306654 - Thinking in Islam

the question

I have read on some atheist websites that Islam does not allow thinking. I hope that you can respond to this specious argument.

Detailed answer

Firstly:

The Muslim should strive to preserve his belief and his faith, and focus on maintaining his sound fitrah and thinking; he should flee for the sake of his religious commitment and spiritual well-being from doubts and confusion, for hearts are weak and specious arguments may be attractive, because of the way they are presented as something beautiful by proponents of innovation and misguidance, when in fact they are based on flimsy and weak foundations.

Reading books that promote innovation and misguidance, or books that promote shirk and myths, or the books of other religions that have been distorted, or the books written by atheists and hypocrites, or looking at websites that promote these deviant ideas and propagate specious arguments, is not permissible except for one who is well-versed in Islamic knowledge, whose aim in reading such material is to refute it and highlight its corrupt nature, and has the ability to do that or is qualified to take on this task.

As for one who does not have Islamic knowledge looking at or reading such material, doing so is more likely to lead to some sort of confusion, undermining the belief in his heart and shaking his faith, because of the specious arguments that he reads.

This has happened to many ordinary Muslims, and even to some seekers of knowledge who are not qualified to deal with such material, to the extent that in some cases they have ended up misguided and astray – we seek refuge with Allah.

Very often, the one who looks at these books may be deceived by his thinking that his faith is stronger than all the specious arguments presented, but then suddenly he finds – if he reads a great deal – that the specious arguments have begun to take root in his mind in a manner that never occurred to him.

Hence the advice of the scholars of the righteous early generations was to forbid looking at or reading such books.

We have quoted the words of the scholars in the answer to question no. 92781.

Secondly:

It is essential to learn Islam from its sources, the greatest of which, and the foundation thereof, are the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Islam has emphasized the importance of reason and thinking, which is reflected in many verses. There are phrases that are repeated dozens of times in the Qur'an, such as "Thus does Allah make clear to you His verses that you might use reason" [al-Baqarah 2:242], "for a people who give thought" [Yoonus 10:24] and "for a people who understand" [al-An'aam 6:98].

Allah calls upon us to think in the Qur'an, as He, may He be glorified, says (interpretation of the meaning):

"[This is] a blessed Book which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded"

[Saad 38:29].

Allah, may He be glorified, says, calling us to reflect upon His creation (interpretation of the meaning):

"Do they not contemplate within themselves? Allah has not created the heavens and the earth and what is between them except in truth and for a specified term. And indeed, many of the people, in [the matter of] the meeting with their Lord, are disbelievers"

[ar-Room 30:8].

Indeed, Allah, may He be exalted, has criticized the people of Hell by stating that they did not benefit from their reason, and He tells us (interpretation of the meaning):

“And they will say, ‘If only we had been listening or reasoning, we would not be among the companions of the Blaze’”

[al-Mulk 67:10]

“So have they not traveled through the earth and have hearts by which to reason and ears by which to hear? For indeed, it is not eyes that are blinded, but blinded are the hearts which are within the breasts”

[al-Hajj 22:46].

Thinking is an act of worship, which Allah points out in the verses (interpretation of the meaning):

“Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding

Who remember Allah while standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], "Our Lord, You did not create this aimlessly; exalted are You [above such a thing]; then protect us from the punishment of the Fire”

[Aal ‘Imraan 3:190-191].

Shaykh as-Sa‘di said:

Here Allah tells us that “Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding”. This encourages people to think deeply, examine these signs and contemplate the creation. He left the word “signs” ambiguous, and did not state explicitly what it points to, as an indication of the great number and ubiquitous nature of those signs. That is because in creation there are amazing signs that dazzle

those who look upon them, convince those who ponder them, attract the hearts of those who are sincere and strengthen the faith of those of understanding. But the details of what these signs contain are impossible for any person to list or even comprehend some of them.

In conclusion, what we see in them of greatness, the vastness and order in the movement of heavenly bodies, point to the greatness of their Creator and His power, which encompasses all things.

Their perfection, precision and beauty point to the wisdom of Allah, His control over all things and the vastness of His knowledge.

The benefits they bring to people are indicative of the vastness of Allah's mercy, the all-encompassing nature of His grace and kindness, and the necessity of being grateful to Him. All of that indicates that the heart should only be attached to its Creator and originator, and should do its utmost to seek His pleasure, and not associate with Him any of those who have not even an atom's weight of power over themselves or others on earth or in heaven.

Allah has intended these signs only for those of understanding, namely people of reason, because they are the ones who benefit from that and who contemplate the signs with reason, and do not merely look at them with their eyes.

Then Allah describes those of understanding as being those "who remember Allah" in all circumstances, "standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides". This includes all types of remembrance of Allah, both verbal and in the heart. That includes praying standing; if that is not possible, then sitting; and if that is not possible then lying on one's side. "and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth" that is, so that they may reach the conclusion intended (that there is a great Creator).

This indicates that thinking is an act of worship, and is one of the characteristics of the close friends of Allah. When they think and reflect upon these things, they realise that Allah did not create them in vain, and they say: "Our Lord, You did not create this aimlessly; exalted are You [above such a thing]" and exalted are You above all that is not befitting to Your Majesty; rather You created it in truth, for truth, and including truth.

“then protect us from the punishment of the Fire” by protecting us from doing bad deeds, and helping us to do righteous deeds, so that we might attain thereby salvation from the fire. End quote.

In the hadith narrated from ‘Ata’, he said: ‘Ubayd ibn ‘Umayr and I went to visit ‘Aa’ishah. She said to ‘Ubayd ibn ‘Umayr: It is about time you visited us. He said: O my mother, I say as the first one said: Make your visits at long intervals, and people will love you more. She said: Spare us from this gibberish of yours! Ibn ‘Umayr said: Tell us of the most amazing thing you saw from the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). She remained silent for a while, then she said: One night he said: “O ‘Aa’ishah, let me focus on worshipping my Lord this night.” I said: By Allah, I love to be near you, and I love what makes you happy. He got up and did wudoo’, then he began to pray. She said: And he kept weeping until his lap became wet. Then he wept and kept weeping until his beard became wet. Then he wept and kept weeping until the ground became wet. Then Bilaal came to call him for prayer, and when he saw him weeping, he said: O Messenger of Allah, why are you weeping when Allah has forgiven you your past and future sins? He said: “Should I not be a thankful slave? Last night a verse was revealed to me; woe to the one who recites it and does not reflect:

‘Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding

Who remember Allah while standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], "Our Lord, You did not create this aimlessly; exalted are You [above such a thing]; then protect us from the punishment of the Fire’

[Aal ‘Imraan 3:190].”

Narrated by Ibn Hibbaan in his Saheeh (2/286). See also as-Silsilah as-Saheehah (1/147).

The man of literature and great thinker, Ustadh ‘Abbaas Mahmoud al-‘Aqqaad, wrote a book on this issue, entitled at-Tafkeer Fareedah Islamiyyah (Thinking is an Islamic Duty).