Sultanate of Oman

Diwan of Royal Court

Sultan Qaboos Centre for Islamic Culture

(Towards an Islamic Culture)

THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWLEDGE

BY

HIS EMINENCE

SHEIKH AHMAD BIN HAMAD

AL - KHALILY

THE GRAND MUFTI OF

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

(Serial. No. 1)

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Praise be to Allah, The Lord of the worlds, and prayers and blessings be upon the most noble of His messengers; our beloved Muhammad, his family, companions and whoever follow in his footsteps until the Day of Judgement.

Knowledge is honour

Mankind strives for knowledge as a matter of instinct due to the fact that to obtain knowledge is to acquire honour.

There is no better proof than the fact that we find most people today claiming to be knowledgeable, whether rightly or wrongly. Allah Almighty distinguished human beings with the feature of knowledge. We are told that when Allah informed His angels that He will be creating Adam whom shall acquire a

position much preferable and sublime to theirs, He Almighty commanded them to prostrate to Adam. The verses that relay this story emphasise the importance of knowledge in Islam. Allah Almighty states in the Holy Quran:

Behold your Lord said to the angels; "I will create a vicegerent on earth". They said: "Will You place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? - Whilst we do celebrate Your praises and glorify Your holy name?" He said: "I know what you know not". And He taught Adam the names of all things; then He placed them before the angels, and said: "Tell Me the names of these if you are right". They said: "Glory be to You; of knowledge we have none, save what You have taught us: in truth it is You Who are perfect in knowledge and wisdom"(2:30-32)

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Knowledge solves confusion and answers questions

All walks of knowledge are beneficial and it is true to say that knowing is better than being ignorant. However, it is also true that this benefit varies according to the type of knowledge concerned.

Therefore, the most important of knowledge is to know the definition of mankind, where we have come from? Where are we going? What is our duty and function in this life? What is the burden that we carry? How can we deal with ourselves, our fellow men, the Universe in which we live? This is the type of knowledge, which cannot be neither deduced nor controlled by virtue of science and experimentation, can only be reached by the divine and true messages.



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The Prophets of Allah were sent as warners and as bearers of glad tidings so that all the confusion that arises in the minds and hearts of people can be resolved and all questions answered.

The mind is the tool of knowledge

All people realise that they have the beginning. They also realise that they have and end. It is also true that everyone knows that between their beginning and their end, they are to fulfil certain duties and responsibilities, as a result of being unique amongst all other creatures on this earth. Allah Almighty blessed man with the mind, by which he has the ability to use and utilise the rest of Allah's creations for his own benefit. The mind was not granted to man simply to fulfil his needs during his short lifetime, but rather

because mankind undertakes responsibility for life as a whole. In addition, man will have to face up to his actions and deeds in the Hereafter, the true life, unto which we shall all move after this life. The knowledge carried in the various messages of Allah came to solve the riddles and resolve the confusions which would have otherwise, remained rife in the hearts and minds of people. It is also vital to realise that man's life is different from that of other creatures in that man is a social creature that strives to relate and to deal with others in a social context.

The divine knowledge imposes restrictions and limitations upon mankind's behaviour

The human spirit is instinctively selfish

and dominant; thus, all people have a tendency to benefit even if that meant the suffering of others. For that reason, man needed restrictions and limitations that were only illustrated in the divine knowledge delivered by the Messengers.

The messages of Allah were fulfilled and completed by the seal of messages, which was delivered by the noble prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The message of Islam addresses the minutest details of man's life and existence in a comprehensive and illustrative manner. This message came to reform the conduct of mankind in this life, so that life becomes better and more pleasant and the ultimate reward becomes in his favour, due to his abiding by the deeds and acts described and decreed by the divine message. It is important to point out that the message of Islam was the

same message sent to all nations and peoples through their respective messengers and prophets, whilst choosing this nation of Muhammed (pbuh) to deliver the message to all people of this earth.

Scholars are responsible for the trust of prophethood

As a result, whoever carries this knowledge is actually carrying the trust of prophethood. And since there is no prophet after the Prophet Muhammad, the case of Islam is not similar to that of Moses (pbuh) who was sent to the People of Israel and then a number of prophets were sent to them again to remind and reinstate particular teachings within the Taurat. Therefore, the scholars of this

nation are entrusted with the message of Muhammad (pbuh). In this context, the Prophet Muhammad stated that "this knowledge is carried by successors who come to rebuke all misinterpretations, correct all mistakes and reform all diversions, created by the ignorant, radical and false".

Scholars are assessed by their actions not by the extent of their knowledge

The more of this knowledge one carries, the more goodness and blessings. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) stated that "if Allah wants good for someone, He will make him aware in the affairs of religion".

This is a special blessing granted by Allah to whomever He Almighty wishes

good, as one would become fully aware and knowledgeable in what should be done and what should not, how to deal with others and how to interact with the vast universe. Only then, will man prove to be the worthy vicegerent of Allah, lord of this universe and responsible for the trust of prophethood; reforming the ill ways of people and harmonising human interaction amongst themselves and between them and other creatures on this earth.

Knowledge in religion is far from being mere theories and ideologies; rather it is to firstly appreciate the right upon us towards our Lord, who created us from non-existence. This knowledge and appreciation would lead to one feeling comfortable in the knowledge and appreciation of one's own position and

posture in relation to Allah; His allowances and His prohibitions. This is true knowledge that is worthy of the description given in the previous statement (Hadith) of the Prophet (pbuh).

However, if this knowledge is transformed into mere rhetoric, theories, studies and volumes that fill library shelves, it ceases to be called knowledge. Allah Almighty gave an example from the state of the People of Israel which will be worthy of this nation should it decline into the same state. Allah states:

The similitude of those were entrusted with the obligations of Taurat, but who subsequently failed in those obligations, is that of a donkey which carries huge tomes (but understands them not). Evil is the similitude of people who falsify the signs of Allah: And Allah guides not people who do wrong" (62:5)

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Would a scholar accept to descend to the status of a donkey?!

If this nation relinquishes the trust given to it by Allah Almighty and refused to fulfil its duties, whilst recognising its responsibilities, it will have become similar to the People of Israel who were compared to a donkey who carries tomes. In fact, the Israelis deserved such a humiliating description whilst having deviated from the way of Allah and failed to abide by their book in the way that Allah wanted. Therefore, scholars of this nation would be more deserving of this description if they committed the same sin, as they are aware of their duties and responsibilities. In any case, knowledge should first and foremost teach its carriers discipline, how to properly set priorities

and to avoid meaningless arguments and insignificant issues which ultimately lead to corruption, Allah forbid.

Knowledge of religion comprises of matters of belief, worship and behaviour

The knowledge of religion (Jurisprudence) enables its carrier to appreciate that Allah Almighty truly possesses absolute power. There is no obedience but to Allah and only within the boundaries decreed by Allah, therefore no individual is to be obeyed if it related to a matter forbidden by Allah Almighty. It is vital to realise that the knowledge of religion (Jurisprudence) should never be to justify tyranny, injustice or corruption in any form or manner. Indeed, it is

incumbent upon the knowledgeable of this nation to reform others. For this reason, it is important for every Muslim to strive for this knowledge as much as possible so that he or she may worship Allah in the proper and correct way. This may be unattainable without the necessary knowledge in relation to, for instance, prayers, paying Zakat, fasting or performing Hajj.

In fact, how would a Muslim be able to interact properly within his own family without knowing his or her duties towards the sons, daughters, husband and wife, brothers and sisters, etc? How would it be possible for one to deal and behave correctly within society without knowing the duties towards neighbours and members of the Muslim community? One would be unable to interact with others in matters relating to buying and selling, etc.

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It is therefore imperative for a Muslim to acquire a certain amount of knowledge which would enable him or her to live according to the code and teachings of Islam so that his entire dealings and behaviour do not breach the boundaries of what is permitted and what isn't.

Seeking all types of knowledge is a necessity

In addition to the above, it is important for each to specialise in a particular field of knowledge as this is decreed by the need of humanity for all kinds of specialities. The Islamic society is in need of all scientific fields, as there is great need for the doctor, engineer, agricultural specialist as well as the teacher and military person, as all those benefit the

Muslims and humanity as a whole.

However, it is also vital that whilst specialising in a particular field, a Muslim must recognise the reason for his creation and the duties asked of him in this life.

This implies the need for a Muslim to acquire a certain amount of knowledge of Islam.

Knowledge of religion brings people guidance

Besides the various fields of knowledge, a group of Muslims must devote their lives to studying Islam in depth. This group are those who bring guidance to all people, and are resorted to whenever problems arise and complications surface. Allah Almighty has indicated the importance of such a group of devotees in Islamic

knowledge, as He Almighty states:

It is not for the believers to go forth together: If a contingent from every expedition go forth to devote themselves to studies in religion, and admonish the people when they return to them, that thus they may learn to guard themselves against evil (9:122)

This contingent must study the teachings of Allah Almighty in an in-depth manner from its authentic sources; The Holy Quran, the heritage of the Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) and the consensus of the great predecessors. However, this contingent must not be isolated from real life in whatever age and time it exists, as any isolation will prevent the possibility of actually solving any problem that may be facing people. It is also vital that this group of people are fully aware of the

conditions of the time in which they live, and the resulting problems and difficulties, so that appropriate solutions may be reached from the general principles and rules of Islamic Sharia (law). It is a fact that modern age has produced many problems and issues which must be addressed according to the teachings of Allah Almighty through His words in the Holy Quran, the words of the Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) and the agreement of the predecessors of this nation. It is by the grace of Allah that these general rules and concepts are readily available, and all issues that arise due to the change of time and life could be returned to these rules.

The religion of Islam was decreed by Allah Almighty for the happiness of mankind so they could live their lives according to a comprehensive and

exclusive code. It is therefore true to say that no issue, however minute or however modern and contemporary, would be deemed as having no solution or address in Islam. The religion of Islam is the message of Allah; the most wise, who knows all secrets of the heavens and the earth including all questions and issues which arise due to the change and development of mankind and of life.

The problems of age must be solved within Islamic law

There are several problems in the field of medicine, for instance, which should be examined and resolved in the light of Islamic law and that of the Holy Quran, heritage of the Prophet Muhammed and the consensus of the predecessors of the

Islamic nation. There are also problems that relate to technology and industry in general. Islamic scholars must be aware of these problems so that they may be capable of deducing solutions from the Quran and the prophetic heritage, and saving Muslims from indulging in prohibited actions.

This matter requires a profound study of Islamic law (Sharia) which comprises the study of the Quran, which includes various sciences and studies, and the heritage of the Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) which again includes various sciences, such as the knowledge of the Hadith, its sources and conveyers, etc. This also entails studying the principles of jurisprudence, so that one becomes capable of deducing jurisprudence evidence from the Holy

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Quran and the heritage of the Prophet Muhammed (pbuh). It is important to note that Allah Almighty did not decree these teaching haphazardly, in fact each of these rulings and teachings were decreed for profound reasons; some realised by people and others not, some are to be sought by the scholars whom Allah guides to the truth. Therefore, the study of all these fields is a necessity rather than a mere luxury.

Seeking knowledge is an act of worship for the pleasure of Allah alone

There is an important fact that must be appreciated by all seekers of knowledge, which is that the act of seeking knowledge is actually a form of worship, which in

turn must be solely for the sake of Allah alone. Allah Almighty states in the Holy Quran:

Whoever expects to meet his Lord, let him work righteousness and in the worship of his Lord, admit no one as partner (18:110)

Therefore, worship is to be only for and to Allah, the Exalted, which implies that the seeking of knowledge must not be for the purpose of acquiring neither fame nor fortune. This must neither be for the aim of acquiring a high position or any other worldly gain or matter. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) stated that "whoever seeks knowledge in order to stand proud amongst scholars or to assume a fake position amongst the ignorant; will meet Allah without any good deeds".

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In the same context, Allah Almighty states in the Holy Quran:

Those truly fear Allah among His servants who have knowledge (35:28)

As a result of the fact that it is the scholars who fear Allah truly, they realise that it is only wise and correct not to favour this life over the hereafter, as Allah Almighty states:

If any do wish for the transitory things (of this life), we readily grant them such things, as We will, to such persons as We will: in the end have We provided Hell for them: they will burn therein, disgraced and rejected. Those who do wish for the things of the Hereafter and strive therefore with all due striving and have faith, they are the ones whose striving will be thanked by Allah (17:18-19)

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Allah Almighty also states:

To any that desires the tilth of the Hereafter, We give increase in his tilth; and to any that desires the tilth of this world, We grant somewhat thereof, but he has no share or lot in the Hereafter (42:20)

Thus, due to the fact that seeking knowledge is a sheer act of worship of Allah, it is incorrect to blemish or distort this act by aiming to any other than Allah alone.

"Learn and act for the sake of Allah alone and be sure of his promised rewards Attract the support of Allah by loving him, and leave all else as they are hollow shells By this, knowledge will reap its fruits, and whoever carries it shall never failSo many times we saw a scholar lose his way, and with him many many a person How can one acquire plenty of

knowledge, yet turn to falsehood and ultimate failure?"

Good deeds are a result of beneficial knowledge

Knowledge must accompany practise, as the fruits of knowledge are the good deeds, otherwise one wonders of what benefit is the knowledge to its carrier? What good is knowledge if the person doesn't pray as he should or prays without properly observing the presence of Allah? What good is knowledge if its carrier does not seek the pleasure of Allah in his actions and deeds or carries these actions out improperly or incorrectly?

The hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in regard to those who fast but

continue to act falsely: "Whoever does not leave false talk or actions, then Allah has no need for him to leave his food and drink".

There is no benefit from the knowledge that one may carry if he does not pay his Zakat properly and according to the directions of Allah Almighty. There is also no benefit from one carrying knowledge if he is incapable of dealing with those around him in a manner that conveys love and respect. It is also detrimental to any who carries knowledge to attempt to justify the actions of tyrants and wrongdoers, or to cheat others so to dispossess them of their wealth and material.

The individual who carries the

knowledge of Islam must be the most pious of people and the most fearful of Allah. His actions should be a true translation of the knowledge granted to him by Allah Almighty and only then will Islam spread and guide the lost in the world to the true path and the straight way.

The behaviour of the scholar is a form of invitation to Islam

Many non-Muslim societies are still oblivious of the true essence of Islam. It is incumbent upon the scholars of this nation to guide these confused and lost people to the true path, through the explanation and illustration of the pure Islam in a convincing and rational manner. This invitation to Islam must also take place within Muslims themselves so that they

continue to practice Islam truly and fully. It is imperative that an individual conveys Islam through his or her behaviour in all aspects of interaction with others.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon the Muslim scholars to guide Muslims, first and foremost, to the goodness of Islam, so that they may, subsequently, persuade non-Muslims to follow the teachings of Islam.

I ask Allah Almighty to make us amongst those for whom He wishes good and amongst those whom He has chose to grant them knowledge of religion and the ability to interpret.



