet. The Kingdom of God thus represents both the beginning and the end of knowledge, the source and destination of human existence. In this awareness, human life becomes intelligible not as random chance but as sacred pilgrimage.

Concluding Reflections on Gnosiology and Islamic Intellectual Tradition

The human body is where the spirit resides in the world and will return to Allah after experiencing so many trials when he lived in this world. Therefore, when this first bow is shot, the human encounter in the Kingdom of God has two dimensions, namely the dimension before he was born and the size after he left the world. Above these two poles, humans live their lives on earth, which is also part of the Kingdom of God. In other words, human life is actually within the framework of the Kingdom of God, both before he was born and after he was born on earth. Information about the Kingdom of God is clearly stated in the Holy Book (al-Qur'an), which is several pieces of information from the unseen world that is only accepted by commendable humans (Muhammad) so that humans can prepare themselves towards the unseen, as described in the Qur'an.

This recognition situates human life as a sacred continuum: spirit before birth, embodiment in the world, and return after death. The Qur'an describes life as a trust (*am?nah*), reminding humans that they live not autonomously but within the sovereignty of God. The trials faced in worldly existence are therefore not meaningless obstacles but pedagogical instruments, shaping the soul for its return. The body itself becomes a vessel of trust, entrusted with housing the spirit during its earthly sojourn. In this view, the human body is not merely biological but theological, a site of divine stewardship.

Understanding life as part of the Kingdom of God also reframes the significance of knowledge. If all stages of existence—from pre-birth spirit to post-death return—are under divine order, then knowledge must serve as preparation for this journey. Gnosis (*ma'rifah*) emerges as the highest science because it integrates this awareness into every dimension of life. The jurist interprets divine law, the philosopher contemplates metaphysics, but the gnostic aligns both law and philosophy with direct consciousness of God. This synthesis prevents fragmentation and ensures that knowledge remains anchored in transcendence.

The Qur'an's unveiling of unseen realities further strengthens this framework. By revealing glimpses of the *ghayb*—the spirit, the angels, the afterlife—the Qur'an equips humanity with orientation toward ultimate realities. Revelation functions as a bridge between the visible and invisible, giving language to truths that philosophy alone struggles to articulate. In this sense, gnosiology is inseparable from revelation, because while reason can point toward the Divine, only revelation discloses its precise

contours. The Prophet Muhammad, as the recipient of divine disclosure, embodies the role of guide who demonstrates how unseen realities shape lived existence.

In the intellectual history of Islam, this integration of revelation, reason, and mystical experience produced a civilization where scholars were simultaneously jurists, philosophers, and mystics. Figures like al-Ghazz?l?, Ibn ‘Arab?, and R?m? demonstrate how gnosis fertilized the sciences, ensuring that knowledge was not merely secular utility but spiritual wisdom. This legacy contrasts sharply with modern secular epistemologies that sever knowledge from transcendence. By recalling gnosiology, Muslims today can recover an epistemology that unites science and spirituality, reason and revelation.

The conclusion, then, is that gnosiology is not a marginal mystical pursuit but the very crown of Islamic intellectual tradition. It situates all forms of inquiry within the framework of humanity’s origin and destiny in God. Far from being outdated, it offers resources for addressing contemporary crises of meaning, where technological advancement often coincides with spiritual emptiness. By re-centering knowledge on God, gnosiology restores balance, reminding us that to know the cosmos and the self without knowing God is to remain incomplete.

Ultimately, the study of gnosis (*ma‘rifah*) is the study of being human in its fullest sense. It unites body and spirit, time and eternity, intellect and heart. In recognizing that human life unfolds within the Kingdom of God, both before and after worldly existence, gnosiology transforms knowledge into wisdom and existence into worship. Thus, the Islamic intellectual tradition affirms that true knowledge is not an end in itself but a means of returning to the Source. In this return, knowledge becomes light, and the seeker becomes a witness to the Real (*al-?aqq*).