

صفات العلماء وطلاب العلم

The Characteristics of the Scholars and the Students of Knowledge



Key points from a lecture given by Shaykh Saleh bin Abdul-Azeez Aali-Shaykh (Hafithahullah) entitled, "The Virtue of Knowledge and Learning along with the Characteristics of the Scholars and their Virtues"



Transcribed and Translated by Al-Thamaraat

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About the Book: This is a translation of some of the key points from a lecture given by Shaykh Saleh bin Abdul-Azeez Aali-Shaykh (Hafithahullah) entitled, **“The Virtue of Knowledge and Learning along with the Characteristics of the Scholars and their Virtues”**. This e-book isn’t a complete translation of the entire lecture, but rather the portion of the lecture that has been translated/ transcribed focuses on the shaykh’s description of the attributes possessed by the scholars and the students of knowledge. These attributes have been titled by the translators for clarity purposes. We ask Allah, The Most High, to benefit the readers as well as the preparers of this translation.

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Translated and summarized by,

Ali Davis
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Introduction¹

All praise is for Allah alone and may prayers and peace be upon our prophet Muhammad, his family and all of his companions.

Allah, The Lofty and Exalted, has perfected the religion of Islam, as He said in the Quran, **“This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion”** (Surah Al-Maaidah: 3). He, The Most High, sent the prophet Muhammad (salla Allahu alayhe wa sallam), as a mercy to mankind, and as an example of how to establish the worship of Allah. Allah, The Most High, said, **“And we have not sent you (O Muhammad) except as a mercy to mankind”** (Surah Al-Anbiyah: 107). He, The Lofty and Exalted, also said, **“Say (O Muhammad to mankind): If you love Allah, then follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you your sins”** (Surah Aali-Imraan: 31).

After the death of the messenger of Allah (salla Allahu alayhe wa sallam), Allah, The All-Wise, preserved the religion by raising those whom He chose during every time period to be from the inheritors of the prophets. These inheritors of the prophets are the scholars of Islam. The messenger of Allah (salla Allahu alayhe wa sallam), said, **“Indeed the scholars are the inheritors of the prophets. And the prophets don’t leave behind deenars or dirhams (i.e. forms of currency), but they leave behind knowledge. So whoever takes from that knowledge has taken something great”²**. In this hadeeth, the scholars have been given a highly respectable position by the messenger of Allah (salla Allahu alayhe wa sallam) and this is why we find the imams of the Salaf (early generations of Muslims) rushing to the sittings of the scholars in order to benefit from their knowledge as well as their manners.

Imam Ath-Thahabee (748H.) mentioned that Sufyaan Ath-Thawree (163H.), rahimahumallah, one of the early scholars of Islam, took knowledge from over 600 scholars.³ These scholars and imams of the past were known to be people who possessed knowledge and they were also diligent worshippers of Allah, The Lofty

¹ TN.

² Recorded by At-Tirmitheh and authenticated by Al-Albaanee #2682

³ Siyaar ‘Alaam An-Nubala by Imam Ath-Thahabee Vol. 7, Pg. 234



and Exalted. It was reported that Saeed bin Al-Musayyib (93H.) said that he performed hajj 40 times⁴, and hajj is one of the greatest acts of worship that a person can perform. Maymoon ibn Mihraan said, "*When I arrived in Al-Madeenah I asked, who was the most knowledgeable from among the people of Al-Madeenah. I was then directed to Sa'eed ibn Al-Musayyib*"⁵. This is just one of many examples of the imams of the past combining between knowledge and worship.

The scholars and imams of the past also considered manners to be a very important aspect of the religion of Islam. Imam Abdullah ibn Al-Mubaarak (181H.) (rahimahullah) said, "*I learned adab (manners and proper etiquettes) for 30 years, and I learned knowledge for 20 years, and the people used to learn adab (manners and proper etiquettes) before learning knowledge*".⁶ It was reported that Abdullah ibn Wahb (rahimahullah) said, "*We learned more from Maalik's (i.e. Imam Maalik ibn Anas) adab (manners and proper etiquettes) than we learned from his knowledge*".⁷ It is also reported that some of the Salaf would say to their children, "*O my son, it is more beloved to me that you learn one chapter on adab (manners and proper etiquettes), than if you were to learn 70 chapters from the many different branches of knowledge*".⁸ So from these narrations, we see the status that was given to worshipping Allah, the status that was given to seeking knowledge, as well as the status that was given to learning adab (manners and proper etiquettes) by the early generations.

In actuality, the scholars of the past and present are role models for the Muslims. They are immediate role models for the students of knowledge and they are also examples for every Muslim who seeks to gain the ultimate success (i.e. Paradise). This is because the scholars have been described as those who fear Allah, and those who fear Allah will be rewarded with Paradise by Allah's permission. Therefore, the following advice should be a reminder for the students of knowledge and an encouragement for every Muslim as we all should be striving to attain Paradise. Allah, The Most High, said in His book, "**It is only those who have knowledge from amongst His slaves that fear Allah**" (Surah Faatir: 28). He also said,

⁴ Siyaar 'Alaam An-Nubala by Imam Ath-Thahabee Vol. 4, Pg. 222

⁵ Siyaar 'Alaam An-Nubala by Imam Ath-Thahabee Vol. 4, Pg. 224

⁶ Ghayah An-Nihaayah fi Tabaqaat Al-Quraa by Shams-Deen Muhammad ibn Muhammad Al-Jazaree Vol. 1, Pg. 398-399, First Edition Narration #1858

⁷ Siyaar 'Alaam An-Nubala by Imam Ath-Thahabee Vol. 8, Pg. 113

⁸ Tathkirah As-Saami' wa Al-Mutakallam by Badr-Deen Muhammad ibn Jamaa'ah Pg. 14



“Indeed the success (Paradise) is for those who fear Allah” (Surah An-Nabaa: 31). Al-Haafith Ibn Katheer, the great scholar of tafseer (rahimahullah) mentioned in his explanation of the previous verse in surah Faatir, *“Indeed those who fear Him, The Most High, the way He is supposed to be feared, are the scholars that have knowledge of Him, The Most High. This is because the more a person has knowledge of Al-‘Atheem (The Great), Al-Qadeer (The All-Able), The One who is described with perfect attributes and with beautiful names, the more complete a person’s knowledge is of Allah, the more the person fears Him, The Most High.”*⁹

We ask Allah to allow us to benefit from the scholars of Islam while seeking His pleasure, The Most High. We beseech Allah to aid us in preparation for that Great Day (i.e. The Last Day), as Allah says, **“The Day when (all) of mankind will stand before the Lord of the ‘Alameen (mankind, jinn and all that exists)”** (Surah Al-Mutaffifeen: 6). Lastly, may prayers and peace be upon our prophet Muhammad, his family and all of his companions.

⁹ Tafseer Al-Quraan Al-‘Atheem by al-Haafith Ibn Katheer, 774 Hijri/1353 Gregorian.



The Characteristics of the Scholars and the Students of Knowledge

Purification of the intentions:

From the most important characteristics of the scholars and the students of knowledge is that they purify their intentions for Allah, The Lofty and Exalted, and that they don't seek knowledge so that it is said about them, "He is a scholar" or "He is a student". The Intention for seeking knowledge is that he seeks it (i.e. knowledge) sincerely for Allah alone, The Lofty and Exalted, so that he can correct his worship and his actions. In addition to this initial intention, if he feels he is able to benefit his fellow Muslim brothers and spread the Deen (religion) of Allah, The Lofty and Exalted, then this is a righteous intention that he will be rewarded for. If he intends to remove the ignorance from himself and from others, then this is also a righteous intention that he will be rewarded for, and this is because ignorance in this situation is something that is blameworthy.

The diligence of the scholars in teaching at-Tawheed (i.e. singling Allah out in His Lordship, in worshipping Him, and in His names and attributes):

And from their characteristics is that they are diligent in teaching that which aides a person in being sincere to Allah, The Lofty and Exalted, and that is (by teaching) at-Tawheed and the correct aqeedah (i.e. belief system). This is because the greatest knowledge that is sought is knowledge of al-Imaan (belief), and for this reason Allah, The Lofty and Exalted, said, **"Except for those who believe (i.e. aamanoo) and do righteous deeds"** (Surah Al-Asr: 3). The people of knowledge have mentioned that Allah began with knowledge because al-imaan (to believe in Allah) is knowledge. Therefore, if al-Imaan (i.e. believing in Allah) is knowledge then that means that the best knowledge, is the knowledge of al-Imaan. The scholars have also explained al-Imaan to mean at-Tawheed and having the correct al-Aqeedah.



This is how knowledge was sought from the scholars (during the earlier generation of Muslims), and the followers of the Salaf (the early generations of Muslims) would give great attention to this (i.e. at-Tawheed). For this reason, it is unacceptable that (a person) does not understand at-Tawheed, while understanding subsidiary issues of lesser importance than at-Tawheed. Moreover, if a problem or question arises that requires attention with regards to at-Tawheed or al-Aqeedah, (a person that does not understand at-Tawheed) will be unable to speak to resolve the matter. This person does not understand the issue (at-Tawheed) while it is Allah's right over His servants! But the person (that lacks knowledge of at-Tawheed) knows other contributory issues (that are important) but not as significant as at-Tawheed; this is a sign of deficiency.

With that said, after learning at-Tawheed, a person should learn other aspects of worship; (for example) what is halaal (permissible) and what is haram (impermissible). (This methodology of learning) is how a person gradually moves in stages in regards to (learning) the rights of Allah upon the servant. For a person to be knowledgeable in Seerah (the biography of the Prophet), but he doesn't know at-Tawheed or the Sunnah, and doesn't know how to worship Allah, The Lofty and Exalted, in his salaah, and doesn't know how to pay zakaat, and doesn't know how to fast or perform hajj, and he doesn't know other fundamental affairs of the religion, then this is a deficiency in that person.

Being merciful to the people:

From the characteristics of the scholars is that they are merciful to one another, working together, and concerned about one another. This is because they follow the same manhaj (methodology of understanding and practicing the religion) and the correct aqeedah (belief system) which the Salaf were upon and likewise the Salaf used to love one another. The Sahaabah (the companions of the messenger of Allah), the Taabi'oon (the generation after the companions) and the scholars after them would criticize scholars who were jealous of or envied other scholars. This is because (this type of) jealousy is contrary to what knowledge demands from its possessor. Knowledge necessitates from a person that his heart is free from any hatred or jealousy, and that he is happy if Allah, The Lofty and Exalted, chooses someone (other than him) to stand up and establish the religion. You should be



happy that you have been freed from the responsibility of calling to Islam and that responsibility has been placed upon someone else. And for this reason the Sahaabah used to shy away from giving fataawaa (Islamic Rulings). They used to shy away from being placed in high ranking positions and having major responsibilities due to them wanting to protect themselves. If they were designated to give fataawaa, they strived to fulfill their responsibility and would ask Allah, The Lofty and Exalted, to aid them and give them success.

And so the students of knowledge are merciful to one another, they love one another, and they are not jealous of each other. Allah, The Most High, said, **“And do not put in our hearts any hatred against those who have believed. Our Lord! Indeed You are full of kindness, Most Merciful”** (Al-Hashr: 10). So if he (i.e. a fellow student) makes a mistake or commits a sin, he (i.e. the advisor) rushes to advise him in an Islamically legislated manner that shows him (i.e. the one being advised) that you love him and want good for him, don't make him feel alienated or bitter. These are from the things that will assist in spreading good and minimizing evil. This will also assist in bringing the scholars and the students together because this strengthens the good and removes or minimizes evil.

Rejecting all forms of Hizbiyyah (to love and hate for other than Allah):

From the characteristics of the students and people of knowledge is that they are free from every name except for Islam and the Sunnah. For this reason, some of the scholars would criticize (another) scholar who (unjustly) defends or supports his shaykh whoever he may be, or he (unjustly) supports his math-hab whatever it is, or he (unjustly) supports or defends a group or a certain community. This is because these are not the traits that are indicative of an individual who possesses knowledge. Knowledge requires from you that you aid the creation and aid the Muslims in establishing the religion. This is the sunnah of the messenger (salla Allahu alayhe wa sallam), that you make the people love the religion, and that you close off the pathways to opposing the religion. This is what beneficial knowledge requires from those who possess it (i.e. beneficial knowledge).

As for the knowledge that consists of aiding a specific math-hab, or group, or community, then this is in opposition to the intended purpose of knowledge. This is



also in opposition to a righteous intention, and this is a blameworthy action. And as a result, some of the people of knowledge have said, and it was shaykh Bakr Abu Zayd, (rahimahullah), he said in his book “Hilyah Taalib Al-‘Ilm”, ‘From the characteristics of the students of knowledge, is that you O’ student of knowledge don’t enter into the different groups and sects.’¹⁰ This is because these groups and sects will divert the student of knowledge from the reality of seeking knowledge and lead him to something else (i.e. other than seeking knowledge). On the other hand, if he is protected from that (i.e. entering into the different groups), then it is hoped that the method he is following in seeking knowledge will be safeguarded. This is why Allah, The Lofty and Exalted, said, **“Say: This is my way; I invite to Allah with sure knowledge, I and whoever follows me”** (Surah Yusuf: 108). Shaykh al-Islam Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab (rahimahullah) said in his book “Kitab At-Tawheed”, The statement in the ayah **‘I invite to Allah’** is calling your attention to sincerity for Allah alone, which is in opposition to those who call to their shaykh or to their way.

Benefiting the people in the affairs of the deen (religious affairs) and the dunyah (worldly affairs):

And from the characteristics of the scholars is that they are diligent in benefiting the people in their deen (religious affairs) as well as their dunyah (worldly affairs) to the best of their ability. The scholars are callers to that which is khair (good). They command the good and forbid the evil, and this is because beneficial knowledge requires that this message (i.e. Islam) is carried. The inheritors of the prophet Muhammad (salla Allahu alayhe wa sallam), as he (salla Allahu alayhe wa sallam) said, **“They don’t leave behind deenars or dirhams (i.e. forms of currency), indeed they leave behind knowledge. So whoever takes from that knowledge has taken something great”**¹¹. The Messenger of Allah (salla Allahu alayhe wa sallam) had many obligations and the people of knowledge have inherited those obligations from giving fataawaa (Islamic rulings), to leading the people in terms of benefiting others and with regards to showing kindness and being merciful to people, keeping the family ties, struggling in the path of Allah, commanding the good and forbidding the evil, and likewise in all aspects of performing good deeds. The people of

¹⁰ “Hilyah Taalib Al-‘Ilm” Pg. 84 by Shaykh Bakr Abu Zayd (rahimahullah)

¹¹ Recorded by At-Tirmitheh and authenticated by Al-Albaanee #2682



knowledge should be the first to perform these deeds. This is because the scholar knows the limits that Allah has revealed to His messenger (salla Allahu alayhe wa sallam) with regards to all of these issues.

Therefore, knowledge in reality is implemented by the student of knowledge calling the person to all that contains good. Calling to that which contains good doesn't necessitate that he is on the microphone giving a lecture, or that he gives the Jum'ah khutbah, this is not a must. A person calls to good based on the knowledge he has. So he begins with himself and those in his household, and those around him who may be ignorant, or those who he travels to visit etc. He intends to teach the people. How can a student of knowledge that possesses knowledge not be diligent in benefiting the people? This is something that is questionable! And it is from the blameworthy characteristics. Rather, (the student) should strive for good by helping the Muslims in their deen and in their dunyah, commanding the good and forbidding the evil, and doing anything else that will bring dignity and glory to religion of Allah, The Lofty and Exalted. (This, in reality is) from the praiseworthy characteristics.

Protecting your heart and tongue:

From the characteristics of the scholars and students of knowledge is that their tongues and their hearts are free from everything that is displeasing to Allah, The Lofty and Exalted.

As for the tongue: Then their tongues only say that which is good. (Is it conceivable that) a student of knowledge backbites?! A student of knowledge that is a nammaam (spreads rumors)?! A student of knowledge who falls into this and that (i.e. from committing sins)?! A student of knowledge who's tongue isn't constantly remembering Allah, The Lofty and Exalted?! If He debates with a person, he displays wicked behavior?! If he speaks, he speaks evil?! These are not from the praiseworthy characteristics of the people of knowledge and this behavior is not from that which beneficial knowledge requires from the one who possesses knowledge. And for this reason Allah, The Lofty and Exalted, said, **“And say to My slaves that they should (only) say those words that are the best. (Because) Indeed Shaytaan sows a state of conflict and disagreement among them”** (Surah Al-Israa: 53). This is where patience enters the picture. Does the scholar or student of knowledge think that he won't



hear things that he dislikes? It is a must that he will hear these things throughout his lifetime. The prophet (salla Allahu alayhe wa sallam) heard things that he disliked and he was harmed! Did he (salla Allahu alayhe wa sallam) just say to people ‘you are this and you are that’? This isn’t correct. You must divide the people into categories and confront them while exercising patience. And his tongue should be pure, using good speech, saying a good word, **“And good and evil are not equal even if you are amazed by an abundance of evil.”** (Surah Al-Maaidah: 100)

So from the characteristics of the student of knowledge is that he uses his tongue in the best way possible with regards to the expressions that he uses, in his dealings with people, and when he is being patient with the people. Some of the people if they were harmed, you could see it in their faces; but this did not affect them to the point that they would take from a person’s honor (by speaking bad about the person). It is a must that from amongst the people there will be those that are correct and those that make mistakes, and those that are upon that which is correct and others that aren’t. But he must be patient with them, teach them, guide them to that which is correct, and his tongue is to be pure.

As for the heart: The student of knowledge strives within himself to free his heart from any hatred or jealousy for those who have passed away and those who are presently living, except for those legislated exceptions that are allowed in some cases. (But it’s not appropriate) that he has some negative feelings in his heart, and we seek refuge in Allah from deceiving or having hatred for the believers.

Rushing to perform good deeds:

Also from the characteristics of the students of knowledge are that they perform righteous actions and that they have fear of Allah, The Lofty and Exalted, because the reality of knowledge is that a person fears Allah with that knowledge. So if knowledge doesn’t produce the fear of Allah, The Lofty and Exalted, then this knowledge is deficient, not beneficial, or not completely beneficial. For this reason Allah, The Lofty and Exalted, said, **“It is only those who have knowledge from amongst His slaves that fear Allah”** (Surah Faatir: 28); meaning the people of knowledge have more right to have fear of Allah, The Lofty and Exalted, due to what they know about Allah from His Lordship, His names and attributes, and from what



Allah, The Lofty and Exalted, has prepared (as a reward) for the believers, and from what he has prepared for the sinful person and the hypocrite.

The people of knowledge always look at their actions from two angles: From the angle of mercy and from the angle of fear.

As far as the angle of mercy, they (i.e. the scholars) look at the creation and specifically the Muslims and they are merciful to them. They are merciful to the disobedient person when he disobeys Allah, because they know that he only disobeyed Allah due to the fact that Iblees (Shaytaan) overpowered him, and he is merciful to the servant who doesn't understand the deen of Allah, The Lofty and Exalted, and he is merciful to the one in need who doesn't implement the deen of Allah, and he is merciful to the one who contradicts what is correct and the one who opposes the manhaj (i.e. the correct methodology of understanding and practicing the religion). He displays this patience so that he can guide them to the manhaj of the Salaf as-Saleh and the Sunnah of the prophet (salla Allahu alayhe wa sallam).

As far as the angle of fearing Allah, The Lofty and Exalted, he also has two ways of looking at it:

Firstly, he fears Allah from being held accountable on the Day of Judgment. So this encourages him to be serious and perform righteous actions. Secondly, he fears Allah from the angle of being merciful, and this encourages him not to be harsh with the believers.

Being patient when seeking knowledge:

And from the characteristics of the scholars and the students of knowledge is that they are continuously patient when seeking and gaining knowledge. Knowledge isn't sought in a day or a night, or in two or three seminars, or ten or twenty seminars! Knowledge is to be sought from the time you begin your journey in seeking knowledge until you die. This is why Imam Ahmed (rahimahullah) said, "*Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave*" because the student of knowledge never becomes fed up with seeking knowledge. Imam Ahmed (rahimahullah) also said, "*With the inkwell, to the cemetery*" meaning it is a must that he always has a book and paper with him.



He is always determined and patient so he doesn't leave off knowledge, and memorizing and studying whatever the situation may be. This is because if he leaves off these things his knowledge will become weak or possibly forgotten.

Gathering the people upon the truth:

And from the characteristics of the students of knowledge is that they are in constant pursuit of good, far away from evil, diligent in those things that are good for themselves and the people, and far away from that which is harmful to themselves and to the people. This is why the people of knowledge are described as being the jamaa'ah (the congregation) that was mentioned in the hadeeth, that the prophet (salla Allahu alayhe wa sallam) spoke about the different groups, **“All of them (i.e. the groups or sects) are in the fire except one”**. It was said, “What group is that O' messenger of Allah?” He said, **“The Jamaa'ah”**¹². It was said to Imam Ahmed (rahimahullah), *“Who is the Jamaa'ah?”* He said, *“They are Ahlul-Hadeeth”*. In another narration he said (rahimahullah), *“They are the people of knowledge”*. Also, Imam At-Tirmitheh (rahimahullah) said in his book *“Al-Jamia'h”*, *“They are the people of knowledge”*.

So from the most important characteristics of the people of knowledge is they always strive to gather the people, gathering them on the Deen al-Haqq (the true religion), they gather the people upon obeying the rulers and not creating fitnah (problems between the people) neither major nor minor. This is the description of the imams of the Sunnah and the followers of the Salaf as-Saleh from the beginning of time up until this present day and until Allah takes the earth and the people on it. For this reason the people of knowledge are described as the Jamaa'ah, and they work hard for both types of the Jamaa'ah: Jamaa'ah ad-deen (i.e. uniting the people based upon the Quran and the Sunnah) and Jamaa'ah al-abdaan (i.e. uniting the people under an imam; a leader).”

Working together upon good and righteousness:

And from their characteristics is that they work together upon righteousness and piety and this is because implementing or establishing the religion doesn't come

¹² Recorded by Ibn Maajah and authenticated by Al-Albaanee #3992
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about from an individual effort, or by focusing on one aspect of the religion. Establishing the religion is by working together, every person according to what he is able to do. The scholars and students of knowledge should be the first of the people to tend to these matters, and they should be the first of the people to be working together upon righteousness and piety, and to warn from working together upon sin and transgressing.



Conclusion

And there are many characteristics of the students of knowledge, and for further details perhaps you can return to the books wherein the descriptions of the scholars have been mentioned. And we ask Allah, The Lofty and Exalted, to make us and you from the people He blesses to carry this knowledge and we ask Him to make this knowledge firm, and we ask Him to bless us with the beautiful characteristics of the people of knowledge. We ask Allah, The Lofty and Exalted, to forgive us for our sins and for being wasteful or transgressing the bounds and we ask Him to make our ending (in this world) upon good.”¹³

And may prayers and peace be upon our prophet Muhammad, his family and all of his companions.

¹³ End of the shaykh’s lecture.