

'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar narrated that God's Messenger (peace be upon him) said:

- 1 There are five keys to the world beyond the reach of human perception. These are known to no one other than God.
- 2 None other than God knows what tomorrow will bring.
- 3 No one other than God knows by how much the wombs may fall short in gestation.
- 4 No one other than God knows at what time rain will come.
- 5 No soul knows in what land it will die.
- 6 And only God knows when the Last Hour takes place.⁽¹⁾

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 4697.

From the Qur'an

- ﴿With Him are the keys to what lies beyond the reach of human perception: none knows them but He. He knows all that the land and sea contain; not a leaf falls but He knows it; and neither is there a grain in the earth's deep darkness, nor anything fresh or dry but is recorded in a clear book.﴾ (6: 59)
- ﴿They ask you about the Last Hour: 'When will it come to pass?' Say: 'Knowledge of it rests with my Lord alone. None but He will reveal it at its appointed time. It will weigh heavily on the heavens and the earth; and it will not fall on you except suddenly.' They will ask you further as if you yourself persistently enquire about it. Say: 'Knowledge of it rests with God alone, though most people remain unaware'.﴾ (7: 187)
- ﴿Say: 'None in the heavens or earth knows what is hidden except God. Nor can they ever perceive when they shall be raised from the dead'. (65) Indeed the total sum of their knowledge stops short of comprehending the Hereafter. Nay, they are in doubt of it. Nay, they are blind to it.﴾ (27: 65-66)
- ﴿Indeed with God alone rests the knowledge of when the Last Hour will come; and He it is who sends down rain; and He knows what the wombs contain; whereas no one knows what they will earn tomorrow, and no one knows in what land they will die. God alone is omniscient and takes cognisance of all things.﴾ (31: 34)
- ﴿Blessed is He to whom sovereignty over the heavens and the earth and all that is between them belongs, and with whom the knowledge of the Last Hour rests, and to whom you shall be brought back.﴾ (43: 85)
- ﴿He alone knows that which is beyond the reach of human perception, and He does not disclose His secrets to anyone (26) except to a messenger whom He has been pleased to choose. He then sends watchers to walk before and behind him.﴾ (72: 26-27)

The Narrator

Abu 'Abd al-Rahmān 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb ibn Nufayl belonged to the 'Adiy branch of the Quraysh. He embraced Islam when he was young. At the time of the Battle of Uḥud, he was too young to fight. His first military effort was the Encounter of the Moat, i.e. al-Khandaq. He also participated in the pledge under the tree. He narrated much useful information from the Prophet, and also from his father 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, Abu Bakr, 'Uthmān, 'Alī, Bilāl, Ṣuhayb and other companions of the Prophet. He issued many fatwas and narrated a large number of hadiths. He died in Year 74 AH 694 CE

Summary

The Prophet (peace be upon him) mentions that God has kept for Himself the knowledge of certain things which will always remain unknown to anyone else. These are the keys to the realm that lies beyond the reach of the human faculties of perception. These keys are what happens in future; the embryos in their mothers' bellies and what happens to them, the time when rain falls, the time and place of death of every person, and the timing of the Last Hour.



Message and Meaning



The Prophet (peace be upon him) mentions that God, Blessed and Exalted, has kept for Himself the knowledge of certain matters that belong to the realm beyond the reach of human perception. He alone knows these. He says: ‘Say: None in the heavens or earth knows what is hidden except God. Nor can they ever perceive when they shall be raised from the dead’. (27: 65) ‘He alone knows that which is beyond the reach of human perception, and He does not disclose His secrets to anyone (26) except to a messenger whom He has been pleased to choose. He then sends watchers to walk before and behind him’. (72: 26-27)

The five things mentioned in the hadith are not the only things that are known to God alone. They are mentioned as examples, rather than giving a full list. Or perhaps they are mentioned by the Prophet as the most important of things known only to God. Histories of the early prophets and their communities include things known only to God. He says: ‘Have you not received accounts of what befell those who lived before you? The people of Noah, the ‘Ād, and Thamūd, and those who came after them? None knows them all but God’. (14: 9) There is also much information that God has kept for Himself about the jinn, the angels and their tasks, as also His marvellous creation in the universe, etc.

As for man’s learning some of the matters that are beyond human knowledge, there are two possibilities:

- Some matters can be learnt through the means, tools and ways God has enabled man to use, such as knowledge of the time of sunrise and sunset, times when prayers fall due, the timings of solar and lunar eclipses, and similar matters that occur according to regular patterns and natural laws.
- Certain matters are known to God alone. These belong to the realm which is totally beyond man and his perception. These include the five mentioned in the hadith and referred to in the Qur’anic verse: ‘Indeed with God alone rests the knowledge of when the Last Hour will come; and He it is who sends down rain; and He knows what the wombs contain; whereas no one knows what they will earn tomorrow, and no one knows in what land they will die. God alone is omniscient and takes cognisance of all things’. (31: 34)

That God calls these matters ‘keys to the realm beyond’ is merely a figure of speech. Indeed, what is kept beyond human knowledge cannot be attained except by the use of the keys that lead to them. If the keys themselves are unknown to any human being, how about the things that are beyond and cannot be reached without the use of those keys?



The first of the five matters mentioned in the hadith is that God knows what will happen to man in the immediate and distant future, including his provisions, benefits and adversities, as well as what he does of good or foul deeds.



The second is that God knows what is conceived in wombs and what happens to these. He knows which pregnancies fall short in gestation and whether a pregnancy ends in abortion or completes its term until birth. He knows everything that takes place in the womb and whether

the embryo receives full nourishment or not, the sex of the embryo, and how it will be after birth in features, its physical and mental abilities, and whether it will have a happy or miserable life in this world and the next. He says: 'God knows what every female bears, and by how much the wombs may fall short [in gestation], and by how much they may increase. With Him everything has its definite measure'. (13: 8)

This is not contradicted by recent developments through which doctors can know the sex of the embryo in the later stages of pregnancy. This is an aspect of what God has enabled His servants to discover through the advancement of their knowledge. Moreover, modern knowledge can only find out the sex of the embryo after four months of gestation, and whatever is known remains uncertain and within the realm of probability. Still, doctors may know the sex of a number of embryos, but God knows everything about every pregnancy at the same time. Doctors remain unable to determine the length of a woman's pregnancy and whether a delivery will be premature or full term.



The third of the five keys is knowledge of the time of rainfall. No one on the face of the earth knows the exact time or place of rainfall or its volume.

Weather centres are now able to predict the approximate times and areas of rainfall, using modern equipment and facilities, but their predictions are based on the observation of various natural phenomena, such as the formation of clouds, speed of wind and atmospheric pressure. Some knowledge of this was available in the past, but modern advancements has made such predictions better and more accurate.



The fourth key is God's knowledge of the time and place of every person's death. He says: 'No one knows in what land they will die'. (31: 34) God has not fixed a term for mankind, so that a human being dies when this term falls due. Nor has He made a single cause of death that ensures its occurrence. A person with a serious disease may regain his health, while a strong, able-bodied person dies suddenly. A young man may suffer a fatal accident, while an elderly man lives to a very advanced age. A person may be very close to death through drowning or an high fall or something similar, but survives, while another is comfortable and secure at home, yet dies.



The last of the five keys mentioned by the Prophet in this hadith is the knowledge of the timing of the Last Hour. This is something God has kept for Himself, giving the information to no angel or prophet. God says: 'They ask you about the Last Hour: 'When will it come to pass?' Say: "Knowledge of it rests with my Lord alone. None but He will reveal it at its appointed time. It will weigh heavily on the heavens and the earth; and it will not fall on you except suddenly". They will ask you further as if you yourself persistently enquire about it. Say: "Knowledge of it rests with God alone, though most people remain unaware"'. (7: 187) The Angel Gabriel asked Prophet Muhammad about it and its timing, but the Prophet's answer was: 'The one questioned about it knows no better than the one asking the question'.⁽¹⁾

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 50; Muslim, 9.

Implementation

1

The Prophet (peace be upon him) tells us about matters which are known to no one other than God Almighty. It is not permissible for a Muslim to entertain a different idea, or to believe any ignorant fortune teller who claims otherwise.

2

Since no one knows what will happen tomorrow except God, Glorious and Exalted, then everyone must do their best. No one should slacken, relying on what lying fortune tellers say. No one should entertain a pessimistic view as a result of seeing or hearing something that causes them to abandon what they need to do.

3

God has kept from mankind the knowledge of what will happen in future. No one may attribute to God's will or decree falling short of their duty or indulging in what God has forbidden. To do so is to emulate the unbelievers who used to say: 'Had God so willed, neither we nor our forefathers would have worshipped any other than Him, nor would we have declared anything forbidden without a commandment from Him'. (16: 35)

4

A person who hopes for God's bounty should appeal to Him alone. It is He who is the Provider, the Giver.

5

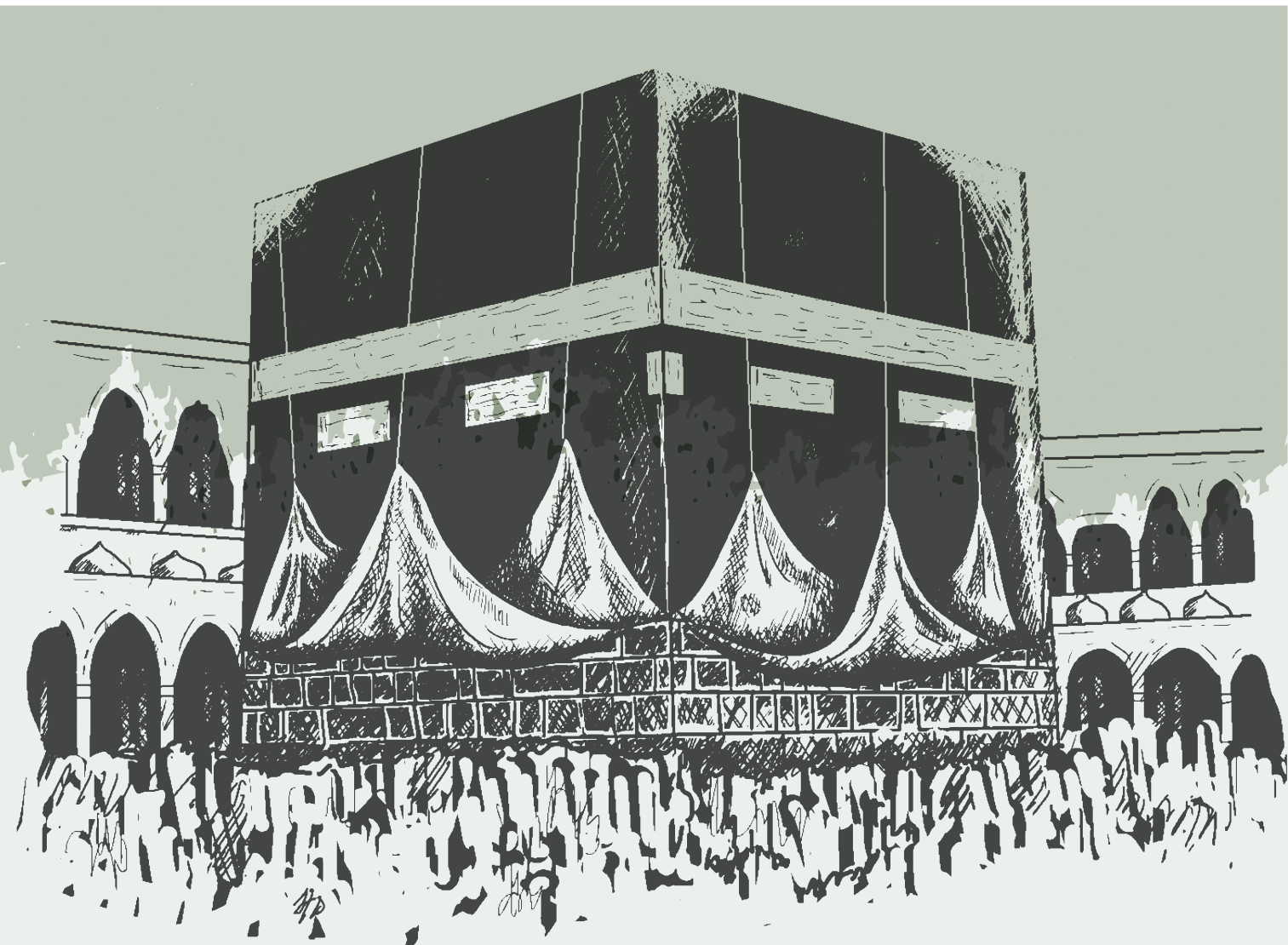
There is no harm in a woman asking her doctor to tell her the sex of her unborn child. This is something God has enabled doctors to learn through certain procedural scans. They get such knowledge after the embryo has been given its organs. Prior to that, there is no way to discover the sex of the unborn child.

6

Rain, which is the cause for the growth of agricultural produce and our means of sustenance, is controlled by God who alone knows its time, volume and place. We should know that our provisions are determined by God alone. Therefore, we worship Him alone, placing our trust in Him and endeavour to secure what He has determined for us.

7

God has withheld from all mankind their time and place of death. Were man to know that he will die on a particular day, life would go wrong and human progress would be stifled. Man would be weeping awaiting the day of his death. God has withheld such knowledge from us so that we continue to cherish hopes and endeavour to build up life on earth. This is an aspect of God's wisdom. He has a purpose for whatever He does, whether such a purpose is known to man or not.



God has withheld from mankind the timing of the Last Hour, so that they will always expect it and always prepare for it, throughout their lives, doing good deeds. Thus, they will always try to do what earns God's pleasure. For the same reason, He has withheld from them the knowledge of the Night of Power, and the time of answering prayers on Fridays.



Belief in such matters which belong to the world beyond our perception, limiting ourselves to the knowledge of what God has revealed to us, gives us comfort and hope. It enhances our faith and strengthens our reliance on God.

