

HIGHER THAN AI

Taking Your *Din* from the Divine



NUH KELLER

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Dear Believers, as-Salamu ‘alaykum wa rahmatu Llahi wa barakatuh. In the Name of Allah Most Merciful and Compassionate: All praise to Allah for His infinite blessings on us all, and the true height of Iman; and blessings and peace on His Prophet Muhammad, who cast out the blind night of this world with the light of Islam.

The Mighty Quran teaches us that light comes from light, darkness from darkness, and that what one requires certainty to follow, one should not accept anything less, as He tells us in verse 17.36 of Surat al-Isra’:

﴿وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ إِنَّ
السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا﴾

Nor blindly follow because of mere assumptions
what you have no proven knowledge of its truth:
Verily the hearing, sight, and knowing heart,
all these shall be asked of.

Allah says as a general rule of guidance to His servants *Wa la taqfu ma laysa laka bihi ‘ilm*, “Nor blindly follow because of mere assumptions what you have no proven knowledge of its truth,” in which the word *taqfu* means “to carefully follow the tracks of, pursue, or proceed according to”—as Abu Su‘ud says: “That is, don’t faithfully follow what you possess no actual knowledge of, be it word or deed, like someone travelling a path he doesn’t know will take him where he is going. . . . [in which] the meaning of ‘knowledge’ (‘ilm) is the conviction of its credibility derived from a *sanad* or ‘connection to a true source,’ whether necessarily or probably—its use in this meaning undeniably being generally accepted.”

The meaning for this in the *din* is obvious—and well attested to by the monumental historiography or ‘way of recording history’ of Islam, unparalleled by any other civilization, religion, or culture—as Imam Muslim

mentions in the introduction to his *Sahih* from ‘Abdullah ibn Mubarak: “Naming (isnad) all the intermediate transmitters of the *sanad* (connection to a true source) is part of the *din*: were it not for recording them (isnad), anyone who wished to could say anything he wished.”

Biqā’i explains *ma laysa laka bihi ‘ilm* “what you have no proven knowledge of its truth,” by saying: “[The ‘proven knowledge’ of] everything depends on what it is—especially for grave slander (*buht*) or charges of fornication without proof (*qadhif*)—so whatever requires decisive proof, one accepts nothing less than that; while whatever strong evidence suffices for, one accepts that.” The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, “Beware of surmise, for verily surmise is the most lying of words” (*Muslim*, 4.1985 (2563). s). Ibn ‘Ashur notes that baseless charges about others’ morals, character, wives, and children abounded in the *Jahiliyya* or ‘pre-Islamic pagan period of ignorance,’ and that this verse not only prohibited all these, but went much further. In his words: “This is a tremendous moral precept and a magnificent reform of reason that teaches the Umma (all Muslims) the difference between levels of rational thought, so that they don’t confuse between the known (*ma’lum*), the probable (*madhnun*), and the merely imagined (*mawhum*). It is moreover a noble social reform that keeps the Umma from falling into, or casting others into, many harms and destructive outcomes from carelessly risking relying on bases of evidence that are mere conjecture (*mawhuma*).” The prohibition in the verse applies not only to idolators (*mushrikin*) who worshipped other than Allah without any convincing evidence, but to *shahada al-zur* “lying testimony,” *qadhif al-muhsanat* “unproven charges of fornication against women who could well be chaste,” asserting something to people without any proof, surmising ill about a person with scant evidence, or lies against a person without proof.

Habannaka says it means, “Don’t follow anything you do not know is the truth or correct, or is sounder and more probable (*rajih*) than all else.” Alusi says, “Its upshot is the prohibition of reaching a judgement on a thing through something not actually known”—which means one may not adopt just *any* assumptions in making a judgement, but must have sound grounds for adopting them—whether the judgement relates to beliefs about Allah (*ilahiyyat*), the prophets (*nubuwiyyat*), one’s religious practice, or whether non-religious matters. One may not follow something without solid grounds.

This prohibition from Allah is as imperative today as it has always been, and certainly applies to what is termed “Artificial Intelligence” or AI, whose owners, developers, and salesmen are aggressively (and lucratively) pushing it in every walk of life. People talk to it online “just me and you” and it writes back or talks back aloud, answers questions, gives advice, and provides company to people who don’t have any. We will take a look at what it is

below, but it is at least a colossal search engine that encompasses a tremendous amount of texts on the internet.

The hype runs so high that a number of influential Muslim figures have formed impressions about it that are far from what it can deliver. Like: “AI gives us unprecedented access to Islamic scholarship at a level of speed and efficiency that outdoes traditional learning. It encompasses all the major works of the Islamic tradition and allows one to direct questions and queries to this massive corpus, which speaks to you directly. It democratizes Islamic learning. You don’t have to know Arabic or study the religion for years to be able to derive answers and insights. Anyone, whatever their level of learning or professional background, can engage with these texts. AI eliminates the biases inherent in the learning and expertise of individuals. It has the potential to produce original creativity in the Islamic tradition. AI absorbs the material, and scholars and experts can now generate new insights rather than spending years occupied with philology (in-depth study of literature and language), translation, and meaning-making.” Such optimism bespeaks the wide streak of the ‘colonial mentality’ found in many people originally from Muslim lands—particularly about new technology—who are convinced they “have to have the latest from the West,” whether rational or irrational. Ibn Khaldun explains this in his *Muqaddima* by saying: “Realize the conquered is always aglow with enthusiasm for faithfully following the conquerer in his catchwords and hallmarks, his garb, his creed, all things about him, and his customary usages—the reason for which is that the mind always believes whoever subdues it to be perfect, and goes along with him.”

A grandson of Sheikh Yunus, former imam of our neighborhood mosque, decided a few days before last Ramadan to try the “intelligence” of Artificial Intelligence by posing to ChatGPT (currently the largest corporate provider of AI) the question “If the Hajj comes in Ramadan [an obvious impossibility because the two are months apart], do we fast or not?” and the printed answer it gave was as follows: “When the time for the Hajj coincides with Ramadan, Hajj pilgrims must fast Ramadan, because it is obligatory, and is not lifted from them because of Hajj. However there are some details: (1) If the fast is *hard* for the pilgrim, a considerable hardship that would weaken him from performing the rites of Hajj, it is permissible for him not to fast if he is a traveller, after which he makes up the fast-days after Ramadan; (2) As for when he is residing in Mecca and not a traveller, then he has to fast Ramadan, unless he finds another excuse recognized by Sacred Law permitting him not to fast. Thus, the Hajj does not eliminate the obligation to fast Ramadan, and the pilgrim may only omit the fast when he has an excuse recognized by Sacred Law permitting him not to, such as travelling, or a considerable hardship, after which he makes up the fast-days he did not fast.” The young man read this, and said, “It’s a fraud.”

How could something that so many billions of dollars have been spent on developing produce an answer so stupid, that anyone with a brain or even half a brain would know better than to say? Because it does not *have* a brain, a mind, consciousness, or *any* intelligence. Its system of providing answers is not based on any of these things, but rather on “large language models” or LLMs. What does that mean?

An LLM learns by studying enormous amounts of written material and repeating one basic task: predicting what word is most likely to come next. By doing this billions of times, it builds a complex mathematical map of how words, ideas, and arguments usually appear together. When we ask it a question, it uses this map to construct a likely answer. It does not observe the world directly, possess knowledge of its own, or independently judge whether something is true. Everything it produces is shaped by the material on which it was trained and by the rules given to it. This raises the important question “Who decides which sources are included, which are excluded, which are treated as authoritative, and which are pushed aside?” The LLM itself cannot make these decisions according to any objective principle of its own. These priorities are introduced by the people and institutions that collect the data, design the system, and guide its responses. Therefore, even when an LLM appears neutral, its answers still reflect the assumptions, preferences, and priorities of those who built it and trained it. Who controls this? Tech tyrants who insist on being opaque and secret about how and what data is put into these LLMs. So there is no transparency, discussion, or review. Where LLMs are secret and stagnant, human thought is transparent, discussed, exchanged, and dynamic. AI’s mere ability to mimic plausible syntax (word order) correctly is not intelligence itself.

The attempt of its proprietors is to pass off AI as “superhuman thought”—while it falls short of the standards of even ordinary human thought—and falls short especially of the standards of a religious judgement (*hukm*) in our *din*, which demands a sanad or ‘connection to a true source’ that answers not only the question “What do you mean?” but “How do you know?” The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) warned us of this while still alive by saying, “Verily Allah does not take away Sacred Knowledge (*‘ilm*) by plucking it out of servants, but rather takes away Sacred Knowledge by taking away the ulema [in death]—until, when He has not left a single scholar [in a particular place or time], people take as their heads the completely ignorant, and they are asked and give ‘expert legal opinions’ without any Sacred Knowledge, going astray themselves and leading others astray” (*Bukhari*, 1.36 (100). s). The Andalusian scholar Ibn Abi Jamra says of this, after prior discussion: “Sacred Knowledge, as we have previously conveyed from the Imams of the *din*, is a *light* (*nur*) that Allah places in hearts, so its diminishment [down the generations] is necessarily realized and palpably found, for the light of the Prophetic Companions (*Sahaba*) is

not merely like that of their students (Tabi'in), nor the light of their students merely like that of *their* students, and so on, generation after generation. So in every generation something of it is lifted and diminished, in view of which [we may say], Sacred Knowledge was initially in the breasts of men, then transferred to pages and books, while its *keys* remained in the breasts of men; until finally now, the books and treatises are many, and the keys are few indeed—and when a key *is* found, it is seldom unfailingly upright (mustaqim).” Ibn ‘Ata Illah says, “Whoever you see answering everything he is asked, expressing everything he sees, and mentioning everything he knows, you may thereby infer is ignorant.”

I asked the Karachi office of Taqi Usmani, one of the foremost muftis in the Islamic world today, whether it was permissible to take Islamic religious knowledge from AI. The fatwa returned read: “Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a modern field of science and technology. It provides answers based on algorithms and previously available data. Because of this, there is a strong possibility of mistakes or incorrect information in its responses. It has been observed that sometimes tools like ChatGPT give wrong rulings on religious matters and even create incorrect or fake Arabic references on their own. Religious knowledge, especially giving a Shari‘a (Sacred Law) ruling, is a very sensitive and serious matter, and requires great care. Therefore religious and Shari‘a matters should always be learned from reliable and trustworthy sources, such as a qualified and dependable Islamic scholar. Acting on information provided by ChatGPT or other AI applications without verification from a reliable scholar is not permissible. Likewise sharing such information with others without proper verification is not permissible.”

On Friday 4 April 2025 the Muslim Council of Britain, one of the largest organizations there, provided an AI-generated Friday sermon (khutba) to imams of mosques that contained a seeming verse of the Quran supposed to be verse 33.10 of Surat al-Ahzab—the original of which is actually: “When they came at you from the ground above you, and that below; And eyes cast about in fright, and hearts reached the very throats; And guesses of all kinds came to your minds about Allah’s final purpose”—in place of which, AI made up and substituted the words *Wa dhanna l-mu’minuna wa l-mu’minatu bi Llahi dhannan hasanan* “And the believing men and believing women thought good of Allah”—a “verse” that doesn’t exist anywhere in the Quran.

I remember that day in particular because at almost the same moment, I was giving a lesson in the zawiya in Amman on some of my views of how human *knowledge* only arises in the face of human *interests*, while the interests behind AI are the oligarchs or ‘few at the top’ whose aim—besides adding a few zeros to the right side of their annual income figures—is to supplant democracy with a new *feudalism* underwritten by the Western

banking cartel: a system of “lords who own, and serfs who work.” I made the following points:

(1) Recognize that AI is a modern-day Trojan horse: it may seem like a helpful tool, but beneath the surface lies a mechanism of controlled and curated information flow, designed to shape perception rather than to merely inform. How does it differ from other search engines? Because queries to them produce various results, opinions, and websites. Even though the results may be skewed and filtered to benefit other ‘family businesses,’ one is exposed to several sources of information. AI is different because it pretends to give you one clear answer with a veneer of scholarly authority and confidence. It will never tell you “I don’t know.” Just ask AI about political topics like Israel’s war against the Palestinians, and the insidious nature of its claims to objective knowledge becomes evident. Ask yourself “Who is producing this ‘knowledge’? And how are they influencing and shaping your worldview?”

(2) Beware of the addiction. Nature’s inexorable rule for all human strengths and capacities is “Use it or lose it.” Remember the “labor-saving devices” of the last third of the twentieth century that eliminated most of the work in day-to-day life in America—which eventually made the top 5 percent physical-fitness quotient in each age group today equal to the *bottom* 5 percent of the fitness of those days. Platoons of psychologists—a profession once vaunted to improve human life—labor to make the user-interface of their AI employers’ most recent products as human, cuddly, attractive, and *addictive* as possible. AI addiction is a mind-dulling downward spiral to the death of one’s creativity and independent thought. It serves those who lack creativity. Creative minds—architects, designers, writers, inventors, and engineers—must *think* carefully and creatively about solutions. They begin with an idea, meaning, inspiration, and move toward something more concrete. This produces solutions, interpretations, and the discovery of knowledge. AI militates against this process through theft at scale, LLM plagiarism, and machine-driven results. Professors complain of once-bright students now using AI to produce flat and monotonous essays, which are decently worded, but no longer contain any original ideas or analytical depth. As the creative process disappears, so does one’s ability to think for oneself and form independent opinions, a veritable “death of thought” by code.

Too, as I realized after the talk, because of AI’s highly addictive ‘talking’ interface, it exposes *children* to severe mental health risks by making them bypass parents, elders, teachers, and the righteous, for advice straight from the modern world’s ‘selfish-jerk’ culture and values. They will lose *your* values because someone else will be telling them what *their* values are. It is not easy to see how dumbed-down, mean-spirited, and socially withdrawn children will be able to live and thrive in the world of tomorrow.

(3) Be cautious when AI echoes your beliefs or praises your values—this alignment may not be genuine. What appears to be confirmation of truth might instead be a calculated strategy to earn your trust and lower your guard.

(4) Beware of data surveillance. AI is the most powerful data-gathering tool ever made. Realize that your data isn't just being stored—it's being turned into a powerful engine to influence public opinion, shape market trends, control social narratives, weaken governments, and shift power—all without physical force. This is valuable data for governments and tech tyrants, for it tells them how people think, feel, and believe, and increases their ability to manipulate and control public opinion.

(5) Most importantly, remember that by revealing to AI your private thoughts, doubts, and vulnerabilities, you're exposing yourself to future risks—including surveillance, coercion, and blackmail. People knowingly feed it personal information by sharing their private struggles, questions, beliefs, and thoughts, and AI creates a facade of privacy by interaction with you and no one else, but all your information is collected. This is a gross violation of *privacy*, an ineradicable Islamic value and primal human right—the violation of which is a *kabira* or enormity, as the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) underscored by saying, “Whoever looks into a family's home without their permission, it is lawful for them to put out his eye” (*Muslim*, 3,1699 (2185). s). AI records and stores your queries on politics, culture, religion, and ideology. All of this can be shared with companies, governments, and law-enforcement agencies. With enough data, AI can build up an intimate and personal profile of who you are, your likes, dislikes, weaknesses, and personality—in the words of one analyst, it can know more about you than your spouse. Because of this it can silence, control, and manipulate individuals. Whitney Webb, a world authority on the crimes of Jeffrey Epstein in America, which she documented in *One Nation Under Blackmail*, was asked in an interview who would be the “next Epstein,” and she said that would be superfluous, now that AI has taken over.

So Allah's words *Wa la taqfu ma laysa laka bihi 'ilm(un)* “Nor blindly follow because of mere assumptions what you have no proven knowledge of its truth”—apply very exactly to blindly adopting AI's advice, until it is independently verified—particularly because it is deaf, dumb, and blind, and cannot actually *think*. What it *thinks* is a mere charade and caricature of the cultural trends and sad state of knowledge in our times, and like a great many of those of the present day, it *lies*—or indeed, does not know the difference between lying and telling the truth because it is without a brain, a heart, or anything besides what it has been programmed with. Its most seductive feature is that it *talks*, while this verse warns you against blindly falling for it. Even if all mankind head like the myth of lemmings into the sea at

its instance, the believer knows better—by Allah’s telling him—than to follow them.

Then Allah gives His reason or *ta’lil* by threatening those who disobey the prohibition with the words *Inna s-sam’a wa l-basara wa l-fu’ada kullu ula’ika kana ‘anhu mas’ula(n)* “Verily the hearing, sight, and knowing heart, all these shall be asked of”—the first two faculties of which, *as-sam’ wa l-basar* or “hearing and sight,” are the two main means of *idrak* or “consciousness, awareness, discernment, and perception,” while the third is the *fu’ad* or “knowing heart” which Biqa’i describes as “the depth of the power of *ideation* (tafakkur) in Man that appropriately and intelligently judges.” The knowing heart (*fu’ad*) is mentioned *after* the first two senses because it usually comes into play after the hearing and sight have conveyed something to it. Ulema of lexicography (*lughah*) note the word *fu’ad* “knowing heart” is *fiery* in derivation—brilliant, bright, heated, lively, burning—its tongues of flame flickering, flaring, and flaming up here and there, and connotes *shawwa* or to “roast, grill, broil”—because its function is ratiocination or ‘deep thought’ that is *nadij* or “done to a turn, mature, ripe”—after *tahiya* or “preparation, readiness, mobilization,” *i’dad* “readying and arranging,” and *tartib* or “putting in pro-per order.” So *fu’ad* is an Arabic term for the heart that focuses on *indaj al-ra’y* or “ripening, stewing, maturing, and perfecting its point of view or judgement.” And all three faculties together—the hearing, sight, and knowing heart’s discernment—represent *certitude*, so Allah’s meaning is that “what you have not made *sure* of through your own consciousness, perception, and intelligent judgement, don’t blindly follow it.”

Allah then finishes with *kullu ula’ika kana ‘anhu mas’ula(n)* “all these shall be asked of,” in which the word *ula’ika* “these” is a plural used for *‘uqala’* or “conscious, intelligent beings” to emphasize the individual greatness of each, but too because *ula’ika* “these” is a plural of paucity or ‘fewness,’ meaning from three to ten, as here just three faculties are named, for had *many* been named, the pronoun would have been *tilka* (‘these’ for many).

The ulema have found two interpretive possibilities for *kana ‘anhu mas’ula(n)* or “shall be asked of”: the first, deemed likeliest by Baydawi, Abu Su’ud, Biqa’i, Alusi, and Ibn ‘Ashur, is that the individual faculties—hearing, sight, and the knowing heart—shall *each* be asked whether or not they themselves have actually perceived and discerned the truth of what their owner has followed, interpreting the verb *kana* (shall) as referring back to *kullu* (all), meaning each of the faculties named. In Biqa’i’s words, “Each [faculty] shall be individually asked [Allah endowing it with the ability to answer] whether its owner *used* it to seek out the correct knowledge to his utmost therein, to *do*—when he established the actual facts—what would please Allah, and *shun* what would draw His wrath—or did not.” The second position interprets the *kana* or “shall” as referring back to the person they

belong to, who *himself* shall be asked of them, which I did not regard as a weak position because of the phrase ‘*anhu* or “asked of”—and the translation I have used, “all these shall be asked of,” can accommodate both of these: the first position by intending the “asked of” as meaning “inquired from” (as in the English sentence “I *asked of* the doorman whether his master was in”), and the second position by intending the “asked of” as meaning “asked about.” These two positions on the verse typify a *khilaf qawi* or ‘strong difference’ of scholarly opinion, and I believe the English rendering may bear *both* of them, as the original does.

To summarize everything, Allah is telling us that everyone who is not deaf, blind, and a fool will be asked on Judgement Day why he didn’t make *sure* before blindly following what he had no knowledge of its truth. This is miles and miles away from asking Artificial Intelligence for anything with a real bearing on one’s life, let alone one’s religion or eternity. It has *no* intelligence, except in the sense of *surveillance*, which is not a kind of intelligence most of us want. Especially when we have the Book of Allah Himself and the guidance of His messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace) that show us the road to endless happiness here and hereafter, and how to be with Allah forever. May Allah make us of their number. ∞

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NUH KELLER was born in eastern Washington State in 1954. He read philosophy at Gonzaga University, the University of Chicago, and UCLA, entered Islam in 1977 at al-Azhar in Cairo, and moved to Jordan in 1980. A scholar of traditional Islamic sciences who studied with sheikhs in Jordan and Syria, he has produced such works as *Reliance of the Traveller*, *Sea Without Shore*, *The Quran Beheld: An English Translation from the Arabic*, and his latest book is *With Allah: Letters on the Quest of Hearts* Vol. I, published by Stanchion Press in August 2026.