

رياضة المتعلمين

Principles for Students of Knowledge

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

قال يحيى بن أبي كثير:

"لَا يُسْتَطَاعُ الْعِلْمُ بِرَاحَةِ الْجِسْمِ" (صحيح مسلم)

Yahya ibn Abu Katheer mentions:

"Knowledge cannot be acquired with sloth (and laziness)" (Saheeh Muslim)

Foreword by Mufti Shabbir Ahmad

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Ever Kind. All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the universe and Master of our fortunes, and may peace and blessings descend on our beloved Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, his companions and upon all who follow in their footsteps.

It has only been a few weeks since the demise of our beloved teacher, *muḥaddith al-‘aṣr* Shaykh al-Ḥadīth Mawlānā Muḥammad Yūnus Jownpūrī (d. 1438/2017) who had dedicated his entire life in the pursuit of knowledge and immersed himself in the ḥadīths of the Prophet ﷺ. His unwavering commitment and passion for the science of ḥadīth is reflected in the fact that he taught *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* for 49 years in Saharanpur and decided not to marry. In fact, a day before he passed away, he was reading the *Musnad* of Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855). Whenever a book was published in relation to the ḥadīth sciences, he would make every attempt to obtain a copy, even in the final years of his life. A few years ago, Shaykh advised me to purchase *Kitāb al-Asāmī wa al-Kunā* of Imam Ḥākim (d. 405/1014), which had only been published, and expressed his delight at its publication.

Similarly, two years ago, *Riyāḍat al-Muta‘allimīn* was published for the first time by my dear friend Shaykh Niẓām Yaquby of Bahrain, who is an expert on manuscripts and has published many beneficial books. The author of *Riyāḍat al-Muta‘allimīn* is Imam Ḥāfiẓ Ibn al-Sunnī (d. 364/975) who is famously known for his book *‘Amal al-Yawm wa al-Laylah* (Days and nights of the Prophet ﷺ), which has been described by Ḥājī Khalīfah (d. 1067/1657) in *Kashf al-Ẓunūn* (2:1172) as the most comprehensive book on this subject. Imam Ibn al-Sunnī mastered the ḥadīth sciences and was also an expert on jurisprudence. Indeed, he served as the Judge of Rayy for some time. Thus, any book that is authored by a person of his calibre interests students and teachers alike. When our teacher *muḥaddith al-‘aṣr* Shaykh Muḥammad Yūnus Jownpūrī received a copy of this book, he was extremely delighted and incorporated some of its contents into his commentary of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, the first volume of which has been published recently by the name *Nibrās al-Ṣārī* (see pages 344, 349, 372).

This book *Riyāḍat al-Muta‘allimīn* is indispensable and beneficial especially for students of knowledge and teachers. Imam Ibn al-Sunnī outlines the etiquettes and guidelines for students and teachers, the methods of teaching and learning, and the different sciences that should be acquired. A salient feature of the book is that the Imam has succinctly outlined approximately three hundred educational principles and substantiated each principle with one or more ḥadīth through his chain of transmission. Towards the end of the book, he has outlined the different sciences a person should study and the sequence that should be followed.

Given the unique nature of the book and Imam Ibn al-Sunnī’s credentials, I suggested to my dear Mawlānā Mu‘āwiyah ibn Mufti ‘Abd al-Ṣamad Aḥmad to translate this book into English for wider benefit. The reality of the matter is that knowledge is like an ocean and students must be equipped with the etiquette and tools to immerse themselves into this ocean and benefit from it fully.

Likewise, teachers also need to be equipped with the tools and etiquette to impart knowledge and maximise their effectiveness. This book will *in shā' Allah* help assist students and teachers to achieve this. Mawlānā Mu'āwiyah has been working tirelessly under the guidance of his respected father Mufti 'Abd al-Ṣamad Aḥmad and other senior teachers of Darul Uloom Blackburn and has also published other beneficial books. May Almighty Allah bless him in his endeavours and grant him the divine ability to continue serving the Dīn. May Allah elevate the status of all our pious predecessors and teachers, reward all those who played a role in the publication of this book and its translation, and make this work a means of guidance and the spreading of beneficial knowledge.

(Mufti) Shabbir Ahmad

8 Dhū al-Qa'dah 1438 / 1 August 2017

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الحمد لله رب العالمين والصلاة والسلام على رحمة للعالمين ومن تبعه من الناس أجمعين أما بعد

When an individual takes to the pursuit of a great and noble objective, then it is of imperative importance to dedicate one's total and undivided attention to that particular cause. Mere wishes and fantasies do not lead a person to reach the heights of achievement and accomplishment, however, it is the determination, perseverance, enthusiasm and hard work that is synthesised with the dealing of constant pressure from challenges along with the toil of sleepless nights and the abandoning of one's luxuries; just a few of the sacrifices that are necessary for those of lofty aspiration and ambition.

In turn, when this noble cause becomes the acquisition of beneficial knowledge, then the required effort substantially multiplies due to the sacred nature of knowledge. A cursory glance at a few sayings from the scholars will accurately provide a suitable gauge into the virtues of knowledge.

Imam Abu Yusuf RA advised thus, 'knowledge will never give anyone a share from itself until that person dedicate their full (efforts and even life) in the pursuit of knowledge.'¹

Imam Sufyan ath-Thawri RA mentioned, 'no deed is better than the pursuit of knowledge, so long as the intention for seeking is correct.'²

The great companion 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud RA mentioned, 'the teaching and studying of knowledge is *salah* (optional prayer)'³

The great companion abu Hurairah RA mentioned, 'to sit for a moment to study (and gain an understanding of religion) is more beloved to me than staying awake all night (in prayers)'.⁴

Imam al-Qurtubi has made mention under the commentary of the verse,

*Allah testifies that there is no God except Allah, and the angels also testify and the people of knowledge also testify.*⁵

'this verse is a proof upon the virtue and merit of knowledge and the scholars, as it was they who are brought alongside Almighty Allah and the angels in giving testimony of there being no God but Allah.'⁶

¹ Shazarat az-Zahab

² Jami' bayan al-'ilm wa-fadhlihi

³ Jami' bayan al-'ilm wa-fadhlihi

⁴ Sunan ad-Daruqutni

⁵ Surah 'Ali Imran:18

⁶ Tafsir al-Qurtubi

Special care and attention in regards to the etiquettes of knowledge and its acquisition is necessary, especially when the knowledge being sought is sacrosanct and sacred.

This humble work is the translation of the Arabic book *Riyaadhah al-Muta'allimeen*; the principles for students of knowledge, authored by Imam ibn Sunni RA (d.364AH/974CE) who is celebrated for his renowned book *'amal al-Yawm wal-Laylah*; actions (and prayers) of the day and night.

Ibn Sunni RA (his full name; Abu Bakr Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn Sunni) was born in the year 284AH and his demise occurred in the year 359AH according to some reports and 364AH according to other reports.

Ibn Sunni RA was known for his piety and scholarship. Ibn Sahdar RA mentioned, 'ibn Sunni RA was a master jurist, a *hafidh* (master of the Prophetic narrations) and an eloquent linguist.' Imam adh-Dhahabi RA mentioned, 'ibn Sunni RA was pious, noble and trustworthy, he was a reliable scholar who travelled a lot'. Imam as-Subki RA mentioned, 'ibn Sunni RA was a pious, Shafi'ee jurist'. Ibn Sunni RA has a number of compilations, including; *al-I'jaaz fil Hadeeth*, *Fadhail al-'Amaal*, *at-Tibb an-Nabawi*.

In this extensive work he has endeavoured to educate the student at a moderate pace in regards to the etiquettes relevant to their studies. He indicates to just under 300 etiquettes of seeking knowledge and he simultaneously provides proofs for each individual etiquette. The majority of the proofs provided are Prophetic narrations, albeit, some being of a weak nature and others even being rejected outright by the scholars of research.

In the footnotes of certain narrations, I have highlighted some of the narrators that have been deemed problematic and controversial (whether major problems or minor problems) by the scholars of research. However, this is not an exhaustive work on the narrators and so one will find that many other narrators and narrations have also been questioned. However, I would advise individuals to seek guidance from their local scholars in regards to the authenticity of the narrations.

The Arabic publication that I used for this translation was the Maktabah Nizaam Yaqubi print published in 2015. I thoroughly advise students to read the complete Arabic version along with the very useful footnotes in that compilation. I would like to extend my gratitude to Shaykh Nizaam Yaqubi for publishing this beneficial work and many other valuable works. May Almighty Allah make all of these publications a means of success for him in both worlds and a means of eternal blessings and reward. Indeed, the scholars of the past have mentioned, 'the book of a scholar is his child that he has left behind in this world forever'.

It is with the grace of Almighty Allah, and the kind instruction and encouragement of Mufti Shabbir Ahmed that I was given the ability to translate this work which my dear friend Raees Usman typed and edited thoroughly, followed by my dear friend Amir Lakhi who gave the work a final edit. May Almighty Allah make this work a means of success for all of those who assisted and a means of salvation for us in the hereafter.

I would firstly like to express gratitude to Almighty Allah upon the ability and understanding he has given this soul. Thereafter, I thank Imam ibn Sunni RA for gathering such a beautiful work that contains essential guidelines for us; the students of knowledge. Furthermore, I thank all the people who have helped in the compilation of this work by means of their educating this humble soul up until this juncture, this includes my honourable father; Mufti Abdus-Samad, my teachers and the beloved students of Jamiatul Ilm Wal Huda. I would like to extend my gratitude once more to the honourable Mufti Shabbir Ahmed for encouraging me to do a translation of this valuable book, informing and reminding me of the benefits that this book will facilitate for the students of knowledge. Indeed, it is without a doubt that it is the encouraging words and guidance of such great scholars that assist in the production of beneficial works. May Almighty Allah reward Mufti Shabbir Ahmed in return for every individual that takes benefit from this book, and may Almighty Allah eternally keep him happy and become pleased with him! Ameen.

Once more, a special expression of gratitude is extended to Raees Usman for his efforts. May Almighty Allah increase him and all those involved in knowledge and make it a means for their guidance and the guidance of many others gaining success in both worlds, especially the ultimate success of the hereafter via entry into Jannah without reckoning. May Allah abundantly reward all who helped in the compilation of this work. Thanking is indeed a very important aspect of our religion as the great scholar and linguist, Imam Firozabadi mentioned;

"الشكر مع المزيد أبدا" وقال "فمتى لم تر حالك في مزيد فاستقبل الشكر"

'The reaction to gratitude is **always** an increase, whenever you don't see your situation increasing (in good), turn to gratitude (thanking).

Therefore, I thank all those who helped in the completion of this work. I finally ask Allah to place this small work and effort in the scale of our good deeds, for verily He is the All-Powerful and Supreme. I pray to Almighty Allah that he makes this work and translation a means of guidance for many students of knowledge and make it a source for the nurturing and beautifying of students with the correct etiquettes. May Allah make the institute, Jamiatul Ilm Wal Huda (Blackburn, UK) and other institutes around the globe a means of guidance for mankind, Ameen.

Muawiyah ibn (Mufti) Abdus-Samad Ahmed

Graduate of Jamiatul Ilm Wal Huda (Blackburn, UK)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

ولا حول ولا قوة إلا بالله العلي العظيم

1. وإن كان فيهم أصم لا يسمع فليُسمِعُوهُ

If there is a deaf person in the gathering, then the people around him should make means for him to understand the lesson.

Proof: Allah's Messenger ﷺ mentioned: "A deaf person is also part of the gathering; if he is unable to hear then he should be made to hear." I.e. He should be provided with material which will allow him to understand the lesson.

2. وإن حضرهم ضرير فليكتب له بعضهم

If there is a blind person (or a person with any other defect, which doesn't allow him to write) present in the gathering, then some of the people around him should write for him.

Proof: Allah's Messenger ﷺ mentioned: "Verily your hearing for a person who is unable to hear, is a means of sadaqah (charity), and your seeing for a person who is unable to see, is also a means of sadaqah (charity).

3. وكذلك إن كان فيهم أبكم أفهموه

Similarly, if there is a person who is unable to speak in the gathering, then the people around him should make him understand the lesson.

Proof: Abu Dharr رضي الله عنه came to Allah's Messenger ﷺ and asked "Oh Allah's Messenger ﷺ, how can I give charity when I don't have wealth?" Allah's Messenger ﷺ replied "Are the doors of charity only open for money? Rather teaching or explaining something to a deaf or mute person is also a form of charity."

4. وليدرّجهم على التعليم قليلا قليلا

When teaching students, teach them gradually (in small amounts which are easy for the students to understand).

Proof: Allah's Messenger ﷺ said to Husayn رضي الله عنه "If you accept Islam then I will teach you two things." When Husayn رضي الله عنه accepted Islam, he came to Allah's Messenger ﷺ and informed him of his Islam and asked him to teach him the two things which he promised. Allah's Messenger ﷺ replied, say, "Oh Allah inspire me with guidance and protect me from the evil of my soul."

The indication in this narration is that Allah's Messenger ﷺ did not teach Husayn رضي الله عنه the full religion all at once, rather he only taught him a small part (enough for him to digest and build on in future).

5. وليعدّل بين المتعلّمين ويأخذ عليهم على السّبِق

A teacher should treat all his students fairly, and he should attend the needs of that student (or students) which comes first to class.

Proof: Allah's Messenger ﷺ lead a congregation, after which two Companions approached Allah's Messenger ﷺ to ask him some questions. One was from *Banu Thaqif* and the other was an *Ansari*. The *Ansari* Companion came before the *Thaqafi* Companion as he engaged in talk. Allah's Messenger said, "The *Ansari* has beaten you." The *Ansari* Companion replied, "O Allah's Messenger ﷺ, it is possible he is trying to solve his issue and is need of a quicker reply than me."

6. فإن تساوا في السّبِق فمن قدم صاحبه وعرف فضله فذلك حسن

If some students come at the same time, then they should give preference to their fellow friend and acknowledges his virtue. The reward is for the one who gives preference to others over himself.

Proof: Anas ibn Malik رضي الله عنه mentioned "We were with Allah's Messenger ﷺ in a *Masjid* when two Companions came to ask questions, one was an *Ansari* and the other was a *Thaqafi*. The *Ansari* Companion said to the *Thaqafi*, "Go ahead and ask Allah's Messenger ﷺ first." However, the *Thaqafi* Companion replied "You go first as you hold more virtue." The *Ansari* started to ask his question.

7. فَإِنْ حَضَرَ مَعَهُمْ غَرِيبٌ كَانَ أَحَقَّهُمْ بِالسُّؤَالِ وَالسُّبُقِ

If a stranger is present in the lesson then he is worthy of asking and being answered first.

Proof: An *Ansari* came to Allah's Messenger ﷺ and said "I want to ask some questions." Allah's Messenger ﷺ replied: "Please sit down". Thereafter, a *Thaqafi* came to Allah's Messenger ﷺ also wanting to ask some questions. Allah's Messenger ﷺ told the *Thaqafi* Companion, "this *Ansari* came before you." However, the *Ansari* Companion said, "the *Thaqafi* Companion is a foreigner, hence he has the right of being answered first." Therefore, Allah's Messenger ﷺ answered the question of the *Thaqafi* Companion first.

8. وَلَيْسَ عَلَى الْعَالِمِ أَنْ يُجِيبَ الْعَوَامَ مِنَ النَّاسِ إِلَّا عَنِ الْفَتْوَىٰ خَاصَّةً ، وَأَمَّا أَصُولُ الْعِلْمِ وَغَوَامِضُهُ فَإِنَّهُ يُخَصُّ بِهِ مَنْ فَرَّغَ نَفْسَهُ لِلْعِلْمِ وَقَصَدَ لَهُ

It is not necessary for an 'alim (scholar) to answer the general public with all the (detailed) answers, he only needs to answer the specific question asked. The depth and detail of the question and its overall understanding will only be provided for those who have freed themselves with the intention of studying.

Proof 1: Allah's Messenger ﷺ mentioned: "Verily, Almighty Allah is odd and He likes odd, therefore, O people of the Qur'an, pray the Witr salah which is an odd number of *raka't*." A Bedouin came to Allah's Messenger ﷺ and said, "what did you say O Allah's Messenger ﷺ?" Allah's Messenger ﷺ replied, "this was not for you and your companions; rather it was for more specific people, the people of knowledge."

Proof 2: Prophet 'Isa عليه السلام told his companions to keep the strange knowledge, which general people won't understand, hidden from the public. Rather only mention it to the knowledgeable people.

Note: This was so the people with less understanding do not get confused due to the depth of this knowledge.

Proof 3: Imam Malik mentioned: "The destruction of knowledge will be due to answering everyone's questions".

Note: When someone asks a question, you should firstly assess his depth of knowledge.