

In the Name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Most Kind

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KNOWLEDGE

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Like any disease striking the Muslim community, ignorance directly impacts on every aspect of our lives. Therefore, it has to be combated in a fashion that addresses not simply the symptoms but the root cause of this disease itself. The most fundamental ingredient of such a cure is knowledge. Let us look into the Qur'an and Sunnah to truly discover how knowledge serves as a foundation toward ridding ourselves of this deadly disease that is destroying us as a community.

KNOWLEDGE IS GUIDANCE

The primary role of knowledge in our lives is that it provides guidance. We all know that in order to worship Allah, it is an absolute necessity that we know the instructions of Allah and His Messenger in this regard. These instructions (contained within the Qur'an and Sunnah) comprise the ONLY acceptable source of establishing the means of worship in Islam.

Allah revealed to us in the Qur'an,

“And thus, We have sent to you an inspiration and a mercy of Our Command. You knew not what is the Book, nor what is Faith? But We have made it (this Qur'an) a light wherewith We guide whosoever of Our slaves. And verily, you (O Muhammad –saw) are indeed guiding (mankind) to the straight path.” (42:52).

((Wa Kathalika Awhayna Elayka Roohan Min Amrina Ma Kunta Tadry Mal-Kitabu Walaa-Imanu Walakin Ja'alnahu Nuran Nahdy bihe Mun Nasha'u Min Ibadina, Wa-Innaka La-Tahdy Ela Siratin Mustaqeem))

Also, Allah reminds us, “And I created not the jinn and men except that they should worship Me.” (51:56). **((Wama Khalqtul Jinn wal Ins Ella Liya'abudoon))**

It is clear from these verses that Allah wants us to worship Him alone, and that this worship ought to be completely based upon what He revealed to His slave, Muhammad (saw). Implicit in this is the promise by Allah of the reward of Paradise to those who submit to this message, and Hellfire as an abode for it rejecters. Knowledge is the ingredient that enables us to possess the correct and necessary understanding of the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

In order to truly worship Allah, every Muslim must know his/her Deen. Every Muslim, man or woman, is mandated to acquire knowledge of that for which they are liable in the sight of Allah. In other words, obedience to Allah is not a matter of choice, and neither is the manner in which we show our obedience to Him (our Creator). Therefore, it is compulsory for us to know those aspects of Islamic knowledge that enable us to worship Allah.

Now, we address the question of how we can cure ignorance.

Allah's Messenger (saw) addressed the very disease of ignorance when he said in a Hadith related by Jabir that “The cure for ignorance is asking.” (Abu Dawud vol.1, p. 69 - hasan hadith)

Furthermore, Allah revealed to us the method by which to obtain this cure when He says, "So, ask of the people of knowledge if you do not know." (16:43).

((Fas'alu Ahla-zikri En Kuntum La Ta'alamoon))

Knowledge serves multiple purposes in Islam, some of which are not commonly acknowledged. For instance, seeking Islamic knowledge is really a means of eliminating one of the major factors that contribute to disunity in the Ummah – namely, ignorance. Moreover, we cannot unite in the absence of knowledge, which should be precipitated by correct belief and correct understanding. This understanding is not simply restricted to acts of worship, but also extends to an honest and upright mode of conduct in everyday life.

When individuals in a society clearly know how to worship their Lord and to earn His acceptance, as well as how to deal with each other justly, only then can such a society unite. Hence, we cannot expect the Muslim community to be deserving of Allah's blessing unless we are armed with the necessary knowledge. Individuals firmly grounded in correct beliefs, knowledge, and understanding would coalesce in order to formulate a strong, healthy and united Ummah. Only such an Ummah would be deserving of Allah's protection and victory from Him.

Allah (swt) emphasized the importance of knowledge in many ways. One of which is the virtues of scholars. Allah says: "Allah will exalt in degree those of you who believe and those who have been granted knowledge." (58:11)

In addition to this we find numerous references to the same exalted status within the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (saw). As an example, Anas reported from the Prophet (saw) "Whoever treads on a path in search of Islamic knowledge, Allah will ease the way to Paradise for him; the angels will lower their wings, pleased with this seeker of knowledge, and everyone in the heavens and on earth will ask forgiveness for the knowledgeable person, even the fish in the deepest of waters will ask for his forgiveness. The superiority of the knowledgeable man over the worshipper in Islam, is like the superiority of the full moon over the rest of the planets. And the scholars are the inheritors of the Prophets, but the Prophets did not leave behind wealth but they left behind knowledge. And whoever takes firm hold of this is a very fortunate man." (Abu Dawud, Ibn Majah, Tirmidhi #2835 - sahih hadith)

The message of this Hadith is truly profound. As we all know, worship is a commendable act in Islam. However, it dulls in comparison to practicing with knowledge, as is obvious from the Hadith.

Muadh ibn Jabal explains the benefits of knowledge in beautiful words; he said, "Seek knowledge, because seeking it for the sake of Allah is a worship and knowing it makes you more God-fearing; and searching for it is jihad, teaching it to those who do not know is charity, reviewing and learning it more is like tasbeeh. Through knowledge Allah will be known and worshipped. With the knowledge Allah will elevate people and make them leaders and imams, who will in turn guide other people." (Fatawa Ibn Taymiyya vol.10, p.39).

In the same vein, Imam Shafi'i said, "Whoever seeks the fruits of this life should gain Islamic knowledge, and whoever seeks the hereafter should gain knowledge." (an-Nawawi, Majmoo' vol.1, p.12). In other words, it is only through knowledge that we can live a life that is free of blatant mistakes because knowledge ensures that whatever we take of the Dunya is indeed lawful for us. Certainly, the importance of knowledge in relation to the hereafter is quite clear and apparent, in that it provides the basis for worship and aids us in establishing our deen for the purpose of gaining Allah's pleasure and His reward of Paradise.

Knowledge is classified according to scholars into two types. The categories are fard 'ayn and fard kifayah. Fard 'ayn comprises that knowledge which is obligatory upon every adult Muslim, man or woman, on an individual basis. Whereas fard kifayah refers to a collective obligation. If this obligation is fulfilled by some then the rest are relieved of the responsibility. However, if it goes unfulfilled then the entire community will be held accountable.

Accordingly, seeking knowledge is FARD, for without knowledge a muslim cannot perform the duties of his religion.

Anas ibn Malik relates from the Prophet when he addressed the issue of knowledge in the hadith where he said, "Seeking knowledge is compulsory upon every Muslim and Muslimah," (Ibn Majah #240, the hadith is sahih).

This hadith refers specifically to the knowledge of the general fard 'ayn, which is compulsory on every Muslim to acquire. This is not a matter in which the believer has a choice in pursuing, or not. Every Muslim is obligated to learn such knowledge, of the general fard 'ayn, for the sake of establishing their deen, irrespective of time and place.

The importance of knowledge is even more emphasized through the fact that it is prohibited to speak or act in religious matters WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE.

This is a well-established principle of Islam, which is based on the following.

Whenever the Prophet (saw) was asked concerning something for which no verse was revealed, he would either say, "I don't know," or give no reply, but, he never gave a verdict based on opinion or analogy.

These statements demonstrate several important concepts for us to understand. Firstly, we see the excellent example of the Prophet (saw) who never spoke, or made any ruling, without revelation from Allah. Furthermore, the Prophet (saw) did not have the authority to act of his own accord, despite his status as the Messenger of Allah. He only established and judged matters based on what Allah had taught him. Lastly, regarding the scenario described by Ibn Masud, this occurred when the Jews approached the Prophet (saw) to test the truth of his prophethood. Yet, even during the opportunity of displaying the validity of his claim as the Messenger of Allah, and to humiliate the Jews, he kept quiet until Allah revealed a response (in sura 17:85).

The Prophet (saw) acted in such an ideal manner, because he knew his Lord, Allah the Most High, so well. The greater one knows his Lord, the greater one fears and worships his Lord with full submission and humility. Concerning this, Allah informs us that, "It is only those who have Islamic knowledge, among His servants, that fear Allah. Verily, Allah is All-Mighty, Most Forgiving," (35:28). Hence, as a golden rule to be followed, it is imperative as Muslims, who desire to fear Allah as He should be feared, that we proceed in any action with regards to our Islam with correct knowledge based on the Qur'an and Sunnah.

In seeking knowledge, we should ensure absolute sincerity in our intention and action. Abu Huraira narrated that the Prophet (saw) said "Whoever seeks Islamic knowledge only for worldly gain, he would not even smell the scent of Paradise on the Day of Judgement," (Abu Dawud, Ibn Majah, hadith is sahih). In another hadith, K'ab ibn Malik narrated that the Prophet (saw) said, "Whoever seeks knowledge to argue with the scholars, or to show off with the ignorant people, and attracts the faces of the people towards him, Allah would enter him into the Hellfire," (Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, hadith is hasan).

The main message to be gained from these ahadith is that true and sincere knowledge should yield goodness which should manifest itself in one's practice of Islam. Knowledge without such fruit is completely futile. Allah did not send forth knowledge for it to be known only, but rather its purpose is for the sake of establishing such knowledge. Hence, one's sincere and correct knowledge should accordingly produce proper practice of Islam.

Regarding this, Allah says, "O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do? Most hateful it is in the sight of Allah that you say that which you do not do," (61:2-3).

Hence, it is indeed a very serious sin to commit such grave action as to preach about Islam that which you, yourself, do not practice. Moreover, it is essential to act on what you know to be of true and correct knowledge. Failure to comply with such guidelines would subsequently result in most grievous consequences, in both this life and the hereafter.

On this note, where people today speak about so many things which they do not enforce in practice, the one statement which repeatedly underlines people's discussions is that Islam is a way of life. While this is most certainly true, it should be quite apparent from the aforementioned that living Islam is dependent on learning and practicing Islam. For if Islam is a way of life, then we should live it, not talk about it! If Islam is a way of life, then we should live it, not lecture about it! If Islam is a way of life, then we should live it, not brag about it! We ask Allah to help us to live Islam in the manner in which Allah wants us to, in every moment and aspect of our lives.