

## Wisdom - Part 1

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### Abstract

This essay examines the concept of wisdom (*bikmah*) in the Qur'an and Hadith. It explores the difference between wisdom and acquired knowledge, and how the terms *bikmah* and *al-bikmah* ('wisdom' and 'the wisdom', respectively) are used in the Qur'an and for what, as well as the term *hakim* (wise). Special attention is given to how the Word of Allah is described as *hakim* ('wise'). It then discusses the prophetic mission, as described in the Qur'an, with an emphasis on the roots of this mission in the time of Ibrahim and Isma'il. Lastly, it closes with some reflections on how one might acquire wisdom.

**Keywords:** *Qur'an, Islamic ethics, wisdom, Qur'anic exegesis*

### Introduction

This article explores the notion of wisdom according to the Qur'an and the Hadith. The concept of wisdom – *al-bikmah* – is one of the most

fundamental virtues that a human being can ever have. It is neither comparable to knowledge nor to many other good qualities that we can acquire. It is something that we – as individuals and as a community – always need to struggle for. One can easily increase their knowledge or work harder to practice Islam, but wisdom is rare and special; it is more of something which is gifted by Allah than something that a person can acquire on their own. Of course, there are certain things that people can do to qualify themselves to be gifted with wisdom, but it cannot be bought for any price or learnt in any university or seminary. Instead, it must be given by Allah, and the most one can do is to qualify one's self to receive this gift, because Allah does not give this arbitrarily. There are certain things that must be done on our side so that Allah gives us this gift. When I reflect on the problems that we have in Muslim society – whether they be related to the scholars, to the laypeople, or to the leadership – I find that wisdom is missing in most of the cases. We have people, who are very knowledgeable and very pious, but when it comes to wisdom, there is a big vacuum. Therefore, I am sharing some of the ideas that I have about wisdom.<sup>1</sup>

### **Wisdom in the Qur'an**

We will begin with the verses of the Qur'an related to wisdom or the wise. The Qur'an uses the concept of *bikmah* (wisdom), *hakim* (the wise), and *hukm* (judgment or ruling on something, also sometimes used for wisdom). The Qur'an only describes two things as *hakim* (wise): Allah and the Qur'an itself. The Qur'an never describes any human being as *hakim*, even though it speaks of people such as Luqman or Jesus who were given wisdom. This means that perfect wisdom can only be found with Allah and His word which is the Qur'an. There are

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<sup>1</sup> This piece is a follow-up to a series of seven lectures which I had the honour to deliver at the shrine of Lady Ma'sumah in Qom, Iran.

human beings who have been given wisdom but they are not perfect enough in wisdom to be compared to Allah or to His word. It is only Allah and the Qur'an which are described as *hakim*. Of course, in *hadith* and in Muslim literature, *hakim* is used for people. For instance, Luqman is referred to as Luqman al-Hakim, but when Allah speaks, it is even greater than when the prophet or Imams speak. Allah's expectations are different from those of human beings. For example in the Qur'an, there are many cases in which Allah says He does not do any injustice. Injustice or *zulm* is absolutely negated from Allah; however, the Qur'an never describes Allah as '*adil* (just). While Allah *is* just, the Qur'an says instead that Allah does not do injustice, even though *hadith* do describe Allah as just. In the Qur'an, '*adil* is only used for human beings, not for Allah; while He does not commit injustice, He is greater and much more than being '*adil*. So, when studying the Qur'an, it is important to realize that the Qur'an has its own absolute accuracy with respect to the usage of words.

Here are some examples from the Qur'an about Allah being *hakim* and about His words. In many cases in the Qur'an, two names or qualities of Allah are mentioned together, especially at the end of verses. For example, four verses of the Qur'an say *al-'alim al-bakim* ('the knowing, the wise'). Two others say *al-bakim al-'alim*. That is, two places put wisdom first, whereas four places put knowledge first. What does that mean? This means that knowledge is different from wisdom, for if knowledge were the same as wisdom, there would be no reason to describe Allah as knowledgeable *and* wise; it would be repetitive. Knowledge is a prerequisite of wisdom, not the same thing as wisdom. It is impossible to have wisdom but not knowledge. One can have wisdom and a little knowledge; with wisdom, one knows how to gain more knowledge quickly. However, a person who does not have wisdom and just has knowledge will not benefit from his knowledge. Many

people have knowledge but do not know how to use it properly. They know too many things and, in the end, cannot make up their mind, like a person who knows how to cook many different dishes, but, in the end, cannot make up their mind what to cook for a particular group of people. So knowledge and wisdom are related, but not necessarily the same.

In three places, Allah describes Himself as *al-hakim al-khabir* ('the wise, the aware'). *Khabir* is the one who has information. The difference between *'ilm*, referring to knowledge, and *khabir* (noun form *khibrah*) is that the latter is used for the one who knows details – who has a kind of articulated knowledge, not just universal and abstract ideas.

More frequent than all these, however, is *al-'aziz al-hakim* ('the honourable, the wise'), which is used 24 times. *'Aziz* is the one who has *'izzah*, often translated as 'dignity' or 'honour'. On a deeper level, *'izzah* means to be so strong that one will never be defeated. This is why it is related to honour and being honourable; to have honour, one cannot be weak or be defeated every day. So, Allah emphasises that He is *al-'aziz* and *al-hakim*. Altogether, there are 33 times when the Qur'an describes Allah as *al-hakim*.

Sometimes *hakim* is also used for the word of God. If Allah is *hakim* (wise), then anything related to Him, including His words, must also be full of wisdom, for it is impossible for a wise person to do something in vain. Otherwise, what would be the benefit of being *hakim* but saying words which are not wise, or creating the world in a way which is not wise? Because Allah is *hakim*, whatever He creates, commands or says must comply with wisdom.

Here are some verses which relate to the Qur'an and the notion of being *hakim*. Some might be grammatically puzzled over whether, in English, one can say the Qur'an is 'wise' or that perhaps one should say it is 'full of wisdom'; setting aside linguistic conventions, *hakim* means for something to be 'with wisdom'. Here, it refers to something very strong and fair in position, where Allah says:

ذَٰلِكَ نَتْلُوهُ عَلَيْكَ مِنَ الْآيَاتِ وَ الذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ

This is what We recite to you of Our signs and the wise reminder. (3:58)

*Al-dhikr al-hakim*, the 'wise reminder', which gives us wise ideas, is the Qur'an.

الر تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْحَكِيمِ

*Alif lam ra*. These are the signs of the wise book. (10:1)

In the words of Allah, the Qur'an is a collection of the verses (lit. 'signs') of the book which is *hakim*, full of wisdom.

Some similar verses are:

تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْحَكِيمِ

These are the signs of the wise book (31:10).

وَ الْقُرْآنِ الْحَكِيمِ

By the wise book. (36:2)

تَنْزِيلُ الْكِتَابِ مِنَ اللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَكِيمِ

The revelation of a book from Allah, the Honourable, the Wise. (39:1, 42:2, 46:2)

The Qur'an is a book which is sent by Allah, who is *'aziz* and *hakim*. This indirectly implies that the Qur'an is also *hakim* and is with *'izzah*; neither the Qur'an can be refuted nor can anything else found in the Qur'an. So, sometimes the Qur'an is directly described as *hakim*; sometime it is said that the Qur'an is the book of the wise Lord, of the wise God, so, directly or indirectly, we realized that the Qur'an is the book full of wisdom. There are (at least) four cases where *hakim* is directly used for the Qur'an and more indirect cases. So, 33 cases for Allah Himself and 4 cases for the Qur'an, but no person is described as *hakim*.

#### HAKIM versus AL-HAKIM

Some verses of the Qur'an describe Allah as *hakim* without the definite article *al-*; that is, as *hakim* rather than *al-hakim*. To express the difference, consider the following phrases, this one without an *al-*:

رَأَيْتُ رَجُلًا

I saw a man (*rajul*).

However if I am talking about a specific person, I would use an *al-*:

رَأَيْتُ الرَّجُلَ

I saw that man (*al-rajul*).

*Al-* can be used both to refer to a specific person as well as for a general group of a case, quality, or species. For instance, the mother of Lady Maryam had made an oath that she would dedicate her unborn son to the temple, but ended up delivering a girl. So, when her child was born, she said:

لَيْسَ الذَّكَرُ كَالْأُنثَى

Boys (lit. ‘the male’) are not like girls (lit. ‘the female’)<sup>2</sup>.  
(3:36)

Here, the *al-* preceding ‘boy’ and ‘girl’ does not refer to a specific boy or girl; rather, they are general. Thus, in Arabic, the *al-* can be used in different ways. When speaking about Allah as *al-bakim*, this means that He is the one who is truly wise, the perfect example of perfected wisdom. However, when I say *hakim*, it just means that He is wise.

Another example can be found in the use of the word *haqq*. *Haqq* means that something is true or not illusory; I am *haqq* and you are *haqq*. Or, as we recite:

أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ الْجَنَّةَ حَقٌّ وَالنَّارَ حَقٌّ وَالنَّشْرَ حَقٌّ وَالْحِسَابَ حَقٌّ وَالْوَعْدَ وَالْوَعْدَ  
بِحَقِّ حَقِّ<sup>3</sup>

I bear witness that Paradise is real (*haqq*), and the Fire is real, and the Resurrection is real, and the accounting is real, and the divine promise [of threats and rewards] is true.

All of these things are real or true, but *al-haqq* is only used for Allah. For Allah is the only one who is really true. It is not correct for me to say *ana al-haqq* (‘I am the truth’). Hallaj said it, and he got into trouble, because they said he was claiming to be the deity. *Ana al-haqq* is only

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<sup>2</sup> It would have been more natural for her to say ‘girls are not like boys’ or ‘I have made a vow to dedicate my son, and a girl is not like a boy’, since she was expecting a boy, but instead she said ‘boys are not like girls’. This shows that girls are better. According to the Qur’anic explanation, this may also have been because she did not speak Arabic, but when Allah uses Arabic words to describe what she said in her own language – maybe Hebrew or Aramaic – Allah says ‘boys are not like girls’.

<sup>3</sup> A. Qommi, *Mafatih al-Jinan*, the *ziyarat* of Hadrat Sahib al-Amr (A).

for Allah. Of course whether he was legitimate or not is another matter, which we will not delve into here. In any case, *al-haqq* can only be used for Allah. Similarly, *al-bakim* is at a very high level. If used in that sense, it means perfect wisdom, and can only be used for Allah and His word. However, *bakim* without *al-* can be used more liberally. So, in addition to those 33 cases where *al-bakim* is used for Allah, there are other uses of *bakim* without the *al-*, for example:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا

Allah is knowledgeable and wise. (4:11, 24; 33:1)

إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا

Allah has always been honourable, wise. (4:56)

كَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا

Allah has always been knowledgeable, wise. (4:17, 92, 104, 111, 170; 48:4)

وَكَانَ اللَّهُ وَاسِعًا حَكِيمًا

Allah has always been wide-embracing, wise. (4:130)

*Wasi'* means 'to include' or 'to embrace', and it can also mean 'to be generous', because with generosity and mercy, you can embrace.

وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا

Allah has always been honourable, wise. (4:158, 165; 48:7, 19)



There are 10 cases in the Qur'an which say '*aliman hakim*,<sup>4</sup> 5 cases of '*azizan hakim*,<sup>5</sup> 1 case of '*wasi'an hakim*,<sup>6</sup> 5 cases of '*hakimun alim*,<sup>7</sup> 15 cases of '*alimun hakim*,<sup>8</sup> 13 cases of '*azizun hakim*,<sup>9</sup> 1 case of '*aliyyun hakim*<sup>10</sup> (the Exalted, Wise), and 1 case of '*tawwabun hakim* ('most-returning, wise').<sup>11</sup> *Tawwab* – which comes from the word *tawbah* (repentance) is not only something that we do; Allah also does it. 'Allamah Tabataba'i says: 'Every act of *tawbah* from us is surrounded by two acts of *tawbah* from Allah.' That is, when we commit a sin and disobey Allah, we harm our relationship with Allah; thus, first, Allah returns to us to give us the ability to repent. That is, He initiates repentance. This is why the Qur'an says:

تَابَ عَلَيْهِمْ لِيَتُوبُوا

He has turned to them so they could repent. (8:118)

Then, again, he returns to me to accept my repentance. Thus He returns twice to us so that I can return to Him once. An example is a child who does something bad and goes out of the house because he knows he has done something wrong. The parents want the child to come back, so what do they do? They first send someone to talk to him or help to come back. They don't want to say this directly, because then maybe the child will end up spoiled, so they send a neighbour or aunt or someone and tell him to come back. So, this is the first act on your side. This person goes and says, 'Go back to your father and mother;

<sup>4</sup> 4:11, 17, 24, 92, 104, 111, 170; 33:1; 48:4; 76:30.

<sup>5</sup> 4:56, 158, 165; 48:7, 19.

<sup>6</sup> 4:130.

<sup>7</sup> 6:83, 128, 139; 15:25; 27:6.

<sup>8</sup> 4:26, 8:71, 9:15, 28, 260, 97, 106, and 110; 12:6; 22:52; 24:18, 58, 59; 49:8; 60:10.

<sup>9</sup> 2:209, 220, 228, 240, 260; 5:38; 8:10, 49, 63, 67; 9:40, 71; 31:27.

<sup>10</sup> 42:51.

<sup>11</sup> 24:10.

they are happy; they will forgive you.’ If the child comes back, what will happen? They will hug him and embrace him with kindness and mercy and say not to worry; they might even give him a gift to end the bitterness of separation. Perhaps, if he had not ran away, he wouldn’t have been given this hug and kiss and gift, so, this is why Allah has special mercy for the people who repent.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ

Allah loves the people who repent. (2:222)

So, Allah himself is also the one who returns a lot and is most returning. He calls Himself *tarwabun hakim* (‘the most-returning, wise’, Qur’an 24:10). He returns, but in a wise way, not by spoiling people.

In some cases, Allah is described as *hakimun khabir* (11:11) and *hakimun hamid* (41:42). Thus, the term *hakim* is used for Allah in many different ways.

*Hakim* itself, without *al-*, is also used for affairs which are decided on the night of Qadr (*laylat al-qadr*). Referring to the night of Qadr, Allah says:

فِيهَا يُفْرَقُ كُلُّ أَمْرٍ حَكِيمٍ

On it are decreed all wise affairs. (44:4)

On that night, all the things which are going to happen over next twelve months are decided, of course provisionally – provisionally because someone may do something later to change them. It is not as if people do things on *laylat al-qadr* and then the matter is finished; rather, it is a type of general approval, like a law which is passed in the parliament. If the law is passed in the parliament, it will be enacted, but there is

always possibility of sending a new law to the parliament and it being changed. So, what is passed on *laylat al-qadr* will come to pass, unless someone does something to override it. There is no guarantee that it will definitely happen; there is always a chance for improving things or for doing something to lose those things.

These are some instances of how *al-bakim* is only used for Allah and His word, and *bakim* (without *al-*), which is rarely used for other things. There are many places where *hikmah* (wisdom) is used; these instances require deep reflection because they are the best sources for understanding the meaning of *hikmah*. These verses in which *al-bikmah* is used help refine our understanding of wisdom, step by step.

### **Ibrahim and Isma'il's prayer**

The following 4 verses of the Qur'an are strongly related in that they refer to the same event and the same fact. The prophets Ibrahim (A) and Isma'il (A) were asked by Allah to restore the Ka'bah, because it was built before Ibrahim, but, by the time that Ibrahim went there, it had fallen into ruin. Still, the foundations were there. Allah says:

وَ إِذْ يَرْفَعُ اِبْرَاهِيمُ الْاَسْوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَ اِسْمَاعِيلَ

Remember when Ibrahim and Isma'il (A) were raising the foundations of the House. (2:217)

So the foundations were there, and they were building upon the foundations. It is interesting to consider how we go to the Ka'bah and pray next to it, and believe that this is the most sacred place where we can call Allah. Although we are ordinary people, we can stand next to His house and know that this is a sacred place. Now, imagine you are prophet of Allah and you are not standing next to the house of Allah but rather building it; how sacred would be your condition? Two

prophets of Allah are building the house of Allah. Who has asked them to do so? Allah himself, so, they are existing at an especially sacred time. But what did they ask from Allah? They said:

رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

...‘Our Lord, accept it from us! Indeed You are the All-hearing, the All-knowing.’ (2:127)

To imagine what they would have said: ‘We are not sure whether this will be accepted or not. We are doing something very holy, but this does not mean that we are very holy. We are doing something sacred, but we are not sure whether we are worthy to be accepted or not – or whether our actions are worthy to be accepted or not. It is only Your approval that makes this significant.’ As the Lady Zaynab said on the day of ‘Ashura:

تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا

Please accept from us.

This was an enormous *du‘a*, not just a matter of etiquette or politeness. One can offer the most sacred things to Allah but still be worried. Similarly Ibrahim and Isma‘il prayed that Allah would accept their work from them and continued:

وَ أَرِنَا مَنَاسِكَنا

Please show us the way we should perform our rituals (our actions). (2:128)

This is very important. Ibrahim (A) was a man of perfection and always wanted to see the things with his own eyes. For instance, he asked Allah:

رَبِّ أَرِنِي كَيْفَ تُحْيِي الْمَوْتَى

Show me how you revive the dead. (2:260)

He didn't just say that he wanted to know; he wanted to see. Similarly he asked Allah to show them their rites (*arina manasikana*), not just teach them (*'allimna*).

وَأَرْنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا

Show us our rites. (2:128)

Even with respect to the *malakut* (the kingdom of the heavens and the earth), Allah says 'We showed him':

وَكَذَلِكَ نُرِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ

And thus We showed Ibrahim the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. (6:75)

Ibrahim saw the kingdom of Allah; he was a man who was after perfect certainty. Thus, they prayed to Allah to be shown their rituals. This prayer also must have come from Allah's inspiration. Sometimes Allah inspires people to ask certain things from Him. For example, if parents collect their salary, go home, and tell their children they have a lot of money, this suggests to the children that they can ask for money. Similarly, Allah inspired Ibrahim and Isma'il to pray in this way; it would not have been just their own thoughts. They then said:

رَبَّنَا وَابْعَثْ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِكَ وَ يُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَ الْحِكْمَةَ وَ

يُزَكِّيهِمْ

Our Lord, raise among them a messenger from amongst them [i.e. their descendants], reciting for them Your verses and teaching them the book and wisdom, and purifying them. (2:129)

After asking Allah to show them the rituals and make them submissive, and for their descendants to be a submissive nation, they finally ask for

one of their descendants to be made a prophet. Look at how clever they were; they asked two things at once: for their descendants to be guided by a messenger, and for the messenger to be from among their descendants.

Right at that time, they defined the task of the Prophet Muhammad (S) when they were erecting the walls of Ka'bah, but it cannot only be Ibrahim and Isma'il who were so far-sighted. The task of the Prophet was to teach the book and wisdom. What a profound understanding! Ibrahim and Ismail could have just said 'teaching the book' without mentioning wisdom or purification. It must have been Allah who inspired them to pray in this way.

### **Purification and wisdom**

In 3 verses of the Qur'an, their prayer is echoed, but, not as a prayer, as a statement. Allah talks about the Prophet and uses the same words that Ibrahim and Isma'il used, but with one difference. One in the same surah, Surah al-Baqarah:

كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِيكُمْ رَسُولًا مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِنَا وَ يُزَكِّيكُمْ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَ  
الْحِكْمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ

We have sent a messenger from yourselves, to you, to recite to you his verses and purify you, and teach you the book and wisdom. (2:151)

These are the same three things as above along with some other extra things.

The next two verses are:

لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَ يُرَكِّبُهُمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَ الْحِكْمَةَ وَ إِنْ كَانُوا مِن قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

Allah has favoured [or obliged] the believers, when he raised among them a messenger from themselves who teaches them His verses, purifies them and teaches them the book and wisdom even though, before that they were in manifest and clear error. (3:164)

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَ يُرَكِّبُهُمْ وَ يُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَ الْحِكْمَةَ وَ إِنْ كَانُوا مِن قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

He is the one who has raised among the illiterate people [or among the people of Mecca, because *ummi* means either 'illiterate' or 'being from Mecca'], a prophet from themselves who teaches them, recites to them his communications, purifies them and teaches them the book and wisdom even though before that, they were in the clear and manifest error. (62:2)

Again, the same three things are mentioned: reciting the Qur'anic verses, purification, and teaching the book and wisdom, as a kind of approval, an answer to the prayer of Ibrahim and Isma'il. The only difference is that in the prayer of Ibrahim and Isma'il, teaching the book and wisdom came before purification. However, in all three places where Allah talks about the task of the Prophet, he mentions purification before teaching the book and wisdom. The late Imam Khomeini used to say that this shows that purification comes before teaching. A good teacher or a good preacher is the one who tries to purify the soul of the people to give them a moral lesson in addition to a theoretical lesson. Allah is saying that the Prophet was trying to purify the hearts of people and by doing so, he was trying to teach them the book and wisdom. After all, what does it mean to teach the book

and wisdom? Does it mean to give them just some theoretical lessons? I can give hundreds of lectures on Qur'an without having a pure audience; that's not the problem. There are non-Muslims nowadays who write encyclopaedias on Islam. The famous *Encyclopaedia of Islam* is published by non-Muslims, so, they have some knowledge of the Qur'an, not necessarily everything which is written there, but enough. However, this teaching of the book and wisdom is special; it doesn't mean just to know the Qur'an as an academic subject. A person can get a PhD in Qur'anic studies without being pure. To teach the book and wisdom here is something which depends on purification and purity of the heart. Why? Because it refers to going into the depths of the Qur'an, and no one can touch it unless he or she is purified.

إِنَّهُ لَقُرْآنٌ حَكِيمٌ \* فِي كِتَابٍ مَكْنُونٍ \* لَا يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا الْمُطَهَّرُونَ

This Qur'an is in a hidden book. (56:77-79)

Sometimes we say that Qur'an is a book, but sometimes the Qur'an itself tells us: 'I am, myself, in a hidden book, and that hidden book cannot be touched except by those who are purified.'

لَا يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا الْمُطَهَّرُونَ

No one touches it except the purified. (56:79)

From a *fiqhi* point of view, it can be said that no one may touch the Qur'an without ritual purity (*tabarab*). If a person's hand is ritually impure (*najis*) or that person doesn't have *wudu*, they are not allowed to touch the Qur'an. This is with respect to the apparent Qur'an and the apparent purity. However, the Qur'an has a reality and that reality also cannot be touched except by the people who have inward purity, not just *wudu*. We understand from the Qur'an that *al-kitab*, which is hidden, which can only be touched by the purified people, is the source from which the Torah, the Injil, and the Qur'an were originated. They



are all branches or offshoots of the same reality and this is why we call Jews, Christians and according to some scholars Zoroastrians the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitab*) rather than the People of the Books (*ahl al-kutub*). We say People of the Book because these are people who believe in something which is a manifestation of *al-kitab* which is with Allah. Similarly, the Qur'an says that the prophets came with the illuminating book (*al-kitab al-munir*), not 'illuminating books':

جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَ بِالزُّبُرِ وَ بِالْكِتَابِ الْمُنِيرِ

The prophets have come with manifest signs and with the illuminating book. (35:25)

There is one book which is hidden, and then there are the Qur'an, Torah and Injil which are manifestations of that book; the Qur'an is the last and the most complete manifestation of that hidden book. If you want to be taught the book – that one – and wisdom, you need first to purify yourself. This is why when Ibrahim and Isma'il prayed, they said 'teaching the book' and 'wisdom' *and* 'purification'. In the three cases where Allah is talking about the task of the Prophet, He mentions purification first, and teaching the book and wisdom later.

### Concluding Remarks

What we understand from these 4 verses is that *al-hikmah* is something which can be taught but not something which can be memorized. It is similar to teaching honesty. It is possible to teach someone to be honest, but not by telling them a few words about honesty which the person memorizes but he still acts dishonestly. 'Teaching wisdom' does not mean just providing information about wisdom; it means teaching people to be wise. So, the prophet came to teach the people how to gain wisdom, but how? By knowing *al-kitab*, because Qur'an is *hakim* and the word of the *Hakim*. The only way, the only prescription for us to

gain wisdom is to familiarize ourselves with the Qur'an, not only in its literal sense, but, also its reality. It is necessary to absorb the Qur'an, to touch the reality of the Qur'an by being purified in order to gain wisdom. So whoever is interested in wisdom must familiarize himself or herself with the Qur'an as much as possible. They must think according to the Qur'an, speak according to the Qur'an, make friendships according to the Qur'an, and live according to the Qur'an. Then that person will become wise (*hakim*).