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‘Ilm

paper 7

The Journey of Knowledge

From Birth to Death

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Introduction

He teaches the human being what he does not know.	عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ
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Quran 96:5

Each and every human being has to embark on the journey of learning and traverse the path of knowledge. All *ilm* requires learning (*ta'allum*) in the initial stage; this learning should be absorbed, internalised and expanded by one's own efforts, augmented by deliberation (*rawiyyah*), contemplation (*tafakkur*) and consideration (*i'tebaar*). To this end, Allah has given the human being a rational soul that is potentially knowledgeable, and various other tools and faculties to facilitate his learning.

The <i>aalim</i> , the seeker of knowledge, is not satiated with knowledge until he reaches his destination, <i>jannat</i> .	لَا يَشْبَعُ الْعَالِمُ مِنْ عِلْمِهِ حَتَّى يَكُونَ مِنْهَا الْجَنَّةَ
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– Rasulullah SA

The Ikhwan us Safa say that the journey of learning begins as soon as one is born and continues till the end of one's life. It is important not to think that one has stopped being a student once school or college ends, and to have the attitude of enthusiasm for learning throughout one's life. The Ikhwan us Safa roughly divide this 'journey' according to age, though of course each individual progresses differently according to his or her ability, dedication, opportunity etc.

From Birth to 4 Years of Age

From birth till the age of four, the human being becomes more and more aware of his new world, solely through his senses at the initial stage. He then progresses towards learning by imitation, which is how he learns to speak. He also starts picking up behaviour good or bad, basic values, various actions such as prayer etc. from people around him and the environment in general. The role of the parents at this stage is of central importance; since they are the child's primary role models, they should take care to set a good example, because the foundation acquired at this time will influence the rest of the child's life.

From 4-15 years: Power of Rational Speech (*al-quwwa al-nateqa*)

From four to fifteen years, his faculty of speech is further developed. In the early stage, this power of speech is limited to expression of the outward or physical description of tangible and material things. This is the age when the child starts going to school, where he learns first to read and write, and then other subjects such as mathematics, literature, history, geography, science, creative arts and languages. As far as religion is concerned, at this stage he should start going to primary school (*madrasa*) and begin learning how to read the Quran and *do'as* used in prayer, and memorise them. The language of Dawat (Lisan ud Dawat) should be learnt – reading, writing and speaking. If possible, he should also learn the Arabic language. Besides these, he should begin to learn: basic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) such as how to do *wuḥu* and pray *namaaz* and other basic directives of the Shari'at, so that he can start becoming familiar with the responsibilities of the Shari'at; something of the history and lives (*seerat*) of the Awliya ul-lah, through anecdotes (*rimayaat*) so that his love and reverence for them is nurtured; *qasidas* which are recited frequently; and *nasihat* and good counsel of the Awliya ul-lah (*maw'izat*). This is the level of the *zaahir*.

The parents of the child are responsible for the child's education, particularly early education, until the child realises the importance of learning and starts sharing the responsibility. Parents take great care to enrol their child in a good school, for which they think it worthwhile to spend a considerable amount of money, and pay considerable attention to their child's progress to ensure he gets a good secular education, in order to set him up for a prosperous career. They should be doing as much if not more – they should pay attention to, take out time for and be willing to spend money – for the *deeni* education of their child. They will sometimes have to make a conscious choice to sacrifice learning a 'worldly' accomplishment to give that time to *deeni* education. It is this basic *deeni* education, which will give him a solid foundation, which will eventually lead him to give *misaaq* and henceforth live his life in accordance with the Shari'at. It is ultimately this knowledge and training that will prepare him for not just this life but the next.

In addition to 'formal' learning in *madrasas*, a large part of the *ilm* of *Aale Mohammed* is also absorbed in the *waaz*, *bayaan*, *wasila* etc., sermons and discourses, given during the *majalis*, commemorative occasions of the *Dawat*. Even though at this age the child may not understand or comprehend a lot, bringing him to the *majlis* from an early age not only makes him familiar and comfortable with that particular environment, the true doctrines and values of *deen* (*haqq ni waat*) that impinge upon his mind almost subconsciously are vital in creating a strong foundation. Bringing the child to the illustrious *hazrat* of the Dai is an immeasurable learning experience in itself, filled with spiritual *barakat* and grace.

From 15-30 years: Power of intellectual thought (*al-quwwah al-aaqela*)

During fifteen to thirty years of age, with the increased development of his intellectual faculties in particular, firstly he starts looking below the outward surface of tangible and material things, searching for greater meaning in them, then slowly moving further to investigate larger cosmological issues, the essential reality of all existing things. During this period he completes his schooling, including higher university or college education; he embarks on a career and starts earning a living for himself, and further ‘settles down’ in his life in terms of marriage etc. As far as *ilm* of *deen* is concerned, if he has been diligent in studying the *ẓaahir*, he makes a considerable leap and rises up to the next level at this time, into the higher stage of *taweel*. He continues with the *ẓaahir*, but also begins to learn the *taweel*, the underlying intellectual meaning, of the acts of worship and other dictates of the Shari‘at, and the Quranic verses and stories of the Prophets. He should subsequently not only continue to practice the *ẓaahir* with more devotion, but also observe the *taweel* diligently.

From 30-40 years: Power of Wisdom (*al-quwwah al-hikmiyya*)

Then from thirty to forty years, as his wisdom and sagacity develop, he begins to comprehend the meanings of abstract things and concepts. He learns to move from the physical by logical inference to the abstract, the spiritual and the metaphysical, going from a lower to a higher and higher plane of knowledge and existence. At this time people are immersed in their worldly lives, generally, men in consolidating their careers and women mainly in making a home and raising their children. *Deeni* education however should be continuing apace; if it has, at this time he takes a big step further towards philosophy (*hikmat*) – the Ikhwan us Safa are a compendium of such philosophy. This is a prelude for the higher radically distinct plane of knowledge, the *haqeeqat*. This is the *ilm* of the unseen and unperceived (*‘ghayb*), the beginning of the world and its end, the knowledge of the essence of the soul – where it came from, where it will go, the hereafter – what is *jannat*, what is *jahannam*, what is resurrection (*ba’i*), the scale (*mizāan*), the Day of Judgment (*qayamat*), and finally the knowledge of the Oneness of God (*ilm* of *tawheed*).

From 40-50 years: Power of Legislation (*al-quwwah al-namusiyya*)

At this stage, from age forty to fifty, one’s continuing increase in knowledge and experience begets the development of the faculty of legislation (*quwwah namusiyyah*). If this faculty is engendered, he is now in a position to legislate and make laws for the regulation of society. Where *deen* is concerned, the power to make laws is confined to the *Sahib uz Zaman*; in the execution of his responsibilities however, he may consult and ask the advice of people who have reached this level of wisdom and experience. As Allah says to *Rasulullah SA* in the Quran Majeed:

Consult them [wise and experienced people] in matters of government, then take a decision and put your trust in Allah.	وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ
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Quran 3:159

From 50-end of life: Angelic Power (*al-quwwah al-malakiyyah*)

As one progresses on the journey of learning throughout life and rises in the levels of knowledge, at each step and level a glimpse of the next level becomes apparent. However, one also realises, as the Imam has said, “you have come to this level of knowledge but there are many levels still beyond and concealed from you”.

The more you know, the more you realise how much you still have to know.	عَرَفْتَ شَيْئًا وَغَابَتْ عَنْكَ أَشْيَاءُ
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From fifty years onwards, as the responsibilities of his worldly life have been largely attended to or decreased, he has more time and thought to devote to his spiritual soul and eternal life in the hereafter. Now with the development of his angelic and inspired faculties (*malakiyyah mo'ayyadiyyah*), his preparation for the *aakherat* takes on an added urgency and momentum. Eventually, on reaching the end of his life and his journey of learning in this world, if his soul has achieved completion, it acquires the power of ascension (*me'raj*), and is elevated to *jannat*.

Conclusion

Books (*kitab*s) are an indispensable part of this journey of knowledge. *Dawat* has a rich literary heritage and a priceless corpus of *kitab*s. These are written books and recorded texts, in which “below each word is a veritable ocean of knowledge and meaning”. The Quran is of course the main repository and source of the knowledge of *deen*. This is expanded and supplemented by the *hadees* of *Rasulullah SA* and the *kalaam* of *Amirul Mumeneen SA* and the *Imams*. The treasury of *kitab*s of *Dawat* is filled with books of all subjects at all levels of *ẓaahir*, *taweel* and *haqiqat* written by *Aimmat*, *Duat* and their *Hudud*. These are books supplemented by *qasidas*, *nasihats*, *vasilas*, *bayans* and *waaḥ*, which too are virtually inexhaustible compendiums and sources of inspired knowledge and true *aqeeda*.

However, the true heritage of the knowledge of *deen* is contained in the hearts and minds of the God-inspired scholars (*Ulama Rabbaniyyeen*), the *Imams* and *Duat*. *Sayyedna Fakhruddin TUS* is today the heir to the ‘ilm of *Aale Mohammad*. In his *rsialats*, *qasidas*, *munajats*, *vasilas*, *waaḥ* and *bayans*, which embody the *ta’eed* of the Imam, he continues to perpetuate, amplify and augment the rich legacy of *Dawat* knowledge.