

FATEMI DAWAT
IKHWANUS SAFA ARTICLE SERIES

‘Ilm

paper 9

Mustafeed

The Student

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Introduction: Traits of a Student of 'ilm

<i>The pursuit of knowledge is incumbent upon every muslim and muslema.</i>	طَلَبُ الْعِلْمِ فَرِيضَةٌ عَلَى كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ وَمُسْلِمَةٍ
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Rasulullah SA

Our *Nabi* has used the word “*fareezat*”, compulsory, that it is compulsory not only on men but equally on women to pursue knowledge, to pursue education. Therefore, every good muslim man and muslim woman should be a seeker of knowledge (*talib ilm*), to the best of his or her ability and opportunity.

The Ikhwan us Safa have outlined fourteen traits a student should possess and strive for, and guidelines in his pursuit of knowledge. These are: 1) pure intention, 2) purity of soul and objective, 3) sound belief, 4) good character, 5) investigation, inquire and curiosity, 6) seeking logical proofs, 7) revision and memorization, 8) recalling, reflecting and curiosity, 9) practice, 10) determination and hard work, 11) Help and Guidance from Allah Taala (Tawfeeq) 12) love of knowledge, 13) humility and 14) gratitude.

1. Pure Intention (*niyyat*)

The most important thing for a student in his pursuit of knowledge *ilm* is his intention (*niyyat*): his heart should be pure and sincere, his aim should be to rise in the levels of knowledge to find, understand and follow the ultimate truth, so that he can attain salvation of his soul and a high rank in *jannat*. His goal should be to seek knowledge in order to find the Truth (*haqq*), the ultimate Truth and Reality, to recognise the *sahab al-haqq*, the Imam and in his *satr* the Dai, through whom all other absolute truths about religion and Allah Ta'ala can be known.

If this is his true and sincere intention, and he makes the required efforts to achieve it, Allah has promised that He will guide him to the truth	وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا
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Quran 29:69

For the Ikhwan a person who seeks knowledge for any other reason, like status or material gain, does not deserve to find the right path.

2. Purity of Soul and Objective Intellect

The Ikhwan say that a pure soul and an objective intellect (*safa un nafs wa istiqamat ut tareeqat*) are the foundation for true knowledge and most important for attaining the heights of *ilm*. The student should be free from prejudice and bias. He should not lie to himself or make excuses for his wrongdoing and failures. *Syedna al-Mu'ayyad* says time and again, only he whose eyes and ears are open, ready and willing to see and hear objectively without prejudice, will benefit from true knowledge.

This purity of soul and intellect is likened to a mirror: if the mirror is clean and clear and smooth, what is reflected in it will be as it really is, a true picture; if the mirror is dirty and uneven, the reflection will be a distorted picture; if the mirror is rusted it will not reflect anything at all. In the same way, the soul and intellect should be clean and clear and unstained by the blackness and rust of ignorance and bad deeds, and not warped by wrong conceptions (*tasawwur*) of doctrine; then only will it comprehend things in their reality and actuality, see the spirituality (*ruhaaniyyat*) of everything in this world, and 'see' things with his intellect which he cannot see with his senses.

3. Sound Belief

A seeker of knowledge should have the correct basic belief (*aqeeda*) and proper clear conception of doctrines and tenets (*tasawwur*), to start with. This is the foundation on which the edifice of knowledge will be built, and the standard against which all knowledge will be measured. The simplest example of this is the *misqa*, the text of the *ahd ul-awliya*, which is sanctified, and which every *mumin* has heard and should know thoroughly. *Syedna Qadi al-Nu'man* says that if any teacher or scholar, however reputedly 'learned' he is, if he tells you something that is contrary to the *misqa* text, you should know that he is teaching falsehood (*batil*).

4. Good Character

A good character, good deeds and abstention from bad habits (*seerat saleha*) is an essential prerequisite for true acquisition of knowledge and its benefits.

5. Investigation, Inquiry and Curiosity

To gain knowledge, the first step is to ask questions and inquire. The student of *‘ilm* should be interested in knowing, he should be curious about the how, why, when, what of things, he should have a questioning mind, he should ask for and actively seek knowledge. Then this asking should be followed by silence and listening (*samt*), in order to comprehend and digest the answer. The *Ikhwan* say that a beginner student should first investigate to the best of his ability that his teacher is a ‘true teacher’ (*mufeede haqq*); then he has no choice but to have faith and trust in his teacher, who is above him in knowledge and comprehension, if he wants to rise higher in the levels of *‘ilm*. Then as time goes by he spends more time with his teacher, his true nature, the extent of his knowledge, and purity of belief should become clearer, enabling him to make a choice whether to continue with him or not. In pursuing secular education, one chooses a school or college on the basis of its reputation, then one has to follow the syllabus, rules etc. laid down by the institution and its teachers. In the beginning therefore, he should simply listen, not in such a way that the information goes in one ear and out from the other; rather, he should pay heed so that the information received is comprehended and processed by his rational mind. The Quran instructs us to have “a heedful ear” (*uzḡunun waa’iyah* – Surat al-Haaqqah: 12) and to “listen and take heed” (*fas-tami’u lahu wa ansitu* – Surat al-‘Araaf). He should listen attentively with full concentration and try to understand and comprehend what the teacher is saying.

There is no peace of mind in life except for the scholar who speaks (imparts his knowledge) and the student who listens/ heeds.	لَا رَاحَةَ فِي الْعَيْشِ إِلَّا لِعَالِمٍ نَاطِقٍ أَوْ مُسْتَمِيعٍ وَاعٍ
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Rasulullah SA.

6. Seeking Logical Proofs

As he begins to get a grip on the subject, then is the time, say the *Ikhwan*, that he should start asking for logical proofs (*burhaan aqli*) and not just accept uncritically everything the teacher says, particularly if it seems to be against logic. As he rises higher in the levels of knowledge, at the beginning of each ‘new’ level he will have to accept the teachings of his *mufeed* unconditionally. Then if he has studied diligently and the doctrines taught by his *mufeed* have crystalized in his mind, only then has he the right to demand such explanations. The higher the level, the more this rule applies, since the *‘ilm* becomes more and more spiritual and sublime.

7. Revision and Memorization

After this step the power of memory (*qumwat hafeẓa*) comes in: one has to store the information received, remember it and memorize it. The *Ikhwan* suggest ways to help you remember, for instance writing it down, taking notes, which can be referred to again later. It is very important to revise, so that the *sabaq* sets in the mind. *Syedna Taber Saifuddin RA* used to say that the knowledge received in *sabaq* is like the negative of a photograph, which after it is been revised it becomes a positive a photograph.

8. Recalling, Reflecting and Contemplation

After listening, heeding, understanding and remembering what you learn from your teacher, you should recall, reflect, cogitate, ponder, and contemplate on it. The *Ikhwan* say, there are two kinds of people, the common people and the elite. Among the former are both those who are completely involved in this worldly life and ignore the hereafter, and others who at least listen to what the Anbiyaa have to say and do what is required of the *shariat* without thinking. As for the ‘elite’, they do not just practice the stipulations (*amal*) of the *shariat* but think about them; the best of their actions is contemplation (*tafakkur*). They observe and contemplate God’s creation – the forces and wonders and beauty and harmony of nature, and its interrelation with us – and particularly things related directly to religion, and ponder over the knowledge in the *kitabs*. Deep *tafakkur* can open up many doors of knowledge. This level and power of *tafakkur*, however, does not just happen in a day; it is a process which if followed with perseverance leads to ever better results.

Deep deliberation of one hour is equal to worship for a full year.	تَفَكُّرُ سَاعَةٍ عِبَادَةُ سَنَةٍ
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Maulana Ali AS.

However, there are two directions that *tafakkur* take you in. The *Ikhwan* say that, regarding the *shariat* for instance, the right manner of *tafakkur* would be to first understand it as a whole, its importance, its origin, the eminence of the one who brought it to mankind, its legal and the ethical aspects etc., before attempting to understand the individual prescriptions. If practised in this manner, the *right* way (*ẓaat al-yameen*), *tafakkur* will lead to a greater understanding of the depths at the *ẓaahir*, *taweel* and especially *haqeeqat* level, and thereby an increased understanding of the workings and purposes of Allah Ta’ala, which will take them closer to Him. If *tafakkur* is not practiced in the right manner, if before

having enough knowledge of and comprehending the *shariat* as a whole one goes into the intricate details of subtle and complex sub-matters, the understanding will be flawed and incomplete, and there is a risk of *tafakkur* deviating onto the ‘left’ or wrong way (*ḡaṭat uṣh-shimaal*), towards doubts about its authenticity, divine origin, benefit etc., towards disbelief and complete lack of conviction.

9. Practice

After learning about the *shariat*, and especially after reflection, contemplation and logical recognition of the truth of the *shariat*, the next step is to put what you have learnt into practice. *Rasulullah SA* has said, once you *know*, you have no choice but to *do*. There is no acceptable excuse for not doing the required *amal* of the *shariat*, if one does not know one is supposed to find out.

The one who is ignorant has a more acceptable excuse than one who knows, but finally neither excuse is acceptable.	إِنَّ الْجَاهِلَ أَغْدَرُ مِنَ الْعَالِمِ وَلَيْسَ لَوَاحِدٍ مِنْهُمَا الْعُذْرُ
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Isa Masih AS

However, doing the *amal* with *ma’refat*, intellectual understanding, entails a radically higher level of reward. *Rasulullah SA* says, “one *raka’at* of a scholar (*aalim*) is equal to a thousand of one who is ignorant (*jahil*).” (We will elaborate on *amal* in the forthcoming paper, *insha’Allah*).

10. Determination and Hard Work (*ijtihad*)

Determination and hard work (*ijtihad*) is very necessary if a student wants to rise in the levels of knowledge. The *Ikhwan* say that actions done regularly and routinely are likely to become a habit. So too persistence in the study of knowledge and reflection and deliberation upon it strengthens comprehension skills, command and depth. Just as people work hard for material wealth so that they may have the best of life in this world, the *Ikhwan* say to people whose goal is *jannat* to strive hard to gain knowledge, which is the spiritual wealth, which will better life in the hereafter. *Amirul Mumeneen SA* has said with regard to the pursuit of knowledge:

Strive hard, do not be lazy, and do not be neglectful, for he who is lazy will suffer for it in the hereafter.	فَاجْهَدْ وَلَا تَكْسَلْ وَلَا تَكُ غَافِلًا فَنَدَامَةُ الْعُثْبَى لِمَنْ يَتَكَاسَلُ
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If one is really dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge, one may have to be contented with less in this world; one will have to prioritise one's goals, time and effort. For one who aims to reach the highest levels of knowledge, a heart not preoccupied with the concerns of this world and total dedication to and complete concentration on and persistence in knowledge is required.

11. Help and Guidance from Allah Taala (Tawfeeq):

Allah Taala gives provision (rizq) to whomsoever He wills, without any limit	وَاللَّهُ يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ
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Quran - 24:38

Over and above the effort one puts into earning one's livelihood, the success of his efforts depends finally on Allah. Similarly, it is necessary for a seeker of knowledge to ask help and guidance (*tawfeeq*) from Allah Ta'ala every step of the way. A student who works very hard will not achieve the knowledge he is seeking or a teacher to give him that knowledge, or indeed the correct benefit of knowledge, unless Allah helps him to achieve his goal.

12. Love of Knowledge

The true student of *'ilm* loves knowledge. He loves the pursuit of knowledge, and, say the *Ikhwan*, he should love the possessors of knowledge. *Luqman Hakim* said to his son,

O my son, through the company of scholars and squeeze in knee to knee with them. If you are an <i>aalim</i> yourself, you will be able to take part in their discussion and their knowledge will increase your knowledge. If you are not an <i>aalim</i> , their conversation will help you to gain knowledge. And if Allah showers them with His <i>rahmat</i> , you too will receive a share.	يَا بُنَيَّ جَالِسِ الْعُلَمَاءَ وَزَارِحْهُمْ بِرُكْبَتِكَ، فَإِنَّكَ إِنْ تَكُ عَالِمًا يَنْفَعَكَ عِلْمُكَ وَيَزِيدُوكَ عِلْمًا إِلَى عِلْمِكَ، وَإِنْ تَكُ جَاهِلًا يُعَلِّمُوكَ، وَلَعَلَّ اللَّهَ أَنْ يَطَّلِعَهُمْ بِرَحْمَةٍ فَتَعَمَّكَ مَعَهُمْ
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13. Humility

As one rises in the levels of ‘*ilm*’, one should be very conscious and careful not to let pleasure and satisfaction with one’s achievements turn into conceit and arrogance.

He whose increased knowledge does not result in greater humility before Allah and greater compassion for the ignorant and greater love for scholars’ increases in distance from Allah.	مَنْ اُزْدَادَ عِلْمًا وَلَمْ يَزِدْ لِلَّهِ تَوَاضُعًا وَلِلْجُهَالِ رَحْمَةً وَلِلْعُلَمَاءِ مَوَدَّةً لَمْ يَزِدْ مِنَ اللَّهِ إِلَّا بُعْدًا
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Rasulullah S.A.

Humility is a trademark of the true scholar (*aalim*). As one rises in the levels of ‘*ilm*’ one should become more humble and open-minded and approachable; if the opposite, if one begins to think oneself above one’s fellow men and is scornful of all others, then one has not absorbed the *ilm* as it should be absorbed, and has not received its true benefits.

Kindness is the best companion of knowledge.	نِعْمَ قَرِينُ الْعِلْمِ الْحُكْمُ
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Maulana Ali S.A.

Not only will conceit hinder one’s rise in the levels of ‘*ilm*’, it will deprive one of the first quality an *aalim* should have and will seriously impair his effectiveness as a teacher, if and when he reaches the level of becoming a *mufeed* himself.

14. Gratitude (*shukur*)

If one succeeds in attaining knowledge, one should never fail to thank God, continuously remembering that it is from Him that he has received this priceless *ne’mat*.

If you are grateful we shall surely give you more.	لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ
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Quran - 14:7

It is most important to recognise that it is only with Allah's *tanfeeq* and aid that one rises in the levels of knowledge. Any student who thinks that his achievements are the sole result of his own efforts, his intelligence and abilities will fail to find the Truth. He should therefore never forget to constantly solicit Allah's help.

Conclusion: *Aim for the Skies*

If you have the ability and potential, the *himmat*, the courage and resolution, to pursue solemn, momentous and consequential matters, say the *Ikhwan*, then do not be satisfied with less, aim for a higher and higher level of knowledge. Remember, they say, that those who are above you today were not always where they are today; they did *ijtihaad* and with the help of Allah reached their goal of the highest levels of knowledge.

Any student or apprentice who listens closely to and obeys his teacher and master, with persistence and diligence, he will one day likely become a teacher and master himself, <i>insha'Allah</i> .	أَيُّ تَلْمِيزًا وَمُتَعَلِّمٍ اِمْتَنَلْ أَمْرًا أُسْتَاذِهِ وَإِقَادَ لِمُعَلِّمِهِ وَدَامَ عَلَيْهِ فَإِنَّهُ سَيَصِيرُ يَوْمًا مَا إِلَى مَرْتَبَةِ أُسْتَاذِهِ وَيَصِيرُ مِثْلَ مُعَلِّمِهِ
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