

عَوَّلُوا قَوْلَ السَّالِفِينَ

OBSTACLES

In the Path of Seeking Knowledge



Shaykh 'Abd al-Salām Ibn Burjis Ibn Nāṣir Āl'Abd al-Karīm

عَوَالِقُ الْقَوْلِ السَّالِبِ

OBSTACLES IN THE PATH OF SEEKING KNOWLEDGE

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Salām ibn Burjis ibn Nāṣir Āl
‘Abd al-Karīm

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of *Allāh*, the Most-Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy

The Biography of ‘Abdus-Salām ibn Burjis Āl ‘Abdul-Karīm¹

His name & lineage:

He is the prominent Sheikh and jurist and prodigious scholar of Islamic fundamentals *Abū ‘Abdur-Raḥmān ‘Abdus-Salām ibn Burjis ibn Nāṣir Āl ‘Abdul-Karīm*.

His birth & upbringing and the beginning of his pursuit of knowledge:

He (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) was born in the year 1387H [which corresponds with the year 1967 of the Christian calendar] in the city of Riyadh which is the capital of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia –may *Allāh* protect it along with the other lands of the Muslims from every evil.

He grew up within a household of religiousness and uprightness and was distinguished (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) from an early age for his intelligence, determination, seriousness and hard work. He memorized the *Qur’ān* and began seeking knowledge when he

¹ **Translator's Note:** This biography was taken from the book ‘*Uṣūl ad-Da‘wah as-Salafiyyah*’ by Sheikh ‘*Abdus-Salām ibn Burjis*’.

was thirteen years old. He received special attention and preferential treatment from several of his scholars and teachers when they recognized in him the signs of distinction and ingenuity.

“He (رحمة الله) became famous from a very early age for his perception and brilliance as well as his serious interest in seeking knowledge and acquiring it. A proper learning environment was available to him and he was serious in pursuit of knowledge and thus strove hard, exerted much effort, stayed up nights and continued for days in pursuit of it. And he continued on the path of knowledge and proceeded forward without desiring anything else but to acquire it. The people who describe him continue to mention his seriousness in pursuit of knowledge and his commitment to it and learning and due to this, he was able to achieve a significant level of knowledge in the Islamic sciences.”²

“He consistently attended the lessons of the scholars and whomever he felt might grant him even the smallest amount of benefit without any arrogance or partiality. He continued and persevered and exerted all of his efforts on this path until he attained in his youth what others do not acquire over an extremely long period of time in terms of mastery of numerous sciences, disciplines and various skills.

² *Ithāf an-Nubalā'* by Sheikh Rāshid az-Zahrānī may Allāh grant him success (volume 1 page 45).

He did not limit himself to a single science when seeking knowledge. Rather, he studied many different disciplines. He studied the narrations of the Prophet (ﷺ) (*al-hadīth*), theologies (*al-‘aqā'id*), jurisprudence (*al-fiqh*), the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*al-uṣūl*), terminology specific to the narrations of the Prophet (ﷺ) (*al-muṣṭalah*) and the sciences of the Arabic language as well as other sciences.”³

And some of the brothers who knew Sheikh ‘*Abdus-Salām* (ﷺ) have mentioned that he used to memorize some classical Islamic texts by heart. From these texts was: ‘*Bulūgh al-Marām*’ by *al-Hāfiẓ ibn Ḥajar* (ﷺ) and ‘*Zād al-Mustaqna*’ by *al-Hajjāwī* (ﷺ) and ‘*Al-Qaṣīdah an-Nūniyyah*’ by *Ibn al-Qayyim* (ﷺ) as well as ‘*Al-Alfiyyah fī an-Naḥw*’ by *Ibn Mālak* (ﷺ).

His formal academic studies:

He (ﷺ) formally studied in the city of Riyadh. After primary school he enrolled in the Educational Institute (*al-Ma‘had al-‘Ilmī*) that is affiliated with *Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa‘ūd* University. Then he enrolled in the College of *Sharīah* at the same University and graduated from there in the year 1410H [or 1989 in the Christian calendar]. Then he went on to enroll in the Higher Judicial Institute (*Al-Ma‘had al-‘Ālī lil-Qadā’*) where he acquired a Master's degree with his thesis entitled: ‘*At-Tawthīq bil-‘Uqūd fī al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*’.

³ *Ithāf an-Nubalā’* (volume 1 page 46-47).

Thereafter he acquired his doctorate in the year 1422H [or 2001 of the Christian calendar] and his thesis was a shared academic checking of the book: '*Al-Fawā'id al-Muntakhabāt Sharḥ Akḥṣar al-Mukhtaṣirāt*' by Sheikh '*Uthmān ibn Jāmi*' (died 1240H).

His teachers:

1. The prominent scholar and illustrious *Imām* of the people of *Sunnah* during his time, '*Abdul-'Azīz ibn 'Abdullāh ibn Bāz* (رحمته الله) [died 1420H].
2. The Sheikh and jurist of his time, the illustrious scholar and specialist of Islamic fundamentals, Sheikh *Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ al-'Uthaymīn* (رحمته الله) [died 1421H].
3. The distinguished Sheikh and illustrious scholar of *ḥadīth* *Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyá an-Najmī* (رحمته الله).
4. The distinguished Sheikh Dr. '*Abdullāh ibn 'Abdur-Raḥmān ibn Jibrīn* (رحمته الله) who he sat with consistently for four years.
5. The Sheikh and scholar of *ḥadīth* '*Abdullāh ad-Dawaysh* (رحمته الله) [died 1409H] upon whom he read during his summer vacations in *Buraydah*.
6. The distinguished Sheikh and illustrious scholar and jurist *Ṣāliḥ ibn 'Abdullāh al-Aṭram* (رحمته الله) whom he read upon in the College of *Sharī'ah*.

7. The prominent scholar Sheikh *Fahad al-Humayd* – may *Allāh* preserve him– who he read upon in the sciences of *tawhīd* and *fiqh*.
8. The Sheikh and jurist and specialist in Islamic fundamentals *‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abdur-Rahmān ibn Ghudayān* (رحمة الله) whom he studied under in the Higher Judicial Institute (*Al-Ma‘had al-‘Ālī lil-Qaḍā’*).

Positions that he held:

1. He was appointed as a teacher in the Educational Institute (*al-Ma‘had al-‘Ilmī*) of *al-Quway‘iyyah* (which is 170 kilometers west of Riyadh). This appointment occurred after he graduated from the College of *Sharī‘ah* in the year (1410H).
2. He was appointed a judge in the Ministry of Justice however he requested to be excused from assuming this position.
3. He was nominated for an appointment at the Office of Grievances (*Diwān al-Mazālim*) in the city of Jeddah, but he did not remain there for more than a single week. He left the position to protect himself (رحمة الله).

4. He then returned to Riyadh as a lecturer at the Higher Judicial Institute (*Al-Ma'had al-'Ālī lil-Qadā'*).
5. Then he was appointed as an assistant professor after acquiring his doctorate and he remained in this position until he passed away (ﷺ) and may *Allāh* make everything that has preceded, be considered from his good deeds on the day of resurrection.

From his written works:

1. *Al-Hujaj al-Qawiyyah 'alā anna Wasā'il ad-Da'wah Tawqifiyyah.*
2. *Mu'āmalah al-Hukām fī Daw' al-Kitāb wa as-Sunnah.*
3. *Minhāj Ahl al-Haqq wal-Ittibā'.*
4. *Al-Aḥādīth an-Nabawiyyah fī Dhamm al-'Unṣuriyyah al-Jāhiliyyah* which was printed with the introduction of the Esteemed Sheikh *Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān.*
5. *Al-'Ilām bi baḍ Aḥkām as-Salām* which was published as a beneficial small paperback.

6. *Al-Amr bi Luzūm Jamā'ah al-Muslimīn wa Imāmihim wa at-Taḥdīr min Mufāraqatihim.*

7. *Īqāf an-Nabil 'alá Ḥukm at-Tamthīl.*

His death (رحمة الله):

Sheikh 'Abdus-Salām ibn Burjis (رحمة الله) passed away on Thursday night the twelfth of Ṣafar in 1425H [Approximately April 1st 2004 of the Christian calendar]. He passed away in a car accident after colliding with a stray camel while returning to Riyadh from *al-Aḥsā'* and may *Allāh* show him expansive mercy. He was thirty-eight years old when he died (رحمة الله).⁴

The website of the Sheikh:

www.burjes.com

⁴ This biography is taken from 'Nuzḥah al-Anfus fī Sīrah Ash-Shaykh 'Abdus-Salām ibn Burjis' which was prepared by *Farīd al-Murādī*.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of *Allāh*, the Most-Merciful, the Bestower of
Mercy

All praise is due to only *Allāh*, and may the prayers of peace and blessings of *Allāh* be upon the one after whom there will be no Prophet.

As to what follows:

Then this concise collection of words was originally prepared for the publication '*Al-Mujāhid*' in the year 1409H [or 1988 of the Christian calendar] and discusses some of the obstacles that confronts the student of knowledge on his continuing path towards acquiring beneficial knowledge with further explanation and clarification.

The primary reason for preparing it was out of consideration for our scholarly awakening and any external factor that could possibly affect its foundations that were established by our pious predecessors –may *Allāh* be pleased with all of them– and in an effort to take the youth by the hand through this blessed awakening towards the best paths for acquiring Islamic knowledge.

I have presented this advice in the form of obstacles so that it would be more likely to be avoided and stronger in terms of the warnings regarding them since contained in these obstacles are

things that guide towards avoiding them and help to eliminate them. I have repeatedly cited narrations of the pious predecessors that are related to these obstacles so that the reader can establish a link to them and take from their biographies a personal methodology since they were more guided and more mindful of *Allāh*.

And may *Allāh* have mercy upon *Ibn Mujāhid –al-Maqri* (the famous reciter of the *Qur'ān*) – who said when a man said to him:

“Why don't you choose a style of recitation for yourself?”

He replied: “We should continue to train ourselves to work towards preserving what our Imāms were upon; this is more befitting for us than choosing a new style of recitation.”⁵

And we have concluded this work with several beneficial pages originally prepared by Sheikh ‘*Abdur-Raḥmān ibn Nāṣir as-Sa’dī* (رحمة الله) that contain a number of benefits related to the etiquettes of teachers and students. I sought to include these benefits in order to complete this work and make its benefit more general.

And *Allāh* is the One who grants success and guides to the straight path. And may the prayers of peace and blessings of *Allāh* be upon our Prophet *Muḥammad* (صلى الله عليه وسلم), his family and all of his companions.

⁵ *As-Siyar* (volume 15 page 273).

Written by:

‘Abdus-Salām ibn Burjis Āl ‘Abdul-Karīm

The 25th of *Rajab* in the year 1412H.

The First Obstacle: Seeking Knowledge for Other Than *Allāh* the Exalted

Upon the authority of *Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb* (رضي الله عنه) who said that he heard the Messenger of *Allāh* (صلى الله عليه وسلم) say:

“Certainly, actions depend upon their intentions, and surely every person is rewarded according to his intention. So whoever performed *hijrah* for *Allāh* and His Messenger, then his *hijrah* will be for *Allāh* and His Messenger; and whoever performed *hijrah* for something of worldly benefit or for a woman to marry, then his *hijrah* is for whatever he performed *hijrah* for.”⁶

And upon the authority of *Ibn Mas‘ūd* (رضي الله عنه) who said:

“If the people of knowledge had protected it, they would have kept it amongst the people of knowledge and as a result they would have become the leaders of our time. But they pursued it for the people who are motivated by worldly gains in order to acquire some worldly benefit and thus became lowly in their eyes.

⁶ Its authenticity is agreed upon.

And I heard your Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) say: ‘Whoever focuses all of his attention upon a single issue, and focused upon the hereafter will find that *Allāh* has sufficed his worldly concerns. And whoever redirects his focus to the affairs of the worldly life, for him *Allāh* will not care in which valley that he dies.’”⁷

Certainly, what is most deserving of the attention of the student of knowledge is the correction of his intention and rectifying it and protecting it from corruption. This is because knowledge only produces goodness when it was sought sincerely for the sake of *Allāh* the Exalted. If it is sought for other than *Allāh*, then there are no redeeming qualities for it. Rather, it is a trial; it is harmful and it will be met with an evil end.

And it is well-known that the acceptance of actions depends upon sincerity and the correctness of the intention as *Allāh* the Exalted says:

﴿ وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ حُنَفَاءَ ﴾

⁷ Narrated by *Ibn Mājah* in his *Sunan* (volume 1 page 95); also extracted by *al-Ḥākim* in *al-Mustadrak* (volume 2 page 443) upon the authority of *Ibn ‘Umar* with a similar wording. And *al-Ḥākim* said regarding it: “This *ḥadīth* has an authentic chain of narration” and *adh-Dhahabī* supported this opinion.

“And they were not commanded except to worship *Allāh* alone, sincerely making their worship purely for Him.” [*Sūrah al-Bayyinah* 98:5]

So if a student intends to attain some worldly goal with knowledge then he has disobeyed his Lord, exhausted himself and committed a sin. And he will not acquire anything from this worldly life except what has been written for him.

Al-Hasan (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) said:

“Whoever seeks knowledge in pursuit of the hereafter will acquire it. And whoever seeks knowledge in pursuit of worldly matters will only receive his share of it.”

And *Az-Zuhri* (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) said:

“So that will be his share.”⁸

And even more explicit than that was the statement of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) as it was narrated by *Abū Hurayrah* (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) who said:

“Whoever seeks knowledge that should be sought for the sake of *Allāh* for no other reason except that

⁸ Extracted by *Al-Khaṭīb* in ‘*Iqtidā’ al-‘Ilm al-‘Amal*’ page 66 and see also *ad-Dārimī* (volume 1 page 70).

he seeks some worldly gain, will not smell the ‘arf of Paradise on the Day of Resurrection.”

And ‘arf here means its scent.⁹

And *Ibn ‘Aṭā* (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) said concerning the one who seeks knowledge for other than *Allāh*:

“*Allāh* has made the knowledge of the one for whom this description applies an argument against him and a reason for him to be punished by *Allāh*. And do not be deceived by the fact that he might benefit in a way that is obvious and apparent since there is the narration: ‘Certainly, *Allāh* will aid this religion even through a sinful man.’ And the example of the one who learns for the sake of acquiring some worldly gain or some increase in it is like the one who raises filth with a spoon made of crystal. How honorable was the utensil, but how despicable was which it carried.”¹⁰

And *Suhmūn* (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) said:

⁹ Extracted by *Imām Aḥmad* in his *Musnad* (volume 2 page 338) and *Abū Dāwūd* in his *Sunan* (volume 4 page 71) and *Ibn Mājah* in his *Sunan* (volume 1 page 92-93); and it was authenticated by *al-Hākim* (volume 1 page 85) and *adh-Dhahabī* supported his authentication.

¹⁰ *Ḥāshiyah Musnad Abī Ya‘lá* (volume 11 page 261).

“It was rare that *Ibn al-Qāsim* would come to us without saying: ‘Fear *Allāh* since even a little of this –meaning knowledge– along with the fear of *Allāh* is a lot. And a lot of it without fearing *Allāh* is a little.’”¹¹

And *Yūsuf ibn al-Ḥusayn* (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) said:

“I heard *Dhā Nūn al-Miṣrī* say that the scholars used to offer admonitions and write to one another regarding three things: Whoever rectifies himself internally, *Allāh* will make him upright externally as well. And whoever rectifies whatever is between himself and *Allāh*, then *Allāh* will rectify whatever is between him and the people. And whoever rectifies the matter of his hereafter, then *Allāh* will rectify his worldly life.”¹²

And *Ibn al-Mubārak* (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) said:

“The first part of knowledge is the intention, then listening, then understanding, then memorization, then acting upon it, and then spreading it.”¹³

And *Ibn al-Mubārak* (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) also said:

¹¹ ‘*As-Siyar*’ by *adh-Dhahabī* (volume 9 page 122).

¹² ‘*As-Siyar*’ by *adh-Dhahabī* (volume 19 page 141).

¹³ *Jāmi‘ Bayyān al-‘Ilm wa Faḍlihi* (Volume 1 Page 118).

“There is nothing superior to seeking knowledge for *Allāh*. And there is nothing more reprehensible to *Allāh* than seeking knowledge for other than *Allāh*.”¹⁴

And here there is a matter that must be mentioned. A group from the *salaf* said:

“We used to seek knowledge for worldly reasons then we became drawn to the hereafter.” And: “We sought this [knowledge] without an intention then the intention came afterwards.” And: “Whoever seeks knowledge for other than *Allāh* will be prevented from it until it drives him to *Allāh*.”¹⁵

As well as other expressions that are similar to these.

Adh-Dhahabī (رحمة الله) has offered a beneficial explanation for these expressions when he said about the statement of *Ma'mar ibn Rāshid* (رحمة الله):

“It used to be said that a man would seek knowledge for other than *Allāh* and it would be prevented from him until it was sought for *Allāh*.’ Yes, this is how it would initially be sought and the main incentive was love of knowledge, the

¹⁴ *Al-Ādāb ash-Shar‘iyyah*.

¹⁵ *Jāmi‘ Bayyān al-‘Ilm wa Faḍlihi* (Volume 2 Page 22-23).

desire to eliminate ignorance, the desire for work and whatever is similar to this. He was unaware of the obligation of maintaining sincerity or a pure intention in this matter. Had he known, he would have made the necessary adjustments to his own character and feared for the evil consequences of his intentions and thus he would develop a righteous intention all at once or over time just as he would repent from his corrupt intentions and express remorse for it. And the sign of this is that he is not a person with many claims who loves to debate and has the goal of boasting about the amount of his knowledge. He finds fault in himself. So if he did boast or said: I am more knowledgeable than so & so then this is something that is far away from him [or out of character].”¹⁶

And from this is what some of what the storytellers mention that a man proposed to a woman who was from a good family and beautiful. She rejected him due to his poverty and lowly social status. So he considered which of these two characteristics would help him marry her. Would it be wealth or social status? He decided it would be social status and sought knowledge for that specific reason until eventually he achieved a more dignified status. At this time, the woman sent notice of her interest in

¹⁶ *Siyar A'lām an-Nubalā'* (Volume 7 Page 17).

marrying him to which he responded I do not prefer anything to knowledge. That is because knowledge led him to correct his intention and acts of righteousness and thus he became from those described in the statement of *Allāh*:

﴿ إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ ﴾

“It is only those who have knowledge among His servants that fear *Allāh*.” [Sūrah Fāṭir 35:28]

So by leaving that woman who he originally sought knowledge for, he attained piety and demonstrated the truthfulness of his intention and the correctness of his direction.

And from what I have composed regarding this issue are the following lines of poetry:

“To you, the captive raises his complaints; in hope for benevolence or finding redemption. Truly, your smiles have shackled his hands to his chin even though before he was once in a higher state. Surely, he has become knocked down by his desire for you; locked in the home from the heat of isolation. He is worn down by longing and your abandonment [of him] and his heart bled throughout the pain. So distract the heart from them in gardens [of knowledge] that expose the servant to the levels of heaven; and ascend with the lowly towards loftiness and clothe the uncovered

with garments of splendor; and cause the young man to be mentioned often and make his image live as long as he remains. Gardens with knowledge that boast, in contrast to her beauty, the appealing neck of gazelles; if it [the garden of knowledge] is inhabited by the love-struck for even a single day, they will turn away from their love of women. And while they were long before humiliated in shackles, the most courageous of the resourceful strove to break their binds. It is inhabited by the scholars whenever they appeared. They bring light to the creation from the most noble of luminous sources. They are scholars who have been nourished by knowledge; they are a mediator of clemency during times of bloodshed. In knowledge they possess much authority and precedence; and their actions are very serious albeit hidden [from the people]. And the seekers are in it [i.e. the gardens of knowledge] whenever they immerse themselves. They smell of musk from the goodness of their influence. You see them, regarding it [i.e. the gardens of knowledge], strive hard hoping for benevolence or to find redemption.”

And beware, beware dear student of knowledge from committing *shirk* in your intention since *Allāh*, the Exalted said as found in the *ḥadīth qudsī*¹⁷:

“I am far above being in need of a partner. Whoever does an action wherein he associates another with Me; then I will reject him and his action.”¹⁸

And those who know have reached a consensus that the intensification of destruction occurs when *Allāh* is neglected by a person to the point that the individual is manipulated by the devils and thus his path divides and the hellfire becomes a more likely destination for him.

Ḥammād ibn Salamah (رحمة الله) said:

“Whoever seeks *ḥadīth* for other than *Allāh* has used it deceptively.”¹⁹

¹⁷ **Translator's note:** The *ḥadīth qudsī* is “whatever the Messenger of *Allāh* (صلى الله عليه وسلم) has narrated with a chain of narration beginning with *Allāh* the Blessed and Exalted. It is referred to as *qudsī* out of honor for these *ḥadīth* since they are directly linked to *Allāh* the Glorified and Exalted.” See: *Mu'jam Muṣṭalahāt al-Ḥadīth wa Laṭā'if al-Asānīd* page 131.

¹⁸ Extracted by Muslim (volume 4 page 2289) upon the authority of *Abū Hurayrah* who said the Messenger of *Allāh* (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said: “...”

¹⁹ Narrated by *Ibn 'Abd al-Barr* in '*Al-Jāmi'*' (volume 1 page 199).

Surely, rectifying the intentions as it relates to knowledge is the greatest factor that assists in its acquisition as *Abū ‘Abdullāh ar-Rūdhbārī* said:

“Knowledge depends upon actions and actions depend upon sincerity. And sincerity for *Allāh* produces understanding from *Allāh* the Mighty and Majestic.”²⁰

And in the *Sunan* of *ad-Dārimī* (volume 1 page 71) upon the authority of *Ibrāhīm an-Nakha‘ī* who said:

“Whoever desires some knowledge should seek it for the sake of *Allāh* and *Allāh* will grant him whatever suffices him.”

It is important to note that some people cite the following verse from the *Qur’ān* in order to prove that actions alone produce knowledge without learning since *Allāh* says:

﴿وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ اللَّهُ﴾

“And fear *Allāh* and *Allāh* will teach you.”[*Sūrah al-Baqarah* 2:282]

Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā said in ‘*Tafsīr al-Manār*’ while quoting his Sheikh (volume 3 page 128): “It has become common upon

²⁰ Narrated by *Al-Khaṭīb* in ‘*Iqtidā*’ page 32.

the tongues of those who claim to be proponents of *at-taṣawwuf*²¹ that the meaning of these two sentences: ‘And fear *Allāh* and *Allāh* will teach you’ means that fear of *Allāh* is a cause for knowledge and based upon that they have built the idea that the methodology of their way and whatever actions they perform and their recitation of supplications and daily invocations will ultimately produce for them divine knowledge without having to actually learn. Their understanding of this verse is refuted from two angles:

1. The first angle is that [the renowned Arabic linguist] *Sībawayh* was rightfully displeased with this extrapolation because using a grammatical conjunction to connect the phrases ‘*Allāh* will teach you’ and ‘fear *Allāh*’ negates the idea that it is a reward for it and the result of it because the conjunction here necessitates inconsistency or variance.
2. The second angle is that this position of theirs is an example of their making the effect a cause, making

²¹ **Translator's note:** There have been various different opinions and much discussion regarding the origins of the terms *at-taṣawwuf* and *Ṣūfīyyah*. The earliest descriptions of *at-taṣawwuf* and *Ṣūfīyyah* [or *Ṣūfism*] seem to refer to strict asceticism and practices of self-denial in acts of worship. However, over time these terms have evolved and gone on to incorporate many ideas, principles, and practices that have not been sanctioned or legislated in the religion of *Islām*.

something that is secondary primary and making the final result an introductory factor.

Certainly what is well-known and logical is that knowledge is what produces fear of *Allāh*. So there can be no fear of *Allāh* without knowledge. Knowledge is the first foundation and it is what is relied upon..." [End of quote]

This speech on the topic is good. However, further clarification should be added to it. Actions do strengthen the faith within the heart and thus enables the heart to understand various sciences and comprehend benefits that could not be comprehended by whoever hasn't reached this level. This is something that people have witnessed with their eyes and can be identified through one's senses.

As for the one who worshipped *Allāh* while abandoning knowledge while saying:

﴿وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ اللَّهُ﴾

“And fear *Allāh* and *Allāh* will teach you.” [Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:282]

This individual is ignorant and doesn't even compare to the common people in terms of his ignorance. And *Allāh* is the One who protects.

The Second Obstacle: Abandoning Actions

Sufyān ath-Thawrī (رضي الله عنه) said:

“Surely, knowledge is sought in order to ensure that an individual fears *Allāh*.”²²

So the goal of learning Islamic knowledge is to act upon it and strive to apply it according to the people of understanding for whom *Allāh* has desired good in both the religion and worldly life. The statement of *Sufyān* is a subject that should never be far from the sight and mind of the student of knowledge.

This concept is taken from the pure Islamic texts and *at-Tirmidhī* has extracted from *Abū Barzah al-Aslamī* who said that the Messenger of *Allāh* (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

“The feet of the servant will not move on the Day of Judgment until he is questioned about his life and how he spent it, his knowledge and what he did with it, his wealth and how he earned it and used it, and about his body and how did he exert it.”²³

²² *Abū Nu‘aym* in ‘*Al-Hūlyah*’ (volume 6 page 362).

²³ Narrated by *at-Tirmidhī* in his *Sunan* (volume 4 page 612) and *at-Tirmidhī* said concerning this narration that it is *Ḥasan/Ṣaḥīḥ*.

And *Al-Khaṭīb* extracted something similar which included the wording:

“And regarding his knowledge and how he applied it.”²⁴

Regarding this, it has been narrated from *Abū ad-Dardā* (رضي الله عنه) that he said:

“No one becomes knowledgeable until he is educated. And no one is truly knowledgeable until he acts according to his knowledge.”

And it has been reported from ‘*Alī* (رضي الله عنه) that he said:

“Knowledge calls out for action so a person will either respond accordingly or it will leave him.”

And it has been narrated upon the authority of *Fuḍayl ibn ‘Iyyād* that he said:

“A scholar will continue to be ignorant of what he knows until he acts according to it. So if he acts according to it, then he is a [true] scholar.”

And *Ḥubayyib ibn Ḥajar* says:

“It used to be said: how great is the faith that is adorned with knowledge and how great is the

²⁴ ‘*Iqtidā’ al-‘Ilm al-‘Amal*’

knowledge that is adorned with actions and how great are the actions that are adorned with gentleness. And nothing can add something to another like the beauty that knowledge adds to forbearance.”²⁵

Acting upon knowledge calls for it to be safeguarded and preserved just as failing to act upon it calls for it to be lost or forgotten. For this reason, *ash-Sha‘bī* (رضي الله عنه) said:

“We used to rely upon acting upon *ḥadīth* to memorize them and we used to rely upon fasting to seek after them.”²⁶

And *ath-Thawrī* (رضي الله عنه) said:

“It was said to some wise people: Why are you people those who seek knowledge the most? They replied: Because we apply it more than anyone else.”²⁷

²⁵ Narrated by *Ibn al-Mubārak* in ‘*Az-Zuhd*’ page 470 in addition to *Ad-Daynūrī* in ‘*Al-Mujālisah*’ (volume 2 page 579).

²⁶ Narrated by *Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr* in ‘*Al-Jāmi*’ (volume 2 page 11). A similar wording was narrated by *Wakī* as found in ‘*Al-Jāmi*’ (volume 2 page 132).

²⁷ Narrated by *Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn Marwān Ad-Daynūrī* in ‘*Al-Mujālisah*’ (volume 2 page 513).

The opposite of this drives knowledge away and causes forgetfulness. ‘*Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd* (رضي الله عنه) said:

“Certainly, I think the servant forgets knowledge that he once knew due to the sin that he commits.”

And it was from the habit of the pious predecessors to act upon knowledge. In this way they achieved unequaled precedence and their knowledge was blessed. For this reason *Abū ‘Abdur-Rahmān as-Sulamī* (رحمته الله) said:

“Those who taught us to recite the *Qur’ān* told us that when they sought to read [the *Qur’ān*] upon the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم); whenever they learned ten verses of the *Qur’ān* they would not leave them until they had committed their meanings to action. So we learned knowledge and action together at the same time.”

And abandoning acting upon knowledge is divided into two categories:

- 1. The First:** Abandoning adherence to Islamic obligations and failure to abandon Islamic prohibitions. This is a major sin for which the threatening verses of the *Qur’ān* and *ḥadīth* regarding abandoning acting upon knowledge apply.

2. The Second: Abandoning Islamic recommendations and failure to avoid detestable actions. This is blameworthy but is not considered to be applicable to the threatening *ḥadīth* except in the sense that the scholar and student of knowledge should uphold and honor the *sunan* and avoid the detestable actions.

Ibn Al-Jawzī (رحمته الله) said:

“The one who is truly poor is the one who wasted his life in pursuit of knowledge without acting upon it. He missed out on the pleasures of the worldly life and the best of the hereafter. So he proceeds [towards the hereafter] in a state of bankruptcy with strong evidences against him.”²⁸
[End of quote]

²⁸ ‘*Ṣayd al-Khāṭir*’ page 144.

The Third Obstacle: Relying Upon Books Rather Than Scholars

Some students feel that they are able to take knowledge from books without returning to the scholars to clarify expressions and correct mistakes. This type of self-confidence is a disease since I have seen it overwhelm those who are negligent and who are far from the countless numbers of people of knowledge. How numerous are their mistakes? How bleak is their outlook? And how disgraceful are their contradictions?

Imām ash-Shāfi'ī (رحمته الله) said:

“Whoever seeks knowledge from the bellies of books will squander the rulings.”

And some used to say:

“From the greatest trials are those who become sheikhs through papers.”

This means those who have learned from pages.²⁹

The jurist *Sulaymān ibn Mūsá* said:

“It used to be said: do not take *Qur'ān* from the *muṣḥafiyūn* (i.e. those who learned exclusively from the *muṣḥaf*) and do not take knowledge from

²⁹ *Tadhkirah as-Sāmi' wa al-Mutakallam* page 87.

the *ṣaḥāfiyūn* (i.e. those who took knowledge from pages).”

Imām Sa‘īd ibn ‘Abdul-‘Azīz at-Tanūkhī who was on the same level as *al-Awzā‘ī* said:

“It used to be said: do not take knowledge from the *ṣaḥāfi* (the one who takes knowledge from pages) and do not take the *Qur’ān* from the *muṣḥafī* (someone who takes *Qur’ān* exclusively from the *muṣḥaf*).”³⁰

And long ago it was said:

“Whoever took his book as his sheikh, then his mistakes will be greater than what he gets right.”

And how extraordinary was the statement of *Abū Ḥayyān an-Naḥwī* who said in his lines of poetry:

“The inexperienced think that the books are beneficial; the brother of understanding in order to acquire the various sciences. And the ignorant do not know that within them [the books] are ambiguities that confuse even the greatest of intellects. So when sciences are learned without a sheikh, you will be misguided from the straight path. And the affairs will become muddled and

³⁰ *Taṣḥīfāt al-Muḥaddithīn* by *al-‘Askarī* (volume 1 pages 6-7).

unclear for you until you are more astray than the *Tūmā*³¹ the wise.”

And the scholars have explained the reasons why the student must limit himself to taking knowledge from the mouths of scholars. And from these explanations is the statement of *Ibn Buṭlān* who said:

“The book contains things that are obstacles that prevent knowledge and these factors are very limited amongst teachers. Examples of this include the type of mistake caused by confusing letters which are not spoken and the error occurs because the eyes can deceive or due to lack of experience in grammar or the insufficient level of grammar that is known, correction of the book, writing what isn't read, and reading what isn't written, or due to the school of thought held by the author, the poor nature of the manuscripts, defective transmission of the text, and the reader combining

³¹ **Translator's note:** *Tūmā* the wise was most likely *Tūmā ibn Ibrāhīm at-Ṭabīb ash-Shawbakī*. It has been said that a man named *Tūmā* used to claim that he was wise and that he was given wisdom but he would give religious verdicts without knowledge. It was said that he told people to offer their daughters in charity (i.e. as *ṣadaqah*) to those who weren't married. [See: *Sharḥ Naẓm al-Waraqāt fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh lil-Uṭhaymīn* page 45 and *Ad-Durrar al-Kāminah fī A'yān al-Mī'ah ath-Thāminah* volume 1 page 528 #1427]

passages that were meant to be separate as well as his errors in the fundamental issues of knowledge in addition to the mention of terminology specific to certain sciences and disciplines. All of this can be an obstacle that prevents learning. The learner can avoid all of these issues by reading upon a teacher.

If the situation is like this, then reading upon the scholars is more beneficial and better than an individual's reading to himself and this is what I had hoped to clarify.”³²

And before this point five other points were mentioned in clarification of why learning from the mouths of men is better than learning from pages [of books]. Refer to the explanation of ‘*Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm ad-Dīn.*’

³² ‘*Sharḥ Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm ad-Dīn*’ by *az-Zubaydī* (volume 1 page 66).

The Fourth Obstacle: Taking Knowledge from Lesser People of Knowledge

The trend of taking knowledge from lesser people of knowledge who are younger has become widespread amongst the students of knowledge in our time.

This phenomenon in reality is a chronic disease and a lasting sickness that keeps the student from attaining his objective and directs him away from the correct path which leads to true knowledge.

This is because taking knowledge from the young whose feet have not yet become grounded in knowledge and whose beards have yet to grey in pursuit of it while there are those who are older than them and more well-grounded weakens the foundation of the beginner and prevents him from benefitting from the elder scholars and adopting their character that has been shaped by knowledge over time, in addition to other than this from the points mentioned in the narration of *Ibn Mas'ūd* in which he says:

“The people will continue to remain upon good so long as they take knowledge from those who are eldest among them [*akābirihim*] and those who are the most trustworthy [*umanā'ihim*], and their scholars [*ulamā'ihim*]. But if they took it from the

youngest [*ṣighārihim*] and most evil among them [*shirārihim*] they would be in ruin.”

And it has been authentically transmitted upon the authority of *Abū Umayyah al-Jumaḥī* who said that the Messenger of *Allāh* (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

“Certainly, from the signs of the hour is that knowledge is taken from younger people [*aṣāghir*].”

And the people have differed over what is meant by the term *ṣighār* here. *Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr* in ‘*Al-Jāmi’*” (volume 1 page 157) as well as *Ash-Shātibī* in ‘*Al-Itiṣām*’ (volume 2 page 93) have gathered these opinions in the previously mentioned works.

And *Ibn Qutaybah* (رحمته الله) held that the *ṣighār* are those who are younger in age and said regarding the previously mentioned narration of *Ibn Mas‘ūd*:

“He means that people will continue to be upon good so long as their scholars are older sheikhs and not young scholars because a sheikh has outgrown the pleasures of youth and its individuality, hastiness and foolishness just as the sheikh is a person with expertise and experience who is unaffected by misconceptions, and desires. He does not incline towards temptation nor is he driven into error by the devil as the young person

might be. Along with age comes deliberateness, nobility and prestige. The young person can be influenced by these matters for which the sheikh is, for the most part, immune. So if the young people [i.e. the *ṣiḡhār*] are affected and offer verdicts based upon these things they will destroy themselves and others.”³³ [End of quote]

And *Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr* narrated from ‘*Umar ibn Al-Khaṭṭāb* (رضي الله عنه) that he said:

“I have learned when the people will be upright and when they will be corrupt. If understanding came from the young [*ṣaḡhīr*] it would be harder for the older person [*kaḡbīr*] to accept. And if understanding came from the older person [*kaḡbīr*], the younger people would follow it and thus they will both be guided.”

And *Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr* has also narrated upon the authority of *Abū al-Aḡwaṣ* from ‘*Abdullāh [Ibn Mas‘ūd]* that he said:

“Surely you will continue to remain upon good so long as knowledge is sought from your elders [*kaḡbārikum*]. If knowledge is sought from your

³³ *Naṣīḡah ahl al-Ḥadīth* by *Al-Khaṭīb al-Baḡhdādī* page 16.

young people [*ṣighārikum*], the elders will discredit the young.”

In these two narrations is justification for not taking knowledge from the young. Another type of *ṣaghīr* which wasn't mentioned by *Ibn Qutaybah* is fear since knowledge may be rejected due to fear if it comes from those who are young. At any rate, the term *ṣaghīr* is general enough to include both the literal and figurative interpretation.

This ruling regarding the younger person [*ṣaghīr*] is not unrestricted. Certainly, a number of companions and their students issued religious verdicts and taught people while they were young while older people were present. However, the like of these individuals is rare in the generations that came after them. If the like of these individuals are present and their uprightness is well-known and their knowledge has been tested and it becomes clear that they are well-grounded and there is no one from the elder scholars that can be sought for sciences that are with the young and along with this, corruption can be avoided; in this case knowledge can be taken from the young.

Al-Ḥajjāj ibn Artāh (رضي الله عنه) said:

“It used to be disliked for a man to speak until grey could be seen in his beard.”³⁴

³⁴ *Akḥbār al-Quḍāh* by *Wakī* (volume 2 page 54).

The intent here is not to completely boycott the knowledge of the young due to the presence of those who are older. Rather, instead the intent is to put people in their proper places. So the right of the young person who is gifted is to be benefitted from within the context of study, revision, and research. However, as it relates to issuing religious verdicts and addressing questions then no; absolutely not, since this is his destruction and a trial and something that misleads him.

Al-Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyyād (رضي الله عنه) said:

“If I saw that the people had gathered around a man I would have said: ‘This individual is crazy. What person for whom the people gather does not like to beautify his speech for them!?’”

And he [*Al-Fuḍayl*] also said:

“It has reached me that the scholars of the past used to act whenever they learned. And whenever they acted they remained busy. And whenever they were busy they would be missed. And whenever they were missed they would be sought. And whenever they were sought they would flee.”³⁵

So dear students, if you truly desire knowledge from its proper sources then hasten to seek knowledge from those elder scholars

³⁵ *As-Siyar* (volume 8 page 434).

whose beards have become grey and whose bodies have become frail and whose strength in knowledge and teaching has weakened. Commit yourselves to them before they disappear and take from their treasures before it disappears along with them since it is during the darkest night that the full moon is missed.

Note: In this time, the criterion for which the scholars are measured has become flawed amongst many of the general masses. They have made anyone who offers an eloquent admonition or gave a meaningful lecture or an unscripted *khutbah* a scholar who should be returned to for religious verdicts and knowledge.

This is an unfortunate disaster and an appalling phenomenon for which the evils associated with it have become widespread just as the harms of it have become prevalent since it involves associating knowledge with other than its people. And whenever the issue is put before other than its people you should anticipate the hour.

So the student should beware of taking knowledge from these people unless if they are from the well-known people of knowledge. Not everyone who possesses the ability to communicate is a scholar. Likewise not everyone who turns heads towards him by attacking the leaders of the Muslims or by mentioning the percentages of Aids related deaths and the like is a scholar.

And what has preceded does not mean, as some people understand, that they should not be listened to or benefited from when they offer admonitions. Absolutely not; rather what is intended is not taking Islamic knowledge from them and raising them to the station of the scholars, and *Allāh* is the One who grants success.

The Fifth Obstacle: Not Seeking Knowledge Gradually

You do not see anyone from the scholars dispute the concept of gradual progression because it is a successful means of attaining knowledge and understanding it. This concept is taken from the book of *Allāh* the Exalted wherein He says:

﴿ وَقُرْآنًا فَرَقْنَاهُ لِتَقْرَأَهُ عَلَى النَّاسِ عَلَىٰ مَكْثٍ وَنَزَّلْنَاهُ تَنْزِيلًا ۝١٠٦﴾

“And [it is] a *Qur’ān* which We have divided [into parts], in order that you might recite it to people in intervals. And We have revealed it in stages.” [Sūrah al-Isrā’ 17:106]

And He the Exalted says:

﴿ وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْلَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ الْقُرْآنُ جُمْلَةً وَاحِدَةً كَذَلِكَ

لِنُثَبِّتَ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ وَرَتَّلْنَاهُ تَرْتِيلًا ۝٣٢﴾

“And those who disbelieve say: ‘Why is not the *Qur’ān* revealed to him all at once?’ Thus (it is sent down in parts), that We may strengthen your heart thereby. And We have revealed it to you gradually, in stages.” [Sūrah al-Furqān 25: 32]

Az-Zubaydī said while citing ‘*Adh-Dharī ah*’ regarding the role of the learner:

“It is obligatory that he does not enter into a discipline until he first covers the discipline that precedes it according to the most basic order until the need has been addressed. Exposing a person to too much knowledge muddles his ability to understand.”

This is why *Allāh* the Exalted says:

﴿الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ يَتْلُونَهُ حَقَّ تِلَاوَتِهِ﴾

“Those to whom We have given the Book recite it as they should.” [Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:121]

This means that they did not move on from a discipline until they had first perfected it in terms of theory and application. So it is obligatory that what is most important is given precedence over things of lesser importance without disrupting this order of importance.

And many of the people have been prevented from attaining [knowledge] due to their abandonment of the most basic fundamentals. And it is only right that the goal in studying any knowledge is to learn it such that a person may continue on to whatever is above it until the end is reached.³⁶ [End of reference]

³⁶ ‘*Sharḥ al-Iḥyā*’ (volume 1 page 334).

And gradual progression is of two types:

1. Gradual progression within various sciences or disciplines.
2. Gradual progression within a single science or discipline.

Both of these two types are subject to the discretion of the teacher and the nature of the situation. For this reason the recommendations of the scholars regarding gradual progression vary according to the school of thought and location. So I will put before the reader various examples of their recommendations so that whatever is suitable might be taken after the approval of his sheikh or teacher.

Ibn al-Madīnī narrated from *'Abdul-Wahhāb ibn Hammām* who narrated from *Ibn Jurayj* that he said:

“I approached *'Aṭā'* and I pursued this issue while *'Abdullāh ibn 'Ubayd ibn 'Umayr* was with him. Then *Ibn 'Umayr* said to me: ‘Did you read the *Qur'ān*?’ I said no. He said: ‘Go and read it. Then seek knowledge.’ So I left and I spent some time away until I read the *Qur'ān*. Then I came to *'Aṭā'* while *'Abdullāh* was with him. Then he said: ‘Have you read about what *Allāh* has made obligatory regarding inheritance (*farīdah*)?’ I said no. He replied: ‘Learn about what *Allāh* has made

obligatory regarding inheritance (*farīdah*), then seek knowledge.’ So I studied what *Allāh* had made obligatory regarding inheritance (*farīdah*), then I returned. Then he said: ‘Now you should seek knowledge.’”³⁷

And *Abū al-‘Aynā* said:

“I came to ‘*Abdullāh ibn Dāwud* and he said to me: ‘What brought you here?’ I said *ḥadīth*. Then he said: ‘Go memorize the *Qur’ān*.’ I said: ‘I have memorized the *Qur’ān*.’ He replied read:

﴿ وَأَنْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأٌ فُوحٌ ﴾

“And recite to them the news of Noah...” [*Sūrah Yūnus* 10: 71]

So I recited from that tenth of the *Qur’ān* until I had completed it. Then he said to me: ‘Now go and learn the laws of inheritance (*farā’id*).’ I said I have already learned the shares allotted for the descendants, the grandfather and the elderly. He asked: ‘Then which is a closer relative; your brother's son or your paternal uncle?’ I replied the son of my brother. He asked: ‘And why is that?’ I

³⁷ *Siyar* (volume 6 page 327).

replied because my brother is related to me through my mother whereas my paternal uncle is related to me through my grandfather. He said: ‘Now go learn Arabic.’ I told him that I learned it before the previous two. He asked: ‘Then why did ‘Umar say –when he was attacked- *yā lallāh wa lil-muslimīn?* Why did one *lām* have a *fathah* while the other had a *kasrah*?’ I replied that one *lām* carried a *fathah* because it was an invocation while the other *lām* carried a *kasrah* due to seeking assistance and victory. He replied: ‘If I was to narrate *ḥadīth* to anyone, I would narrate to you.’”³⁸ [End of quote]

Abū ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul-Barr (رحمة الله) said³⁹:

“Seeking knowledge consists of levels, virtues and degrees that should not be skipped over. And whoever skips them over altogether has skipped the way of the pious predecessors, may *Allāh* have mercy upon them. And whoever intentionally disregards their way has gone astray while the one who disregards their way due to misinterpretation has erred.”

So the beginning of knowledge is memorization of the Book of *Allāh* the Mighty and Majestic and understanding it and

³⁸ *Siyar* (volume 9 page 351).

³⁹ *Al-Jāmi‘* (volume 2 page 166).

everything that leads to its comprehension must also be sought after. And I do not say that memorizing all of it is compulsory. Rather, I say it is a binding obligation upon the one who wishes to become a scholar but not from what is considered compulsory.

So whoever memorizes it before puberty and then incorporates whatever might assist him in understanding it from the Arabic language, this will be a great help to him in clarifying what was meant by the original Arabic as well as the *sunan* of the Messenger of *Allāh* (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ).

Then he should look to the abrogating and abrogated verses of the *Qur'ān* and the rulings associated with them just as he should also review the different opinions of the scholars and the things that they agreed upon which is a matter made easier for the one for whom *Allāh* has made it easy.

Then he should review the authentic *sunan* of the Messenger of *Allāh* (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) which will enable the student to discover what was intended by *Allāh* the Mighty and Majestic in His Book which essentially reveals to the student the rulings of the *Qur'ān*.

The biography of the Messenger of *Allāh* (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) also contains much information regarding the abrogating and abrogated matters from the *Sunnah*.

And whoever seeks after the *sunan* of the Messenger of *Allāh* (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) will find that it is a tool that assists in understanding the speech of the trustworthy Imāms and memorizers. Also from the things that assist in understanding *ḥadīth* is knowledge of the

Arabic language, how it is used, its vastness, its figurative expressions and metaphors as well as the generality of how it is used as well as its specificity and the rest of the related schools of thought for whoever is able to do so.

This is a matter that is indispensable. And ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (رضي الله عنه) used to write to the furthest limits of his sovereignty that people should learn the *Sunnah*, the laws of inheritance (*farā’id*), and Arabic language mistakes –meaning Arabic grammar- just as they should learn the *Qur’ān*.

Then *Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr* (رحمته الله) said [in ‘*Al-Jāmi’*’] (volume 2 page 172):

“It is a must, my brother, that you memorize the fundamentals and place emphasis upon them; and you should know that whoever places emphasis upon preserving the *sunan* and the rulings that are explicitly mentioned within the text of the *Qur’ān* and considers the statements of the jurists such that they aid in performing interpretive jurisprudence (*ijtihād*) and become a key to the various types of extrapolation and an explanation for most of the *sunan* with ambiguous meanings.

And no one should blindly follow any one of them in the same way that the *sunan* should be followed and relied upon in every situation without interpretation. And a person should not free himself of what the scholars have taken it upon

themselves to do in terms of memorizing the *sunan* and carefully considering them just as people should take them as examples in terms of research, understanding and consideration.

And they should be thanked for their beneficial efforts and recognized for them and praised when they are correct –which is the majority of their positions– just as they should never be considered unable to be mistaken just as they do not consider themselves to be immune to error.

This is a description of the student who adheres to what the pious predecessors were upon and who has attained prosperity, whose righteousness can be witnessed and who follows the *Sunnah* of his Prophet (ﷺ) and the guidance of his companions, may *Allāh* be pleased with them...”
[End of quote]

And *Ibn al-Jawzī* (رحمة الله) said:

“And the brevity of life is known as well as the vastness of knowledge. So the student begins with the *Qur’ān* and its memorization and he also looks at its exegesis in such a way that nothing is hidden from him. And if his reading of the seven recitations of the *Qur’ān* is correct as well as some

issues from Arabic grammar and the books of Arabic language and he has begun to study the sources of *ḥadīth* related to transmission like the books of *ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth*, the *masānīd*⁴⁰ and the *sunan*⁴¹ in addition to the sciences of *ḥadīth* like the knowledge of weak narrators and names; he should refer to the sources for this.

And the scholars have organized from these sciences what will save the student from much frustration.

And the student need only to look back into history in order to learn what he cannot do without like the lineage of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), his relatives, his wives and whatever happened to him.

Then the student should direct himself to jurisprudence (*fiqh*); so he should learn the preponderant school of thought and opposing views though it should be his foundation in issues

⁴⁰ **Translator's note:** The term *masānīd* is the plural form of the term *musnad*. In this context, *masānīd* are collections of prophetic narrations wherein narrations are organized according to each narrator.

⁴¹ **Translator's note:** The term *Sunan* here refers to the collections of prophetic narrations that are arranged according to the chapters of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*).

of differing. Then he should examine the issue and all of its variables and he should study it from within the proper context like from the explanation of a *Qur'ānic* verse, *ḥadīth*, and word in the Arabic language.

And busy one's self with principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and with the science of calculating inheritance (*al-farā'id*) and he should also recognize that the various sciences revolve around *fiqh*.”⁴²

So these have been just a few of the many recommendations of the scholars –may *Allāh* have mercy upon them– for the students of knowledge and it represents the product of their experience upon the path of learning which they have guided us to and thus saved us time and ensured that we set out upon a sound foundation. So we should not deviate from their way in order to keep our information free of error so that it does not betray us since we are in dire need of it.

And the poet said:

“Whoever hasn't been addressed by a scholar directly with all of his principles will find that his certainty regarding problematic issues becomes doubtful.”

⁴² From '*Ṣayad al-Khāṭir*' p. 169.

And may *Allāh* have mercy upon *Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr* since he lamented the students of knowledge of his time and criticized them for their abandonment of the well-known manner of learning according to the way *salaf* in his statement:

“And know –may *Allāh* have mercy upon you– that the student of knowledge in this time of ours and in this land of ours has deviated from the way of their people and the path of their *salaf* and has pursued paths that were unknown to their Imāms and innovated in such a way that their ignorance and deficiency in comparison to the scholars before them became clear.”⁴³ [End of quote]

And *Ibn al-Jawzī* outlined a program for the student of knowledge that would enable him to reach the finest limits of his potential when he said:

“And the first thing that should be undertaken by the student of knowledge during his youth is the precise memorization of the *Qur’ān* since it should be memorized until it is so strong it is like a part of him (literally flesh and blood). Then the student should be introduced to Arabic grammar so that he can recognize grammatical errors. Then he should learn jurisprudence (*fiqh*) by a school of thought

⁴³ *Jāmi‘ Bayyān al-‘Ilm wa Faḍlihi* (Volume 2 Page 169).

and what opposes it. And whatever else is possible to learn from the various sciences; if it is memorized then this is good.”⁴⁴ [End of quote]

Reading through the classical texts of *ḥadīth* and *ḥadīth* terminology should be added to this so that the understanding can be based upon the *Qur’ān* and whatever has been authentically narrated from the Messenger (ﷺ) so that the one who does so might reach the pinnacle of superiority.

And Sheikh ‘*Abdur-Raḥmān ibn Nāṣir as-Sa’dī* (رحمته الله) said:

“As for beneficial knowledge, then it is the knowledge that purifies the hearts and souls which results in success in the life of this world and the next and it is what has come from the Messenger (ﷺ) from *ḥadīth*, *Qur’ānic exegesis (tafsīr)* and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and whatever things may assist these subjects from the sciences of the Arabic language so long as the time and place permits.

And organizing the time that should be committed to the different books differs according to location and circumstances.

And the ideal situation here in our eyes is that the student of knowledge exerts effort in memorizing the shorter classical texts of the discipline that he is focused upon. And

⁴⁴ *Ṣayad al-Khāṭir* p. 244.

if he is unable or has difficulty memorizing then he should read them repeatedly until their meanings become firm in his heart. Then the remaining books of the same discipline become more or less a clarification or explanation for the foundation that he has established and learned.

So if the student of knowledge memorized '*al-'Aqīdah al-Wāsiṭiyyah*' by Sheikh *al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah* and '*Thalāthah al-Uṣūl*' and '*Kitāb at-Tawḥīd*' by Sheikh *Muḥammad ibn 'Abdul-Wahhāb*; and in jurisprudence (*fiqh*) there is '*Mukhtaṣir ad-Dalīl*'⁴⁵ and '*Mukhtaṣir al-Muqni*'⁴⁶. In *ḥadīth* there is '*Bulūgh al-Marām*' and in Arabic grammar there is '*al-Ajarūmiyyah*'.

And the student should strive to learn these texts and refer to whatever he can from the explanations of these texts or the books of their respective disciplines since they are similar to an explanation of them. This is because once a student of knowledge has preserved the fundamentals such that he possesses a complete familiarity with them, all of the other books of the various sciences become easier for him regardless of whether they were small or big. And whoever ignores the fundamentals will be prevented from achieving success.

⁴⁵ *Dalīl at-Tālib* by *Mar'ī al-Karmī*.

⁴⁶ *Zād al-Mustaḥṣin* by *al-Hajāwī*.

So whoever is diligent concerning these beneficial sciences and relied upon *Allāh* and sought His assistance will be blessed in his knowledge and the path that he has set out on. And whoever set out on another path in search of knowledge other than the path of benefit has wasted his time and will find nothing but hardship; and this is well-known through experience and observation.”⁴⁷ [End of quote]

And this detailed suggestion from the Sheikh (رحمته الله) deserves attention. And we have read through the compiled biographies of our scholars and there is not a single one of them who abandoned this way; and in this manner they achieved the greatest success.

And it should be known to the student of knowledge that our encouragement to memorize smaller classical texts in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is not a call for blameworthy blind following. Rather, this is done for several reasons. From among these reasons is for the student to possess a strong foundation in this monumental subject and limiting his mind to the issues found in this smaller treatise prevents confusion caused by other issues which might prevent him from distinguishing between their respective rulings. And striving to reach a level where he is able

⁴⁷ *Al-Fatāwá as-Sa'diyyah* pages 30-31.

to perform interpretive jurisprudence (*ijtihād*) should occur step by step. And the first of these steps are these smaller treatises.

And memorizing them doesn't mean applying everything found in them since there must be a teacher who is read upon who also clarifies ambiguous passages and explains difficult issues while citing evidence for them and distinguishing the strongest position from the weaker positions.

Entering into this issue is from the matters which require great depth and was not particularly intended here. Instead I will suffice myself with the mention of some speech of the great impartial one and the distinguished educator, the prominent scholar *adh-Dhahabī* (رحمته الله) since he classified every person according to his level. He said:

“The one who attained the level of interpretive jurisprudence (*ijtihād*) which was recognized by several of the Imāms; it is not appropriate for this person to blindly follow.

Likewise, the beginner jurist and the layperson who has memorized the *Qur'ān* or much of it; it is never appropriate for them to perform interpretive jurisprudence (*ijtihād*) so how could they even do so?! What would they say? And upon what would they base their opinions? How could they fly when they have no wings?

The third category is the complete jurist who possesses awareness, understanding and knowledge of *ḥadīth*. This individual has memorized a smaller treatise in the branch subjects and a book in the fundamental principles just as he has also read about Arabic grammar and possesses good character in addition to his memorization of the *Qur'ān* and readings in *Qur'ānic* exegesis (*tafsīr*) and strong debating skills. This is the level of the one who reaches the level of restricted interpretive jurisprudence (*ijtihād muqayyad*) and is qualified to examine the evidence of the scholars. So whenever the truth becomes clear to him in an issue, and the textual support is authenticated, and one of the noteworthy Imāms has acted upon it, in this situation he follows the truth and does not take any concessions or become shy. And it is not appropriate for him to blindly follow in the issue, after the proofs have become clear to him.”⁴⁸ [End of quote]

And may *Allāh* have mercy upon the individual who recognizes his own level and does not raise himself above his station and seeks knowledge upon the way of the *salaf*, and truly *Allāh's* aid is sought.

⁴⁸ *As-Siyar* (volume 18 page 191).

The Sixth Obstacle: Conceitedness, Vanity and Arrogance

Disobeying *Allāh* the Exalted is an obstacle that inhibits attaining Islamic knowledge because knowledge is the light of *Allāh* that is placed in the hearts of whomever He wills from His servants. And light and darkness cannot be combined in a heart. For this reason *Ibn Mas'ūd* (رضي الله عنه) said:

“Truly I believe that a man forgets knowledge that he has learned due to sins that he committed.”⁴⁹

And may *Allāh* have mercy upon *ash-Shāfi'ī* who said [in his famous lines of poetry]:

“I complained to *Wakī* about my poor memory and he directed me to abandon sins. He informed me that knowledge is light; and the light of *Allāh* is not given to someone who is disobedient.”

And certainly the ugliest of what the student of knowledge might be involved in from sins –even though all of them are ugly– is arrogance, cockiness and conceitedness which causes one person to have contempt towards another, feel like he is above yet another and strut when walking and speak theatrically whenever talking in addition to other than that from the characteristics of

⁴⁹ *Al-Jāmi'* (volume 1 page 196).

the one who is amazed with himself and the other attributes that *Allāh* has forbidden in His statement:

﴿ وَلَا تُصَعِّرْ خَدَّكَ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَمْشِ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَحًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُورٍ ﴾

“And do not walk through the earth exultantly. Indeed, *Allāh* does not like every self-deluded and boastful individual.” [Sūrah Luqṣmān 31:18]

And the term *marḥ* which has been translated as exultantly here means to strut arrogantly.

And *Allāh* the Exalted says:

﴿ تِلْكَ الدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ نَجْعَلُهَا لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُرِيدُونَ عُلُوًّا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فَسَادًا وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴾

“That is the home of the Hereafter that We shall grant to those who do not desire superiority in the earth or corruption. And the [final] outcome is for those mindful of *Allāh*.” [Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ 28:83]

And in the two authentic collections of *ḥadīth* (*al-Bukhārī* and *Muslim*) upon the authority of *Abū Hurayrah* (رضي الله عنه) who said the Messenger of *Allāh* (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

“While a man was walking in a garment that he was amazed with; his head held high, strutting

while walking, *Allāh* caused the earth to swallow him, so he will continue to sink down into the earth until the Day of Resurrection.”

Ibn al-Jawzī (رحمته الله) said:

“The best of things is to increase in knowledge since the one who restricts himself to what he already knows and thinks that it is sufficient has stubbornly clung on to his own opinion until his amazement with himself has prevented him from benefiting.”

He said:

“Nevertheless, the man who suffices himself with what he knows whenever he mixes with others is a type of vision of himself that prevents him from realizing what is correct; and we seek refuge in *Allāh* from that.”⁵⁰ [End of quote]

And *‘Alī ibn Thābit* was truthful when he said [in his lines of poetry]:

“The ill-effects of knowledge are arrogance and anger, and the ill effects of wealth are wastefulness and robbery.”

⁵⁰ *Ṣayad al-Khāṭir* p. 111.

Ayyūb as-Sakhtiyānī said:

“It is appropriate for the scholar to put dirt on his head out of humility towards *Allāh*.”

And they said the humble one from the students of knowledge is the one with the most knowledge just as the place that is the lowest collects the most water.

And it was said to a wise man:

“What is the one blessing that no one will envy anyone because of it?” He replied: “Humility.” Then it was said to him: “What is the calamity that will ensure that no one will be merciful towards the person afflicted with it?” He responded: “Arrogance.”⁵¹

So the student should beware from the like of these blameworthy characteristics which *Allāh* detests as well as the believers. And certainly, the one who is humble before *Allāh* will be raised by Him. Conversely, the one who will not be humble before *Allāh* will be lowered.

And if a person's soul whispers something from this, then he should remember his destination and his journey's end. And he

⁵¹ *Al-Jāmi'* (volume 1 page 142).

should know that there are those who are younger than him who have more knowledge.

And we have been tried in this time by small groups –and the praise is due to *Allāh*– who read a book or two, memorize an issue or two and then after a day or two of seeking knowledge become able to perform interpretive jurisprudence (*ijtihād*) and accuse others based upon this depressing fantasy. In fact, they even belittle the scholars other than them not to mention the students of knowledge and callers to Islam. And they think that they have reached some lofty station that no one else has reached which is apparent from their dress, their walk, and their speech. And we belong to *Allāh*, and to Him we will all return. How great is the harm they cause and how little do they benefit. And how strong is their ignorance. And we ask *Allāh* the Exalted to guide them to the straight path.

And it is for them that I cite an important section by *Ibn al-Jawzī* (رحمته الله) wherein he says:

“Most of the scholars and pious people have been criticized for hiding arrogance. This person looks at his own state and that someone has been raised above him. And this person does not visit the sick or the poor because he sees himself better than them.

And there are very few that I have seen except that this is how they view themselves. And even more amazing than those who view themselves this way is why they view themselves in this way. If it was due to knowledge, then the scholars have preceded them.

And if it was due to worship, then the pious worshippers have preceded them...”

Until he [*Ibn al-Jawzī* (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ)] said:

“And whoever scrutinizes his own character and his own sins knows with certainty regarding his own sins and negligence. But regarding the condition of others he is in doubt. So what deserves to be warned from is being amazed with one's self and the idea of being ahead of others in the matters of the hereafter. And the true believer continually looks down upon himself. And when it was said to ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul-‘Azīz (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ): ‘If you die, should we bury you in the apartment of the Messenger of *Allāh* (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ)?’ To this he replied: ‘For me to meet *Allāh* with every sin other than *shirk* is more beloved to me than to assume that I am deserving of that.’”⁵² [End of quote]

⁵² *Ṣayad al-Khāṭir* p. 282.

And he said in *Tahdhīb al-Ihyā'*:

“Arrogance as it relates to knowledge is the greatest of its harm and the majority of its disease and the furthest away from accepting a remedy except through severe hardship and the greatest of efforts. This is because the status of knowledge is very great with *Allāh* as it is also great with the people. Its status is greater than wealth, beauty and other than these things.

And the scholar cannot protect himself from arrogance except through knowledge of two things:

The first issue is that he knows that the argument of *Allāh* against the people of knowledge is more severe and that what may be possible from the ignorant is not possible from the scholar, or even a tenth of it. Surely, whoever disobeys *Allāh* the Exalted with knowledge and understanding; the wrongdoing involved is far more wicked and reprehensible since no blessing of *Allāh* had been prevented from him as it relates to knowledge.

The second issue is that the scholar knows that arrogance is inappropriate for anyone besides *Allāh* the Mighty and Majestic and none other.

And if he were to be arrogant he would be detested by *Allāh* and hated.”⁵³ [End of quote]

This is because of the narration of *Abū Hurayrah* (رضي الله عنه) who said the Messenger of *Allāh* (صلى الله عليه وسلم):

“Might is My lower garment and pride is My cloak; whoever contends with Me [regarding them] will be punished.”⁵⁴

And *Ibn Mas‘ūd* (رضي الله عنه) narrated from the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) that he said:

“No one shall enter the Paradise so long as he possesses the weight of a mustard seed of pride in his heart.” So a man asked: “Certainly a man likes to have a nice garment and nice sandals?” He replied: “Certainly *Allāh* is beautiful and He loves beauty. Pride is rejecting the truth and looking down on the people.”

And the term *ghamṭ an-nās* which was translated as “looking down on the people” means to have contempt for them.

⁵³ *Tahdhīb al-Iḥyā’* (volume 2 page 136).

⁵⁴ Narrated by *Muslim*.

The Seventh Obstacle: Rushing to Produce Results

Some students think that knowledge is up for grabs or a significant portion that will immediately produce results and whose benefits will quickly become clear.

So this person hopes in his heart after a year or so passes from his life in pursuit of knowledge, he will become a major scholar whose ambitions will not be matched and for whom there is no equal.

This idea is dangerous and it is a corrupt outlook to have and an empty ambition. Its harms are serious and its ill effects are great since it leads to consequences that are blameworthy like speaking about *Allāh* without knowledge and unjustifiable blind self-confidence and the love of higher positions and being given precedence. This individual will eventually end up abandoning any affiliation to knowledge and its people regarding these things.

And *al-Ma'mūn* was correct when he said while scoffing at this type of student:

“One of them learns *ḥadīth* for three days and boasts that I am from the people of *ḥadīth*.”⁵⁵

⁵⁵ *As-Siyar* (volume 10 page 876).

The one who considers the condition of the *salaf* sees amazing examples of their patience upon the unsavory aspects of attaining knowledge, extended periods of seriousness and they would not fabricate, fail or become arrogant; their distinct characteristic was: “Knowledge is from birth until death.” Or: “Knowledge is to take from the inkwell until the cemetery.”

Imām Ibn al-Madīnī said:

“It was said to *ash-Sha‘bī*: ‘Where did you get all of this knowledge?’ To this he replied: ‘It came from rejecting complete reliance and traveling throughout the lands and observing patience like inanimate objects and being early like the crow.’”⁵⁶

And *Imām ash-Shāfi‘ī* said:

“A man will not amount to anything in this affair [i.e. seeking knowledge] until he is harmed by poverty and prefers it over everything else.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *At-Tadhkirah* by *adh-Dhahabī* in the biography of *ash-Sha‘bī ‘Āmir ibn Sharāḥīl*.

⁵⁷ *As-Siyar* (volume 10 page 89).

And *Ibn Ḥamzah* said:

“*Ya’qūb ibn Sufyān* –the *Ḥafīẓ* and *Imām*– said to me: ‘I spent thirty years travelling.’”⁵⁸

And *Yaḥyá ibn Abī Kathīr* said:

“Knowledge cannot be acquired with a well-rested body.”⁵⁹

And *Ibn al-Ḥaddād al-Mālikī* said:

“The scholar like the angels has no bed.”⁶⁰

So it is upon the student of knowledge to take those *Imāms* as an example to be followed and likewise follow in their footsteps until he attains his goal and fulfills his objective. Truly, their methodology is sound and their path is straight and they have not achieved what they have achieved in terms of exalted mention and continual benefit for the Muslims except through patience and perseverance and everything that the student exerts in terms of wealth and time in the path of knowledge and learning is never considered enough.

In conclusion, I will mention a discussion between two through which the value of knowledge, its lofty station and how it cannot be acquired except by the one who sacrifices everything for it

⁵⁸ *At-Tadhkirah* by *adh-Dhahabī* in the biography of *Makhūl*.

⁵⁹ *Al-Jāmi* (volume 1 page 91).

⁶⁰ *As-Siyar* (volume 14 page 206).

will become clear in accordance with the statement: “If you give all of yourself to knowledge you will be given some of it.”

A man said to another: How did you acquire knowledge? He replied: I sought it and found it to be a far reaching goal that is not hunted with a single arrow, nor revealed through dreams or inherited from fathers and uncles.

I acquired it by living on clumps of earth, reclining on stones, through continuous sleepless nights, repeated readings, while putting the intellect to good use, traveling in pursuit of it and exposure to danger.

Then I found it [i.e. knowledge] to be something that is not appropriate except for planting. And this planting occurs within an individual. And it is not watered with anything more than the lesson.

Have you seen the one who spends his day gathering money and his night making love; will he come away from this a jurist?! By *Allāh*, of course he won't.

Certainly, knowledge will not be acquired except by those who rely upon notes and carry inkwells and cross wastelands and continue seeking knowledge day and night.⁶¹

⁶¹ See: *Maqāmāt Badī' az-Zamān (al-Maqāmāt al-'Ilmiyyah)* and the additions here are from some of our scholars.

And perhaps in this interesting discussion is what might remove the image that remains in the minds of some of the students that knowledge is acquired in a short amount of time or over a brief period so that they might make their efforts continuous and look down upon their accomplishments in the path of knowledge and learning until *Allāh* opens for them the doors of learning and knowledge such that they become examples of knowledge and Imāms of guidance.

The Eighth Obstacle: Low Aspirations

We have seen from the ranks of some of the students of knowledge, people who possess great talents and vast potential that positions them for academic leadership. However, the lowly nature of their aspirations nullifies their talents and removes the luster of their ingenuity.

So you might find them suffice themselves with very little information and they dislike reading or researching issues and busy themselves with things other than seeking and acquiring knowledge.

These individuals are quickly deprived ownership of their abilities and the blessings associated with their time are removed. This is because being ungrateful of the blessings allows for them to be removed just as being thankful for them allows for them to increase.

Al-Farrā' (رضي الله عنه) said:

“I have no sympathy for two types of men. A man who seeks knowledge without understanding it and a man who understands but doesn't seek it; Certainly, I am amazed by the one who involves himself in seeking knowledge but doesn't learn.”⁶²

⁶² *Jāmi' Bayyān al-'Ilm wa Faḍlihi* (Volume 1 Page 103).

And *Abū al-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī* (رحمة الله) said commenting on the statement of *Abū at-Tayyib al-Mutanabbī*:

“I do not see in the errors of people any error like the deficiency that prevents completeness in those who are able.”

It is befitting for the one of sound mind to push himself to the limits of what is possible for him. So if it were possible for a human to ascend into the heavens, you would see that from the worst of imperfections is that he is pleased to remain on the earth.

And if prophethood could be acquired through individual effort (*ijtihād*) you would see the negligent one pursuing it from the lowest level.

And the most impressive biography according to the wise people is when a soul seeks to achieve the highest level of completeness possible in terms of knowledge and action.’

He said: ‘In general, no virtue should be left while it is possible to attain except if it has already been achieved since complacency is the condition of the vile and despicable.

So be a man whose feet are firm in the ground, while the height of his ambition is in the stars.

And if it is possible for you to pass every single one of the scholars and pious people then you should do so. Since they were men and you are a man. And nothing stopped anyone from doing anything except lowly and petty aspirations.

And know that you are in a place of competition and that time is being wasted. So do not perpetuate laziness since whatever was lost was not lost except due to laziness and whatever was gained was not gained except through diligence and determination.’⁶³ [End of quote]

So for the one who detects within himself the sign of genius and intellect, do not seek after anything else besides knowledge and do not busy yourself with anything but it. So if you refused and *Allāh* caused you to die in a state where He caused there to be great reward for the Muslims with you, how severe would this loss be and how great would this calamity be?!

[And as the poet said]:

“Leave off thinking of desires and those who are fond of them and assume a loftier station filled with pearls. Distract yourself through your love of it [i.e. knowledge] from everything that you desire, from the blessing of the worldly life whose greatest attributes are fleeting, from a companion with whom sittings are more entertaining and from gardens adorned with flowers and light. Stand up in

⁶³ From ‘*Ṣayad al-Khāṭir*’ pages 159-161.

pursuit of knowledge with seriousness and without laziness, like a servant who hastens towards goodness. And be patient in acquiring it as someone serious must do, since it will not be attained by someone who is impatient.”⁶⁴

Certainly, from the most beneficial matters that aid in heightening aspirations is looking back at the biographies of the *salaf* – may *Allāh* be pleased with all of them – since their situations consist of the most perfect examples of knowledge and action; so if the student witnesses this, he is critical of himself and sees his own actions to be insignificant in his eyes and thus strives harder to catch up with the *salaf* and imitate them, and whoever imitates a people is from them.

Ibn al-Jawzī (رحمة الله) said:

“So *Allāh Allāh*; it is upon you to be mindful of the history of the *salaf*, look over their [written] works, and review news related to them. Increased examination of their books presents a vision of them.”

He said:

“And increase yourself in research since it reveals the knowledge of that people, the loftiness of their

⁶⁴ From the poetry of Sheikh ‘*Abdur-Raḥmān ibn Nāṣir as-Sa’dī* from his *Fatāwá* page 647.

aspirations and sharpens the intellect and redirects motivation towards diligence.”

The Ninth and Tenth Obstacles: Procrastination and Longing

Procrastination or *taswīf* means delay (*ta'khīr*) and defense (*mudāfa'ah*)⁶⁵. It is said: He procrastinated if he said: I will do it.⁶⁶

The term *taswīf* or procrastination is used in relationship to aspirations. It is said: So and so survives on *sawf*, meaning that he lives on mere aspirations alone. *Al-Kumayt* said [in a few lines of poetry]:

“And *sawf* for the youth is sustenance that they live on and they have welcomed expectations.”⁶⁷

Longing or *tamannī* is what an individual whispers to himself regarding what will happen in the future and what will not – meaning what is impossible. And it is said that it is the desire that is connected with the future.⁶⁸

And both procrastination and longing are two dangerous diseases that destroy the heart and time and carry an individual to the world of imagination.

⁶⁵ *Mujmal al-Lughah* by Ibn Fāris (volume 2 page 479).

⁶⁶ *Asās al-Balāghah* page 220 of the *Dār al-Ma'rifah* print from Beirut.

⁶⁷ **Translator's note:** *Dīwān* of *al-Kumayt ibn Zayd* (volume 1 page 84) and *Kitāb al-Ḥaywān* (volume 5 page 76).

⁶⁸ *Fayḍ al-Qadīr* by *al-Manāwī* (volume 1 page 319).

As for procrastination (*taswīf*), then it is a characteristic that dulls the senses and eliminates concern. Whenever an individual intends good, the good is obstructed by ‘*sawfa*’ and ‘I will do it’ until he is overcome by death unexpectedly and says:

﴿ رَبِّ لَوْلَا أَخَّرْتَنِي إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ قَرِيبٍ ﴾

“My Lord, if only You would give me respite for a little while.” [Sūrah al-Munāfiqūn 63:10]

So it is upon the student of knowledge to rid himself of this deficiency and hasten towards acts of righteousness in accordance with the statement of *Allāh* the Exalted:

﴿ فَاسْتَيْفُوا أَلْحَيْرَاتِ ﴾

“So hasten towards all that is good.” [Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:148]

He the Exalted says:

﴿ وَسَارِعُوا إِلَىٰ مَغْفِرَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ عَرْضُهَا السَّمَاوَاتُ ﴾

﴿ وَالْأَرْضُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴾ (١٣٣)

“And hasten or strive towards the forgiveness of your Lord and a Paradise as wide as the heavens and the earth which was prepared for the righteous.” [Sūrah Āli ‘Imrān 3:133]

So of the people, the student of knowledge is the most mindful of the value of time and how to benefit from it.

And the Prophet (ﷺ) said to ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar (رضي الله عنه):

“Be in this world like a stranger or a wayfarer.”

And Ibn ‘Umar (رضي الله عنه) used to say:

“When it is night, do not wait for the morning. And if it is morning, do not wait for the night. And take from your times of health in anticipation of sickness and benefit from your life in anticipation of death.”⁶⁹

And Ibn Al-Jawzī (رحمته الله) said:

“And whoever contemplates in his mind the mention of Paradise wherein there is no death or disease or sleep or grief - rather its pleasures are continual without ending-whoever contemplates this increases in those things which correspond with the increase in diligence in this world taken from this time. So one should not sleep more than necessary and a person should not neglect a single moment from his life.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Narrated by *al-Bukhārī* (volume 11 page 199).

⁷⁰ From *Ṣayad al-Khāṭir* p. 323.

As for longing or *tamannī*, then it consists of both praiseworthy and blameworthy types of longing.

As for the praiseworthy longing, then this occurs when an individual wishes to do a recommended act of good but is unable to. For this type of longing there are three conditions:

1. **The First:** A firm intention to do the action as soon as the individual is able.
2. **The Second:** The fact that the action is from the things that are legislated in Islam like the desire to build a Mosque and whatever else is similar to this.
3. **The Third:** That the action is not from the regular habits of an individual.⁷¹

As for the blameworthy type of longing or *tamannī*, then *Ibn al-Qayyim* (رحمة الله), said about it in his explanation of the speech of *Abū Ismā'īl al-Harawī* regarding the corruptors of the heart when he said:

“The second corruptor from the corruptors of the heart is riding the sea of longing which is a sea without a shore. And it is the sea which is travelled by the utterly bankrupt of the world as it is said [in those lines of poetry]: ‘If I were to long I would

⁷¹ I have mentioned the evidence for these conditions in detail in a treatise I wrote on the topic of *tamannī*.

have spent the night in bliss, surely longing is the currency of those who are bankrupt.'

And the belongings of these travelers are the devil's appointments and impossible fantasies and falsehood. So the waves of misplaced hope and baseless fantasies play with the travelers of this sea just as the dog plays with dead animals. And it is the belonging of every despicable, vile and lowly soul. There is no ambition in it that can be realized externally. Instead, longing is substituted as a lowly conciliation. He said: So the one who longs for something chases an image in his head and prevailed when it was realized and enjoyed celebrating it. And all the while he was in this state, he awakened [to the reality that] his hand was grasping the mat."⁷² [End of quote]

And how excellent was the statement of *Abū Tamām* who said [in his lines of poetry]:

“Whoever's determination and concerns are cultivated in the garden of longing will remain wretched.”

And it was said to some wise people:

⁷² *Madāraj as-Sālikīn* (volume 1 pages 456-457).

‘Which of the people are in the worst situation?’
One of them responded: “Whoever's enthusiasm is far reaching and whose yearnings are vast but whose tools are limited and whose ability is deficient.”

The other one said: “Stay away from longing, since it will eliminate the best of what has been conferred upon you and because of it you will make light of the blessings of *Allāh* upon you.”⁷³

So the student should stay far from this sickness and beware of becoming afflicted by it since it is like a deadly cancer that only few can survive.

So how many from those knocked down do not recover from their unconsciousness and do not break free from its shackles?! And *Allāh*'s refuge is sought from this. And may *Allāh* busy us with righteous deeds in the place of false aspirations and useless fantasies and daydreams that waste time and eliminate deeds from the scale.

And the poet said:

“You wished to become a jurist able to argue without difficulty; certainly craziness is of different types.”

⁷³ *Ādāb ad-Dunyā wa ad-Dīn* page 308.

And the following lines of poetry are from a poem I wrote on the subject:

“How wonderful were the days of study; truly they clothe the heart in happiness and relieve [it]. And the individual during the time of his youth is energetic, [like a] horse that attacks his dreams and clings on to them with his the teeth until [the student] reaches the end and his dreams are subjected to an evil that cannot be withheld. He has found his livelihood to be difficult and not easily acquired through far reaching aspirations, and the passage of time is also not helpful. So choose for yourself other than the valleys of wishing since the highest thing in the valley of mere wishing is wreckage.”

Pearls of wisdom from the scholars regarding knowledge and pursuing it

1. *Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī* (رضي الله عنه) said:

“A man used to, whenever he would seek knowledge, [he would] not wait to see it in his humility, his foresight, his tongue, his hand and in his piety. And if the man truly achieved some branch from the branches of knowledge, then he would act upon it and it would be better for him than the whole world and everything in it.”⁷⁴

2. *Ash-Shāfi‘ī* (رضي الله عنه) said:

“Knowledge is of two types: knowledge of the religion which is true understanding and knowledge of the worldly life which is medicine. Whatever is other than this from the likes of poetry and other than that is nothing more than painstaking and pointless.”⁷⁵

3. *Al-Aṣma‘ī* said:

⁷⁴ *Al-Jāmi‘* (volume 1 page 60).

⁷⁵ *Al-Ḥulyah* (volume 9 page 142).

“What I most fear for the student of knowledge if he doesn't know Arabic grammar (*nahw*) is that he would be considered from those described by the statement of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم): ‘Whoever lies upon me; let him take his seat in the Fire.’”⁷⁶

4. *Suḥnūn ibn Sa'īd* said:

“The people most willing to offer religious verdicts are the least of them in terms of knowledge. This person may know a single issue of knowledge yet he thinks that every aspect of the truth is with him.”⁷⁷

5. Some of the people of wisdom used to say:

“May *Allāh* benefit us and you with knowledge and not make our relationship with it merely a matter of listening and amusement.”⁷⁸

6. *Sufyān ath-Thawrī* said:

“If a man gained a position of leadership too quickly, he may corrupt much of the knowledge. And if he sought knowledge, he should continue to do so until he is ready.”

⁷⁶ *As-Siyar* (volume 9 page 178).

⁷⁷ *Al-Jāmi'* (volume 2 page 165).

⁷⁸ *Al-Jāmi'* (volume 2 page 10).

7. *Al-'Abbās ibn al-Mughīrah ibn 'Abdur-Rahmān* narrated upon the authority of his father who said:

“*Abdul-'Azīz ibn ad-Darāwardī* came with a group to my father to show him a book. So *ad-Darāwardī* read for them and his reading was poor and he made horrible mistakes. Then my father said: ‘Woe unto you O *ad-Darāwardī*! You were better off correcting your tongue and in more need of it than looking into this matter or anything else!’”⁷⁹

8. *Az-Zuhrī* said to *Yūnus ibn Yazīd*:

“Do not look down upon knowledge since knowledge consists of valleys. So whatever you take from it, let it be a significant portion before you convey it [to others]. And take it over days and nights. Do not take knowledge all at once. For certainly, whoever seeks to take it all at once will lose it all at once. Instead, take it little by little over days and nights.”⁸⁰

⁷⁹ *As-Siyar* (volume 8 page 368).

⁸⁰ *Jāmi' Bayyān al-'Ilm wa Faḍlihi* (Volume 1 Page 104).

From the Characteristics of Teachers and Students by Ibn Sa'dī

Purifying the intention:

It is particularly important for the people of knowledge, from those who are educated and those who teach, to make the basis upon which they build their activities and inactivity complete sincerity and drawing closer to *Allāh* the Exalted through the best, most complete, most beneficial acts of worship and the acts of worship that produce the most general benefit. And they pursue this beneficial principle in the finest and most important details of their affairs.

So when they study or teach, research or debate, lecture or listen, write or memorize, or repeat their personal lessons, or review them, or other than them from other books; or whenever they sit in the gatherings of knowledge, or carry their feet to sittings of knowledge, or purchase books or whatever might assist in acquiring knowledge; sincerity to *Allāh* and seeking after His reward and recompense must be observed by them in order for their pursuits to be strong and based upon obedience and things that draw an individual closer to *Allāh* and His benevolence.

And they achieve this according to the statement of the Messenger of *Allāh* (صلى الله عليه وسلم):

“Whoever sets out on a path in pursuit of knowledge, *Allāh* will make easy for him a path to Paradise.”⁸¹

So every literal or figurative path that is travelled by the people of knowledge in order to assist them in knowledge or acquiring it is considered part of this.

The path of knowledge:

After this, in the beginning, what is most important is given precedence, and then whatever is most important after that, and then whatever is most important after that from the Islamic sciences, and whatever might be helpful from the sciences of the Arabic language. And the explanation of this statement is elaborate and well-known and it varies according to different circumstances and individuals.

It is important that the closest path that leads to the objective which is sought after is used. It is also important to select from the writings on the subject one is studying, the best, clearest and most beneficial writings and to make the selected book the focus of his attention in terms of memorization or repeated study, if this is possible, so that its meanings are understood and

⁸¹ Extracted by *Muslim* (volume 4 page 2074) upon the authority of *Abū Hurayrah*.

memorized. Then he should continue to repeat whatever he has covered and review it repeatedly.

What the scholar should do for his students:

It is upon the teacher to consider the intellect of the student and the strength or weakness of his preparation. He should not allow the student to busy himself with a book that is not appropriate for him since this is from sincere advice. Surely, the smaller amount that is understood and comprehended is better than the larger amount which is likely to be misunderstood and forgotten.

Similarly, he should offer clarification and instruction regarding his lesson according to what the student's understanding is able to process. He should not mix several different issues together.

It is also important that the teacher does not move from one type of issue to another until the first issue is understood and applied since this is the basis for the previous issue and it makes the next issue more understandable.

However, if several types of issues are mixed together before they are understood by the learner, then this will lead to the earlier information being lost and the latter information being misunderstood. Furthermore, too many issues which have not been applied in the mind of the student causes boredom and leads

him to become narrow minded regarding returning to them, so it is not appropriate to neglect this matter.

It is also upon the teacher to advise the learner in every way that he is able regarding learning just as he should remain patient when the student doesn't understand, or is not behaving admirably or is brash. Just as he should also show determination and foresight in everything that may rectify, alter and improve the student's behavior.

This is because the learner has a right over his teacher since he has taken it upon himself to busy himself with the knowledge that will benefit himself and the people, and also because he sought out to learn from a specific teacher as opposed to other than him. Similarly, whatever he acquires of knowledge from his teacher is the possession of the teacher, so he memorizes it and develops it and through it he pursues beneficial gains so he is [in a sense] the true son of the teacher who inherits from him. *Allāh* the Exalted says:

﴿ فَهَبْ لِي مِنْ لَدُنْكَ وَلِيًّا ۖ يَرِثُنِي وَيَرِثْ مِنْ آلِ يَعْقُوبَ ﴾

“So give me from Yourself an heir, who will inherit me and inherit from the family of Jacob.”
[*Sūrah Maryam* 19:5-6]

And what is meant here is inheriting knowledge and wisdom.

So the teacher is rewarded for his teaching regardless of whether the learner understands or not. So if he understands what he has learned and benefits from it himself or benefits others, then the reward of the teacher will continue so long as the benefit continues unbroken. This is the type of arrangement that people should compete for.

So it is upon the teacher to strive very hard to be proficient in this and develop it since it is from his works and the fruits of his labor.

Allāh the Exalted says:

﴿ إِنَّا نَحْنُ نُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ وَنَكْتُبُ مَا قَدَّمُوا وَآثَرَهُمْ وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ

أَحْصَيْنَاهُ فِي إِمَامٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿١٢﴾

“Indeed, it is We who give life to the dead and record what they have put forth and what they left behind.” [*Sūrah Yāsīn* 36:12]

And what they put forth was what they did directly. And what they left behind was the residual effect of their actions from the righteous and beneficial actions or the opposite of this during their life or after they pass away.

It is also important that the learner is encouraged in every way and he should not be made disinterested by being busied with

what is too difficult for his understanding from the types of knowledge and its branches.

Manners of the student:

It is upon the student to respect his teacher and observe proper manners with him to the extent of what he is able because of what he is due in terms of both general and specific rights.

The general right of the scholar:

As for the general right, then the teacher of good has surely prepared to benefit the creation through his teaching and religious rulings so it is his right upon the people to be treated as a good doer and there is no greater and more beneficial good than the good of instructing the people regarding the affairs of their religion and teaching them what they do not know and identifying the areas in which they may be negligent.

All of this creates, in the way of producing good, curbing evil and spreading the religion and beneficial knowledge, what is from the absolutely most beneficial of things for the monotheists and their successors from their descendants and other than them. So if it wasn't for knowledge, people would be like animals crawling around in the darkness. It is the light which guides in the darkness and what brings life to the hearts, the souls, the

religion, the world and the place wherein there is no one to teach them the matters of their religion and instruct them regarding whatever befalls them from the things that they are in dire need of.

Certainly, the people have lost in the way of necessities and benefits what is harmful to their religion and worldly life. So if this is the extent of one's good and his effect upon the creation, how could it not be obligatory upon every Muslim to love this individual and honor him and fulfill his rights?

The specific right of the scholar:

As for the scholar's specific rights upon the learner, then due to what he has exerted through his teaching and in order to preserve his instructions and promote him to the highest station; then the benefit of fathers and mothers is not similar to the benefit of the teachers who cultivate the people and develop them little by little by teaching the smaller aspects of knowledge before the larger and whom dedicate the most precious of their time and their best ideas to helping those who seek their council in every way and with every means available to them.

So if it is the case that whoever does good to a person by offering a valuable monetary gift which provides benefit but then comes to an end and goes away; if this merits a right upon the one who received this good, then what do you think about the many

different gifts of beneficial knowledge whose benefit remains throughout one's life and after death which is thus continuous according to the state of those gifts?! So in this case, it should be recognized that this individual is deserving of rights, honor, good manners, obedience, and failure to deviate from whatever instructions that he offered from the things that benefit him from the affairs in which he has experience. He is more knowledgeable concerning them than his student, from the likes of how to teach and other than this which are things that are not for others.

Honoring the scholar:

One should sit before him with manners while making apparent the dire need for what he possesses of knowledge. He should be supplicated for in his presence and in his absence. And if he confers upon the student a benefit or clarifies something problematic, then the student should not make it apparent that he had learned it previously even if he did. Instead, he should pay attention just as the one who is in need of benefit would. This is the case when what was taught was known. So what about when the information was not known? For this reason, this type of interaction is recommended for everyone from the scholars and those who are sought after in the affairs of the religious and worldly matters.

Correcting the mistake of the teacher:

If the teacher makes a mistake in something, then he should politely be reminded with gentleness and consideration according to the situation. No one should say to him: "You're wrong!" or: "It is not as you say!" Instead, the student should use a more gentle and polite expression that will notify the teacher of his mistake without influencing his heart. Certainly, this is from the rights that are absolutely necessary and more likely to result in a return to what is correct since the response that is accompanied by poor behavior and inciting passions will prevent an individual from seeing what is correct and intending it.

Correcting a mistake:

Just as it is a must upon the student, it is also obligatory for the teacher whenever he makes a mistake to return to the truth. And the teacher is not prevented from correcting his position and returning to the truth by the fact that he previously said one thing but then realized that what was correct was actually the opposite of what he said. This is the sign of impartiality and humility regarding the truth. And it is obligatory to follow what is correct regardless of whether it came at the hands of a child or an adult.

And from the blessing of *Allāh* upon the teacher is that he finds from his students those who remind him of his mistakes and

direct him towards what is correct so that he does not continue to proceed upon ignorance. This merits being thankful to *Allāh* the Exalted and then thanking whomever *Allāh* has caused to be a source of guidance whether it was the student or other than him.

The statement of the scholar “*Allāh* knows best” regarding whatever he does not know:

From the greatest of the things which are obligatory upon the teachers is saying whenever they do not know: “*Allāh* knows best.” And this does not take away from their abilities. Rather, this is from what elevates their station and is a proof for the completeness of their religion and their pursuit of what is correct.

The benefits of stopping when an individual doesn't know:

And there are several benefits to stopping when the teacher doesn't know; from them is that this is what is obligatory upon him. Also from them is that, if he stops and says: “*Allāh* knows best” he will soon receive knowledge regarding what he didn't know either through his own review or someone else's since the student, if he sees his teacher stop in an issue will exert great efforts to acquire knowledge in the matter and pass this knowledge on to his teacher. And what can be better than this.

Also from the benefits is that if he stops concerning what he doesn't know, this is evidence of his trustworthiness, credibility and certainty regarding what he speaks about definitively from the issues. Conversely, whoever is known to speak concerning what he doesn't know will cause people to doubt everything he says - even the clearest issues.

Also from the benefits is that whenever the students witness the teacher stop when he doesn't know, they learn and are shown how this is a good approach, and following actions and situations is far more significant and influential than mere words alone.

Discussions with the students:

And from the things that aid in this matter is for the teacher to open the door for discussion amongst the students regarding issues and the textual support for them. In these discussions, the goal should be clear; following whatever is most correct according to the evidence. If the teacher makes this point clear for all eyes to see, the ideas will be enlightened, sources and evidence will be known and identified and the truth will ultimately be followed. And the original intent here is recognizing the truth and following it.

The blameworthy nature of partiality (*at-ta'aṣṣub*):

Every precaution should be taken against partiality (*at-ta'aṣṣub*) towards opinions and people which occurs when an individual makes his goal (in discussing an issue or researching) defending and promoting the position that he or someone he respects holds. Certainly, partiality (*at-ta'aṣṣub*) negates sincerity and eliminates the joy of knowledge and turns a blind eye to the truth while opening the door to resentment and harmful argumentation in the same way that impartiality is the adornment of knowledge and the place of sincerity, advice and success.

A warning against seeking knowledge for worldly reasons:

Every precaution should also be taken to avoid seeking knowledge for corrupt reasons and evil objectives like flaunting, for the sake of argument, in order to show off, to earn a reputation and to use it as a means towards some worldly goal or position. This is not the condition of the people of knowledge who truly deserve to be associated with knowledge. And whoever seeks knowledge or uses knowledge for his own evil goals, will have absolutely no share in the hereafter.

Acting upon knowledge:

From the greatest characteristics of the people of knowledge is that they can be described by what they call to of knowledge and it can be seen in their manners, actions and teachings. So they are the people who most deserve to be described with beautiful character and who are free of lowly characteristics. They are the first of the people to fulfill their obligations whether this occurs in front of the people or behind closed doors. They also abandon what is prohibited because of the knowledge and understanding that distinguishes them from others. This is because they are an example for the people and the people are created to follow their scholars in all of their affairs whether they do so willingly or unwillingly. This is also because the scholars are met with objections and criticism whenever they leave off whatever they call to in terms of knowledge more so than anyone else.

Also, the *salaf* used to use acting upon knowledge as a means to increase in knowledge. If an individual acted according to his knowledge, it would become firm and lasting and it would grow and increase and be blessed. However, if acting upon knowledge was abandoned, it would disappear and its blessings would also cease. So the life and soul of knowledge and its foundation is acting upon it, developing one's character through it, teaching it and advising others with it. And there is no power or might except with *Allāh*, the Most High and Most Great.

The method of teaching:

It is important to utilize a beneficial method of research as it relates to learning and teaching. So if the teacher introduces an issue, he clarifies it and links the minds of his students to it using every means at his disposal from using different expressions, citing examples, as well as using images and deconstructing things or breaking them down.

Then he does not move on to another issue until the first issue is clearly understood by his students. Likewise, he does not allow his students to leave the subject that has not been completely fleshed out and presented for another subject until they have perfected and understood the first subject completely, since leaving one subject for another before the first is finished will eliminate any possible benefit as previously mentioned.

The students should reinforce what they have memorized:

It is important to reinforce whatever the students have memorized and their information through repetition, testing, through encouraging further study and review and by returning to the lesson. This is because learning is like the planting of a tree. Studying and repeating the lesson is like watering that new

seedling and removing anything harmful from it so that it might develop and continually increase.

The manners of study partners:

Just as the student should respect his teacher and observe proper etiquette with him, he should also behave in a similar manner with his colleagues and those who are students along with him and observe their rights. And behaving properly with them is greater than behaving properly with friends, since companionship as it relates to seeking knowledge combines several different rights because it involves the right of brotherhood, the right of companionship and the rights of association to their shared teacher - and they are all like his children. Likewise they share the right of benefiting one another as well.

For this reason it is important for the stronger student not to abandon benefitting whoever he can from his colleagues by teaching them whatever they do not know and helping them research for the sake of cooperation upon goodness and directing them towards what will benefit them.

And it is also important that every time they meet is beneficial, such that the one who may struggle can learn from those who are more advanced than he is. And the one who knows teaches

the one who doesn't and they continually go over beneficial issues and place emphasis upon what they are currently studying.

The harms of remaining busy with the people:

Students should beware of remaining busy with the people and looking into their affairs and finding faults with them since there is sinfulness in that. And sinfulness as it relates to people of knowledge is of a greater magnitude than it is for other than them since other people look to them as examples, and whoever, other than them, naturally inclines towards evil is compared to them. Similarly, busying one's self with the people causes valuable benefits and precious time to be lost while driving away the essence of knowledge and its light.

Remaining satisfied with little:

Know that remaining satisfied with little and being frugal in the matter of provisions is recommended for everyone, especially those who are busy with knowledge since this is particularly applicable to them. This is because knowledge is the driving force behind all action, or most of it. So whenever both worldly endeavors and needs become compounded and overwhelming, deficiency occurs as a natural result. So being frugal and satisfied

with little is from the greatest reasons for limiting worldly pursuits and helping the student to focus upon the task at hand.

Spreading knowledge:

And also from the etiquettes of the scholar and the student is advice and spreading beneficial knowledge according to one's abilities to the extent that if a person learned only a single issue and then spread it, it would be from the blessings of his knowledge. This is because from the fruits of knowledge is that people will take from you, so whoever is stingy with his knowledge will have his knowledge die when he does, and perhaps he will even be forgotten while he is still living. Conversely, whoever spread his knowledge will enjoy a second life, and what he knew will be preserved and his reward will be from the same nature as his works.

Softening hearts:

And from the most important characteristics that are specific to the people of knowledge, whether they are teachers or learners, is that they strive for unity and to soften the hearts and eliminate the causes of evil, enmity and animosity amongst themselves. This issue is clearly a point of emphasis that they strive for in

every way. This is because there is a single goal and a single objective involved while the benefit is shared.

So they achieve this through loving everyone from the people of knowledge and those who are involved in it or benefit from it. And they do not allow harmful objectives to overwhelm them and prevent them from this lofty goal. So they love one another and defend one another and advise those whom they see have deviated, just as they also provide proof as to why disputing in minor secondary issues which lead to contempt and disunity should not be given precedence over the major primary issues for which the people should be united.

And they do not allow the opponents of knowledge from the lay people and other than them to corrupt the unity between them and undermine their solidarity.

From the benefits of harmony:

Certainly, in fulfilling this lofty objective and attaining it there are several innumerable and countless benefits even if there was no benefit associated with it except that this is the religion that the Divine legislator has endorsed in every way, and the greatest of those who adhere to it are its people. And the greatest proofs for sincerity and self-sacrifice which represent the essence of the religion and the center of its circle; and with this the servant is described as being from the people of knowledge who have been

mentioned in the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah* with praise and recognition so much so that this is not the place to mention it.

Also included in the benefits of this is the increase of knowledge, increasing the ways in which it is attained, and varying the paths - which is all apparent since the people of knowledge, if their way is one, are all able to learn from one another and teach one another. And if each group of them were isolated from the others and diverging from them, the benefit will be cut off and it would have the opposite effect by producing hatred, partiality and an environment where everyone is searching for the mistakes and errors of one another just as it would lead to slander. And all of this opposes the religion, what is sensible and what the pious predecessors were upon, since the ignorant people associate it with the religion.

So you find the successful one advising for the sake of *Allāh* according to Islamic monotheism and establishing His worship in the open as well as in secret through sincerity and commanding the public good, while completing this depends upon his ability.

Likewise, this individual advises in accordance with the Book of *Allāh* (the *Qur'ān*) with faith in everything that it is comprised of while seeking to learn it, and whatever is related to it, and associated with it from the related sciences of Islamic legislation.

Similarly, this individual advises in accordance with the Messenger of *Allāh* (صلى الله عليه وسلم) through faith in everything that he brought from the fundamentals of the religion as well as its subsidiary branch issues. And he gives precedence to loving the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) over every other form of love after the love of *Allāh*. And he publicly and privately follows him in the legislation of the religion.

This individual also advises the Imāms of the Muslims from those responsible for them, their scholars and their leaders out of a love of good for them and striving to assist them through speech, action and love for the constituents to unite under their obedience without any harmful opposition.

This individual also advises the larger community of general Muslims while loving for them what he loves for himself and hating for them what he hates for himself. And he strives to deliver benefit to them with everything that he is able to do. And his apparent actions are consistent with what is hidden just as his speech is consistent with his actions. And he calls to this great principle and the straight path. So we ask *Allāh* the Exalted to help us love Him and love those who love Him and love the actions that draw us closer to His love, and that He grant us the gift of His mercy since He is the one who bestows gifts. And may

the prayers of peace and blessings of *Allāh* be upon *Muḥammad*
(صلى الله عليه وسلم).⁸²

⁸² The end of the treatise of Sheikh 'Abdur-Raḥmān ibn Nāṣir as-Sa'dī.

Our Call

1. Judging to the Noble Qur'ān and the Authentic and Purified Sunnah in every affair of the affairs of life.
2. Every issue of 'Aqīdah (creed), worship or manhaj (methodology) which the Book of Allāh and the Sunnah has not provided a text for and upon which the Companions never agreed upon is falsehood, vain and innovated.
3. Affirming what is established in the Book and the Authentic Sunnah in every issue of the issues of 'Aqīdah and not resorting to figurative interpolation with respect to any of it and not delving into argumentation regarding it in that for which there is no place for the intellect.
4. Not arguing with the People of Innovations and Desires, or sitting with them, listening to their words or presenting any of their doubts (to others).
5. The Prophetic Manhaj (methodology) which is found in the Qur'ān, the Ṣaḥīḥ compilations of Bukhārī and Muslim and the remaining books of the Sunnah and the sayings and actions of the Salaf us-Saalih, not the various new and pretentious methodologies.
6. Acquainting the Muslims of their true religion and calling them to act in accordance with its teachings and rulings and to adorn themselves with its excellences and its noble manners - which will guarantee for them the pleasure of

Allāh and which will bring into reality both happiness and glory.

7. Warning the Muslims from Shirk (associating partners with Allāh) in all its different manifestations, and from innovations, all strange and false thoughts and rejected and fabricated ḥadīth - all of which have mutilated the beauty of Islaam and have prevented the advancement and progress of the Muslims.
8. Eagerness for bringing about the Jamā'ah of the Muslims and uniting their word upon the truth and in the truth. And these multiplicity of contemporary groups and parties have divided the Muslims and have mutilated the beauty of Islaam.
9. It is a duty upon every Muslim, Muwahhid to restore and offer the rights that the Sharī'ah has upon him with respect to the Scholars, the Senior Shaikhs - to respect them, honor them, giving them their due recognition and estimation, taking knowledge from them, refraining from attacking them and their honor and keeping far from causing doubt about their intentions.

So do not be a helper to the criminals by abandoning the Scholars of the Sunnah, and by this action of yours, make the people flee from them, from their lectures and gatherings - and forsake them, leaving them as booty for the callers of political agitation and incitement or leave them neglected as prey for the various parties and groups.

10. Getting closer to Allāh - the Mighty and Majestic - by giving obedience to whomever Allāh has placed over our affair and not to rebel against him.
11. Following the truth, absolutely and unconditionally in both narration and opinion without specifying a specific person or group besides the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) as someone to be followed in all circumstances.
12. We love every Muslim to the extent of what he possess of obedience, following (of the Sunnah) and we hate him to the extent of what he possess of disobedience and opposition (to the Sunnah). And we love the one who aids the Sunnah and its people and we hate the one who helps Innovation and its people.
13. We love the Companions of the Messenger of Allāh (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and we detest everyone who speaks ill about them. And when you see a man speaking bad about a single one of the Companions of Allah's Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم), then know that he is a heretic.
14. We believe that the Qur'ān is the Speech of Allāh, it is not created and we do not declare anyone from the people of the qiblah to be a disbeliever on account of a sin that he committed - so long as he does not declare it to be permissible.
15. We reject those who divide the religion into the categories of a) trivial and b) important matters, and we know that this is a destructive call. And we reject those who desert the knowledge of the Sunnah, who abandon

acting by it and who abandon separating what is authentic from what is inauthentic.

16. Tasfiyah (purification of the religion in terms of 'Aqīdah and worship) and Tarbiyah (nurturing and cultivation upon the pure religion) upon the Straight Prophetic Methodology and the guiding understanding of the Salaf.
17. Refuting every opposer (to the Sunnah) whether he is a Muslim or other than that - whatever level his slip or mistake might be, regardless of whether his opposition to the truth occurred deliberately or as an error - whatever methodology he may ascribe to - with whatever is possible from the use of evidences - so that this Noble Religion retains its purity and innocence and so that the people can drink from it, certain of its sweet taste.
18. Speaking the truth, not fearing the censure of those who blame and rebuke and holding on to the Sunnah with the molar teeth amidst all the controversies and differences, till the affair of Allāh is established.

And all praise is due to Allāh and prayers and peace upon His Messenger, Muhammad, his family and his Companions.

OBSTACLES

In the Path of Seeking Knowledge

This concise collection of words discusses some of the obstacles that confronts the student of knowledge on his continuing path towards acquiring beneficial knowledge with further explanation and clarification.

I have presented this advice in the form of obstacles so that it would be more likely for them to be avoided and stronger in terms of the warnings regarding them since contained in these obstacles are things that guide towards avoiding them and help to eliminate them. I have repeatedly cited narrations of the pious predecessors that are related to these obstacles so that the reader can establish a link to them and take from their biographies a personal methodology since they were more guided and more mindful of *Allāh* (ﷻ).

Az-Zubri said to *Yūnus ibn Yazīd*:

“Do not look down upon knowledge since knowledge consists of valleys. So whatever you take from it, let it be a significant portion before you convey it [to others]. And take it over days and nights. Do not take knowledge all at once. For certainly, whoever seeks to take it all at once will lose it all at once. Instead, take it little by little over days and nights.” *Jāmi Bayyān al-‘Ilm wa Faḍlihi* (Volume 1 Page 104).

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