

## Tools for Acquiring Knowledge in the Qur'an

AMONG THE physical senses through which we receive sensory data as a means of obtaining knowledge, the two that receive the most attention in the Qur'an are hearing and sight, as well as their associated organs: the ear and the eye. As for the sense of touch mediated through the hands, its role in knowledge acquisition is presented as a support or aid to visual perception via writing or holding something for the sake of examining it.

### FIRST: THE FUNCTION OF THE SENSES IN KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION

As we have seen, scholars generally classify *‘ilm* as either intuitive or acquired. The physical senses serve to convey data to the brain and, as such, they represent the first stage of cognition. According to many researchers in philosophy and other fields, the senses are subject to error and, as a consequence, cannot provide us with certainty. On this point they are in agreement with a number of ancient philosophers, some of them Muslim thinkers the likes of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, Ibn Ḥazm, and others. In support of the claim that the senses are unreliable, some thinkers have appealed to *Sūrah al-Nūr*, 24:39, which reads, “But as for those who are bent on denying the truth, their [good] deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty supposes to be water – until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing.” Numerous other references support this line of thinking as well. The physical senses are, in fact, relative rather than absolute. However, they are still capable of providing certainty when they are in agreement with logic and common sense. At the same time, the five senses cannot take in all possible data. Hence, if someone were given some additional

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sense over and above the five we already enjoy, he/she might discover many things of which he had never been aware before. As has been noted, our surroundings are replete with images that we are unable to perceive with the naked eye and frequencies that are either too high or too low for us to hear. As we read in *Sūrah al-Ḥāqqah*, 69:38-39, "I call to witness all that you can see, as well as all that you cannot see!"

There are those who even go so far as to claim what we perceive with our physical senses is nothing but fantasy and illusion. As for the Qur'an, it does not cast doubt on either sight or hearing, although it acknowledges that certain factors might impair these senses. In *Sūrah al-Hijr*, 15:15, we are told that if skeptics of the Qur'an had been given a veritable staircase to heaven on which to ascend, "they would surely have said, 'It is only our eyes that are spellbound! Nay, we have been bewitched!'" In other words, a person's sight might be rendered ineffective because his or her mind has been clouded, or because his or her eyes are under a magic spell. Elsewhere God speaks of sealing people's hearts in such a way that they are no longer able to hear. Speaking of those who are not heedful of His message, God declares in *Sūrah al-A'raf*, 7:100: "if We so willed, We could smite them [too] by means of their sins, sealing their hearts so that they cannot hear [the truth]." The hearing spoken of in this verse is not physical; rather, it refers to the ability to receive the truth in one's heart and respond to it. Indeed, whenever the Qur'an refers to the senses in a negative manner or speaks of them being incapacitated, it is referring to a level of perception higher than that of the physical. More specifically, it is referring to God's dulling of human beings' receptivity to truth as punishment for having willfully ignored His guidance despite having heard, seen, and understood the evidence in its favor. In a situation such as this, individuals who choose to disregard the guidance that has come to them via their inward sense of right and wrong will not be given any further, more profound guidance such as that received by prophets and apostles.

God has given us the physical senses so that each of us, within his or her own limitations and circumstances, may benefit from them. The gift of the physical senses has been given to all people without exception, although individuals differ in the extent to which they put them to

good use, and although one sense might be sharper than another in a given individual. At the same time, however, the senses are not the only path to knowledge that we have been given, and sole dependence on the physical senses is fraught with peril. God has given people three means by which to attain to knowledge, and holds us responsible for their use. As we read in *Sūrah al-Nahl*, 16:78, “God has brought you forth from your mothers’ wombs knowing nothing – but He has endowed you with hearing, and sight, and minds, so that you might have cause to be grateful.” It is clear, then, that unlike certain philosophical schools of thought, the Qur’an casts no doubt on the reliability of the senses, nor does it deny their importance. It is equally clear, on the other hand, that the Qur’an gives the senses no greater importance than it does the faculty of reason; in this respect, Islam parts ways with radical empiricists who place the physical senses above all else. The Islamic position on the senses is one of moderation whereby the senses are viewed as the source of the ‘raw material’ which is then put to use by other means of perception and cognition.

## SECOND: HEARING AND SIGHT IN THE QUR’AN

### 1) *The ear and hearing in the Qur’an*

The Arabic feminine noun *udhun* (plural, *ādhān*) refers to the ear in both human beings and animals. Speaking of those who care nothing for the truth, God says in *Sūrah al-A‘rāf*, 7:179,

And most certainly have We destined for hell many of the invisible beings and men who have hearts with which they fail to grasp the truth, and eyes with which they fail to see, and ears with which they fail to hear. They are like cattle – nay, they are even less conscious of the right way: it is they, they who are the [truly] heedless!

The sense of hearing is mentioned 139 times in the Qur’an, more frequently than any of the other physical senses. As noted in an earlier section, the sounds one hears may or may not lead to understanding. Speaking of certain nations of bygone times, God states in *Sūrah al-Aḥqāf*, 46:26: “We had endowed them with hearing, and sight, and [knowledgeable] hearts: but neither their hearing, nor their sight, nor

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their hearts were of the least avail to them, seeing that they went on rejecting God's messages.”

The word *sam<sup>c</sup>* or hearing is associated in the Qur'an with numerous related concepts and processes, including: perception, understanding, reason, responsiveness, acceptance, and obedience. The verb *sami<sup>c</sup>al yasma<sup>c</sup>u* takes a single direct object. As for the active participle *sāmi<sup>c</sup>*, or hearer, it is more inclusive than the word *mukhāṭab*, which refers to the person being spoken to, since you may hear a message that is not addressed to you in particular. The noun *sam<sup>c</sup>* may be used to refer not only to the act of hearing but to the ear as well. We read in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:6-7, “Behold, as for those who are bent on denying the truth – it is all one to them whether you warn them or do not warn them: they will not believe. God has sealed their hearts and their hearing (*sam<sup>c</sup>ihim*)....” Similarly, the word *sam<sup>c</sup>* is used to refer not only to the act of hearing, but to the process of understanding what has been heard and responding to it in obedience. As we read in *Sūrah al-Anfāl*, 8:31, “And whenever Our messages were conveyed to them, they would say, ‘We have heard [all this] before (*qālū qad sami<sup>c</sup>nā*).’” In other words, they had heard the message with their ears, but they had not responded with acceptance and obedience. *Sam<sup>c</sup>* associated with understanding and positive response is also illustrated in *Sūrah al-Jinn*, 72:1-2, where we are told that after hearing the Qur'an recited, certain ‘invisible beings’ said to others of their kind, “Verily, we have heard a wondrous discourse, guiding towards consciousness of what is right; and so We have come to believe in it...” (Cf. *Sūrah al-Rūm*, 30:52 and *Sūrah al-Nūr*, 24:51.)

It will have been seen, then, that the kind of *sam<sup>c</sup>* that is commended in the Qur'an is accompanied by understanding, obedience to God's commands, refraining from acts that have been forbidden, and so on. Without understanding, obedience and faithful response, the *sam<sup>c</sup>* may as well not have taken place. This applies equally to believers and unbelievers. Turning away from the truth is equated with turning away from what one has heard such that someone who rejects the truth is, in essence, deaf. We read in *Sūrah Luqmān*, 31:7: “For, whenever Our messages are conveyed to such a one, he turns away in his arrogance as though he had not heard them – as though there were deafness in his

ears...” Such a person has heard the message with his or her physical ears; however, he or she might as well not have heard the message, since it was not met with belief or obedience; hence, the purpose for which the message was addressed to him or her was not achieved.

## 2) *The eye and seeing in the Qur’an*

The Arabic noun *‘ayn* refers first and foremost to the physical eye. Used metaphorically, it may refer also to the essence of the object perceived via the eye or other sensory organs. What concerns us in this context is the role played by the eye in cognitive processes. God asks rhetorically of the person who does not seek the truth through the senses he has been given, “Have We not given him two eyes...and shown him the two highways [of good and evil]?” (*Sūrah al-Balad*, 90:8,10). The function of the eye as presented in the Qur’an is that of seeing (*Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān*, 3:13; *Sūrah al-A‘rāf*, 7:179; *Sūrah al-Anbiyā’*, 21:61).

References to eyes abound in the Qur’an in a variety of contexts: God’s causing people’s eyes to be dulled (*Sūrah Yāsīn*, 36:66); the eye being gladdened (*Sūrah al-Aḥzāb*, 33:51); turning one’s eyes on the things of this world (*Sūrah Ṭāhā*, 20:131); one’s eyes holding someone in contempt (*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:31); eyes overflowing with tears (*Sūrah al-Tawbah*, 9:92); eyes being veiled from the remembrance of God (*Sūrah al-Kahf*, 18:101); eyes rolling in terror (*Sūrah al-Aḥzāb*, 33:19); and eyes delighting in a sight (*Sūrah al-Zukhruf*, 43:71).

An action mentioned frequently in the Qur’an with relevance to the eye is that of *naẓar* (the verb being *naẓaral/yanẓuru*), meaning ‘to look’. The action of looking involves focusing one’s eyes steadily on something in such a way that one can form a thorough and accurate image of the entity being looked at. Consequently, the word *naẓar* is often used to refer to a process of reflection and examination. It is possible to look at something in the sense of directing one’s eyes toward it without actually perceiving it or seeing it. When used with the preposition *fī* (*naẓara fī*), the verb conveys the sense of investigating or carefully studying something; used with the preposition *li* or with a direct object, the verb *naẓara* is used to refer to the act of having mercy or compassion on. These, however, are only a few of the numerous ways and senses in which the verb *naẓaral/yanẓuru* is used in the Qur’an.

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### 3) A comparison between *sam*<sup>c</sup> and *baṣar* in the Qur'an

#### (a) The differences between *sam*<sup>c</sup> (hearing) and *baṣar* (sight) in the view of scholars

Scholars have differed over which of the two, *sam*<sup>c</sup> or *baṣar*, is superior. Some scholars argue for the superiority of *sam*<sup>c</sup> (hearing) over *baṣar* (sight). In favor of this view they cite *Sūrah Yūnus*, 10:42-43: “And there are among them such as (pretend to) listen to you: but can you cause the deaf to hearken even though they will not use their reason? And there are among them such as [pretend to) look towards you: but can you show the right way to the blind even though they cannot see?” According to these scholars, the passage just quoted associates ‘deafness’ with a refusal to use one’s reason; however, it associates a failure to look not with a loss of the use of reason, but only with a loss of sight. Other scholars, by contrast, view *baṣar* as superior to *sam*<sup>c</sup>. These scholars argue that the best of all blessings bestowed by God on human beings is the beatific vision (*al-naẓar ilā Allāh*), which takes place via the sense of sight. They also argue that the reality perceived via sight is more complete and perfect than that perceived via hearing, just the locus of sight is more honorable than the locus of hearing.

#### (b) The pairing of *sam*<sup>c</sup> and *baṣar* in the Qur'an

The Qur'an mentions *sam*<sup>c</sup> and *baṣar* either separately or jointly in 36 places (see, for example, *Sūrah Yūnus*, 10:31, and *Sūrah al-Nahl*, 16:78). There are several reasons the Qur'an tends most frequently to mention hearing and sight together when discussing the various paths of knowledge available to human beings. These reasons are as follows: (1) Hearing and sight are among the most important means of attaining to knowledge about God. (2) Hearing and sight are the two most important pathways between knowledge and reason. (3) The loss of these two senses deprives the individual to a significant extent of the ability to obtain knowledge through the spoken and written word. (4) Hearing enables one to perceive sounds in both light and darkness, and despite the presence of certain barriers between speaker and listener. As for sight, it requires the presence of light and the absence of physical

barriers. Furthermore, a person is more likely to wake up from a sound than from the presence of light. The sense of hearing is the first to be activated when one wakes from sleep, and the last to be deactivated when one goes to sleep (since the sense of hearing continues to operate even when one has one's eyes closed).

(c) The reasons for the Qur'an's mention of hearing before seeing

It will be noted that hearing tends to be mentioned prior to sight when the two are paired in the Qur'an. The reason for this order appears to lie in the tendency to list the superior of two entities prior to the inferior and this phenomenon has been viewed as evidence of the Qur'an's literary and rhetorical miraculousness. The consistency of this order in the Qur'an has been cited as evidence of hearing's superiority over sight in relation to knowledge acquisition. The arguments for such superiority are taken, moreover, not only from the Qur'an, but from other realities as well. One notes that numerous verses of the Qur'an pair *sam*<sup>c</sup> (hearing) with *ʿaql* (reason) without a similar pairing between *baṣar* (sight) and *ʿaql*. This first pairing is found in *Sūrah al-Mulk*, 67:10, where inhabitants of hell fire are quoted as saying, "Had we but listened [to those warnings], or [at least] used our own reason, we would not [now] be among those who are destined for the blazing flame!" Similarly, the divine names *al-Samīʿ* (the All-Hearing) and *al-ʿAlīm* (the All-Knowing) are paired in the Qur'an (see *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:127, 137, 181, etc.), whereas the divine name *al-Baṣīr* (the All-Seeing) is not paired with *al-ʿAlīm*.

On the purely epistemological level, hearing may be viewed as superior to sight for a number of reasons: (1) Hearing plays a more important role in holding people accountable before God. (2) Hearing is capable of conveying events both present and future, whereas sight can only convey what is present and visible to the eye. (3) You can hear sounds that are not immediately present to you; in order to see something, however, the object must be directly before you, or at least within the range of your peripheral vision. (4) One's sense of hearing operates night and day, in the darkness and in the light. The first sense that becomes active when a person wakes up is the sense of hearing, even if the person has his or her eyes closed. (5) Someone who has lost

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his or her hearing also loses the ability to speak due to the inability to hear himself or herself (not to mention others) and, hence, to carry on meaningful dialogue.

### (d) Reasons for mentioning *baṣar* before *sam*<sup>c</sup> in the Qur'an

The places in which sight (*baṣar*) is mentioned before hearing (*sam*<sup>c</sup>) in Qur'anic pairings of these terms are generally associated with censure, impairment, and punishment, whereas the places in which hearing is mentioned before sight are associated with commendation. This reversed order does not negate the superiority of the sense of hearing; on the contrary, it confirms it. Passages in which sight is mentioned before hearing include 7:179, which condemns people who “eyes with which they fail to see, and ears with which they fail to hear”; *Sūrah Hūd*, 11:24 speaks of “the blind and deaf and the seeing and hearing,” asking, “Can these two be deemed alike in [their] nature?” *Sūrah al-Isrā'*, 17:97 warns of the fate of those who have rejected God's messages saying: “We shall gather them together on the Day of Resurrection, [they will lie] prone upon their faces, blind and dumb and deaf, with hell as their goal.” In a similar vein, *Sūrah al-Sajdah*, 32:12 describes the condition of those who had turned away from God on earth and who, on the Day of Resurrection, hang their heads before God and cry, “O our Sustainer! [Now] we have seen, and we have heard! Return us, then, [to our earthly life] that we may do good deeds...”

### THIRD: THE *Qalb* IN THE QUR'AN

The physical senses are completed in the knowledge-acquisition process by the *qalb*, generally rendered as the heart. Closely related terms used in the Qur'an are *fū'ād*, *lubb*, and *ʿaql*. The function of the *qalb* is that of comprehension, just as the function of the *udhun* is hearing and the function of the *ʿayn* is sight. The *qalb*, or *fū'ād*, is paired with the senses of hearing and sight in approximately 20 verses of the Qur'an, all of which portray the *qalb* as being an internal apparatus whose role complements that of the outer senses, particularly hearing and sight. This complementary relationship is suggested by the fact that these entities are mentioned in association with each other in

*Sūrah al-Nahl*, 16:78, which speaks of God endowing us with “hearing [ears], and sight [eyes], and hearts [minds]” (*al-sam‘a wa al-abṣāra wa al-af‘idah*).

### 1) *The concept of the qalb in the Qur’an*

Scholars have equated the *qalb* with the *fū’ād*, with reason (*‘aql*), and with the inward essence (‘heart’) of a thing. From the root *q-l-b* we derive the verb *taqallabalyataqallabu* (verbal noun, *taqallub*), meaning to fluctuate or vary. The adjective *qullab* refers to someone who is adaptable, versatile, and of varied skills and talents.

The word *qalb* is used in the Qur’an to denote three things: (1) Reason (*‘aql*). This meaning is illustrated in *Sūrah Qāf*, 50:37, which reads: “In this, behold, there is indeed a reminder for everyone whose heart is wide-awake – that is, [everyone who] lends ear with a conscious mind.” (2) Opinion or point of view (*ra’y*). This meaning is illustrated in *Sūrah al-Ḥashr*, 59:14 which, in talking about those who oppose truth, states that “their hearts are at odds [with one another]: this, because they are people who will not use their reason.” (3) The physical organ itself. *Sūrah al-Ḥajj*, 22:46 thus refers to “the hearts that are in their breasts.”

The word *qalb* can thus be used to refer to one’s powers of reason, just as the word *udhun* (ear) can be used to refer to the sense of hearing, and the word *‘ayn* (eye) can be used to refer to the sense of sight.

### 2) *Qur’anic terms synonymous with qalb*

The epistemological concepts in the Qur’an may be divided into two types. The first has to do with sensory organs (eyes, ears, and the like), while the second has to do with their functions (sight, hearing, and so on). A function might be mentioned alone without the organ that performs it, since the purpose for its mention is not to convey information about the body as such, but to convey knowledge and encourage action. In other situations, the sensory organ might be mentioned alone by way of allusion to its function. Thus, for example, the heart (*qalb*) might be mentioned in an allusion to reason, the allusion becoming clear from the surrounding context.

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In what follows I discuss entities to which the Qur'an attributes some of the cognitive functions of the *qalb*, thereby indicating that these entities are viewed as synonymous with the word *qalb*.

### (a) *Fū'ād*

As was noted in an earlier discussion, the root *f-'-d* denotes fever, heat and intensity, and the heart (*qalb*) is sometimes referred with the noun *fū'ād* due to its warmth. Unlike the term *qalb*, however, the word *fū'ād* is used consistently in reference to the non-material dimension of the heart. It is in this non-material sense that the word *fū'ād* is used in *Sūrah al-Isrā'*, 17:36, where God declares that “never concern thyself with anything of which thou hast no knowledge” for our “hearing (*al-sam'*) and sight (*wa al-baṣar*) and heart (*wa al-fū'ād*) – all of them – will be called to account for it [on Judgment Day].”

Ibn Ashur observed that the term *af'idah* (plural of *fū'ād*) is frequently used in the Qur'an to refer to reason or the mind. At the same time, however, the word *fū'ād* is sometimes used in reference to a specific cognitive or perceptive capacity. This can be deduced from the way it is paired, as in *Sūrah al-Isrā'*, 17:36 above, with the faculties of hearing and sight. In other words, the term *fū'ād* may be seen here not to be referring to the physical sensory organ itself (the heart that pumps blood throughout the body), but rather to the ‘heart’s’ spiritual or intellectual function. When the term *sam'* and *baṣar* are paired with the word *qalb*, the pairing is most always in a negative context, that is, one that refers to ingratitude, hardness of heart, etc., whereas the term *fū'ād* is paired with these same functions in contexts of gratitude, faith and the like.

A comparison between the Qur'anic verses containing the words *fū'ād* and *qalb* indicates that the *fū'ād* is associated with spiritual vision and the ability to distinguish a true vision from a false one; we read in *Sūrah al-Najm*, 53:11 that “The [servant’s] heart did not give the lie to what he saw” (*mā kadhdhaba al-fū'ādu mā ra'ā*),” whereas the term *qalb*, by contrast, is associated with waywardness, denial, conjecture, blindness, and hypocrisy. The word *fū'ād* is also associated in places with emptiness. We read in *Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28:10 that after casting the infant Moses into the river at God’s command, “the heart of

Moses' mother became empty" (*aṣbaḥa fū'ādu ummi mūsā fārighan*). Asad renders this phrase with the words, "an aching void grew up in the heart of the mother of Moses." Virtually all commentators agree that the "void" or "emptiness" described here is an allusion to the fear Moses' mother was experiencing. In *Sūrah Ibrāhīm*, 14:43 we read that on the Day of Judgment, evildoers will be "running confusedly to and fro, with their heads upraised [in supplication]...and their hearts an abysmal void" (*wa af'idatuhum hawā'*). The phrase *af'idatuhum hawā'* means literally, "their hearts [will be] air." In a positive context, God tells the Prophet that the reason He has related to him the stories of earlier prophets was to make his heart (*fū'ād*) firm (*Sūrah Hūd*, 11:120).

Both the *fū'ād* and the *qalb* are described in the Qur'an as subject to tumultuous change. In relation to those who have refused to believe in His messages, God declares in *Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:110, "We [too] shall turn to [confusion] their hearts and their eyes (*nuqallibu af'idatuhum wa abṣārahum*)." And in *Sūrah al-Nūr*, 24:37, the Day of Judgment is referred as "the Day on which all hearts and eyes will be convulsed" (*tataqallabu fīhi al-qulūbu wa al-abṣār*).

#### (b) *Lubb*

As mentioned in the earlier discussion of the trilateral root *l-b-b* and its derivatives, the word *lubb* is often used in the plural (*albāb*) to speak of people who have been granted special understanding of God's ways and messages. Referred to as *ulī al-albāb* ("those endowed with insight"), these are individuals who exercise conscientious obedience to God and whose reflection on revealed texts enables them to discern the divine wisdom that is manifested in God's laws but which is not visible to others. Moreover, because of the deeper understanding they have been given, such individuals are held more strictly accountable for their attitudes and actions than others would be.

#### (c) *Abṣār*

The noun *abṣār* (plural of the noun *baṣar*, meaning sight) occurs in *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*, 3:13 in the phrase *ulī al-abṣār*, those "who have eyes

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to see.” According to al-Rāghib, the related term *baṣīrah* refers to the perceptive faculty of the heart. It is rarely used to refer to the organ of sight, that is, to the physical eye. Similarly, the verb *baṣura* is rarely used to refer to the physical act of seeing unless it is associated somehow with the vision of the heart. The noun *baṣīrah* denotes inward powers of perception, and is rarely understood in any other sense. Al-Ṭabarī interpreted the phrase, *ūlī al-abṣār* to mean “those possessed of keen understanding.” The function of *baṣīrah* (“insight”), that is, the light by means of which the heart “sees”, is to engage in reflection. As such, *baṣīrah* enables one to see the truth of what he or she has received through God’s messengers. Consequently, it is *baṣīrah* that delivers one from uncertainty, either through faith or through direct vision. And while the *baṣīrah* is associated with the moral lessons derived from God’s messages, the *lubb* is associated with the act of bringing these lessons to mind. Speaking of those who do not heed God’s messages, *Sūrah al-Ḥajj*, 22:46 asks, “Have they, then, never journeyed about the earth, letting their hearts gain wisdom, and causing their ears to hear? Yet, verily, it is not their eyes that have become blind (*lā ta‘mā al-abṣār*) – but blind have become the hearts that are in their breasts (*wa lākin ta‘mā al-qulūb allatī fī al-ṣudūr*)!”

### (d) *Ṣadr*

As seen earlier, the word *ṣadr* refers to the uppermost or foremost part of something. It can also refer to the beginning of something, as in the phrase, *ṣadr al-islām*, which refers to the early years of Islam. Similar phrases are *ṣadr al-nahār* (the early part of the day), *ṣadr al-layl* (the early part of the night), *ṣadr al-shitā’* (early winter) and *ṣadr al-ṣayf* (early summer). In keeping with its definition as the uppermost or anterior portion of something, the noun *ṣadr* is used to refer to the chest in both human beings and animals and, more specifically, to the rib cage.

The trilateral root *ṣ-d-r* and its derivatives occur 44 times in the Qur’an. The ways in which these words are used in the Qur’an indicates that the *ṣadr* plays a role in the process of knowledge acquisition in relation to the heart as the seat of perception. The *ṣadr* contains the *qalb*, which contains the *fū’ād*, which contains the *lubb*. The *ṣadr* is to the heart what the white of the eye is to the pupil, what a courtyard is to

a house, or what the environs of Makkah are to Makkah. For just as it is the white of the eye on which follicles form when someone suffers from trachoma, it is the *ṣadr* into which doubts, misgivings, temptations and other disturbing thoughts enter. The *ṣadr* is also the seat of lusts, cravings, and other promptings of the lower self, while at the same time being the locus of faith, surrender to God, learning and knowledge.

The following passages illustrate some of the ways in which the word *ṣadr* is used in the Qur'an. *Sūrah al-Naḥl*, 16:106 warns of the fate that will meet someone "who willingly opens up his heart to a denial of the truth" (*man sharaḥa bil-kufri ṣadran*). Conversely, *Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:125 tells us that when God wills to guide someone, "his bosom He opens wide with willingness towards self-surrender [to Him]" (*yashraḥ ṣadrahu lil-islām*). When announcing to the Prophet that He has a revelation to bestow upon him, God said in *Sūrah al-A'rāf*, 7:2, "So let your heart be oppressed no more (*lā yakun fī ṣadrika ḥarajun*). *Sūrah Hūd*, 11:5 assures us that no matter how we may try to hide from God, He "He has full knowledge of what is in the hearts [of men]" (*innahu 'alīmun bi dhāt al-ṣudūr*; cf. *Sūrah al-Mulk*, 67:13). *Sūrah al-Hajj*, 22:46 tells us that when people are astray, it is not their physical eyes that are blinded but, rather, "the hearts that are in their breasts" (*al-qulūb allatī fī al-ṣudūr*).

As has been mentioned, the *ṣadr* is identified as the seat of troubling, anxious thoughts. We read in *Sūrah al-Nās*, 114:5 that Satan "whispers in people's hearts" (*yuwaswisu fī ṣudūri al-nās*). Speaking of those who question God's messages without evidence to support their doubts, *Sūrah Ghāfir*, 40:56 states that "in their hearts is nothing but overweening self-conceit" (*in fī ṣudūrihim illā kibrun*). Speaking of a time of war and tribulation, *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*, 3:154 declares that God allowed this hardship in order to test what was in their hearts (*li yabtali Allāhu mā fī ṣudūrikum*). *Sūrah al-Ādiyāt*, 100:10 speaks of how, on the Day of Judgment, "all that is [hidden] in people's hearts" (*mā fī al-ṣudūr*) will be revealed. *Sūrah al-Hashr*, 59:13 speaks of the fear in the hearts of the unbelievers (*fī ṣudūrihim*), while *Sūrah Yūnus*, 10:57 declares that God's messages contain a cure for the ailments in people's hearts (*shifā'un li mā fī al-ṣudūr*).

## *Qur'anic Terminology*

### 3) *The motions and states of the heart in the Qur'an*

The functions of the heart can be divided into two main categories: cognitive and emotive. The cognitive category includes processes relating to knowledge and conceptualization: thinking, reflecting, idea formation, recollection of information one has learned in the past, and the acquisition of new information. As for the emotive category, it has to do with the will: desires and intentions, inclinations and disinclinations. In this realm there exists a gradation from a mere inclination, to attachment, to enslavement. The will gives rise to intention or determination, which is a decision of the heart to use one's bodily members in the commission of a given act, be it praiseworthy or blameworthy. If no action results, the intention remains in the realm of wishing or craving. Only when a decision takes firm root does it become determination and develop into action.

The Qur'an speaks of the heart (the *qalb*) in numerous ways. It describes actions undertaken by the heart as well as attributes that make it a multifaceted world unto itself. The heart is the seat of mental images and knowledge, of feelings and sentiments; in some situations the heart combines the cognitive and the emotive, while adding a deeper dimension to both.

### Cognition and Perception

This realm includes conceptualizations, images, and ideas, the aptitude for knowledge and learning, the internal thought processes that arise out of experience, and the ability to discriminate, memorize, recall, and produce information.

### The Will

The will encompasses temperament and mood, which include cravings, sentiments, desires, and inclinations. The realm of the will includes the dualities of seeking out and abandoning, love and hate, intimacy and alienation, as well as awareness of right and wrong, possibility and impossibility. Will and determination are what emerges after a thought process that yields certainty, faith, belief, and inner peace.

As discussed in an earlier section, some Qur'anic statements relating to the *qalb* describe processes that arise from the heart itself or actions undertaken by the heart (fearing, trembling, and the like), while others describe processes which the heart undergoes (such as being sealed, strengthened, examined, and so on).

To live sound lives, human beings need four things: (1) knowledge of what is beneficial and desirable and, therefore, to be sought after, (2) knowledge of what is harmful and undesirable and, therefore, to be avoided, (3) a means of achieving what is beneficial and desirable, and (4) a means of avoiding what is harmful and undesirable. Our wills tend to be subject to our desires and whims, and the impressions and notions formed based on our sense perceptions. However, conceptualizations formed based on sensory experience are subject to refinement and alteration as our awareness increases and we develop greater powers of discernment. Given these powers, we are able to decide whether to suppress a desire or to satisfy it, and to act accordingly. Human action is thus based on three foundations: cognition ("What actions are called for and/or possible?"), will ("What do I choose to do?"), and ability ("What action am I capable of?").

#### 4) *The importance of the qalb in knowledge acquisition*

God has created the *qalb* as the seat of both knowledge and will. It is the site of both our perception of reality as it is, and our conception of how it should be (our ideals). Knowledge and action both grow out of thought processes. Thought processes give rise to conceptions, which give rise in turn to decisions, which lead to action. When an action is repeated, this results in the formation of habits. Along with knowledge and will, each of us has worldly attachments, inborn character traits, and life experiences that have contributed to our psychological makeup. Given the complexity of our makeup as human beings, it is impossible for us to fully control the thoughts that come to us, of course, and we are sometimes beleaguered by thoughts that seem to assault us against our wills. However, we have been given the gifts of reason and faith, which enable us to distinguish which thoughts to welcome and act upon, and which ones to resist and suppress. When put to use, these gifts make it possible for us to live our lives fully, and to give everyone his/her due, and everything its due.