

Seeking Knowledge - The Way to Paradise

By Habib Ahmad

"Allah will exalt those who believe among you, and those who have been granted knowledge to high ranks."

(Qur'an)

"Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim (male and female)."
(Hadith)

THE VIRTUES OF KNOWLEDGE

Allah (Most Exalted is He), Who created us and gave us sustenance, has also given us guidance. He said:

"Verily We have created man into toil and struggle... Have We not made for him a pair of eyes; and a tongue, and a pair of lips; and shown him the two ways (obedience and disobedience)?"

(Qur'an, Al-Balad 90:4-10)

After providing us with the capability to contemplate, think and differentiate between things, He instructed us to know Him, to know his Prophets and to know His Deen, Islam. He said:

"So know that there is no god save Allah, ask forgiveness for your sins and for the believing men and the believing women. Allah knows well your moving and your place of rest."

(Qur'an, Muhammad 47:19)

This verse shows the importance of knowledge and the virtues that Allah has given to it. It also shows that knowledge comes before deeds, since Allah instructed His Prophet to know that He is One and the only One worthy of worship. After that, He commanded him to ask forgiveness for himself, his family and for his Ummah.

If Muslims truly realise the importance Islam places on knowledge and its virtues, they will definitely be keen to learn and teach others. They would start with themselves and their families; then their neighbours and the community at large. Once Mu'awiyah Ibn Abi Sufyan (may Allah be pleased with her) gave a sermon in which he said, "I heard Allah's Messenger saying, "If Allah wants to do good to a person, he makes him very knowledgeable in the Deen." (Related by Bukhari and Muslim)

This is because knowledge is the basis of all good; it generates actions that are based on the commandments of Allah and the instructions of the Prophet . Hence, every Muslim must instil in his mind a desire to seek knowledge. Allah (Most Exalted is He) instructed His Prophet -- and thus all Muslims -- to ask Allah to increase him in knowledge. He said:

"And say: My Lord increase me in knowledge."

(Qur'an, Ta-Ha 20:114)

Though, initially, all Muslims are equal in the sight of Allah, those who believe, have taqwah (fear of Allah and righteousness), and have been granted knowledge move up to higher ranks. Allah says about those who have taqwah:

"Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is he who has most taqwah."

(Qur'an, Al-Hujurat 49:13)

And He said about those who believed and acquired knowledge:

"Allah will raise up, to (suitable) ranks and (degrees), those of you who believe and who have been granted knowledge. And Allah is well-acquainted with all you do."

(Qur'an, Al-Mujadilah 58:11)

When a servant of Allah is granted knowledge, he appreciates Allah's creation more, and becomes more acquainted with Allah's attributes and qualities. Consequently, he wholeheartedly witnesses that his Creator is the only one worthy of worship, and then submits to Him humbly. This, in return, generates in his heart a fear, which is akin to a full appreciation and love of His Lord. Allah (Most Exalted is He) has witnessed in favour of His learned servants these qualities, full appreciation of His Oneness and fear of Him. He stated in two verses, to be recited until Doomsday:

"There is no one worthy of worship but He: That is the witness of Allah, His angels and those endowed with knowledge, Standing firm in Justice (or maintaining His Creation in Justice). There is no god but He, the Exalted in power, the Wise."

(Qur'an, Al-'Imran 3:18)

"It is only those who have knowledge among His servants that fear Allah."

(Qur'an, Fatir 35:28)

The Messenger of Allah gave glad tidings to anyone who undertakes the task of seeking knowledge. Abu Hurayrah relates that the Prophet said, "For him who embarks on the path of seeking knowledge, Allah will ease for him the way to paradise." (Related by Muslim) If no Hadith on the importance of knowledge besides this one had been uttered by the Prophet, it would have been enough for Muslims. Yet the Prophet did more than that:

He used to stimulate his companions to seek knowledge: Ibn Mas'ud relates that the Prophet said, "Only two persons are worthy of being envied; a person upon whom Allah bestows riches and gives him the power to spend it in a righteous cause; and a person upon whom Allah bestows wisdom by which he judges and which he teaches." (Related by Bukhari and Muslim)

He used to congratulate the companions whenever they issued a right judgement or correctly answered a question. Imam Muslim narrates that once the Prophet asked Ubayy Ibn Ka'b, "Do you know which verse in Allah's Book is the greatest?" Ubayy answered by reciting Ayat-ul-Kursi (the verse of the Throne, i.e. **Al-Baqarah, 2:255**): "Allah! None has the right to be worshiped but He, the Ever Living, the One Who sustains and protects all that exists...) The Messenger kindly patted him on the chest, saying, "Congratulations, Abul-Munthir for this knowledge".

He used to call upon Allah to grant them the correct knowledge and understanding of this Deen: Ibn 'Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated, "Once the Prophet embraced me and said, 'O Allah! Bestow on him the knowledge of the Book (Qur'an)." (Related by Bukhari)

He ordained all his companions and, thus, every Muslim who possesses some knowledge -- even as little as one verse -- to disseminate what they know to others: He said, "Convey (what you learn from me) even if only one verse..." (Related by Bukhari)

He made special du'a (supplication) for those who learn his sayings and transmit them to others: Zayd Ibn Thabit narrated that the Prophet said, "May Allah brighten the face of the person who hears what I say and retains it, then conveys it to others: for sometimes one who hears from another remembers it better than the original hearer himself." (Related by Ahmad and Tirmithi)

He assured all those who disseminate his knowledge that they will get the same reward of any Muslim who acts upon that knowledge: Abu Hurayrah relates that the Prophet said, "He who calls another to guidance will have a reward equal; to the reward of him who follows him without diminishing the reward of either of them." (Related by Muslim)

He showed to us the noble status of the learned people of His Ummah: Abu Umamah relates that the Prophet said, "A learned one is as much above an (ordinary) worshiper as I am above the least of you; and he added: Allah, His angels and all those in the heavens and in the earth, even the ants in their holes and the fish in the water, call down blessings on those who instruct people in beneficent knowledge." (Related by Tirmithi)

Better still, he declared that the 'Ulama' (those who have Islamic knowledge) are his heirs: Abu Darda' said that he heard the Prophet saying, "The 'Ulama' are heirs of the Prophets, and the Prophets do not leave an inheritance of Dirhams and Dinars but (they left) only knowledge. He who acquires knowledge acquires a vast portion." (Related by Abu Dawud and Tirmithi)

After reading all these promises and glad tidings, one might ask, what more do we need to awaken our consciousness? We have been promised an easy way to paradise; the inheritance of our Prophet; a lofty rank, high and noble in status; a blessing from Allah and a supplication of all that exists in the heavens and earth; a face beaming in brightness and beauty on the Day of Judgement, when other faces will be sad and dismal. So, let us embark on the road to paradise; let us seek knowledge today.