

# Prophet Muhammad and *Ilm-e-ghayb* (The knowledge of the unseen)

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## A. Introduction

The issue of Prophet Muhammad possessing *ilm-e-ghayb* is one of the issues on which there are lot of discussions and debates amongst some groups of muslims. ***Ilm*** means knowledge. ***Ghayb*** means something absent / behind the curtain / unseen. So *ilm-e-ghayb* refers to the knowledge of the unseen or hidden knowledge.

One group claims that Prophet (peace be upon him) possessed *Ilm-e-Ghayb* while the other group claims Prophet (peace be upon him) did not possess *Ilm-e-Ghayb*. Both sides have their proofs and references from Quran and Hadith. Each side accuses other of not following Quran and Sunnah and hence deviated. Now let's analyze whether there is anything to fight about it.

*Note: The Word 'Prophet' refers to Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) in this article.*

## B. The Entire debate is only because of terminology

In order to solve differences, it is better to ask questions and take confirmation from either side. Based on the answers we can narrow down our differences. In this case let's ask some basic questions to both groups.

Suppose people belonging to group B say that Prophet possessed *ilm-e-ghayb* and people of group D deny that. If u ask both groups what was the knowledge level of the Prophet (peace be upon him)? Was it more than Allah or was it lesser than Allah?

Group B will say that it was lesser than Allah.

Group D will also state that the Prophet (peace be upon him) possessed knowledge lesser than Allah.

Next, ask both the groups, what was the knowledge level of the Prophet (peace be upon him) compared to normal human being? Whether he possessed more or equal or lesser knowledge than ordinary human beings?

Both the groups will say; the Prophet (peace be upon him) had knowledge more than the ordinary human beings.

From this we can conclude that **Prophet (peace be upon him) had knowledge lesser than Allah**

**but more than other Human beings.** We can see that both groups are actually saying the same thing. All muslims believe that knowledge of the Prophet (peace be upon him) was more than human being and lesser than Allah. Then why there is so much of debate? Answer is: due to viewing things from **DIFFERENT** perspective.

When a person belonging to group B says that the Prophet possessed *ilm-e-ghayb* then he is speaking relative to ordinary human beings.

When D says that Prophet did NOT possess *ilm-e-ghayb* then he is speaking relative to Allah.

This is the crux of the problem. If we can leave aside the terminology of *ilm-e-ghayb* for some time then things become clear. If we focus on MEANING rather than the TEXT then this problem will be solved.

### **C. Prophet Muhammad did not possess *ilm-e-ghayb* in comparison to Allah**

Quran says many times that knowledge of *ghayb* is with Allah. Quran proclaims that Prophet did not possess knowledge of unseen. Go through these ayah of Quran:

- 6:73; 9:78; 9:94; 9:105; 10:20; 13:9; 23:92; 32:6; 34:3; 34:48; 39:46; 59:22; 62:8; 64:18; 72:26 says: Allah possesses *ilm-e-ghayb*.
- 2:33; 11:123; 16:77; 18:26; 27:65; 35:38; 49:18; says: Allah has *Ilm-e-ghayb* of heavens and the earth.
- 5:109; 5:116; says: Messengers will say on *qiyamah* that they did not have knowledge and Allah possesses *ilm-e-ghayb* in totality.
- 6:50; 11:31 says: The Prophet did NOT possess *Ilm-e-ghayb*.
- 7:188 says: Prophet says if he had *ilm-e-ghayb* then he would have gained lot of benefits and no evil could have touched him.

Above ayah – in context with Allah – say that the Prophet did NOT possess *ilm-e-ghayb*. Absolute knowledge of unseen is with Allah alone.

If you look at the life of the Prophet then you can point out numerous instances wherein it becomes clear that Prophet did not possess *ilm-e-ghayb* in absolute sense. Following are some instances from the life of the Prophet:

- ❖ Why he was crying and making *dua* before battle of *badar*? If he was pretty sure that Muslims would win tomorrow then he would not have wept, and not sought Allah help.
- ❖ Prophet saw in a dream that the keys of *kaba* were being given. The interpretation was that Muslims would be going to *Mecca* and they would perform hajj. He along with *sahaba* went for hajj. However; they could not perform hajj. Instead; a peace treaty was done with

the *Meccans*. *Sulah-e-hudabia* (Treaty of *hudabia*) is probably the most sensitive and delicate situation in the life of Prophet. It was the situation when *sahaba* (companions) – for some time - refused to obey words of prophet regarding treaty. They could not believe that in spite of being stronger, having all the favorable conditions why prophet was doing treaty by accepting humiliating conditions. Had the Prophet possessed *ilm-e-ghayb*; why would he have gone towards Mecca and faced such critical moments when he was pretty sure that he would not be allowed to do hajj?

- ❖ It's not always true that the Prophet possessed more knowledge than everyone in every domain. The Prophet did NOT know many things that other people knew. *Hadees* literature has many examples. For instance; some people were doing pollination for date palms for better productivity. The Prophet advised them not to do so. Later, productivity dropped and people told this to Prophet. Then the prophet made them clear to them that in matters in which they possessed more knowledge; they should go ahead with it. [Ibn Maja; English reference: Vol. 3, Book 16, Hadith 2470]
- ❖ When he was given poisonous food then also he did not know in advance. It was only when he ate the food that he was informed by Allah about the poisonous nature of the food and thus he was saved. Had he known that he will be served poisonous food – would he accept the invitation?
- ❖ When the first *wahi* was revealed to the prophet, the prophet was very scared, nervous. His wife – Hazrat Khadeeja supported him, consoled him and stood by him. She took him to her cousin – *Waraqah bin nawaful* - a jewish scholar. *Waraqah* told that he (Prophet Muhammad) is the prophesized Prophet. *Waraqah* told that people of *Mecca* would be against him and he will be forced to go out of *Mecca* after he starts preaching Islam. At that moment Prophet Muhammad did not know these details of his prophet hood.
- ❖ Many hadees in Bukhari tells that some people will be driven away from *hauz e kausar* (in *akhrat*) and reason told will be that prophet did NOT know what these people did after him. Prophet was not knowledgeable enough to know what wrong his people did.
- ❖ Similarly, you can cite a number of incidences from his life that makes clear that he did not possess absolute *ilm-e-ghayb*.

#### **D. Prophet Muhammad had *ilm-e-ghayb* in comaprision to ordinary human being**

- 3:44 says: Some *ilm-e-ghayb* was given to the Prophet.
- 3:179 says: Allah will NOT reveal *ilm-e-ghayb* to believers (normal people). Allah chooses messenger. Indirectly ayah indicates that messengers might get some of knowledge of unseen.
- 11:49; 12:102 says: some events of *ghayb* are revealed to the Prophet.

- 81:24 says: The Prophet is not stingy in giving *ilm-e-ghayb*.
- ❖ Prophet said – “If you know what I know then you would laugh less and weep more”. This means that some of the *ilm-e-ghayb* was given to him by Allah.
- ❖ His prophesies regarding signs of the last hour are part of the *ilm-e-ghayb* given to him.
- ❖ His prophesies regarding many future events are part of the *ilm-e-ghayb* given to him.
- ❖ The knowledge given to us regarding paradise-hell – which is not described in Quran - are part of the *ilm-e-ghayb* given to him.

#### E. A very beautiful Ayah – 7:188 - regarding *Ilm-e-ghayb*

قُلْ لَّا أَمْلِكُ لِنَفْسِي نَفْعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ ۚ وَلَوْ كُنْتُ أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبَ لَأَسْتَكْتَرْتُ مِنَ الْخَيْرِ وَمَا مَسَّنِيَ السُّوءُ ۗ إِنْ أَنَا إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ وَبَشِيرٌ لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

Say: "I have no power over any good or harm to myself except as Allah wills. If I had knowledge of the unseen (*In context with Allah, he did NOT have ilm e ghayb*), I should have multiplied all good, and no evil should have touched me: I am but a warner, and a bringer of glad tidings (*In context with Human being, he had ilm e ghayb*) to those who have faith." Quran 7:188

Some important points coming from this ayah are:

- **Except as Allah wills:** Means there is some portion of power which Allah gives / bestow to some people.
- **If I had knowledge of the unseen:** This portion is indicating that he did not possess *ilm-e-ghayb*. Had he possessed absolute *ilm-e-ghayb* then he would not have faced any problems in his life and he would have always benefitted. So in context with Allah he had NO *ilm-e-ghayb*; it means he was NOT given absolute *ilm-e-ghayb*.
- **I am but a warner, and a bringer of glad tidings:** Who can warn and give glad tidings? Answer is: One who knows things more than other people. If I warn you against going on a particular road then it's because I KNOW problems in passing through that road. If I give you glad tidings / good news regarding something then it means that I know in advance what you don't know. So Prophet was a Warner and giver of glad tidings because he was given some *ilm-e-ghayb*. In context with Human being, he had *ilm-e-ghayb*.

## F. Another perspective of Ilm-e-ghayb

*Ilm-e-Ghayb* is something relative. If you say that a line is short then you need to clarify – “shorter compared to which line”. *Ilm-e-ghayb* is specific to the person in question. Prophet did NOT possess *ilm-e-ghayb* in comparison to Allah but he possessed the same in comparison to human being.

*Ilm-e-ghayb* is specific to era / time also. Allah gave some *ilm-e-ghayb* to the Prophet and the Prophet gave this information to people. So some knowledge that was hidden to the prophet earlier, became known to him and something that was unknown to people became known to them after the prophet informed them about it.

Something can be part of *ilm-e-ghayb* in some era but it can cease to be *ilm-e-ghayb* later on.

For example:

- ❖ Earlier people did not know the exact time of future sunrise and sunset. So knowledge of sunrise & sunset was part of *ilm-e-ghayb* earlier. Now – we can tell precisely time of sunrise and sunset for days that are thousands of years ahead (due to the discovery of principles of sunrise & sunset). We have calendars which can tell in which region when will be sunrise and sunset after 100 of years. So this is no more *ilm-e-ghayb* now.
- ❖ Earlier a person did not know what is inside a mother’s womb. Now, with advances in medical science and medical equipments – not only the sex of the baby can be known, but also many of its qualities and traits can be known. Earlier knowledge of baby’s sex was *ilm-e-ghayb*; it’s no more so. Many congenital disease of the baby is still part of the *ilm-e-ghayb*.
- ❖ With the passage of time we are moving towards more-knowledge area. With the passage of time, with more pondering over AYA of God, with more advancement, with more intellect: the unknown domain of knowledge is converting into known one.

## G. Conclusion

- 1) Some Muslims debate / argue in the matter of knowledge level of the Prophet. Some say that the Prophet possessed the *ilm-e-ghayb* while others say he did NOT.
- 2) *Ilm-e-ghayb* refers to knowledge of the unseen.
- 3) Actually the Prophet possessed knowledge more than ordinary human being and lesser than Allah.
- 4) Quran makes clear that absolute *ilm-e-ghayb* is with Allah. Allah possesses knowledge of whatever is in the heavens and the earth; whatever is open and whatever is concealed.
- 5) Quran also makes clear that the Prophet was given some of the the *ilm-e-ghayb*. He was revealed some knowledge by Allah which no one else knew.

- 6) Life of the Prophet also depicts this range of Prophet's knowledge very clearly.
- 7) Many things regarding future he did not know and many things he knew. Whatever he knew about future was only because he was informed about that by Allah.

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