# Truth and Falsehood In Islam

This short essay is written to define and explain truth and falsehood from the Islamic perspective with reference to the Quran. I want to examine here the relationship between knowledge, ignorance, truth and falsehood. Knowledge and ignorance are opposites and truth and falsehood are opposites. The motivation for writing this essay is twofold: Firstly, because knowledge and truth are closely related, sometimes I have found in my experiences that there is a misunderstanding of going from ignorance to knowledge and going from falsehood to truth. Secondly, often people gloss over these fundamentals assuming they are basics that are learned in childhood and don't require much introspection in maturity. I want to express here that there are profound implications of *sourcing* truth and falsehood that it should make every person pause and give deep thought to what is being ignored or glossed over.

Knowledge and ignorance can be likened to light and darkness. When someone does not understand something you tell it to them and immediately they are in the knowing. We say that they are enlightened (en-LIGHT-ened). They moved from darkness (ignorance or not knowing) to light and knowing. Truth and falsehood is often treated as synonymous to knowledge and ignorance. That is to say that the relationship between knowledge and ignorance is exactly the same as between truth and falsehood. They are not exactly the same but they are very closely related. To come out of falsehood is not the same as coming out of ignorance. People often confuse the two because any form of truth is itself knowledge. That I accept as true. But the difference between truth and knowledge rests on the third word of the previous sentence. The word *accept*. You can receive knowledge of something. You can know of something or you can be informed of it but it is not regarded by the individual as truth until it is accepted and believed in. To believe and accept that article of knowledge makes it a personal truth. The opposite of acceptance is rejection. When a presentation of knowledge is not accepted it is rejected and regarded as a falsehood from the individual's personal perspective.

Now bear in mind at this stage of the discussion that there are common misunderstandings when discussing truth and falsehood and acceptance and rejection. Truth and falsehood can be understood in subjective and objective terms. This essay is concerned with objective truths. Objective truths are rationally accepted based on sound axiomatic principles. 1 + 2 = 3 is a mathematical knowledge and is objectively true. If someone rejects the equation and calls it false then it is the person's thinking that rests on falsehood not that the equation is false. The individual's personal (or subjective) evaluation regards the equation to be false but objectively the equation is true.

Acceptance and rejection can be discussed in both morally loaded and amoral or neutral terms. This essay is written to elucidate the former - to objectively explain acceptance and rejection in the moral context of truth and falsehood. The latter approach of neutrality can be either objective or subjective. In a neutral discussion of acceptance and rejection one can say that the opposite of acceptance is rejection and that rejection is nothing more than being the opposite of acceptance. In other words, it has no moral weight. As an example one can reject chocolate milkshake and in its place accept strawberry milkshake. The rejection of the

chocolate milkshake is not immoral. So a person can conceive the notion of rejection as being neutral, neither weighted in evil nor goodness. And like with the chocolate milkshake the rejection of knowledge does not necessarily have to be immoral or evil and therefore the assertion of falsehood is neutral and morally impartial. Importantly here for this discussion of truth and falsehood is not to confuse the physical rejection of chocolate milkshake, the chocolate flavoured milk drink itself, with the non-physical rejection of the knowledge that it is in fact a chocolate flavoured milkshake. To reject the physical chocolate milkshake is a neutral rejection but to accept the physical chocolate milkshake and then say "I reject that this milkshake is chocolate flavoured and it is a strawberry flavoured milkshake", when it is in fact chocolate flavoured milkshake, is a morally weighted rejection. The knowledge that it is a chocolate milkshake is also an objective truth and the rejection of this article of truthful knowledge is a falsehood that is unlike ignorance or darkness. This is why I emphasize differentiating between truth and falsehood and knowledge and ignorance. Falsehood is not ignorance or darkness. Falsehood is rooted in corruption.

I took many sentences and paragraphs to explain this singular point that falsehood is the face of corruption and yet in the Quran Allah (God) contrasts truth and falsehood in a very short and forceful verse and the shortness and forcefulness of the verse tends to make people think that Allah is displaying emotional language to motivate people to actions of goodness and righteousness. Here below is the verse under discussion. It is the 18th verse from the 21st surah:

21:18 Rather, We dash the truth upon falsehood, and it destroys it, and thereupon it departs. And for you is destruction from that which you describe.(Saheeh International translation)

The footnote to this verse in the Saheeh International publication I have states:
'Literally, "strikes its brain," disabling or killing it.'

Simply put, to strike is to bash. Yusuf Ali's English translation is more direct:
21:18 Nay, We hurl Truth against falsehood, and it knocks out its brain, and behold, falsehood doth perish! Ah! Woe be to you for the (false) things ye ascribe (to Us).

Now I can tell you that this is not an emotional verse. Allah is not emotionally saying what can be said in a non-emotional metaphor of truth dispelling falsehood, which would be likened to knowledge dispelling the darkness of ignorance. The forcefulness of the words 'strikes its brains' is apt because corruption cannot be shed light on. Corruption is not a darkness or the absence of light. Corruption and its face of falsehood is a madness. It is like repeated saying that 1 + 1 = 4. Falsehood such as this cannot stand. It has no place. It cannot sustain. It cannot live or fly. Its brains are bashed. It is not a stain to be washed. It is bashed away until it is no more - bashed until it is dead and gone, which is what will happen if someone takes a rock and bashes the head and cracks open the skull and keeps on bashing until the brains are physically bashed, pulverised, and the blood pours out and the grey brain matter generating the corruption, rejection and falsehood ceases to function.

In absolute terms truth and Iman (belief in God) are synonymous. Therefore knowledge is intimately wound up with Iman. Iman increases when knowledge increases. Increase in Iman is like finishing a jigsaw puzzle. It is a two step endeavour:

1. Finding the missing jigsaw piece - seeking knowledge and dispelling ignorance and darkness, and
2. Fitting (or integrating) the piece correctly into its place in the jigsaw puzzle and keeping it in place - affirming truth over falsehood.

With each piece put correctly the completeness of the picture in the jigsaw puzzle, and likewise the completeness of Iman and truth. The kufr (disbelief in God) that condemns to hell eternally is when people having found the missing piece of the jigsaw puzzle- they are knowledgeable - fail to fill the gap in the puzzle correctly - they put it elsewhere or place it incorrectly in the wrong orientation. The piece does not fit and they repeat the step all over again and in the second and third attempt they repeat the same error as before - they put it elsewhere or place it incorrectly in the wrong orientation and the jigsaw piece does not fit and it does not integrate into the rest of the jigsaw puzzle. In fact the error is repeated *endlessly*. They never put the piece in the correct slot in the correct orientation even though they have the knowledge and ability to do so. Imagine it is a puzzle with the shahadah (the Muslim testament of belief in God) written is beautiful Arabic calligraphy across the middle of the puzzle and around it is a symmetrical design of geometric shapes beautifying the picture and the shahadah in the middle. The person doing the puzzle has already correctly slotted into place the bordering pieces and the pieces making up the symmetrical geometric design around the shahadah. Now when it is time to put in the pieces that correctly write out the shahadah they repeatedly fail to slot the pieces correctly. Repeatedly they are corrupting the picture of the jigsaw puzzle. They are locked in a loop of falsehood and corruption, rejecting truth. This is the metaphor of the disbelievers in God – those that deny God's existence or those that falsely ascribes partners or associates to God. They can be doctors, engineers, academics, social workers, professionals in different industries, proving beyond doubt that they have the knowledge and the ability to correctly assert Iman without corruption and association - they already have placed the pieces in the jigsaw puzzle that make up the geometrical design - yet repeatedly assert falseness - they repeatedly fail to complete the shahadah section of the puzzle. It is a rejection. Because truthful believers share this world with such people in our modern secular society it is a faux pas to point it out as rooted in corruption. We politely regard it as ignorance, as if to mean some lack of knowledge is impeding.

Concisely put, Iman (belief in God) is a meaningful, orderly and truthful integration of knowledge. Kufr (disbelief in God) is chaotic and corrupted, meaningless madness.

The author of this brief essay is Ziad Cassim.

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