



Center for Cultural
and Ethical Studies

Spiritual Quest

**A Biannual Journal of
Ethics and Spirituality**

Vol. 10 | No. 2 | Summer & Autumn 2020

Islamic Lifestyle - Part III

Muhammad Ali Shomali

Abstract



Islam not only places great emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge, but has also provided guidelines on what to study, when to study, how to study and who to acquire this knowledge from. This article, which is structured on the book of Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli, titled *Mafatih al-Hayat* or the *Keys to Life*, aims to shed some light on the above-mentioned topics by firstly alluding to the merits and virtue of learning and teaching and the rewards associated with them, then categorizing the subjects and topics that one should prioritize in order to fulfil their religious duties and responsibilities, and lastly focusing on certain etiquette and mannerisms that must be adhered to by the seeker of knowledge. All of this is discussed based on the Glorious Quran and traditions from the Ahlul Bayt (a).

Keywords

Learning, teaching, knowledge, beneficial knowledge, religious sciences, practical skills.

The Merits of Learning and Teaching

In discussions on the merits of knowledge, great emphasis has been placed on teaching. Hence, in addition to seeking knowledge, a person should also seek opportunities to spread that knowledge with sincerity and pure intention. A *hadith* from Imam al-Baqir (a) reads:

عن أبي جعفر عليه السلام قال: إن الذي يعلم العلم منكم له أجر مثل أجر المتعلم وله الفضل عليه، فتعلموا العلم من حملة العلم وعلموه إخوانكم كما علمكموه العلماء

The one among you who teaches other people has a similar reward to the one who is being taught, but with something extra. So learn knowledge from its possessors, and teach your brothers just as you have learnt from the scholars (‘ulama). (Hilli, 1411 AH, p. 595)

In this tradition, we notice some important points. Firstly, the one who teaches has everything that has been mentioned regarding the *thawab* and reward for learning, in addition to something more; and, more importantly, “Learn knowledge from its possessors”. So, when you want to buy something, you should go to the main suppliers. Do not be satisfied with getting it from someone who has a limited quantity. Always go to the source, to the nearest main supplier. If you can go to grand ‘ulama, then go to them. If not, then go to someone who is available, who is a carrier of knowledge, not someone who has just recorded something in his mind and is just passing it on.

We will discuss the importance of teaching in detail. Ayatullah Jawadi mentions a few things which can be understood from the above *hadith*. One is that we have to be very selective, especially since there are so many things to learn. Today there is an explosion of information; there are numerous courses, resources, and books. Therefore, we need to be extremely selective.

Seeking Beneficial Knowledge

In a *hadith* from Amirul Mu'minin (a), he states:

العلم أكثر من أن يحاط به، فخذوا من كل علم أحسنه

Knowledge is far greater than can be completely encapsulated, so take from all knowledge the best of it. (Tamimi Amudi, 1366 AH, p. 98)

So seeking knowledge requires a selective nature. Furthermore, when Amirul Mu'minin (a) talks about the *muttaqin* (those who are conscious of God) in the Sermon of the God-conscious, he describes them as:

وقفوا أسماعهم على العلم النافع

They have dedicated their ears to the knowledge which is beneficial. (*Nahj al-balagha*, 303)

There are many things that if known or not known would not make that much difference to a person. In a famous *hadith*, it is reported:

قال: دخل رسول الله ﷺ المسجد فإذا جماعة قد أطافوا برجل فقال: ما هذا؟ ف قيل: علامة يا رسول الله فقال: وما العلامة؟ فقالوا له: أعلم الناس بأنساب العرب ووقائعها وأيام الجاهلية والأشعار العربية فقال النبي ﷺ: ذاك علم لا يضر من جهله، ولا ينفع من علمه

One day, the Holy Prophet (s) entered the mosque and saw a group of people gathered around a person. He asked, "What is this?"

"He is an '*allamah* (very knowledgeable person), O

Prophet of God,” they replied.

He then asked, “What kind of ‘*allamah*?”

They replied, “He is the most knowledgeable concerning the genealogy of the Arabs, the history of their wars and pre-Islamic days, their poetry, and the Arabic language.”

To this, the Holy Prophet replied, “This is knowledge that neither benefits the one who knows it, nor harms the one who is ignorant of it.” (Hilli, 1411 AH, p. 627)

What we notice in this tradition is that the Holy Prophet(s) never asked about the individual but twice asked about the “what”. Basically, we can conclude that the ‘*allamah*’ was what can be called a “melting pot” (*kashkul*) of historical and biographical data.

Although it is knowledge, it is “knowledge that neither benefits the one who knows it, nor harms the one who is ignorant of it.” But life is too short; even if a person were to live for a hundred years, which itself is extremely rare, it would not be sufficient. If one were to go to a library, life would not permit the reading of all the numerous beneficial books within it – hence the need to be very selective.

A noteworthy example of a personal first-hand example that can be presented is when the author was studying for his PhD (1997) at the University of Manchester. Initially, the library’s database was used as a means to search for relevant books in the database of the university library, as the topic that was being researched was ethical relativism. Within the search, more than 1300 books and articles about ethical relativism were found. Even if only these books and articles were going to be studied and nothing else, it would have taken years to complete these 1300 titles. Therefore, being selective and identifying what title was necessary was of utmost importance, as after the best titles are identified, based on author and content, the rest becomes repetitive.

Firstly, entries on ethical relativism in encyclopaedias were read, because encyclopaedias have a team of authors, so the best experts in the field are chosen to write entries. In addition to providing important references, these encyclopaedia entries were written in a classic, comprehensive and up-to-date manner. Thereafter the references that were mentioned in these entries were followed up on and so on. This resulted in the thesis being submitted within two years and nine months, despite other responsibilities. Hence, it is extremely important to be very selective; the first point is to be able to differentiate between those things which are a priority and those which are not, and then, even among those titles which are a priority, they must be classified in order of importance.

This is an important point for the youth: they need to pay special attention to this matter, as even though this point is important for those who are in the later or middle stages of their lives, the formative period of one's life is the period of youth. A decision made at this stage can affect a person for the entirety of his or her life. Additionally, unlike the later stages, opportunities for change are more probable in one's youth.

Stressing the importance of learning at this stage, Amirul Mu'minin (a) said:

أولى الأشياء أن يتعلمها الاحداث الأشياء التي إذا صاروا رجالا احتاجوا إليها

The most important things that the youth should learn are those things that they will need when they become older. (Ibn Abil Hadid, 1404 AH, vol. 20, p. 333)

For in later life, it may be difficult for one to start learning something because of lack of time or maybe because of learning difficulties. But if something was begun at an early stage, it only needs to be developed. Therefore, learning necessary and

important material during one's youth is another priority.

What Should be Learnt?

So, what are some of the things that must be learnt? The answer can be summarised in this way. In Islam, sometimes the discussion is about information, while at others it is about disciplines. These are two different things. Information is not always beneficial, since there is some information that is better not to know.

لَا تَسْأَلُوا عَنْ أَشْيَاءَ إِنْ تُبْدَ لَكُمْ تَسُؤْكُمْ

Do not ask about things that, if they are disclosed to you, they will upset you. (Qur'an, 5:101)

For example, it is better that the secrets of others are not known, or even things about myself. If someone has said something bad about me, it is better that it is not known by me, because if it becomes known to me, it may be difficult to interact normally with that person. Therefore, it is not necessary for every single bit of information to be known. There are many things that should remain unknown. Curiosity has to be controlled and regulated.

On the contrary, when it comes to the different types of disciplines and sciences, they are all generally good. Although Islam does not have an issue with any science, the manner of its usage is very important. For example, the science of magic in itself is not bad, but because usually it is misused, the *'ulama* and scholars have said that it should not be learnt or be taught unless there is a genuine need to have experts in order to solve the problems created by mischievous magicians. If the science itself was absolutely bad, then why should some people learn it? Furthermore, why did Allah (swt) send those two angels, Harut and Marut? Thus, the usage of any science has to be very carefully

administered and regulated. It is in this area where the discussion on the ethics of technology, usage, etc. occurs. Nevertheless, since there are so many different things that can be learnt, there must be a distinguished order of priority.

In this regard, two things need to be sought. One, the learning of those things which are required by all and which lead to becoming a better person. So, this involves *akhlaq* (ethics), religion, and faith. Two, the needs of society must be taken into consideration. Does society need teachers, doctors, engineers, etc.? Society requires different experts so that people can live their lives. This is also a priority. Therefore, everyone must learn how to become a better person and how to become a better servant of Allah (swt), and only after this stage can the discussion move to the stage of specialising; some can specialise in the Islamic sciences, while others can specialise in other sciences. There is no problem in learning skills or practices, but one cannot just simply say, “Because I am a doctor or an engineer, I do not want to know about religion.” Although it is not necessary for everyone to become an expert in religion, it is necessary for everyone to at least have a sound, firm and deep understanding of their religion so as not to be confused by others. The minimum requirement is for one to know the basics and to know where and to whom to turn to when questions arise.

Sciences which are needed

Religious Sciences

In this section, those sciences which are needed will be discussed further. The first of these sciences is the religious sciences. In a famous *hadith* from Imam al-Rida (a), he is quoted as saying:

أبا الحسن علي بن موسى الرضا عليه السلام يقول رحمه الله عبد أحياناً أمرنا

May Allah's mercy be on the one who revives our affair.

This tradition indicates that one can believe in the teachings, cause, and affairs of the Ahlul Bayt (a), but it still may not be something which is alive. It is very important that life is given to it (as the text says - ahya); it must be revived and enlivened. It is not sufficient for this knowledge to remain in the books and minds of the people; it has to be a living experience.

فقلت له: وكيف يحيي أمركم؟ قال: يتعلم علومنا ويعلمها الناس، فإن
الناس لو علموا محاسن كلامنا لاتبعونا

The Imam was then asked, "How can your affair be revived?"

The Imam (a) replied, "By learning our sciences (knowledge) and teaching people, for if they come to know the beauty of our words, they would surely follow us." (Ibn Babawayh, 1361 SH, p. 180)

So, one has to first learn the teachings of Ahlul Bayt (a) and then teach them to others. Additionally, when the tradition refers to "people", it does not just mean the Shia, but the general public. It can mean Sunni Muslims or it can even mean non-Muslims. It can refer to any person who is not from the local Shia community.

Additionally, the tradition does not advocate that everything be said to people, but rather that which is beautiful for people should be said. In this regard, some of the words of the Ahlul Bayt (a) may be beautiful specifically to the Shia, but would not lead people to follow the Ahlul Bayt (a) and in fact may lead them to question and become troubled by such statements. Indeed, one must learn the teachings of Ahlul Bayt (a), but must also learn *hikmah* (wisdom), as Allah Almighty says:

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom. (16:125)

A person must possess the wisdom to know what teachings of the Ahlul Bayt (a) will be appreciated by people, as not only will they then say that this makes sense, but they will say that this actually makes perfect sense and this is better than what can be found in other places. Then they will surely follow them, but if something is said that will confuse and trouble them, or make them unhappy or angry, then how are they going to follow the Ahlul Bayt (a)? Hence, beautiful words in the tradition may indicate that it must be beautiful for people and not just a specific group, and that both the Shia and others find these words beautiful and attractive.

Imam ‘Askari (a) said:

ألا فمن كان من شيعتنا عالماً بعلومنا فهدى الجاهل بشريعتنا...
وأرشده وعلمه شريعتنا كان معنا في الرفيق الأعلى...

Be mindful that the one who is from our Shia and is learnt regarding our teachings and he guides someone who does not know our *Shariah* [i.e. the teachings of the Ahlul Bayt (a)]... so that he leads him to and teaches him our path: he [the teacher] will be with us in the elevated stations of Paradise.
(Tabarsi, 1403 AH, p. 16)

This concept of *ta'lim* (teaching) is very important. It does not mean to merely pass on information or to even to ensure that the student remembers, but it is the passing of light and *nur* from the heart of one person to the heart of another via mental concepts and the mind. For example, if a person has a garden and has planted flowers in it, these flowers will grow in his soil. However, if he cuts a flower from his garden and gives it to someone else, this flower is

not going to remain alive; it is going to die and dry up. Even if that person keeps that dried flower in his room, it is not a flower and soon will become dust. Similarly, knowledge is something beautiful that a person has grown in their heart, and teaching enables that knowledge to be planted and grown in the heart of another, so that it will remain forever. This is what *ta'lim* with regards to the teachings of Ahlul Bayt (a) is; *ta'lim* of physics and maths is one thing, but *ta'lim* of something that is from faith and *nur* cannot only go from mind to mind. It therefore may be for this reason that Imam 'Askari (a) mentions such a high reward for a person who is at the service of another for this type of knowledge.

Qur'anic Sciences

Among those sciences which are strongly highlighted is the teaching of the Qur'an. Amirul Mu'minin (a) was very particular about teaching his children the Qur'an, starting with recitation (qira'ah); even though they were Arabs, they still needed to be trained.

كان امير المؤمنين علي ليامر ولده بقراءة المصحف

Imam Amirul Mu'minin Ali (a) would regularly instruct his son to recite the Qur'an. (Hilli, 1411 AH, p. 645)

There is a story found in the book *Manaqib Ibn Shahrashub* that mentions a person named 'Abd al-Rahman Sullami who taught a child of Imam Husayn (a), other than Imam Sajjad (a), Surah al-Hamd. When the child read the surah for Imam Husayn (a), Imam Husayn (a) gave the teacher 1,000 dinars and 1,000 fine outfits of clothing. This story indicates that even the Imams (a) would ask someone else to teach their children the Qur'an, as sometimes either one is too busy or children may learn better from another person, even if the parent is a scholar, because there is a kind of informality.

Therefore, it may be better for someone else to teach them.

The story continues whereby people were surprised at the generosity of the Imam (a) towards the teacher, to which the Imam (a) replied, “What is this in comparison to what he has given, i.e. the teaching of the recitation of the Glorious Qur’an?”

(Ibn Shahrashub, 1379 AH, vol. 4, p. 66)

Consequently, teaching the Qur’an is very important and, likewise, teaching *hadith* is also very important. It has been greatly recommended to teach *hadith*. A *hadith* reported from Imam al-Baqir (a) in this regard reads:

قال تنازعوا في طلب العلم، والذي نفسي بيده، لحديث واحد في حلال وحرام تأخذه عن صادق، خير من الدنيا وما حملت من ذهب وفضة

Compete in the attaining of knowledge, I swear by He who has my life in His hands that the goodness of learning one tradition regarding the permitted and forbidden (halal and haram) from a trustworthy and reliable person is better than the world and all the gold and silver it contains. (Hilli, 1411 AH, p. 645)

This tradition shows that it is very important to know from whom knowledge is being received, as the Imam (a) did not say to just learn *hadith*, but rather to learn *hadith* from a person who believes in what he says and is a reliable person (sadiq).

Secondly, the last phrase of the tradition cannot be understood unless two things become clear. One may ask and be surprised, “How can one *hadith* be better than the whole world and what it contains?” Firstly, it must be understood that the world (dunya) has no value, and secondly, that everything concerning the Hereafter and the spirit are great. Unfortunately, the greatness of spiritual gifts is not understood, and the world is seen as being very magnificent,

so this tradition may surprise some. Similarly, how can the Imam (a) give 1,000 gold coins to someone for just teaching Surah al-Hamd? How can learning one *hadith* be better than the whole world? In fact, this means that you cannot compare them. For example, if one is asked, “What is the value of your father or your child, one million dollars or one billion dollars?” the reply will be, “Why are you offending me, who do you think I am? You think I don’t have any love for my father and children? Why are you asking me about money? This is an insult.” Therefore, religion, reward, knowledge, etc. are even greater than this.

Learning *Fiqh*

Fiqh is very important. There is a well-known *hadith* about a person who said to Amirul Mu’minin (a):

يا أمير المؤمنين! إني أريد التجارة قال: «أفقهت في دين الله؟» قال: «يكون بعد ذلك» قال: «ويحك الفقه ثم المتجر».

فإنه من باع واشترى، ولم يسأل عن حرام ولا حلال، ارتطم في ربا ثم ارتطم.

“O Amirul Mu’minin, I want to go into business.” The Imam responded to him, “Have you learnt the laws of religion?”

The man replied, “I will learn them later.”

“Woe be upon you! First learn religious laws, then go into business, for surely one who buys and sells but does not ask about the permitted and forbidden will fall into the ditch of usury.” (Tamimi, 1375 AH, vol. 2, 16)

In Islam, *tijarah* or business is one of the good things that can be

done, in addition to other occupations which are recommended, such as farming and agriculture. However, the Imam (a) first asks whether or not the person has learnt those rulings which are essential for him to know. To which the reply was what many of us today give: “God-willing when time is found, after my business is established, then I will learn them.” The Imam concludes that if one does not know or ask about the permitted and forbidden, it is very likely that the forbidden will be done, because it is not known that it is forbidden.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance that among those things that are learnt in religion are those *masa'il* and matters that are applicable to every individual, and those that may be specific to a person's situation, which are called *mubtala bihi*. Thus, if someone has to know something, they must learn the relevant rulings and read the *risalah* or manual of Islamic laws. Again, it is not necessary for one to know the whole manual, but at least they should know or find out those rulings that affect and are applicable to them.

Learning Practical and Useful Skills

Another important point is learning skills and getting trained to perform productive tasks. It is not good to just learn some theories, but be unable to undertake any job or task. A person should be able to undertake some professions. For example, Amirul Mu'minin (a) says:

الحرفة مع العفة خير من الغنى مع الفجور

To have a job with modesty is better than being rich but sinful. (Tamimi Amudi, 1366 SH, p. 354)

Thus, it is good to have a job, but Ayatullah Jawadi says that this

tradition also means that we have to train ourselves for different jobs and different tasks.

Learning Hobbies and Sports

In addition to skills for jobs, it is also recommended to learn some skills that would not be considered as a job. They can be called hobbies or skills which might be useful for society. For example, a *hadith* from Rasul Allah (s) states:

عَلِّمُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ السَّيِّحَةَ

Teach your children swimming. (Kulayni, 1365 AH, vol. 6, p. 48)

This certainly for some may become an occupation, but it is unlikely that this what Rasul Allah (s) meant; rather, he meant that this skill is something that can help a person at some time during his life. More so, it is amazing that Rasul Allah (s) said this in the middle of the desert. If people were living close to the sea, swimming would be something they must definitely learn, but Rasul Allah (s) meant that, even for a person living in the desert, perhaps one day knowing this skill might come in handy; it may save one's life or that of others. Furthermore, in order to defend one's territory, certain skills are needed.

In another tradition, he states:

عَلِّمُوا أَبْنَاءَكُمْ الرَّمِيَّ

Teach your children archery. (Rawandi, 1408 AH, p. 45)

Archery can of course be learnt to be played as a sport, as there are also other options in this regard. However, the tradition

means to teach them how to be able to use means of defence. So, these are among those things that can be mentioned as skills, but it is not limited to only these. For example, in this age it is very important that driving be learnt and taught, because today if someone cannot drive it is a problem. It is also important to teach them at a proper age how to use a computer, because if someone today cannot use a computer, then he may face many limitations. Of course, it should be done at the right time.

Learning Literature and Poetry

Another thing which is recommended to teach children and, of course, learn ourselves, because something not known cannot be taught, is literature and poetry. However, this does not mean every poem, as the Qur'an is critical of those who used poetry as a vehicle to just state their imagination and sometimes even deceive people. On the contrary, a poem is a very important vehicle for conveying deep spiritual, theological, philosophical, social, and ethical meanings. For example, if we use an ambulance to carry bricks from one point to another, it is a misuse of the ambulance. Every vehicle has to be used for the highest purpose that it can be used for. Hence, poems should be used for wise and spiritual ideas which would impact the heart, not just for singing, flights of fancy, romance, etc. For instance, it is reported:

كان أمير المؤمنين عليه السلام يعجبه أن يروى شعر أبي طالب عليه السلام وأن
يدون، وقال تعلموه وعلموه أولادكم
فإنه كان على دين الله وفيه علم كثير

Amirul Mu'minin (a) was happy to see that people read, recited and compiled the poems by Abu Talib. He said, "You should learn these poems and

teach them to your children, for surely Abu Talib was upon the religion of Allah (Islam), and within them [i.e. the poems], there is great knowledge.”
(Amuli, 1409 AH, vol. 17, p. 331)

Not only was Abu Talib a very faithful person and a man of virtue, but he also had the ability to compose poems and express wise ideas. So Amirul Mu'minin (a) was very happy that people read poems by Abu Talib because some people used to read the poems of *jahiliyyah*, but the poems of Abu Talib were different.

Therefore, teach poems, but also the poems of others, so we can say that it does not imply only one poem and one poet. Although this is a great example, there can also be other examples.

Manners of Learning and Teaching

In addition to the merits and virtues of learning and teaching, Islam also provides guidelines on how to study. This next section will focus on the manners of learning and teaching.

Learning from Those who are Qualified

The first form of etiquette is to learn from those who are qualified. If food is not taken from every hand because of fear of poisoning, knowledge is no less important. Indeed, the good thing about being poisoned by food is that the results are seen quickly, notifying a person that there is a problem, but the problem with the poisoning of ideas and thoughts is that they are enjoyed and require more poison; it is like a person who is an addict. It is not that he starts vomiting or having a fever; actually, if he stops, he feels uncomfortable and gets a headache if he does not take the drug. Hence, poisoning of thoughts can be very dangerous, very gentle and very subtle. It is

not noticed, and one may actually start enjoying it.

There are numerous traditions in this regard; some will be mentioned below. Rasul Allah (s) said:

لَوْ عَلِمَ النَّاسُ مَا فِي طَلَبِ الْعِلْمِ لَطَلَبُوهُ وَلَوْ بِسَفْكِ الْمُهْجِ وَخَوْضِ
الْجُجِ.

If people knew what is involved in seeking knowledge, they definitely would seek it even though it entails considerable sacrifice and enduring extreme hardship. (Kulayni, 1365 AH, vol. 1, p. 30)

There is no exception; we do not say that you have to become an *'alim*, we do not say you have to become full-time or part-time *talebah*, but as much as one can, one must seek knowledge. Perhaps for someone, seeking knowledge occupies a few hours per day, but for someone else, it occupies a few hours per week. However, every person can and must do at least one hour per day, for anything less may not include him or her within the above tradition. Unfortunately, sometimes we do not seek knowledge, and even if knowledge is brought to us, we close our eyes and ears. When we see a lecture on TV, we change the channel; when a lecture is being given in the *masjid*, we leave. When given a book, we leave it aside. So, knowledge is coming to us, but we do not welcome it, although we are actually supposed to seek knowledge, even by going to China or even if it entails some difficulties.

وَلَوْ بِسَفْكِ الْمُهْجِ وَخَوْضِ الْجُجِ

Seek knowledge, even if it entails great sacrifice and strife. (Ibid., 35)

Can any Muslim be found who questions this tradition – Shia or

Sunni?

Indeed, it is accepted by all Muslims. How then are we going to answer Rasul Allah (s)? Are we going to say, “Yes, we listened to this *faridah* and obligation?” Therefore, in my view, one hour is the minimum; it may even not be enough, but it is the least we can do.

The Places of Knowledge

Additionally, besides the how, there is also the where. Rasul Allah (s) is reported to have said:

فاطلبوا العلم من مظانه واقتبسوه من أهله

... So, seek knowledge from its proper places and people. (Tusi, 1414 AH, p. 569)

Knowledge cannot be sought from a TV channel which is, for example, intended for other things and just once a day broadcasts a lecture. This is not a platform for knowledge. It is the same with newspapers or secular settings, like secular universities. One can go to secular universities to perhaps learn some techniques and skills, even about Islamic Studies; going or not is the focus but rather religion cannot be learnt from a secular college or university. On the contrary, the acquisition of religious education must be done via proper platforms which are specifically prepared for this endeavour; they have authenticity, originality, and loyalty to the tradition. How can someone who does not believe teach our children religion?

In this UK, a person who teaches religion can be an atheist. First-hand experience has shown that many who were doing a PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate of Education) course were atheists who wanted to teach religion. They claim that religion is a kind of objective subject, and as long as it is taught objectively,

it is fine. Yet how can someone who has already decided against religion and faith in God teach religion objectively?! It is not possible. So, seeking religious knowledge does not mean seeking it from any platform and every person, and then to feel pleased that a certificate has been obtained.

To conclude this section, a tradition quoted from Dhu al-Qarnayn will be mentioned. Rasul Allah (s) is reported to have said:

من وصية ذي القرنين لا تتعلم العلم ممن لم ينتفع به، فإن من لم ينفعه علمه لا ينفعك

One piece of advice from Dhu al-Qarnayn was: Do not learn knowledge from one who has not benefited from it. For surely, one who has not benefitted from his knowledge will not benefit you.

(Rawandi, 1408 AH, p. 63)

“Do not learn knowledge from one who has not benefited from it.” For example, a person is teaching religion, but he does not believe in it. Or, he tells you how to look after your mental health, but he himself has mental issues. He tells you to look after your diet, but he himself does not look after his diet. You cannot benefit from him. Then, Dhu al-Qarnayn brings an argument. He says, “For surely, one who has not benefitted from his knowledge will not benefit you.” If he did not believe and practice, it would be almost impossible for it and him to have an impact on you, even though there may be a slim chance of some “benefit”. If something is said and the person who it is said to knows that the speaker does not believe or appreciate it and it is just a way to gain some benefit, it will not have any impact. Furthermore, it will not have an effect if it is known that the speaker is actually against the claim. So, it is possible that those who are atheists and who do not believe in a religion may use their teaching positions in fact to undermine religion.

Knowledge is a Treasure

There is a *hadith* found in *al-Kafi* that is worthy of deliberation.

Amirul Mu'minin (a) says:

أيها الناس اعلّموا... والعلم مخزون عند أهله وقد أمرتم بطلبه من أهله
فاطلبوه

O people! Know, surely... knowledge is a treasure stored with its people, and indeed you have been commanded to seek it from them. So seek it.
(Kulayni, 1365 AH, vol. 1, p. 30)

Among the things he (a) mentions in this tradition are: "...knowledge is stored with its people and indeed you have been commanded to seek it from them. So seek it." This means that, as was previously mentioned, first, seek knowledge, and, secondly, its proper people must be found – people who are *ahlul 'ilm* and who are truly dedicated to knowledge.

The point that is worthy of focus is when the Imam (a) says, "*Ilm* (knowledge) is a stored treasure," indicating that it is something hidden. Sometimes people think that just being next to an '*alim* makes one an '*alim*. However, even if one's father is an '*alim*, his mother is an '*alimah*, and his brother and sister are an '*alim* or '*alimah*, it does not make the individual an '*alim*. Similarly, if one meets an '*alim* ten times a day, it does not make him an '*alim*; if he has lots of books around him, it does not make him an '*alim*. Even if he goes to the *hawza* every day, it does not make him '*alim*. Knowledge is like a treasure which is not found on the surface; one must dig a little bit deeper in order to find it. In other words, it needs a deliberate attempt to get it.

Akhlaq is somehow different; if someone has *husnul khulq* (a good demeanour), one can gain something even by just meeting that

person. It is like fragrance. If someone is wearing perfume and we are close to him or shake his hand, we can also acquire it. However, knowledge does not spread like fragrance; for, in order to gain knowledge, one needs to talk to that person, listen to that person, sit on the floor and take notes. Yes, the fragrance of knowledge can be seen in an *'alim* if he is really an *'alim*. His sight can be a means of pleasure, but one cannot become an *'alim* by just looking at him.

For example, it is mentioned in the *hadith* literature that:

النظر إلى وجه العالم عبادة

Looking at the face of an *'alim* is *'ibadah* (worship).
(Amili, 1409 AH, vol. 12, p. 312)

Or:

النظر إلى باب العالم عبادة

Looking at the door of *'alim* is *'ibadah*. (Fahd Hilli, 1407 AH, p. 75)

Is it *'ibadah* to just look at him or at his door? In fact, it means to take one step further and try to learn. Therefore, *'ilm* is *makhzun* (hidden); *'ilm* is not something like fragrance or rain which is spread all over the world. In contrast, it must be searched for it and obtained. So, even if one is a son of an *'allamah* or ayatollah, it does not necessarily make him an *'alim*; indeed, it may help him, but it does not make him an *'alim* unless he makes the required efforts.

Patience

Another crucial aspect of learning is that one should be patient. Do not rush and lose hope, saying, "I have been studying for a few

months now, but I did not learn anything.” It is not a matter of a few months; in fact, it is a matter from the cradle to the grave. A person should always be in the state of seeking knowledge. A *hadith* from Rasul Allah (s) states:

من لم يصبر على ذل التعلم ساعة بقي في ذل الجهل أبدا

One who is unable to bear the difficulties of learning for an hour [or a period of time] will remain in the disgrace of ignorance forever. (Ahsa'i, 1405 AH, vol. 1, p. 285)

If one has a particular issue, for example they do not understand something pertaining to *'aqaid*, *fiqh*, or *akhlaq*, but is not patient and humble enough to learn it, then the result is that they will remain ignorant and suffer from ignorance for the rest of their lives. So, patience is needed with respect to both asking about particular issues and generally in seeking knowledge.

Not Feeling Embarrassed

Another etiquette of learning is that the student should not feel embarrassed or shy. “I do not feel good to ask,” or “I am much older than these people who go to these lectures; I am old and they will say, ‘Oh, you do not know?’” “I do not know how to read the Qur'an or I do not know how to say my prayer; I don't know my *'aqaid*, but I feel shy and embarrassed to ask.” People may say that an elder should know these things, but on the contrary, one should never feel embarrassed if the goal is to learn. Actually, embarrassment should be felt if one does not know and does not make the efforts to find out.

Imam al-Rida (a) says:

ولا يستحي أحدهم إذا لم يعلم أن يتعلم

None of them should feel embarrassed to learn if he does not know.” (Ibn Babawayh, 1378 AH, vol. 2, p. 44)

The Rights of Teachers

When it comes to knowledge, there are numerous rights and manners which students should observe towards their teachers, but for the sake of keeping the discussion short, Ayatullah Jawadi only noted a few of them. One of those mentioned is respect for the teacher and anyone you learn from, to the extent that the *hadith* states that you can even flatter your teacher. But generally, such an action is not encouraged in Islam. As it is recorded in some *hadith*:

احثوا في وجوه المداحين التراب

Throw soil on the face of those who are flattering.
(Amili, 1409 AH, vol. 17, p. 183)

This tradition means not to encourage them and show that you are unhappy. However, when it comes to a teacher, not only is it not a problem, but he can actually be praised abundantly, but within the limits, i.e. not going to extremes or saying something that would be classified as lying.

Rasul Allah (s), in a tradition that demonstrates the significance of knowledge, said:

ليس من أخلاق المؤمن الملق إلا في طلب العلم

It is not part of the character of a believer to flatter, except in learning and seeking knowledge. (Fahd Hilli, 1407 AH, p. 81)

Sincere Intention

Another important manner of learning is that we have to be very careful about our intentions. Knowledge is something that people appreciate, even those who do not have it. *‘Ulama* normally have a high position, so there is a greater chance that Satan may try to block the way to it, and the *nafs al-‘ammara* also wants to deviate us from the objective. As a result, from the beginning to the end, a seeker must always be concerned about the sincerity of his intention. He should continuously ask himself, “Why am I learning? Am I learning so that I can be counted among the scholars? Am I learning so that I tell people who do not know that ‘I am better than you’? Am I learning to argue with people? Am I learning so that when I enter a gathering, they seat me in the best position, kiss my hand, and give me money? Or, am I only learning for the sake of Allah (swt)?”

There is a *hadith* from Rasul Allah (s), which is quoted nearly identically by both the Sunni and Shia *hadith* books. Rasul Allah (s) is reported to have said:

لا تطلبوا العلم لتباهوا به العلماء ولا لتماروا به السفهاء ولا لتراءوا به في المجالس ولا لتصرفوا وجوه الناس إليكم للتراؤس فمن فعل ذلك كان في النار و كان علمه حجة عليه يوم القيامة ولكن تعلموه وعلموه

Do not seek knowledge in order to boast and to show off in front of other *‘ulama*, or so that you can argue with the ignorant and foolish, or to earn privileges and the attention of people towards you in gatherings, seeking authority. For whoever does so, his punishment will be the fire, and his knowledge will be a proof against him on the Day of Judgment. Rather, learn knowledge and teach it to others. (Daylami, 1412 AH, p. 16)

Pay careful attention to the punishment for such people. In the same way that seeking knowledge, learning, and teaching with sincerity has immense reward, the misuse of knowledge carries severe punishment. If someone is learning for these intentions, he is using something that is meant for guidance to misguide people and something which is supposed to be giving light to darken his life and the lives of other people. It is because of this that the punishment of the “scholars” mentioned in the traditions are very severe. For example, it is narrated:

يغفر للجاهل سبعون ذنبا قبل أن يغفر للعالم ذنب واحد

Seventy sins of an ignorant person will be forgiven before even one of a “scholar”. (Kulayni, 1365 AH, vol. 1, p. 47)

This tradition is referring to personal sins, but if it is misuse of knowledge, it will be even more severe.

However, this and other traditions like this should not scare one into saying, “Since I am worried, I will not go near knowledge, because if I go near it and my intention is not sincere, I am going to be destroyed.” This should definitely not be the case. Learn and teach, but a seeker should continuously check his intention.

In this regard, there is an important anecdote that has been quoted by one of the scholars from Ayatullah Quddusi. He said that we – i.e. the teachers and scholars – should ensure that those who come to study with us in the *hawza* as *talebeh* and seminarians must remain with the same intention that they enter with. It is however possible that on occasion the intention improves, but his worry was that sometimes when students who are teenagers or in their youth enter the *hawza*, they have nothing in mind except Allah (swt). Often, these days, when people go to *hawza*, it means that they are really saying “no” to all of the other

options that they have. There is more attraction in going to university or doing other things, but for the sake of Allah (swt), they decide to go to the *hawza*. From all over the world, they go to Qum and Najaf to study. There is no promise of *dunya* and material benefit there, but the question is: will that intention remain? Things can and do change, little by little, especially when a student becomes known, receives attention, and gains respect, position and money. Thus, what Ayatullah Quddusi could have meant was that it is not necessary to improve the intention, but rather the original intention and sincerity should be maintained.

Payment for Teaching

The final topic that this brief article will tackle is taking money for teaching. Is it allowed or not? Can a teacher charge his students, or can a speaker charge his audience? This is a very detailed discussion, but it can be summarised by means of how the '*alim*' looks at himself. Does he see himself as someone who is delivering a service and therefore has to charge for it? If this be the case, then he is not an '*alim*'. This is not to say that an '*alim*' should not get money, but if he thinks, "Everyone has a job, they are paid and this is my job. So, people should pay me; otherwise, I don't teach people who don't pay me, or I prefer to teach people who pay me more." So, for example, if community A paid 3000 pounds, but community B offered more or had given more perks, then they are a priority. Unfortunately, if knowledge is looked at in this manner, then this person is not an '*alim*'. He is only a store of knowledge, not an '*alim*'.

The following tradition is quoted from Amirul Mu'minin (a) in *Ghurar al-Hikam*; Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli only mentions a part of the *hadith*, but it will be quoted below in its entirety, as both parts are of benefit.

لا يكون العالم عالما حتى لا يحسد من فوقه ولا يحتقر من دونه ولا
يأخذ على علمه شيئا من حطام الدنيا

An *'alim* is not considered a true *'alim*, until he is not jealous of one who is above him and does not humiliate those who are below him, and does not take in return for his knowledge any of the vanities of this world. (Tamimi Amudi, 1366 sh, p.794)

Therefore, in order to be a true scholar and *'alim*, some qualities are required. Not having jealousy may refer to those being above him in rank, in wealth, in leadership, or perhaps even above him in knowledge. It must be understood that Allah (swt) has given great blessings, and therefore there should be no place for jealousy towards someone who is higher. What is more apparent from the tradition is above in the worldly sense. Nevertheless, even regarding knowledge, one should not negatively envy people, by thinking, for example, "Why does this person know more than me? I wish he did not know more than me." Also, those who are lower than him, be it in knowledge or otherwise, should not be undermined and demeaned by him. An *'alim* should have a balanced position and honestly know his status. Hence, he will not become arrogant or proud, and he will not lose hope if someone is above him. Then finally, he should not value his knowledge by means of anything worldly, for there is no object in the *dunya* that can be set as a price for knowledge. However, the practicality of such needs to be discussed further.

The mentality of the scholar should not be that this is his occupation, way of earning money, and making a livelihood. He has chosen the path of the prophets, and the prophets did not ask for payment. In a beautiful *hadith*, 'Isa (a) is reported to have said to his *hawariyyun* (disciples):

لا تأخذوا ممن تعلمون من الأجر إلا مثل الذي أعطيتموني

Do not take from people for what you teach except what you have given me. (RayShahri, 1392 SH, p. 32)

He is telling them in a beautiful manner that “nothing was taken from you, so do not take from others for what you give them.” Similarly, did Rasul Allah (s) or any other prophet ask people for payment? The Qur’an states in Surah Shu‘ara that the prophets kept saying, “We do not want any payment from you.” The responsibility of the people towards the scholar is another important matter and subject that needs to be discussed, but the aim here was to clarify the intention and understanding of those who are teaching and seeking knowledge.

References

- *Glorious Qur’an*
- ‘Amili, Muhammad b. Hasan, *Wasa’il al-Shi’a*, Qum, Muassisah Ale al-Bayt, 1409 AH.
- Ahsa’i, Muhammad b. ‘Ali, *‘Awali al-la’ali*, Qum, Intesharat Sayyid al-Shuhada, 1405 AH.
- Daylami, Hasan b. ‘Ali, *Irshad al-Qulub ila al-Sawab*, Qum, Sharif Razi, 1412 AH.
- Fahd Hilli. , Ahmad b. Muhammad, *Uddah al-Da’ee wa Najah al-Sa’ee*, Qum, Dar al-Kitab al-Islami, 1407 AH.
- Hilli, Ibn Idris, *Mustatrafat al-Sara’ir*, Qum, Mu’assisah Intesharat Islami, 1411 AH.
- Ibn Abil Hadid, ‘Abd al-Hamid, *Sharh Nahj al-balagha*, Qum, Kitab Khane Ayatullah ‘Abd al-Hamid Mar‘ashi Najafi, 1404 AH.
- Ibn Babawayh, Muhammad b. ‘Ali (Saduq), (1378 AH.), *‘Uyun al-Akhbar al-Rida*, Tehran, Jahan.

- Ibn Babawayh, Muhammad b. 'Ali (Saduq), (1361 AH.), *Ma'ani al-akhbar*, Qum, Mu'assisah Intesharat Islami.
- Ibn Shahrashub, Muhammad b. 'Ali, (1379 AH.), *Manaqib Ale Abi Talib*, Qum, 'Allamah.
- Kulayni, Muhammad b. Ya'qub, (1365 AH.), *al-Kafi*, Tehran, Dar al-Kutub al-Islammiyah.
- *Nahj al-Balagha*, compiled by Razi, Sayyid, (1414 AH.)
- Nu'man b. Muhammad, (1385 AH.), *Da'aim al-Islam*, Cairo, Dar al-Ma'arif.
- Rawandi, Sa'ieed b. 'Abd Allah, (1407 AH.), *al-Da'awat*, Qum, Mu'assisah Imam Mahdi (ajfs).
- Rawandi, Sayyid Fadl Allah, *al-Nawadir*, Qum, Mu'assisah Dar al-Kitab, (n.d.)
- RayShahri, Muhammad Muhammadi, (1392 SH.), *Hikmatnameh 'Isa b. Maryam* (as), Qum, Mu'assisah 'Ilmi Farhangi Dar al-Hadith.
- Tabarsi, Ahmad b. 'Ali, (1403 AH.), *al-Ihtijaj*, Mashhad, Nashr Murtadha.
- Tamimi Amudi, 'Abd al-Wahid, (1366 SH.), *Ghurar al-hikam wa durar al-kalim*, Qum, Daftar Tablighat Islami.
- Tusi, Muhammad b. Hasan, (1414 AH.), *Amali*, Qum, Dar al-Thiqafah.

