

Learning About **ISLĀM**

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LEARNING ABOUT ISLĀM
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Introduction

It has been a regular practice of my respected Shaykh, Shaykh Mawlānā Muhammad Saleem Dhorat *ḥafīẓahullāh*, to impart weekly lessons on the tafsīr (commentary) of the Qur’ān at Masjid An Noor, Leicester, UK. On one occasion, he postponed his regular tafsīr lesson in order to convey an important message – the vital need to portray the beautiful teachings of Islām with wisdom and authentic knowledge in a suitable format for non-Muslims.

The topic discussed was the need of the time. The Shaykh emphasised the need to learn about Islām, practise upon it and reach out to others who do not share our beliefs and values and familiarise them with its beautiful teachings with wisdom, without abandoning our religious principles.

All present appreciated the importance of this simple but enlightening lecture and the heartfelt plea of the Shaykh.

A student of the Shaykh, Mawlānā Sulayman Bhula, immediately transcribed the lecture into written form which was further edited by the Shaykh’s other associates. It is only through the Grace of Allāh ﷻ that He has made it possible for this lecture to reach a wider audience.

May Allāh ﷻ accept all Muslims in their efforts to propagate His Dīn in light of the Qur’ān and Sunnah, and may He grant the respected Shaykh *ḥafīẓahullāh* His Divine Acceptance and nearness as he continues to strive for the welfare of humanity. Āmīn.

(Mawlānā) Muhammad Isa Abdullah

Dhul Qa’dah 1424 / January 2004



Learning About Islām - A Pressing Need of Our Time

Let us take this opportunity to analyse a well-known and universal aspect of our lives. There are many important Islamic injunctions that are, by and large, ignored by the majority of the Muslim community. Even though much is said regarding these commands, no one appears to pay much attention. Many people feel that they have heard it all before and know it all too well. What we need to understand is that religious discussions do not take place solely for the purpose of increasing our knowledge. The aim of such discussions is to remind us of our obligations and prompt us to rectify our actions. Therefore, we should listen attentively to everything that is being said with the intention of immediately implementing.

The Need for Reminding

The objective of listening to lectures and reading books is not simply to learn knowledge such as what is ḥalāl

and ḥarām. It is true that knowledge is important, but we must then take stock of our deeds and put into practice those things we are failing to adhere to. The Glorious Qur'ān states:

وَذَكِّرْ فَإِنَّ الذِّكْرَ تَنْفَعُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

Remind them, for truly, reminding benefits the believers. (51:55)

Remind those who already know for it will encourage them to remain steadfast if they are already implementing and guide them towards practising if they are failing to do so. These gatherings of learning are not just a teaching exercise, they are a reminder, an opportunity for imparting advice that needs to be translated into action. If during this process we learn something new, then all the better. Reminding, in this context, means to bring to attention a concept one already knows but is failing to act upon with serious consideration. As long as there is Īmān, reminding is definitely beneficial.

Accordingly, something which is common knowledge and already known should not be ignored. The topic of this particular discussion is also a very common and well-known matter, but as I related earlier, do not sit

back and think, ‘I know this already.’ Instead listen attentively and ask yourself to what extent have you practised. If there are shortcomings or deficiencies then resolve to rectify them and practise immediately.

Our Topic of Discussion

“Acquire authentic knowledge and practice upon it.”

We have heard this statement so often that we do not feel the need to listen further to the finer points. But the question that needs to be answered is how many times have we picked up a book with the intention of reading its contents and acting on the knowledge that it contains?

To illustrate the weakness of our willpower, take ṣalāh as an example. Do we have the correct knowledge with regards to the laws and injunctions of ṣalāh? If yes, then is our ṣalāh in compliance with this knowledge? Everyone knows that ta‘dīlul-arkān is necessary in ṣalāh, i.e. one must pause for such a time that the body becomes motionless in each posture of ṣalāh before changing to the next posture.¹ For example, after getting up from rukū‘, one must pause

1 Badāi‘uṣ-Ṣanā’i, part 1, p.687

until all movement ceases and stay motionless for at least one second before saying ‘Allāhu Akbar’ to go into sajdah. Every person knows this, but how many people practise?

Importance of Learning

It is therefore important for us to ingrain two concepts into our minds. Firstly, to continuously acquire knowledge and secondly, to practise what we learn. Any deed performed without correct knowledge is not fruitful. Take the case of takbīrut-taḥrīmah at the beginning of ṣalāh. A person says ‘Allāhu Akbar’ and raises his hands and another merely raises his hands. Both have exerted the same effort, both have left their homes to come to the masjid in the cold, both have performed wuḍū, both stood in the rows, performed rukū‘ and sajdah and spent half an hour of their time but the ṣalāh of one is complete and acceptable whereas the other’s is not. One had correct and authentic knowledge that takbīrut-taḥrīmah is compulsory and ṣalāh is not complete without it² and the other did not.

On the theme of takbīrut-taḥrīmah, it is astonishing to

2 Badāi‘uṣ-Ṣanā’i, part 1, p.592

find how many worshippers do not possess the correct knowledge regarding this. Perhaps after reflection, we may come to the conclusion that we ourselves are also offering ṣalāh without saying takbīrut-tahrīmah! Without realising it, many people fall into the habit of merely lifting their hands without ‘saying’ the takbīr.

Another mistake committed by many is the omission of qirā’ah in their ṣalāh. They read the Qur’ān in their minds. This is not qirā’ah. In Arabic, qirā’ah does not refer to reading within the mind, but involves movement of the lips and tongue to such an extent that one should hear his own voice and practically sense what he is saying.³ Thus ‘qirā’ah’ is not to be performed in the way we read a newspaper, in our minds only. In such cases the absence of knowledge leads to a deficient and invalid ṣalāh.

Therefore, two things are required, acquisition of authentic knowledge and bringing this knowledge into practice. Only then will our efforts become fruitful.

Deeds Without Knowledge

The example of acting without correct knowledge is

3 Al-Mabsūt, part 1, p.17

like a body, fully intact and perfect but deprived of a soul. It is like someone who stands in the first row and offers long rak‘āts of ṣalāh with full concentration but without wuḍū. However impressive his actions may look, this poor man does not know that his ṣalāh is invalid as wuḍū is farḍ and a prerequisite for ṣalāh.

Our elders have said:

عِلْمٌ بِلَا عَمَلٍ كَشَجَرَةٍ بِلَا ثَمَرَةٍ

*Knowledge without practice is like a tree
without fruit.⁴*

كَوْنُ الشَّخْصِ بِلَا عِلْمٍ كَالْجَسَدِ بِلَا رُوحٍ

*A person without knowledge is like a body
without a soul.⁵*

Knowledge Without Deeds

Correct knowledge is necessary for the deed to be accepted in the Court of Allāh ﷻ, and not practising what has been learnt can be likened to a tree that does not bear fruit.

4 Iqtiḍāul-‘Ilm Al-‘Amal, p.37

5 ‘Uyūnul-Ambā’ fī Ṭabaqātil-Aṭibbā’, p.390

It is like a mango tree in an orchard. The owner labours hard in tending to it until it is fully grown. However, when the mango season arrives it bears no blossom or fruit. If this continues year after year, no owner will put up with such a tree. No one will admire it either. If it had given fruit, then the owner and passers-by alike would have cast admiring glances at it out of admiration for its beauty and all would have loved such a tree.

Similarly, someone who has knowledge and practises upon it will attract all who see him. They will remark how nice a person he is, in his character, politeness, generosity, interaction with people, patience, understanding and helpfulness - the whole world may speak against him and try to turn people against him, but whoever meets him will be captivated by him.

The Fruits of Practising on Our Knowledge

No matter how many times it is repeated that a particular person is bad, when someone interacts with him and witnesses his character then he will conclude that the speaker has malice for this person, and dislike for the propagandist will develop in the heart instead. The person in question will not need to explain to anyone

by the use of words that he is not a bad person; his good character will proclaim it.

So we learn that a person becomes beloved and the favourite of people when he has sound character and morals and performs good deeds. It is also obvious that deeds and manners stem from knowledge. Knowledge is thus the first step, followed closely by action, for knowledge without action is like a fully grown tree but without fruit. When knowledge and action combine, then immense beauty is achieved. An Arab poet has said:

لَيْسَ الْجَمَالُ بِأَثْوَابٍ تُزِينُنَا
إِنَّ الْجَمَالَ جَمَالُ الْعِلْمِ وَالْأَدَبِ
وَلَيْسَ الْيَتِيمُ الَّذِي قَدْ مَاتَ وَالِدُهُ
إِنَّ الْيَتِيمَ يَتِيمُ الْعِلْمِ وَالْأَدَبِ

Beauty is not through apparel that decorates us;

*True beauty is the beauty of knowledge and
etiquettes.*

An orphan is not he whose father has died;

*A true orphan is the orphan of knowledge and
etiquettes.*

A man wearing smart clothes looks impressive at first, but if he turns out to be uncultured and bad mannered, then dislike for him will develop. Another man is in simple clothing but meets people in a well-mannered way, is sympathetic, listens to the problems of others and is concerned about alleviating their difficulties, helps and assists people and lives with simplicity; such a person very soon becomes beloved.

Also ponder over the second part of the poem:

*An orphan is not he whose father has died;
A true orphan is the orphan of knowledge and
etiquettes.*

At present, my friends, how many children of the Ummah are orphans! At the death of a child's father or mother we feel great sympathy, but what of the child who has been deprived of education and a moral upbringing?

Today's Pressing Need

The message is acquire correct knowledge and thereafter practise. We should strive to the extent that our knowledge of Islām increases daily.

This is my earnest appeal to you because if this

happens, it will greatly assist in rectifying the misconceptions about Islām in the current global state of affairs. Increase your knowledge so that you can explain to the world what Islām truly is. At present, we are victims of an inferiority complex because criticisms against Islām coming from all directions, via the media and statements made by leaders, leave us demoralised due to a lack of knowledge about our own religion.

It should not come as a surprise either to realise that there are a minority of Muslims who, after hearing such remarks (of the propagandists), start to doubt their own religion. This is why we observe the apologetic view of ‘modern’ Muslims who deny aspects of Dīn outright saying, ‘This is a local custom, it is not an Islamic teaching.’

Apologists and the Inferiority Complex

Such views expressed by apologists are indeed lamentable. We should have confidence in the Commands of Allāh ﷻ that each Directive of His is full of wisdom. We should present every aspect of Islām to the world in its true perspective. We must not become victims of an inferiority complex, which suggests that non-Muslims will not be able to understand

our arguments. If someone makes a thorough and comprehensive study to appreciate the wisdom behind an issue and considers all of the other related teachings of the Dīn alongside it in the context of the whole social structure of Islām, then he will be able to convince any non-Muslim of the merits of the Islamic system. Sadly, there is a grave deficiency in our study of Islām which is a great tragedy.

A Conversation With a Non-Muslim

Once while travelling abroad, I met a non-Muslim who complained during our conversation that Islām deals unfairly with women and favours men. I asked him to give an example to support his claim, as I had studied the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth yet had never come across his point of contention. He replied saying there are many examples, an obvious one being the rules of inheritance in which males inherit twice the amount that females do. It should have been the opposite, he argued, for females being the weaker gender are unable to strive as much as males.

I commented, ‘It seems you have neither given this issue proper thought nor delved deep enough to discover its wisdom. This is because you have not viewed our

religion as a whole; you have singled out one injunction without studying all matters related to it. Your example is like that of a person who has never seen a car, yet wishes to know the function of an indicator switch and its benefits. Without him stepping into the car, it is next to impossible to give an explanation about the indicator switch that will fully satisfy him. Once he is inside the car and becomes accustomed to the functions of a car, he will very quickly conclude that without this small control, countless accidents would occur on the road. Without studying the whole car and its operation, he will be unable to understand. Similarly, you have only ‘seen the indicator control’ as it were, and now you will need to step into the car to see the whole picture.’

I then explained, ‘When a Muslim girl is born, her father is responsible for her complete upbringing until she reaches a marriageable age and further until the time she actually gets married.⁶ If her father is not alive, then our beautiful Dīn has stipulated a sequence of responsible people who will be charged with her responsibility.

So as far as the Muslim female is concerned, she is not responsible for her own upkeep from birth to the

6 Fathul-Qadīr, part 3, p.344

time of her marriage, and any income she accumulates, e.g. gifts or inheritance, will all belong to her.

After marriage her husband is responsible.⁷ She will own whatever she may have received in dowry, gifts or inheritance. She is not responsible to spend even five pounds on her husband to support him. No matter how poor the husband may be, his rich wife is not obliged to support him. He must earn for himself, his wife and children.⁸ If the husband dies or she is divorced, then the responsibility of looking after her reverts to her father, and in his absence to the stipulated responsible persons, such as brothers, sons, grandfather, uncles etc. And if she has no one to support her, the Islamic government will be obliged to support her.⁹ How compassionately Allāh ﷻ has treated womankind. From birth to death, a female is not obliged to spend a single penny towards her upkeep. The full responsibility lies upon her father, husband, brother, etc.

Now let us study the other side of the coin. The father is responsible for his son until he attains maturity. From the age of maturity, the son is responsible for his upkeep,

7 Fathul-Qadīr, part 3, p.321

8 Fathul-Qadīr, part 3, p.344

9 Fathul-Qadīr, part 3, p.344

whether he gets married or not.¹⁰ Upon marrying he will give maḥr (dowry) to his bride.¹¹ Thereafter, he is responsible for himself, his wife and children. Furthermore, if, for example, his daughter becomes widowed and returns home, then he will have to take responsibility of her as well. Similarly, in the absence of the father, he will need to provide for his mother and sisters.¹² In other words, a woman throughout her life is a recipient and the man is continuously spending.’

My travelling companion listened to the whole argument very attentively and was left speechless.

Lack of Knowledge Hinders Us from Talking about Islām

The point being addressed is that there is no law of Islām regarding which one cannot hold a discussion with somebody; the trouble is we do not possess the necessary knowledge! Therefore, acquire knowledge, for this is the pressing need of the time.

In accordance with the aptitude that Allāh ﷻ has

10 Fathul-Qadīr, part 3, p.344

11 Al-Mabsūṭ, part 5, p.63

12 Badāi‘uṣ-Ṣanā’i, part 5, p.167-172

blessed each one of us with, we should study Islamic books and then logically discuss what we have learnt with non-Muslims. How can anyone justify silently working away alongside individuals in whose minds all manner of criticisms and objections are brewing about the beautiful Dīn of Allāh ﷻ? Doctors working in hospitals, professionals working in offices, students at colleges and universities and those that interact with the wider community on a daily basis have a great opportunity of highlighting the beautiful teachings of Islām.

Practical Method

Allāh ﷻ has placed in my heart a practical method for Muslims working with non-Muslims. Firstly, ask yourself why you do not desire to discuss Islamic topics with your non-Muslim colleagues? The answer will most probably be that you do not want to place yourself in an embarrassing situation in which you are left unable to give a satisfactory answer. If this is the case, then put pen to paper and jot down a list of possible issues. Thereafter, under each heading compile a list of the possible questions which may be posed concerning a particular issue. After compiling this list, approach an authentic ‘Ālim, sound in knowledge, and ask each question, one by one, and take notes of the answers.

After taking notes, inquire whether there is any authentic written material on the subject. You are now ready, armed with the basics and full of confidence, able and willing to tackle the subject. If you ever get stuck, do not panic or worry, defer it for another time and refer back to the ‘Ulamā so you are better prepared. Inshā’allāh in this way, within five to six months you will become a dā’ī (caller) towards Islām. Through you, inshā’allāh, Allāh ﷻ will bring people onto the path of Paradise or, at the very least, their dislike for Islām will diminish for they will realise that Islām is not what they read in the papers, hear on the radio or view on TV.

Knowledge Should Increase Daily

So resolve to increase your knowledge daily and make a programme of study. It is very unfortunate that months pass by without any increase in our knowledge. After leaving madrasah in our early days we have made no programme to acquire knowledge of our Dīn. Let us for once create an enthusiasm to research the topics regarding our religion which the media is always discussing. Consult the ‘Ulamā and read authentic books.

Allāh ﷻ has promised to safeguard His Dīn, and

that can only happen when there exists answers to questions. Therefore, for every particular question that may arise, there must be someone able to answer it. If one ‘Ālim cannot answer, then there will definitely be another who will.

Once you begin this exercise, you will have in front of you a correct picture of Islām giving you the ability and confidence to talk about it. For example, when a bad incident takes place anywhere in the world which is attributed to Islām, then during such circumstances you feel embarrassed due to a lack of knowledge. If you possessed knowledge, you would be able to explain, ‘This is an act of injustice and Islām condemns such behaviour.’

Dispelling Doubts - Our Duty

Read quality books, good articles, the works of authentic ‘Ulamā and acquire knowledge. Whatever you learn, be sure to practise and also explain to non-Muslims whenever you get the opportunity. The need of the time is to present the Dīn of Allāh ﷻ in its true form to those who are unaware, apprehensive or antagonistic towards us. Explain to them that Islām teaches mercy and compassion and we are the followers of that Nabī

ﷺ who was a mercy for the worlds and the likes of whom has never been born in all of the creation of Allāh ﷻ. A poet has stated:

دیکھ کر اخلاق کو اور آپ کے الطاف کو
غیر بھی کہتے ہیں تم ہو رحمۃ للعالمین

*Looking at his characters, looking at his
benevolence,*

*Even the foes concur that he is the mercy for all
the worlds.*

This is my heartfelt appeal. Learn, practise and pass on. The ‘Ulamā and professionals need to develop and maintain a close relationship with the intention of serving the Dīn. To dispel the misunderstandings being created about Islām is an essential duty of Muslims. If we fail in this duty, the non-Muslims will draw further and further away from Islām, making it all the more difficult for us to survive in any corner of the world, as a hostile attitude has emerged against Islām.

May Allāh ﷻ give us the ability to practise upon what has been discussed and may Allāh ﷻ protect Islām, Muslims and humanity as a whole. Āmīn.

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