

ETIQUETTES OF KNOWLEDGE

Once the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was delivering a sermon when a companion *Hazrat Abu Rifa'ah (Radhi Allahu Anhu)* came and said, “O the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), A stranger who knows nothing about his religion wants to learn the religion.” Upon this, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) turned to him, stopped the sermon and started teaching the religion to Abu Rifa'ah. When he had understood well, the Prophet resumed the sermon.

After the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) had departed the world, *Hazrat Abdullah bin Abbas (Radhi Allahu Anhum)* took extreme care to collect the hadith. No sooner did he know that so and so person had knowledge of hadith than he reached their house. If they were sleeping, he sat outside waiting for them to wake up. The garments of *Hazrat Abdullah bin Abbas* would get covered with dust. Upon one meeting, the person exclaimed, “Dear son! You took pains unfairly. You should have commanded me and I would have come to meet you.” Ibn Abbas (*Radhi Allahu Anhu*) used to reply, “No, No. You have the hadith of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) with you. It is my duty to come to you and get the hadith.” [Al-Hakim]

In Islam, the status of knowledge is very high. The very first verse of the Qur'an talks about knowledge.

﴿أَفْرَأَىٰ بِأَسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ﴾ العلق: ١

Translation of Meaning: “Read: In the name of thy Lord Who createth.” (Al-Alaq:1)

Allah swore, and He swore with the pen:

﴿ن وَالْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ﴾ القلم: ١

Translation of Meaning: “Nun. By the pen and that which they write (therewith).” [Al-Qalam:1]

Similarly in the hadith, knowledge has been accorded to high status. It is so that the struggle for education has been termed to be path to the Paradise. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) says:

«مَنْ سَلَكَ طَرِيقًا يَلْتَمِسُ فِيهِ عِلْمًا، سَهَّلَ اللَّهُ لَهُ طَرِيقًا إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ» [بخاري، ابوداؤد، ترمذي]

Translation: “He who travels on a path in search of knowledge, will find that Allah causes him to travel on a path to Paradise.” [Bukhari, Abu Dawood, Tirmizi]

Knowledge is such that its reward continues even after a man of knowledge has died. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, “

» إِذَا مَاتَ الْإِنْسَانُ انْقَطَعَ عَنْهُ عَمَلُهُ إِلَّا مِنْ ثَلَاثٍ: إِلَّا مِنْ صَدَقَةٍ جَارِيَةٍ أَوْ عِلْمٍ يُنْتَفَعُ بِهِ أَوْ وَلَدٍ صَالِحٍ يَدْعُو لَهُ» [مسلم]

Translation: When a man dies, his acts come to an end, but three, recurring charity, or knowledge (by which people) benefit, or a pious son, who prays for him (for the deceased).” [Muslim]

For the seeker of knowledge the angels lower their wings. *Hazrat* Safwan bin Assal al-Muradi (*Radhi Allahu Anhu*) narrated, “I came to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), who was sitting in the Masjid Nabwi. He had a red sheet on him. I said, “O Messenger of Allah, I have come to seek knowledge.” The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) told me, “Welcome, O seeker of knowledge! Truly the angels surround the seeker of knowledge with their wings.” [Ahmad & Tabrani]

Knowledge is of two types: The first is that which every Muslim must acquire and it is the knowledge of his/her religion. Through this knowledge, a Muslim recognizes his Lord, becomes aware of the biography and characters of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and gets other religious information. Seeking this knowledge is an obligation which every individual has to do on his/her own.

The second type of knowledge relates to the industry, arts, sciences, agriculture and medicine etc. Seeking this knowledge and gaining expertise in it is necessary only for some people.

It is only through knowledge that Allah can be recognized. Therefore, only the people of knowledge fear Allah. The Qur'an says:

﴿إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ﴾ **فاطر: ٢٨**

Translation of Meaning: “The erudite among His bondmen fear Allah alone.” [Fatir:28]

There are some etiquettes of seeking knowledge, which every seeker of knowledge must follow:

Sincerity: The first and the foremost condition for successfully acquiring knowledge is sincerity in intention. The aim behind seeking knowledge should not be exhibition of one's self or fame. Neither should one intend that having acquired much knowledge they would overawe gullible people of less knowledge. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ، وَإِنَّمَا لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مَّا نَوَىٰ» [متفق عليه]

Translation: “Deeds (their correctness and rewards) depend upon intentions, and every person gets but what he has intended.” [Bukhari & Muslim]

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) told the ummah about the person who will be the first to enter the Hell. He said, **Translation:** “There will be brought forward a man who acquired knowledge and imparted it (to others) and recited the Qur'an. He will be brought and Allah will make him recount His blessings and he will recount them (and admit having enjoyed them in his lifetime). Then Allah will ask, “What did you do (to requite these blessings)?” He will say, “I acquired knowledge and disseminated it and recited the Qur'an seeking Thy pleasure.” Allah will say, “You have told a lie. You acquired knowledge so that you might be called “a scholar”, and you recited the Qur'an so that it might be said, “He is a Qari and such has been said.” Then orders will be passed against him and he shall be dragged with his face downward and cast into the Fire.” [Muslim]

Longing for beneficial knowledge: There is a famous du'a (Supplication) of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ):

«اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ عِلْمٍ لَا يَنْفَعُ، وَ مِنْ عَمَلٍ لَا يُقْبَلُ، وَ مِنْ دُعَاءٍ لَا يُسْمَعُ» [أحمد، ابن حبان، حاكم]

Translation: “O Allah, I seek Your protection from a knowledge which does not benefit, from a deed which is not accepted and from a prayer which is not entertained.”[Ahmad, Ibn Hibban, Hakim]

It is said about knowledge that unless the seeker of knowledge has put his/her whole into it, he/she cannot get even a tiny portion from it. Our predecessors valued knowledge and, therefore, they formally took out their time for it.

Steadiness, consistency and regularity are of utmost importance in this subject. The life of human beings is very short and knowledge is a boundless ocean. Therefore, as the proverb goes, “seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.”

Knowledge is a powerful means for purifying human instinct psyche from bad morals. It is a light from Allah which He bestows upon only His pious and righteous slaves. Therefore, a Muslim seeker of knowledge must keep himself away from filths of psyche and save himself, to the possible extent, from bad habits like envy, showing off, arrogance etc.

The knowledge acquired at young age is very useful: At this stage of life the slate of the mind is blank. Whatever is learnt in this age becomes an inscription on stone. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, Translation of Meaning : “The child who rears the habits of acquiring knowledge & worship, and continues doing so until he gains maturity, Allah will give him on the day of Resurrection a reward equal to 72 Siddiqs.” [Tabrani]

Hazrat Qubaisa (Radhi Allahu Anhu) said, “O Prophet, now I have grown old, my bones become feeble, now I wish you to teach me what Allah will benefit me from. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, Translation of Meaning: “The way you have come through for this purpose, its each and every sand and leaf kept on seeking Allah’s forgiveness for you. O Qubaisa, when you have offered Fajr prayer, say this three times:

«سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ الْعَظِيمِ وَبِحَمْدِهِ» "Subhan Allahil Adheem Wa behamdehi" and you will be safe from blindness, leprosy and paralysis. O Qubaisa! Keep praying your Lord:
«اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ مِمَّا عِنْدَكَ وَأَفْضِلْ عَلَيَّ مِنْ فَضْلِكَ وَانْشُرْ عَلَيَّ رَحْمَتَكَ وَأَنْزِلْ عَلَيَّ مِنْ بَرَكَاتِكَ» [أحمد]

Translation: “O Allah, I ask you from what You have, pour upon me from Your grace, spread over me from Your mercy, and bring down upon me from Your blessing.” [Ahmad]

Wordily hurdles do not come in the way of true seeker of knowledge: The sahaba would perform their entire daily chores and take out time for learning the religion. For this, they would remain awake in night. *Hazrat Abu Sa’eed Khudri (Radhi Allahu Anhu)* narrates, “we would go for battles and leave some of our

colleagues with the Prophet (ﷺ). They would listen to the hadith from him and when we were back, they would tell us the hadith of the Prophet (ﷺ). Then, we would convey those hadith. [Asakir]

So, it became evident that there is no clash at all between struggle for halal sustenance and struggle for seeking knowledge. For seeking knowledge, patience and persistence are key. Undoubtedly, the path to seek knowledge is difficult and patience works as a weapon to overcome those difficulties. A man, sans patience, cannot get knowledge. It is rightly said that: if anyone cannot bear shame for seeking knowledge, he/she has to suffer humiliation throughout their life.

Gradation: For seeking knowledge, gradation is a must. Learning starts with learning initials. Going into depth is a later stage towards which only an experienced teacher can guide. A sincere student reaches up to the tops of knowledge gradually. Then there comes a day when he has acquired complete command over all sciences.

Expertise: If a Muslim wants to specialize in a certain science, he should select the best and most beneficial branch of knowledge. Here, he/she should also consider his/her temporal preferences and taste. It is said, if you want to be a scholar, learn knowledge without missing any aspect, and if you want to be expert select a specific dimension of knowledge and leave the rest aside.

Istihdar (presence of mind): In knowledge istihdar along with thinking and pondering is laudable. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«نَضَرَ اللَّهُ أَمْرًا سَمِعَ مِنَّا حَدِيثًا فَحَفِظَهُ حَتَّى يُبَلِّغَهُ غَيْرَهُ قُرْبًا حَامِلٍ فَقِهِ إِلَى مَنْ هُوَ أَفْقَهُ مِنْهُ وَرُبَّ حَامِلٍ فَقِهِ لَيْسَ بِفَقِيهِ» [الترمذي]

Translation: “May Allah keep him fresh (and radiant) who hears a hadith from me, remembers it if he conveys it to others, for, many a scholar of fiqh may carry it to one more learned than him in fiqh and many a scholar of fiqh is not himself a faqih (jurist).” [Tirmizi]

Writing down notes: It is said that knowledge is saved in writing. The proverb goes that knowledge is a prey and writing its chain. A seeker of knowledge must note down what he/she has learnt so that he/she should never forgets. Noting down

the knowledge, too, has a principle; instead of collecting everything authentic or unauthentic, one should write only the selected texts. It is said that the seeker of knowledge who sit near a scholar are of three kinds: 1) who preserves everything that he has listened to 2) who listens everything but writes nothing and 3) who collects after considering what is worth to him. And the last one is the best one.

Revision and Discussion: *Hazrat Mu'adh bin Jabal (Radhi Allahu Anhu)* says, “O people! Seek knowledge, because learning for the sake of Allah is piety, seeking it is worship, discussing it is tasbeeh (glorifying Allah), pursuing it is jihad, and teaching it to one who does not know it is charity and expending it over those who deserve it is a cause of closeness to Allah.”

Time management in seeking knowledge: Unless one learns to manage his time he cannot pursue knowledge. To make it fruit-bearing and to reach its the climax, time management is necessary. Generally, a Muslim does his works systematically. The five daily prayers are the best example in this case. For acquiring sciences and knowledge of Allah, too, time management should be taken care of.

One shying away on the way to knowledge falls short of his destination: Allah says:

﴿ فَسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴾ [النحل: ٤٣]

Translation of Meaning: “Ask the followers of the Remembrance if ye know not!” [Al-Nahl:43]

Hazrat Ayisha (Radhi Allahu Anha) praised Ansar women because they did not shy away from understanding the matters of the religion. It is a characteristic of a Muslim that he questions for more knowledge. Asking men of knowledge for more knowledge is not a matter of shame for a Muslim as he knows that knowledge is a treasure and its key is to question.

Struggle for acquiring knowledge: *Hazrat Jabir bin Abdullah* said, “I was told about a hadith which a man heard from the Prophet (ﷺ), so I bought a camel and put my saddle on it, then I traveled on it for a month until I came to Ash-Sham (Syria), where Abdullah bin Unays was. I said to the doorkeeper, ‘Tell him that Jabir is at the door.’ He said, ‘Jabir bin Abdullah?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ So he came out,

still putting his garment on, and embraced me, and I embraced him, and said: ‘I heard a hadith narrated by you, that you heard from the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) about reciprocal punishments. I was afraid that you or I would die before I could hear it.’ Thereupon, *Hazrat* Abdullah bin Unays narrated him the hadith. [Ahmad, Tabrani]

Similarly, *Hazrat* Ubaidullah bin Adi said, “I was told that *Hazrat* Ali (*Radhi Allahu Anhu*) knows a hadith. I was afraid that if he died, I could not hear the hadith from anyone else. So, I started on a journey to him in Iraq. [Khateeb]

Likewise, *Hazrat* Abdullah bin Mas’ood (*Radhi Allahu Anhu*) says, “If I am told that so and so person has more knowledge than me of what has been revealed upon the Prophet (ﷺ), and I can reach him by camel, I will must go to him for increasing my knowledge.” [Ibn- Asakir]

Imam Sho’abi (may Allah mercy upon him) says, “if a man travels from the upper land of Syria to the extreme corner of Yemen for listening to a wisdom, to me his journey will be successful.”

Put your knowledge into practice: Allah Almighty has condemned those who just have knowledge but do not act accordingly. Allah has established similarity between them and donkeys who have books on their backs. Allah says:

﴿مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ حُمِّلُوا التَّوْرَةَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَحْمِلُوهَا كَمَثَلِ الْحِمَارِ يَحْمِلُ أَسْفَارًا ۚ﴾ الجمعة: ٥

Translation of Meaning: “The likeness of those who are entrusted with the Law of Moses, yet apply it not, is as his likeness of the ass carrying books.” [Al-Jum'ah:5]

At another place He says:

﴿أَتَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَتَنْسَوْنَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ نَتْلُونَ الْكِتَابَ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ۚ﴾ البقرة: ٤٤

Translation of Meaning: “Enjoin ye righteousness upon mankind while ye yourselves forget (to practise it)? And ye are readers of the Scripture! Have ye then no sense?”[Al-Baqarah:44]

A Muslim has faith that tomorrow, he will be asked about the life of today. Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) said:

«لَا تَزُولُ قَدَمَا عَبْدٌ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ حَتَّى يُسْأَلَ عَنْ عُمُرِهِ فَيَمَّا أَفْنَاهُ وَعَنْ عِلْمِهِ فَيَمَّا فَعَلَ وَعَنْ مَالِهِ مِنْ أَيْنَ اكْتَسَبَهُ وَفِيمَ أَنْفَقَهُ وَعَنْ جِسْمِهِ فَيَمَّا أَبْلَاهُ» [الترمذي]

Translation : “(On the Day of Resurrection) the feet of a slave will not move till he is asked about his life how he spent it; and about his knowledge, what he did with it, and about his wealth, how he earned it and on what he used it, and about his body, in what way he wore it off.” [Tirmizi]

Respect to the teacher: A teacher is the spiritual father of a student. Giving respect to his teacher works like elixir for the student. Entry into the city of knowledge is impossible without proper guidance of a teacher. A study of history reveals some or the other teacher behind every man of knowledge. The student gets prays from the teacher only by showing reverence to him.

Listening whole heartedly: *Hazrat Hasan bin Ali (Radhi Allahu Anhu)* said, admonishing his son, “O my son! When you are among scholars, focus more on listening than speaking. Like you have learnt to remain silent, also become the one who listens attentively. It is the right of a student to question, but it is necessary that the question is meant for understanding and acquiring more. Never aim at argument with the teacher or tease him.”

The students should be polite, well-mannered and serious. Laughing, smiling, looking here and there or making unnecessary pointing gestures are against the dignity of a student. Likewise, in a meeting with the teacher the student should be neat and clean and well-attired. If he has to ask question, he should ensure to first take permission. Likewise, the students should not insult or laugh at one another. They should exhibit mutual brotherhood, sympathy and respect.

For acquiring knowledge in a better way, it is also necessary that the classrooms are well - lit, the atmosphere is peaceful and free from noise. The students should avoid talking when on bed, as it leads to laziness and slothfulness. A good and active student also keeps his books clean and well-arranged. Instead of becoming busy all the time with books, the students should also take care of their bodies. They should avoid one-sided study and give time to all the subjects.

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