

Benefiting from Islamic Knowledge

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It is one of the paradoxes of our time, the Age of Paradox that we find more and more people who have a lot of knowledge about Islam but who seem to use it to find ways of getting away from the obedience of Allah ﷻ. They believe that their knowledge enables them to escape from Allah ﷻ and to 'legalize' all kinds of prohibited activity. I call this a paradox because when we look at the early generations of Muslims, the Sahaba of Rasoolullah ﷺ, their students the Tabayeen we find that the more knowledge they acquired, the more submissive they became to Allah ﷻ and the more careful of His Hudood and boundaries. This is in keeping with what Allah ﷻ says about those who have knowledge. He said:

إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ

Faatir 35:28 It is only those who have knowledge among His slaves that fear Allâh.

Fearing the displeasure of Allah ﷻ and having His Taqwa is the only true sign of knowledge. The more knowledge of Islam you have the more careful you become about Allah ﷻ and the more Muttaqi you become. The reward for this is high stations with Him about which He said:

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَنْتَقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

Hujuraat 49:13 Verily, the most honorable of you with Allâh is that (believer) who has At-Taqwa. Verily, Allâh is All-Knowing, All-Aware.

When a Muslim learns about Allah ﷻ and reflects on His blessings, his heart is filled with gratitude and he loves Allah ﷻ. When he learns about and reflects on the Glory and Magnificence of Allah ﷻ, he understands his own relationship with Allah ﷻ.

‘A person will interpret everything he hears according to the light that dominates his heart.’ ~ Imam Al Ghazali

He is talking about the importance of Tazkiyyatun Nafs before acquiring Islamic knowledge. If the heart is not purified and illuminated with the Noor of Allahﷻ, then Hidayat can't come and a person will continue to be misled, even when he reads Quran and Hadith. This explains all the corruption which led to the Mu'tazilah and the Khawaarij and the rejecters of Hadith. People who were religious and personally pious but who left Islam and became apostate, despite their piety because their hearts were full of themselves and their own arrogance instead of the Noor of Allahﷻ.

Our relationship with Allahﷻ is based on His Book, the Qur'an. A book of signs, not verses. A verse can be enjoyed or not, but it demands nothing more. A sign on the other hand demands to be understood because it points to something which must be recognized. It is a warning or good news about a destination which we must all reach one day. The one who recognizes and understands the signs can prepare for that day so that it may be the most honorable day of his life. The Qur'an as we all know but must remind ourselves, is the actual spoken Word of Allahﷻ. It was spoken to Jibreelﷺ in a manner that suits the Grace and Majesty of Allahﷻ. Jibreelﷺ then communicated it to Muhammadﷺ who recited it to his followers, who recorded it in their memory, in writing and most importantly in their lives by following it in every aspect. Muhammadﷺ explained the Qur'an to them and demonstrated its meaning by living it himself and they emulated him with sincerity and dedication. The Qur'an is our connection to Allahﷻ and we can get closest to Him in this life by learning, reciting, understanding and living by it.

The Qur'an is not a book of stories though it has stories in it. It is not a book of history though it mentions the history of people who lived before us. It is not a book of science though it mentions many scientific facts, centuries before they were discovered and

proved in our laboratories. It is not a book of laws, though every law in Islam has its foundation in the principles it outlines. Finally, it is not even a book of rituals of worship, because not a single ritual is explained in detail in the Qur'an. Allah ﷻ left the explanation to His Messenger ﷺ to do and teach people. He merely ordered that He must be worshipped.

The Qur'an is a map, a template and a framework to live a life that makes one influential, beneficial and beloved to all in this world and honored before Allah ﷻ when we meet Him on the Day of Judgment. It is a criterion of right and wrong, based not on every passing fad or fancy, but on fundamental principles of good and evil that affect, not only humanity but all things living or dead, animate or inanimate. The Qur'an is not a book of poetry to be recited in a pleasant tone for the enjoyment of listeners but a book of action that calls for us to stand up and start living it, so that we can fulfill the purpose of our creation, which is to become the most beneficial people on the face of the earth.

That is why Allah ﷻ said:

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ
A'al Imraan 3: 110. You [Muslims] are the best of peoples ever raised up for mankind; you enjoin Al-Ma'ruf (all that is good i.e. Islam) and forbid Al-Munkar (all that Islam has forbidden), and you believe in Allah.

Allah ﷻ defined the purpose of our existence as being for the benefit of all mankind and said that this means to stand up for all that is good, just, honorable and beneficial to everyone and against all that is the opposite of this i.e. unjust, dishonorable, discriminatory, oppressive or harmful in any way. Islam is the name of a pathway of action, a way of life that results in goodness for all those who inhabit the earth. Anyone who claims to speak for Islam or to live by it but whose speech or actions don't spread goodness, harmony, justice and love is a liar and a cheat. Justice is the cause, the result

of which is peace. There can be no peace in the absence of justice. There can be no peace in the presence of hatred, discrimination, oppression and cruelty. When justice is established, peace is the result. That is why Rasoolullah ﷺ said:

On the authority of Abu Sa'eed al-Khudreeؓ said: I heard Rasoolullah ﷺ say, "Whoever sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then [let him change it] with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart — and that is the weakest of faith." [Muslim]

Rasoolullah ﷺ said about the Muslims:

Jabirؓ reported: Rasoolullah ﷺ said, "The believer is kind and gracious, for there is no goodness in one who is neither kind nor gracious. The best of people are those who are most beneficial to people." (Hasan) Source: al-Mu'jam al-Awsat, 5937

Knowledge creates in the sincere student, the desire always to be obedient to Allahﷻ, to serve Him and to submit his own life to whatever pleases his Rabb. The more he reflects on his relationship with Allahﷻ, the more he loves Allahﷻ and the more he is conscious never to displease Him. This is the essence of Taqwa...i.e. the fear of displeasing the One you love. This is a concept that brings together two apparently paradoxical qualities and emotions; fear and love. If you reflect on this, you will realize how natural this is. The people we really and truly don't want to ever offend are those we love. Not those we fear. We may obey those we fear but when they are not present, we talk ill of them, poke fun at them and if there is anything we can do to irritate them without getting caught, we would do it. But not with those we love. We only want to do good to them, serve them, make them happy.

My brother was here last week from the US and told me about a friend, who is fifty years old and has a father who is eighty-five on hemodialysis and a mother who is eighty and has Alzheimer's. He graduated from MIT, is himself divorced and has no

children and runs a successful business. Obviously, he has the choice of putting them both into Hospice or Palliative Care to be taken care of as they both, especially his mother, need attention and care, twenty-four hours a day. Instead, he scaled down his business, rented out his own house and moved into his parent's house and sleeps on a couch in the hallway between his mother's and father's rooms. He takes his father to his dialysis sessions, thrice a week and takes care of his parents constantly. Big question, WHY? Big answer, because he LOVES them. He is not a Muslim. Make dua for guidance for him and his parents. Love enables the greatest dedication. Far more than any fear can do.

I ask myself therefore, 'Do I love Allahﷻ?'

Love is a result of knowing someone and knowing what we receive from him. In the case of Allahﷻ, the answer is simple; EVERYTHING. And that is precisely what works against our really getting serious with understanding what that means. We simply say EVERYTHING and leave it. What is necessary is to sit with a pen and paper and list that EVERYTHING. Physical, mental, spiritual, material, emotional, visible and invisible.

List it all. Then look at each one of the items on your list and imagine your life without that. Then ask yourself, 'What did I do to get this? What did I do to deserve it? What would I be willing to pay for it, if I needed to buy it? How will my life be without it?' Think up your own questions in this line. List the questions with each of the items on your list of blessings and ask these questions and write the answers. Spend as much time as you need to, on each of them. Learning to love Allahﷻ is not a weekend course. This is the essence of Tarbiyya wa Tazkiyya. It is the first step in Islam without which we can't go ahead to the next i.e. developing Taqwa.

Allahﷻ ordered us to develop His Taqwa and to do it to the extent that is keeping with His Majesty and Grace. And He warned us to do this before we die and not to

die except in a state where we are Muttaqoon; submitted to the Will of Allahﷻ. He said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ

A'al Imraan 3: 102. O you who believe! Have Taqwa of Allah as is His right that you should have His Taqwa and die not except in a state of Islam (submission to Allahﷻ)

What is Taqwa?

Taqwa is not the fear of Allahﷻ but the fear of displeasing the One we love the most. I say that because Allahﷻ mentioned love for Him as the distinguishing feature of the Believers. He said:

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِلَّهِ

Baqara 2: 165 But those who believe, love Allah more (than anything else).

My brothers and sisters, we can't love someone we don't know. That is why it is essential to know Allahﷻ. Not just to know about Him. But to know Him as He described Himself and then feel His presence in our lives. To measure the level of our love for Him and the level of our sensitivity to feeling His presence in our lives Allahﷻ gave us a meter. He said:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُهُ زَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ

Anfal 8: 2. The believers are only those who, when Allah is mentioned, their hearts shiver with His Awe and Majesty and when His Ayaat (Qur'an) are recited unto them, they (Ayaat of the Qur'an) increase their Faith; and they put their trust in their Rabb (Alone).

The Qur'an is a book of action and everything that Allahﷻ told us in it, relates to some practical action that we need to take. This Ayah is a great example, for it shows us a method to check our level of faith (Imaan) and reliance and trust (Tawakkul) on Allahﷻ. Let us do this right away. I want you to listen to what I am about to recite and go inside yourselves and get in touch with your inner being, your Quloob, your hearts and see what happens. Check to see if anything happens. I ask Allahﷻ to make our hearts responsive to His Majesty and Grace and His message.

Allahﷻ introduced Himself to us in a way that nobody else can do. He said:

Baqara 2: 255. *Allah! La ilaha illa Huwa (none has the right to be worshipped but He), the Ever Living, the One Who sustains and protects all that exists. Neither slumber, nor sleep overtake Him. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on earth. Who is he that can intercede with Him except with His Permission? He knows what happens to them (His creatures) in this world, and what will happen to them in the Hereafter. And they will never understand anything of His Knowledge except that which He wills. His Kursi extends over the heavens and the earth, and He feels no fatigue in guarding and preserving them. And He is the Most High, the Most Great. [This Ayah 2:255 is called Ayat-ul-Kursi and is considered the greatest Ayah in the Qur'an because it is the introduction of Allahﷻ.]*

Hashr 59: 21. *Had We sent down this Qur'an on a mountain, you would surely have seen it humbling itself and rending asunder by the fear of Allah. Such are the parables which We put forward to mankind that they may reflect. 22. He is Allah, other than Whom there is La ilaha illa Huwa (none has the right to be worshipped but He) the All-Knower of the unseen and the seen (open). He is the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful. 23. He is Allah than Whom there is La ilaha illa Huwa (none has the right to be worshipped but He) the King, the Holy, the One Free from all defects, the Giver of security, the Watcher over His creatures, the All-Mighty, the Compeller, the Supreme. Glory be to Allah! (High is He) above all that they associate as partners with Him. 24. He is Allah, the Creator, the Inventor of all things, the*

Bestower of forms. To Him belong the Best Names. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorify Him. And He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.

Ikhlāas 112: 1. Say (O Muhammad): "He is Allah, (the) One. 2. "Allah-us-Samad (The Self-Sufficient Master, Whom all creatures need. He is unlike them in every respect, has no needs but fulfills all the needs of His creatures). 3. "He begets not, nor was He begotten; 4. "And there is none co-equal or comparable unto Him."

Is it not strange that this weak needy creature which depends on Allahﷻ for every breath he takes, still chooses to rebel against Him and does not hesitate to disobey Him? Does he not understand that the rules are for his own benefit, not for Allahﷻ' s. Yet what did Allahﷻ say about this creature? Did he promise to roast him in the fire? Did he promise to punish him? Allahﷻ taught him how to ask, how to make dua. Allahﷻ promised to forgive him and to cover his faults and to save him from his own self.

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا اكْتَسَبَتْ رَبَّنَا لَا تُؤَاخِذْنَا
إِنْ نَسِينَا أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَا إِكْرَامًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِنَا رَبَّنَا
وَلَا تُحْمِلْنَا مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِ وَاعْفُ عَنَّا وَارْحَمْنَا أَنْتَ مَوْلَانَا فَانصُرْنَا عَلَى
الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ

Baqara 2:286. Allah burdens not a person beyond his scope. He gets reward for that (good) which he has earned, and he is punished for that (evil) which he has earned. "Our Rabb! Punish us not if we forget or fall into error, our Rabb! Lay not on us a burden like that which You did lay on those before us (Jews and Christians); our Rabb! Put not on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear. Pardon us and grant us Forgiveness. Have mercy on us. You are our Maula (Patron, Supporter and Protector) and give us victory over the disbelievers (enemies)."

But how do I know that this dua will be accepted? I know because He said:

قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ
الدُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

Zumar 39: 53. Say: "O 'Ibadi (My slaves) who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins)! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah, verily Allah forgives all sins. Truly, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

And then because He is Allahﷻ, the Magnificent and Glorious, who doesn't count while giving and gives without measure in keeping with His greatness and glory, He announced for the one who seeks forgiveness with sincerity:

إِلَّا مَن تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا فَأُولَٰئِكَ يُبَدِّلُ اللَّهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ حَسَنَاتٍ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ
غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا

Al Furqaan 25: 70. Except those who repent and believe (in Islam), and do righteous deeds, for those, Allah will change their sins into good deeds, and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

What can you say about our Rabb, except to fall in Sujood before Him in thanks for His Mercy and never deliberately disobey Him in any matter. Truly unfortunate and insane are those who know all this, yet it doesn't stop them from disobeying Allahﷻ. Truly we fool ourselves.

I remind myself and you, that to benefit from Islamic knowledge we need to read, reflect, practice and correct our practice until we see results and then repeat this cycle. We have all heard the proverb, 'Practice makes perfect'. I submit to you that practice doesn't make perfect. Practice merely makes permanent. It is correct practice which makes perfect. And only correct practice gives the desired results. Acquiring

knowledge of an art is all about practice. Just as reading about or watching Aikido or Judo videos alone will not make us expert fighters, so also reading about or watching lectures on Islam won't make you an effective practitioner of Islam. When that results in problems in life, blaming Islam is as futile as blaming Judo, if you can't win a fight after reading a book on Judo. If you want to win a fight you have to spend time in the Dojo and fall 10,000 times (remember Malcolm Gladwell's Outliers)? You learn to fall not only to learn how to save yourself but to understand that all knowledge begins with humility. With acknowledging, that you know nothing. That you are in need. That you are willing to start from the ground up. The strongest and sturdiest construction is built on the deepest foundation. To go up, you must first go down. Otherwise, a building built without a foundation will stand only until the first storm hits it. If you don't practice the martial art, but do a PhD thesis on it, you may get your Doctorate but will hit the ground very hard, the first time you come across a hooligan in the street. Only correct practice benefits.

If you want to connect to Allahﷻ you must stand before Him in the night and live in the day according to the way of His Messengerﷺ, being good to everyone, denying your base instincts, controlling your anger, greed, jealousy and overcoming hatred with love and compassion.

Sounds tough? So is winning a Judo tournament. The question is not whether it is tough or easy. The question is, 'Do you want to win or lose?'

Winners walk the difficult road, the road less travelled. Losers complain about why they couldn't win. Choose your path because every path leads to its own destination.

To make the effort to know Allahﷻ, love Him and have His Taqwa is therefore the first and foremost duty of the Muslim. Ask how much awareness and concern we have for this? Ask how much effort we make to develop this in ourselves and our dependents? Ask what importance we give to this in our parenting or teaching?

Allahﷻ told us that He created us only and only for His worship. Developing Taqwa is a precondition of worship. That is the reason why in the Seerah we see all the live training that the Sahaba received in Makkah for 12 years, before formal Salah was given to them as a gift. They received Tahajjud in the very first year of Revelation as a tool to develop Taqwa. And then the Fardh Salah as a crowning reward for attaining to the rank of Muttaqoon. That is the reason they didn't treat Salah like we do, as a burden, but instead looked forward to it, waited for it in anticipation and established it with joy and thankfulness at having been given the opportunity to talk to Allahﷻ. That is why Rasoolullahﷺ called the Salah, Me'raj-ul-Mu'min. For the Muttaqi, Salah is when he meets Allahﷻ and tells Him his story, praises Him, thanks Him and seeks His help.

Someone asked the servant of Abdullah ibn Abbasؓ to describe his master's daily schedule. The man replied, 'He waits from one Salah for the next and recites Qur'an while he waits.' If you think about it, Abdullah ibn Abbasؓ was a businessman. He went to his office, he dealt with clients, he traded in the market, he did major financial deals across national borders. He had a family and spent time with them. He fought in battles when there was a need to defend his land and people. So, what was this servant talking about? The servant was talking about the fundamental force that drove Abdullah ibn Abbasؓ and enabled him to do everything else; and that was his connection to Allahﷻ, which was sustained by his Dhikr and Salah. That is why, while he traded, worked and dealt with people, his heart and tongue were busy in the recitation of Qur'an and Dhikr and he waited for the next Salah as we may wait for the next call from a major client. Ta'allah-hul amthaal. I give the example of the client only to help us understand the fact that we await with anticipation something from which we expect major benefit.

Islam is the name of a practice. It is not the name of a theory or ideology or philosophy. It is the name of a practice. There is a theology and philosophy behind the practice, but its benefit comes only from correct practice.

Narrated Abu Hurairah رضي الله عنه that Rasoolullah ﷺ said: *If anyone acquires knowledge, he should do so only seeking the Face of Allah ﷻ. But if he acquires it only to get some worldly advantage, he will not experience the Arf, i.e. the fragrance, of Jannah.* (Sunan Abi Dawud, Book 26, Hadith 24)

Today we are seeing the strange phenomenon where people claim to have read many important and weighty books on Islam, they claim to have an understanding of Qur'an and Sunnah to the extent that they have the courage to advise others, yet when you see their actions or listen to their speech you see that they are showing people ways to indulge their base desires, to find loop holes in the Shari'ah or to somehow escape the 'restrictions' of Islam that Rasoolullah ﷺ and his Sahaba lived by, joyously. We see such people twisting the Ayaat of Allah ﷻ and the Ahadith of His Nabi to extract convenient meanings, which they think, now license them to do what Rasoolullah ﷺ clearly pronounced as Haraam. Obviously, this is wrong and has no parallel in the lives of the Sahaba, yet we see this happening today more and more. What is the reason?

The reason is not so difficult to understand. It relates to three basic principles of agriculture. These three principles relate to the sequence of activities which must be done if you want to grow a successful crop. This sequence is as follows: Prepare the soil > Plant the seed > Water the soil. If this sequence is not followed or is interrupted, then you will find that even though you may have the best seed it will either not germinate at all or it will germinate and die. To explain this a little more, if you plant the best seed on rocky ground full of thorns and weeds, insects and disease, the seed will not germinate or will germinate and die. Similarly, if you plant the seed in good

soil, but don't water it, it will still germinate and die. So, all three steps of the sequence are important if you want the seed to germinate and flourish.

If we relate this to the teaching methodology of Rasoolullah ﷺ and the great teachers of Islam, we see that for Islamic knowledge to take root, the heart must be prepared first. It must be cleansed of personal desire, arrogance, greed, love of fame and money, deceit, rebellion. It must be prepared to bow in submission and ask, "What pleases you O Allah ﷻ? Tell me so that I can do that?" Only then will knowledge benefit. That is why knowledge acquired without the preparation of the heart results in misguidance, more ignorance and worst of all, in arrogance. Not in opening of the inner eye of Ma'arifat (enlightenment). You may well ask how this is different from learning math or physics or chemistry. Why this whole emphasis on Tarbiyyat (training)? Why can't we simply read the Qur'an (or translations) some books of hadith and then we are ready to give out rulings or to teach others?

The answer is very simple. It lies in the difference in teaching methodology between teaching a class of history students and a class of aircraft pilots. Both require reading books, but one needs also to fly a plane and his/her life and the lives of all the passengers in the plane will depend on how well he learns to fly. A student of history only needs some knowledge of facts and events. The pilot needs the knowledge plus he needs training. If he does not train himself then reading all the books in the world on aerodynamics or aero-engineering will not make him a pilot. The knowledge of aerodynamics is important, but it must be understood while experiencing the fear and thrill of flight. The sinking feeling in the pit of the stomach as the plane gathers speed and the air flow over the aerofoil of the wings produces lift. This is what will drive the principles of aerodynamics into the brain with a welding torch. The fact that the plane is flying is proof that the laws of lift are true. The pilot needs no convincing and he is not in any doubt. But he needs to sit in the cockpit and pull the stick back as he opens the throttles to truly understand this principle. The student of history does not need

any of this because nobody's life depends on his knowledge. In the case of Islam, not only the lives, but the Aakhira of the teacher and students depends on the knowledge. So correct knowledge must be acquired and it must be acquired in the correct way.

Allahﷻ said about the Sahaba:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَرْتَابُوا وَجَاهَدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الصَّادِقُونَ

*Hujuraat 49:15. Only those are the Mu'mineen (believers) who have believed in Allâh and His Messenger, and **afterward doubt not** but strive with their wealth and their lives for the Cause of Allâh. Only Those! They are the truthful.*

To reach this stage of not doubting, which Allahﷻ is categorically calling a sign of being a Believer (Mu'min – Only those are the Mu'mineen) it is necessary to first train yourself by preparing your heart to receive the Hidayah of the Qur'an. That is the reason Allahﷻ trained the Sahaba in the 13 – year long training course in Makkah by exposing them to all kinds of hardship so that their hearts would be opened to Islam and His Power and Majesty. Only then did the doors of conquest open for them. Until then they were being tempered in the fire of hunger and poverty, facing hatred and enmity – hardships which were both physical and emotional. Then when like fine steel, they emerged, tempered from this fire, they were ready to be shaped into swords that would then rise, not to oppress people, but to establish justice in the land.

Imam Ad-Dhahabee says in his book Siyar A'alaamun Nubula (18/192)

“Whoever seeks knowledge for action, his knowledge makes him humble and fearful and causes him to weep at the deficiencies within himself. But whoever seeks knowledge merely to teach, give verdicts, brag and showoff, becomes foolish,

arrogant and looks down in contempt at the people, is destroyed by pride and the people hate him.”

Remember that Iblis (Shaytaan) was destroyed not because of lack of knowledge but because of lack of Khashiyatullah (fear of displeasing Allahﷻ). That is why Allahﷻ gave us the criterion, the qualifying fact which makes a person an A'alim.

Allahﷻ didn't name any university or Darul Uloom or Madrassa from which you need to qualify. In fact, Allahﷻ didn't mention teaching and learning as we know it at all. Instead He mentioned the effect of knowledge so that we can judge ourselves to see if we really have knowledge or only information pretending to be knowledge like Iblis had. If that is the case, then all the books and degrees will be the kindling for the Fire in which the individual will find himself. Allahﷻ said about those who He called 'Al Ulama':

إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ

Fatir 35: 28 *It is only those who have knowledge among His slaves that fear Allah. Verily, Allah is All-Mighty, Oft-Forgiving.*

Khashiyatullah is the only criterion for knowledge. Anything that produces the opposite of that; fearlessness with respect to Allahﷻ, playing games with His Deen, giving rulings to please people or for personal gain, using Islamic knowledge to make money, monetizing the Qur'an, making Islam a business, charging money for Da'awa are all traps of Shaytaan which can only lead to one place. May Allahﷻ protect us from them. Learn and teach Islam for one reason only and that is the pleasure of Allahﷻ. If you can't do that, then just practice what you learn, yourself, to the best of your ability and make Istighfaar for shortcomings. That is enough. To pray Juma is Fardh. To give the Khutba is not. If you can't give the Khutba for the sake of Allahﷻ' s pleasure alone, don't do it. Pray your Juma and go home. Islam is not a business. There are more than nine Ayaat where Allahﷻ stated categorically that His Messengers

don't ask for recompense and reward. He said that their reward is with Him. This is the Sunnah of the Anbiya. Follow the Sunnah of the Anbiya for the work of the Anbiya. If you don't, then what you are doing is not the work of the Anbiya. May Allah ﷻ protect us all from the deception of Shaytaan.

Islam is learnt, not read. Sahaba got trained by 'Sohbat' (companionship) of Rasoolullah ﷺ, not by reading books. This is not to say that reading is not important but to emphasize the importance of Tarbiyya; the company of a Shaikh, who one can observe, listen to, learn from, clarify doubts and benefit from the dua of the Shaikh.

This follows the principles of agriculture. A good farmer knows that the first thing to do to get a bumper harvest is to prepare the land. If the land is not prepared, no matter how good the seed, it will either not germinate, or it will germinate and die. The farmer therefore spends a lot of time and energy in preparing the soil. He knows that there is no standard formula for all kinds of soils. There are some things that are the same, like removing physical contaminants, ploughing the land, furrowing it, breaking soil clods, removing weeds and treating the soil against pests and diseases. But there are also special things that the farmer will have to do after first testing the soil for acidity (pH value), organic matter content, nitrogen content and pathogen infection. Each of these needs a different treatment but without it, the crop can't be grown. What is interesting is that none of these problems, which are potentially fatal to the crop, is visible to the normal person. It takes an expert who can recognize the signs and for him too, in some cases, only after performing tests, that the ailment becomes clear. The farmer knows that this preparation is the most critical time and activity without which his crop will be a failure. So, he doesn't grudge the time and energy spent in it.

This stage mirrors the stage of Tazkiyya wa Tarbiyya in the process of learning. To learn, one must first assess oneself and prepare oneself to learn. Islamic knowledge is

not academic information but learning on which not only your life but more importantly your life in the Hereafter, depends. This assessment can be done by an expert, much like you go to a doctor for a physical assessment and then follow his prescription in practice because you know that it is necessary to cure any ailments that you may have or prevent others, some of which may be fatal. So also, a spiritual doctor is necessary to diagnose your spiritual state and prescribe a line of treatment so that your spirit is cured of its ailments. Without Tazkiyya wa Tarbiyya, no learning can take root or bear fruit. It will be like scattering seed on unprepared land. The seed will simply lie there and perish in time. So also, the best learning will not change the person if it is acquired without adequate preparation. Today this is the downside of the ease of access to learning. At one stroke a person can download three Tafaseer of the Qur'an and all the six books of Hadith and various collections of duas, lectures, recitations by different Qurra and so on. Yet, at the end of it all, that person who has all those things in his phone, will still tell lies, cheat, watch and listen to Haraam, find directions to places he should not visit, gamble and so on, using the same phone. It is not to say that using a different phone makes Haraam permissible. What I am saying is that simply acquiring information won't convert that information into knowledge if the heart has not been prepared and if the life and priorities of the person remain unchanged. Just as throwing seed on unprepared land will not convert that seed into a harvest. Preparing the land and preparing the heart are critically important.

The second stage is to plant the right seed in the right way. Some seeds are scattered. Some need to be placed in small holes lined up according to the contour of the land. Some seeds must first be germinated in a nursery and grown to a certain stage in polybags in a greenhouse before they are planted out in the field. Some seeds are scattered in seed beds in one corner of the main field and when they have germinated, they are uprooted and transplanted in the main field. All kinds of seeds are not treated in the same way.

So also, all kinds of Islamic knowledge can't be taught in the same way, as is currently done – the lecture method. Apart from the lecture method, one must use reflection, experience, introspection, journal writing, questioning, debate, dialogue, research, role playing, model making, scenario planning, what-if thinking, critical analysis and documentation of learning. Sadly, almost none of these are done today in the way of teaching and learning Islam. We are content with lecturing, some reading, memorizing and regurgitating, which when done without any processing, we call, passing exams. And that is why our Ta'aleem without Tarbiyya produces graduates who are arrogant, narrow minded, rigid, with tunnel vision and very poor understanding about how Islamic knowledge is applied in this life. Tarbiyya would have produced humility, life-long love for learning, open minded outlook to life, the ability to see value in others, flexibility and understanding and the capacity to interpret how Islam can make one a winner in both worlds. Our graduates are therefore misfits in society and apart from giving rulings on what is Halaal and Haraam, have very little impact on their constituents. In a world where a Google search will give you not one but multiple opinions and rulings on any matter by scholars from around the world, the average graduate from our Madrassas and Jamiaat is rapidly losing relevance. We must train students the way Rasoolullah ﷺ used to do. But for that, we must first undergo Tarbiyya ourselves, because we can only give what we have.

That is why Allah ﷻ sent Rasoolullah ﷺ with a clear task and defined the sequence to complete it. He said:

لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ
وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِن كَانُوا مِن قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

A'al Imraan 3: 164. Indeed, Allah conferred a great favor on the believers when He sent among them a Messenger (Muhammad ﷺ) from among themselves, reciting unto them His Ayaat (the Qur'an), and purifying them (Tazkiyya), and teaching them the Book (the Qur'an) and Al-Hikmah (wisdom – Tarbiyya), while before that they had been in manifest error.

The sequence of the Prophetic way is as follows:

1. Tilawa: Inform (Recite the Ayaat)
2. Purifying: Prepare (Tazkiyya)
3. Teach (Ta'aleem)
4. Hikma: Demonstrate (Tarbiyya)

Today we do only No. 1 & 3. And we have forgotten No. 2 & 4. That is why we don't get behavioral change which is the basic purpose of all education, especially Islamic.

We teach students to recite Qur'an, most of the time without even teaching them the meaning. To speak the truth, simply teaching the literal meaning of the words is far from sufficient in any case. But we (in India) don't even do that. We just teach them to read by character recognition so that when they are reading, they are merely making the right noises. Not reading as we understand the word in any logical sense. Then we teach them parts of various books of Tafsir, Hadith and Fiqh. And graduate them with the title of A'alim. The sheer illogicality of this doesn't strike us.

We should have instead, focused on teaching them Akhlaaq and on purifying themselves. Then we should have taught them the tools of learning: Literacy, numeracy, logic, critical analysis, rules of differing in opinion, research methodology, journal writing, self-realization and most importantly, manners and piety. Today we

don't even talk of Zuhd and Akhlaaq. We don't mention the importance of Ikhlaas (sincerity). We have no shame in seeking name and fame and in making Islam, including Da'awa, into a business and a means of earning a living. This is totally against the Sunnah of Rasoolullah ﷺ and the sunnah of all the Anbiya.

After teaching them these things and after they have passed practical tests on Akhlaaq (by observing their behavior. Not merely passing exams by rote learning) they should be permitted to enter classes of higher learning where they learn the actual subjects of Islamic sciences. I hope this system (which used to be practiced in the early days of Islamic history) is revived and students once again learn Islam in a way that is distinct and differentiated from learning any other body of knowledge. Today's system of learning and teaching needs to be completely changed before it causes more harm.

Finally, a reminder on the position of the Learner and the Teacher.

Position of the Learner:

1. Approach the teacher as a supplicant in need. You are the one in need. Reflect on that and approach the teacher with humility and the willingness to learn. Check your Ikhlaas often. It is a very shaky thing.
2. Be willing to take the pain. Learning is painful. Behavioral change is even more painful. Be prepared for that. Welcome that. And know that it is for your benefit. Accept it and work through it so that you can benefit from the learning. Tazkiyya and Tarbiyya are the keys to success.
3. Focus on your own correction. Not on pointing fingers at others, criticizing the teacher, arguing with the teacher, engaging in debates or condemning others. In the end, it is your own behavior and actions which will determine your location in the Aakhirah. Not what anyone else is doing.

4. Do it for the love of Allahﷻ alone. Teach and learn Islam like the Anbiya did; for the pleasure of Allahﷻ and because you love Him alone. Not for any other reason. Definitely not to make money or use Islam as a means of earning a living.

Position of the Teacher

1. Consider it his need. Because on the Day of Judgment he will be asked what he did with the knowledge that Allahﷻ gave him. He must teach with sincerity, dedication and above all else, with love. His love for his students must be visible in his teaching and must enable him to stand in the night before Allahﷻ and make dua for them.
2. Be willing to learn. The teacher must remember that he is not the recipient of Wahi and so he is also a learner. His students may well be able to teach him things that he would not otherwise have been able to learn. He must appreciate the opportunity that his students provide him to improve his own understanding of Islam, because the best way to learn is to teach. Without students he would not have been able to benefit from this way.
3. Seek your own Islaah. The teacher must have a spiritual mentor of his own, who corrects him and guides him. Anyone who thinks that he does not need correction has been deceived by Shaytaan.
4. Practice what you preach. This is self-evident but still must be mentioned because it is lacking in many cases. Students listen with their eyes. It is the company of the teacher which is the best school and where a student learns more than in any lecture. However, that company must not be contaminated by the teacher's own lack of manners, greed, envy, seeking personal gain, lack of piety, arrogance and pretensions of high status. Any teacher who doesn't conform to these standards is not fit to teach Islam.

This is the reason that when one wants to learn Islam, it is necessary first to subject yourself to some tests: Here are some questions we need to answer:

Tarbiyya Self-Test

1. Do I love Allahﷻ and His Messenger more or do I love myself, my wealth, position, society, friends and associates more? Because Allahﷻ said:

قُلْ إِنْ كَانَ آبَاؤُكُمْ وَأَبْنَاؤُكُمْ وَإِخْوَانُكُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُكُمْ وَعَشِيرَتُكُمْ وَأَمْوَالٌ اقْتَرَفْتُمُوهَا وَتِجَارَةٌ تَخْشَوْنَ كَسَادَهَا وَمَسَاكِنُ تَرْضَوْنَهَا أَحَبَّ إِلَيْكُمْ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَجِهَادٍ فِي سَبِيلِهِ فَتَرَبَّصُوا حَتَّى يَأْتِيَ اللَّهُ بِأَمْرِهِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفَاسِقِينَ

Tawba 9:24. Say: If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your wives, your kindred, the wealth that you have gained, the commerce in which you fear a decline, and the dwellings in which you delight ... are dearer to you than Allâh and His Messenger, and striving hard and fighting in His Cause, then wait until Allâh brings about His Decision (torment). And Allâh guides not the people who are Al-Fâsiqûn (the rebellious, disobedient to Allâh).

Let's ask ourselves what the proof of that is? Find data in our lives to support whatever we wrote. What is not visible in our life doesn't exist, no matter what we may think of yourselves.

2. Do I want to live to establish Allahﷻ's law on the face of the earth or do I want to really live my life the way I feel like and follow whatever is suitable to it in Islam and either leave the rest or try to change it? For Allahﷻ said:

فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا
مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا

An-Nisa 4:65 But no, by your Rabb, they can have no Faith, until they make you (O Muhammad) judge in all disputes between them, and find in themselves no resistance against your decisions, and accept (them) with full submission.

وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا لِمُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَىٰ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ
وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا مُّبِينًا

Al-Ahzaab 33:36 It is not for a believer, man or woman, when Allâh and His Messenger have decreed a matter that they should have any option in their decision. And whoever disobeys Allâh and His Messenger, he has indeed strayed in a plain error.

إِنَّمَا كَانَ قَوْلَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذَا دُعُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَهُمْ أَنْ يَقُولُوا سَمِعْنَا
وَأَطَعْنَا وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

An-Nur 24:51 All that the believers say, when they are called to Allah and His Messenger that he may judge between them, is that they say, 'We hear, and we obey: it is these who are successful.

3. Am I ready to enter Islam fully or am I among those who want to take what suits them and leave the rest? Because Allahﷻ said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ادْخُلُوا فِي السِّلْمِ كَآفَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ
عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ

Baqara 2:208. O you who believe! Enter completely into Islâm (by obeying all the rules and regulations of Islâm) and follow not the footsteps of Shaitân (Satan). Verily! He is to you a plain enemy.

لَا تَعْتَذِرُوا قَدْ كَفَرْتُمْ بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ إِنَّ نَعْفَ عَنْ طَائِفَةٍ مِّنْكُمْ نُعَذِّبُ طَائِفَةً بِأَنَّهُمْ
كَانُوا مُجْرِمِينَ

At-Taubah 9:66 Make no excuse; you have disbelieved after you had believed. If We pardon some of you, We will punish others amongst you because they were Mujrimûn (sinners, criminals).

وَقَدْ نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الْكِتَابِ أَنْ إِذَا سَمِعْتُمْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ يُكْفَرُ بِهَا وَيُسْتَهْزَأُ بِهَا فَلَا
تَقْعُدُوا مَعَهُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَخُوضُوا فِي حَدِيثٍ غَيْرِهِ إِنَّكُمْ إِذَا مَثَلْتُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ جَامِعُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ
وَالْكَافِرِينَ فِي جَهَنَّمَ جَمِيعًا

An-Nisa 4:140 And it has already been revealed to you in the Book (this Qur'ân) that when you hear the Ayaat of Allâh being denied and mocked at, then sit not with them, until they engage in a talk other than that; (but if you stayed with them) certainly in that case you would be like them. Surely, Allâh will collect the hypocrites and disbelievers all together in Hell

This self-test is not exhaustive by any means and I am sure we can add some more questions of our own. My intention is to give you an idea of the framework. Once you are ready with the answers it will give you an idea of the areas you need to work on to get yourself ready to receive the message.

For the Baraka of Islam to manifest itself in our lives it is essential to prepare the heart to receive the message by intense training. This is by no means easy or painless. How much difficulty and pain we suffer in this preparatory stage depends on the degree to which our heart has become used to worshipping our desires. It is like the famous Native American story of the two wolves – one good and one bad – that are in eternal combat in our heart. The child asked his grandfather who told him the story,

“Grandfather, which wolf wins?” His grandfather smiled and replied, “The one you feed.”

Similarly, the Nafs – desire – which we nurtured all our life and allowed to have its own way and to grow fat and strong on self-indulgence will not take kindly to being curbed and prevented from fulfilling its every desire. After all this is what we allowed it to do all its life until now. Suddenly now we say, “You can’t do this and that and the other. You have to pray regularly and lower your gaze and cover yourself, grow your beard, don’t eat or drink doubtful things, be polite, don’t curse or lie.” Naturally the Nafs will rebel. So be prepared for pain and turmoil. This sometimes takes the form of doubts, fears and anger with yourself – though we may not recognize it as such and direct the anger at others. But we must get through this stage and subdue our Nafs to the law of Allahﷻ that Rasoolullahﷺ taught us.

Because he said, “Your Imaan is not complete until you submit your desires to the Deen which I have brought.” (Approximate meaning). Allahﷻ said about the Nafs;

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَنَبَلُوكُمْ بِالشَّرِّ وَالْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ

Al-Anbiya 21:35 Every human being is bound to taste death; and We test you [all] through the bad and the good [things of life] by way of trial: and unto Us you all must return.

أَرَأَيْتَ مَنْ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ أَفَأَنْتَ تَكُونُ عَلَيْهِ وَكِيلاً
أَمْ تَحْسَبُ أَنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ أَوْ يَعْقِلُونَ إِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلاً

Al-Furqaan 25:43-44 Have you (O Muhammad) seen him who takes as his ilah (god) his own vain desire? Would you then be a Wakil over him?? Or do you think that most of them

hear and understand? They are only cattle – nay they are even farther astray from the Path (worse than cattle).

فَلَمَّا نَسُوا مَا ذُكِّرُوا بِهِ فَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ أَبْوَابَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا فَرِحُوا بِمَا أُوتُوا
أَخَذْنَاهُمْ بِغْتَةٍ فَاذَا هُمْ مُبْلِسُونَ

Al-Anam 6:44 Then, when they had forgotten all that they had been told to take to heart, We threw open to them the gates of all [good] things until - even as they were rejoicing in what they had been granted - We suddenly took them to task: and lo! they were broken in spirit;

So, you see, if we want the Baraka of the knowledge of Islam to permeate our lives then we must make some effort to become ready for the knowledge to work.

Otherwise let us remember that knowledge which only increases us in disobedience and which we use to try to deceive Allahﷻ and His Messenger and to try to find ways to indulge ourselves at the expense of the laws of Allahﷻ, is misguidance of Shaytaan and on the Day of Judgment this knowledge will become witness against us instead of helping us to achieve salvation.

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَقُولُ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَمَا هُمْ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ
يُخَادِعُونَ اللَّهَ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَمَا يَخْدَعُونَ إِلَّا أَنفُسَهُمْ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ
فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَّرَضٌ فَزَادَهُمُ اللَّهُ مَرَضًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْذِبُونَ

Baqara 2:8-10 And of mankind, there are some (hypocrites) who say: "We believe in Allâh and the Last Day" while in fact they believe not. **9.** They (think to) deceive Allâh and those who believe, while they only deceive themselves, and perceive (it) not! **10.** In their hearts is a disease (of doubt and hypocrisy) and Allâh has increased their disease. A painful torment is theirs because they used to tell lies.

I ask Allahﷻ for His help to do what is pleasing to Him at all times irrespective of whether it pleases anyone else or not. Having said that, let me also assure you that whatever you do, good or bad, will please someone or the other. That is why it is best to be concerned about pleasing Allahﷻ because what pleases Him, will please all good people. And that is all that matters.