KNOWLEDGE IN ISLAM

I begin with the name of Allah the most merciful and the most kind, peace and blessing be upon beloved Prophet (S.A.W) All praise is for Allah.

Islam is the religion of knowledge. The first aayah of the Qur’an to be revealed enjoined reading which is the key to knowledge. Allah (SWT) says:

“Read! In the Name of your Lord Who has created (all that exists). He has created man from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood). Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous. Who has taught (the writing) by the pen. He has taught man that which he knew not” [al-'Alaq 96:1-5]

Allah (SWT) created man and provided him with the tools for acquiring knowledge, namely hearing, sight and wisdom. Allah says:

“And Allâh has brought you out from the wombs of your mothers while you know nothing. And He gave you hearing, sight, and hearts that you might give thanks (to Allâh)” [al-Nahl 16:78]

Because of the importance of knowledge, Allah (SWT) commanded His Messenger to seek more of it. Allah (SWT) says:

“and say: ‘My Lord! Increase me in knowledge”[Ta-Ha 20:114]

Islam calls us to seek knowledge. The Prophet (PBUH) made seeking knowledge an obligation upon every Muslim, and he explained that the superiority of the one who has knowledge over the one who merely worships is like the superiority of the moon over every other heavenly body. He said that the scholars are the heirs of the Prophets and that the Prophets did not leave behind dinars and dirhams (i.e., money), rather their inheritance was knowledge, so whoever acquires it has gained a great share. The Prophet (PBUH) said that seeking knowledge is a way to Paradise. He (PBUH) said:

“Whoever follows a path in the pursuit of knowledge, Allah (SWT) will make a path to Paradise easy for him.” (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, Kitaab al-‘Ilm, 10)

Islam calls us to learn all kinds of beneficial knowledge. Branches of knowledge vary in status, the highest of which is knowledge of shari‘ah, then knowledge of medicine, then the other fields of knowledge.

The best of all branches of knowledge are the sciences of shari‘ah through which man comes to know his Lord, and his Prophet and religion. This is the knowledge with which Allah (SWT) honoured His Messenger; He taught it to him so that he might teach it to mankind:
“Indeed, Allâh conferred a great favour on the believers when He sent among them a Messenger (Muhammad) from among themselves, reciting unto them His Verses (the Qur’ân), and purifying them (from sins by their following him), and instructing them (in) the Book (the Qur’an) and Al-Hikmah [the wisdom and the Sunnah of the Prophet (i.e. his legal ways, statements and acts of worship)], while before that they had been in manifest error”[Aal ‘Imraan 3:164]

There is no goodness in knowledge which is not confirmed by action, or words which are not confirmed by deeds:

“O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do? Most hateful it is with Allâh that you say that which you do not do”[al-Saff :2-3]

Knowledge brings a great reward. The one who points the way to something good is like the one who does it. When the knowledgeable person dies, his reward with Allah (SWT) does not cease when he dies, rather it continues to increase so long as people benefit from his knowledge. The Prophet (PBUH) said:

“When a man dies, all his deeds come to an end except for three – an ongoing charity, beneficial knowledge or a righteous son who will pray for him.”
(Narrated by Muslim, 1631)

The first and most crucial obligation on us is to acquire knowledge and secondly to practice and preach this knowledge. No man becomes truly a Muslim without knowing the meaning of Islam, because he becomes a Muslim not through birth but through knowledge. Unless we come to know the basic and necessary teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) how can we believe in him, have faith in him, act according to what he taught? It is impossible for us to be a Muslim, and at the same time live in a state of ignorance. A person without knowledge is like someone walking along a track in complete darkness. Most likely his steps will wander aside and he easily can be deceived by shaytaan. This shows that our greatest danger lies in our ignorance of Islamic teachings and in our unawareness of what the Qur’an teaches and what guidance has been given by the Prophet (PBUH). But if we are blessed with the light of knowledge we will be able to see plainly the clear path of Islam at every step of our lives. We shall also be able to identify and avoid the dangerous paths of Kufr, Shirk and immorality, which may cross it. And, whenever a false guide meets us on the way, a few words with him will quickly establish that he is not a guide who should be followed.

Knowledge is pursued and practiced with modesty and humility and leads to beauty and dignity, freedom and justice. The main purpose of acquiring knowledge is to bring us closer to God. It is not simply for the gratification of the mind or the senses. It is not knowledge for the sake of knowledge or science for the value of sake. Knowledge accordingly must be linked with values and goals.
One of the purposes of acquiring knowledge is to gain the good of this world, not to destroy it through wastage, arrogance and in the reckless pursuit of higher standards of material comfort.

**SIX ETIQUETTES OF LEARNING**

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah - rahimahullaah - said:

"There are six stages to knowledge:
Firstly: Asking questions in a good manner.
Secondly: Remaining quiet and listening attentively.
Thirdly: Understanding well.
Fourthly: Memorising.
Fifthly: Teaching.
Sixthly- and it is its fruit: Acting upon the knowledge and keeping to its limits."

**PURIFYING THE HEART**

Ibn al-Qayyim - rahimahullaah - said:

"There is no doubt that the heart becomes covered with rust, just as metal dishes - silver, and their like - become rusty. So the rust of the heart is polished with dhikr (remembrance of Allah (SWT)), for dhikr polishes the heart until it becomes like a shiny mirror. However, when dhikr is abandoned, the rust returns; and when it commences then the heart again begins to be cleansed. Thus the heart becoming rusty is due to two matters: sins and ahafah ( neglecting remembrance of Allah (SWT) ). Likewise, it is cleansed and polished by two things : istighfaar (seeking Allah (SWT)'s forgiveness) and dhikr."

The first revelation that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) received starts remarkably with special emphasis on the importance of knowledge:

“Proclaim! (or read!) In the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created; Created man, out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood; Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful; He Who taught (the use of) the pen; Taught man that which he knew not.” (96:1-5)

The Quran exhorts believers to pray for advancement in knowledge:

“Acquire knowledge, because he who acquires it in the way of the Lord performs an act of piety; who speaks of it, praises the Lord; who seeks it, adores God; who dispenses instruction in it, bestows alms; and who imparts it to its fitting objects, performs an act of devotion to God. Knowledge enables its possessor to distinguish what is forbidden from what is not; it lights the way to Heaven; it is
our friend in the desert, our society in solitude, our companion when bereft of friends; it guides us to happiness; it sustains us in misery; it is our ornament in the company of friends; it serves as an amour against our enemies. With knowledge, the obedient servant of God rises to the heights of goodness and to a noble position, associates with sovereigns in this world, and attains to the perfection of happiness in the next.”

He would often say:

“the ink of the scholar is more holy than the blood of the martyr”.

It was due to injunctions of the Holy Quran and instructions of the Prophet that the knowledge has been at the core of the Islamic world-view from the very beginning. Among his followers intellect, arts and learning prevailed and flourished on gigantic scale and the Muslims made glorious and marvellous achievements in almost every field of scientific knowledge including Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Medicine and Social Sciences. According to Quranic perspective, knowledge is a prerequisite for the creation of a just world in which authentic peace can prevail. The Quran emphasizes the importance of the pursuit of learning even at the time, and in the midst, of war:

“Nor should the Believers all go forth together: if a contingent from every expedition remained behind, they could 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]