

اتباع العلم بالعمل

للشيخ عبدالسلام برجس (رحمه الله)

Following Knowledge With Action
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Peace and blessings be upon the Messenger of Allah, his family, companions, and those who followed him.

To proceed: We praise Allah, the Exalted, for facilitating this connection between us and our brothers in Birmingham. We ask Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, to make this telephone communication beneficial for us in our religious and worldly affairs.

We will discuss, Allah willing, an extremely important topic: **Following Knowledge with Action**. This is because many of my brothers know the virtue and importance of knowledge, but when it comes time for action, many procrastinate and determination weakens. And we seek Allah's help.

O noble brothers, the righteous predecessors (Salaf), may Allah be pleased with them, were most concerned with following knowledge with action, and through this they achieved precedence and excelled over people generally in goodness in both religious and worldly matters. They were careful, may Allah be pleased with them, to follow knowledge with action just as they were careful about acquiring knowledge initially.

For this reason, Abu Abdur-Rahman As-Sulami, may Allah have mercy on him, said: "Those who used to teach us the Quran, meaning Uthman bin Affan and similar companions, told us that they would not move beyond ten verses until they knew their meaning, learned them, and acted upon them. He

said: "So we learned knowledge and action together." This was their methodology, may Allah be pleased with them.

Because they followed this way and this path, they achieved a strong understanding in knowledge and mastered it clearly and evidently.

This is because knowledge was not meant merely for people to enjoy intellectually, nor just to accumulate more of it, but rather this knowledge was prescribed, and learning was prescribed so that people would follow it with action. Whoever follows knowledge with action will, in this case, benefit in many ways. I will write them in the following paragraphs:

First: Following knowledge with action demonstrates Allah's blessing upon you and shows Allah's favor upon you in that He has distinguished you with this knowledge above most people.

For whoever learns knowledge and masters it, gratitude for Allah's blessing regarding this knowledge is shown through demonstrating action, being eager for it, and striving against oneself to implement it.

For this reason, Abu Qilabah, may Allah have mercy on him, said: "When Allah gives you new knowledge, do some act of worship (based upon it), and don't let your main concern be just to tell people about it."

Second: Following knowledge with action contains within it fear of Allah and demonstrates reverence for Allah, for knowledge is not sought merely for knowledge's sake, but rather is sought for fear of Allah, fear of Him, and awareness of Him.

This is why the Salaf would say: "Knowledge is not about extensive narration, but knowledge is fear [of Allah]." This is what Ibn Mas'ud said.

This is confirmed in Allah's statement: "Only the scholars among His servants fear Allah." The scholars are the people who fear Allah most. They fear Allah in private and public, performing what Allah has obligated upon them, being eager to perform voluntary acts, and completely avoiding what Allah has forbidden them.

Imam Al-Hasan Al-Basri, may Allah have mercy on him, said: "The concern of scholars is care (for implementation), while the concern of foolish ones is narration."

This is a clear text from one of the Salaf's Imams indicating that true scholars' concern revolves around caring for what they narrate, meaning: acting upon what they narrate and what they transmitted from Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) and his noble companions.

As for the concern of the foolish who learned knowledge not to worship Allah with insight, nor to achieve fear of Allah in their hearts, it is merely narration. They narrate hadith and recite verses but don't act upon them - they are the furthest people from acting upon them.

This is why Al-Hasan called them foolish, because they degraded themselves with this detestable work where they limited themselves to narration without following it with action, bringing the means while leaving the goal and purpose!

Third: Following knowledge with action increases one's knowledge and establishes religious knowledge firmly. Whoever follows their knowledge with action, their feet become firmly planted and their heart becomes established in knowledge, so Allah gives them vast knowledge and opens for them from the treasures of understanding what no one would imagine.

This is why it is said that Ali bin Abi Talib, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "Knowledge calls out for action – if it is answered it remains, otherwise it departs." Meaning that knowledge calls out and announces: Action! Action! That is: Work! Work! If the possessor of knowledge acts, [the knowledge stays], otherwise the knowledge leaves them and goes to others.

This is the meaning of Allah's statement: "Fear Allah and Allah will teach you." [2:282] When a person acts upon what they know, fearing Allah with insight, this leads to beneficial knowledge and righteous action.

From this starting point, the Salaf agreed that whoever doesn't act upon their knowledge is ignorant, even if they are well-versed in narration and encompass scholarly opinions.

Fudayl bin Iyad, may Allah have mercy on him, said: "A scholar remains ignorant of what they know until they act upon it; when they act upon it, then they become knowledgeable."

For us, a scholar is not called a scholar until they follow their knowledge with action. If they don't follow their knowledge with action, they are ignorant and have similarity to the Jewish rabbis and scholars, whose path we have been commanded to seek refuge with Allah from.

This is why we say in every prayer: "Not of those who earned anger, nor of those who went astray." [1:7] Those who earned anger are the Jews, and those who went astray are the Christians.

Some of the Salaf said: Whoever among our scholars goes astray has similarity to the Jews, and whoever among our worshippers goes astray has similarity to the Christians.

Fourth: Whoever follows their knowledge with action will find the correct answer on the Day of Judgment. The Prophet (ﷺ) informed us, as in the hadith of Abu Barzah Al-Aslami, may Allah be pleased with him, that he said: "A servant's feet will not move on the Day of Resurrection until he is asked about four things: about his life and how he spent it, about his knowledge and what he did with it, about his wealth – how he earned it and how he spent it, and about his body and how he used it." Reported by At-Tirmidhi and others, and it is an authentic hadith.

His statement "about his knowledge and what he did with it" is evidence that when you learn knowledge, you will be asked about it on the Day of Judgment. Did you act upon it? You will be rewarded if your intention was sincere for Allah.

If you didn't act upon it, you will be punished according to how much knowledge you left. If you left obligatory knowledge without acting upon it, you sin. If you left knowledge indicating recommendation and preference, you have missed out on reward, but there is no punishment or sin, Allah willing.

Fifth: And among its benefits: that a Muslim avoids what Allah has forbidden regarding not following knowledge with action. Allah criticized this in two matters, or showed its blame in two aspects:

1. That He, the Exalted, criticized the Jews for being like a donkey carrying books, saying "like a donkey carrying books" [62:5]. They carry the Torah in their chests, know it and its rulings, but don't act upon it. A Muslim is not pleased for himself to be similar to the Jews, because **'whoever imitates a people is one of them'**. [Abu Dawud, Saheeh]

2. That Allah, the Exalted, warned the believers against this characteristic: "O you who believe, why do you say what you do not do? Most hateful it is with Allah that you say what you do not do." [61:2, 3] A Muslim fears for himself from not acting upon his knowledge, lest his end be evil, especially since it is established in Sahih Muslim that among the first people to be punished in the Fire will be a scholar who did not act upon his knowledge.

Sixth: What follows that is that abandoning action upon knowledge leads to falling into the forbidden matters of disputes and arguments that corrupt religion, corrupt the heart, and corrupt many matters for Muslims.

When a Muslim occupies himself with action and nurtures himself upon it, he rises above such sickly matters of false disputes and arguments that contradict what the Salaf were upon regarding arguing for truth and clarifying it.

When he occupies himself with action, he rises above such matters and others that take knowledge away from its higher purpose, which is following it with action. When a Muslim occupies himself with action, his soul becomes occupied with good instead of evil, but if he doesn't occupy himself with action, his soul becomes occupied with evil and leaves this tremendous good.

After these paragraphs that we have clarified and spoken about in summary, we call our Salafi brothers to be eager for action and desire it, and not to have their concern only in acquiring knowledge. Rather, they should follow the acquisition of knowledge with what brings them good in their religion and worldly life through acting upon it and being eager to establish it.

The Salafis are the most deserving people to act upon what they know, because the Salaf – may Allah be pleased with them – who are their role models, were like this and upon this way. They were extremely eager to follow knowledge with action.

For this reason, the scholars – from Ahlus-Sunnah – authored many books about asceticism, eagerness for action, warning against abandoning it, and about asceticism in worldly matters, meaning: acting upon what Allah has prescribed, being eager to perform recommended and voluntary acts, and completely staying away from evil and destructive acts.

This asceticism is what the Salaf were more deserving of than those who claimed affiliation with Sufism or others who claimed asceticism while not being ascetic.

This is why they authored many books about asceticism, some as independent works and some within their other compositions. There isn't any of the Imams like Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi, Nasa'i, and Ibn Majah except that they included chapters on asceticism and heart-softening matters in their major books of Sunan and Sahih.

Scholars authored independent works on this, like Imam Ahmad who authored Kitab Az-Zuhd, and like Ibn Al-Mubarak, Waki', Hannad ibn As-Saree, and Abu Dawud – all of these authored independent books on

asceticism, which means they cared about this matter, were eager for it, and gave it weight. We are the most deserving people to follow these scholars and the most deserving to walk in their footsteps.

It is obligatory upon us to care about this issue and tend to it, and we must know that acting upon knowledge divides into two categories:

1) **Obligatory section:** This is acting upon knowledge that indicates obligation, like the five daily prayers, fasting, paying zakat for those it's obligatory upon, performing Hajj once in a lifetime for those able to do so, and similar matters of knowledge.

Whoever knows usury/interest is forbidden must act upon this knowledge, whoever knows fornication/adultery is forbidden must act upon this knowledge, and so on. Acting upon this knowledge is obligatory and no one can leave it. Whoever leaves it is sinful.

2) **The other knowledge:** Knowledge that is recommended to implement and praised for those who do so. If one doesn't do it, they don't sin, like recommended matters such as voluntary worship, voluntary prayers, voluntary fasting, voluntary Hajj, voluntary charity and so forth.

These matters that aren't obligatory are recommended for a person to act upon when they know of them, and this is emphasized for them, even if it wasn't obligatory upon them.

Actions, praise be to Allah, are many and easy before us, but only those who strive against themselves for them and accustom themselves to them can do them. The soul is stubborn, strong, and severe – a person cannot easily and simply subdue it.

Allah said: "Indeed, the soul commands to evil," [12:53] and this soul cannot be mastered, controlled, and its reins taken for Allah's obedience except through proper striving to act upon what one has learned.

Acting upon knowledge needs training and needs patience and perseverance. This, praise be to Allah, is acquired.

Whoever is patient and perseveres will reach acting upon knowledge, as the Prophet (ﷺ) said: "Knowledge is only acquired through learning, and forbearance is only acquired through practicing forbearance. Whoever seeks good will be given it, and whoever protects against evil will be protected from it." [Saheeh al-Jaami' as-Sagheer, no. 2328]

This indicates that whoever seeks good will be guided to it, and whoever guards against evil will be helped to avoid it, and that these matters are achieved through training the soul upon them and developing the soul upon them. When this happens, it becomes much good in religion and worldly life for its possessor.

We call the brothers to increase in action and strive for it as much as they can. By Allah, besides whom there is nothing which deserves to be worshipped, if we occupied ourselves with action as much as we could, these souls would be among the purest souls, highest in aspiration, and closest to Allah.

But the state of Muslims today is disheartening and painful to the soul. I don't say this is specific to common Muslims, rather this disease has spread to most Muslims including scholars, students of knowledge, common people and others, except those Allah has mercy upon, and they are few.

We should lift this matter from ourselves and strive to return to what the Prophet (ﷺ) and his noble companions were upon, where their concern was directed to action. Whenever they learned something, they acted upon it and applied it.

Through this comes the strength of Muslims, and through this comes the happiness of Muslims. There is no good in a Muslim's life if there isn't righteous action in it bringing them closer to Allah.

Allah has mentioned actions abundantly in His Book, commanded them and encouraged them. He even informed that this Paradise is "for what you used to do" [7:43]- meaning: you obtained it, O people of Paradise, for what you used to do, **after Allah's favor and mercy.**