



ADVICE FOR STUDENTS OF THE SACRED SCIENCES

*This booklet presents a compilation of advice
for students of Islamic knowledge, derived
from a lecture delivered by Mawlānā
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**MADRASAH
'URWAH
BIN AZ ZUBAYR**

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1. Understanding the Status of ‘Ilm and ‘Ulamā’:

When the heart of a person stops beating, their life ends. Our madāris (institutions of Islamic knowledge) are the heartbeat of the ummah. When knowledge of Dīn remains alive, the Dīn thrives, and when the ‘Ulamā’ are no longer present in an area, the Dīn fades away. Decline and degeneration quickly follow until, eventually, the Dīn becomes extinct.

In a ḥadīth narrated by Imām al-Bukhārī raḥimahullāh, Rasūlullāh ﷺ said:

إن الله لا يقبض العلم انتزاعاً ينتزعه من العباد، ولكن يقبض العلم بقبض العلماء، حتى إذا لم يبق عالماً اتخذ الناس رؤوساً جهالاً، فسئلوا فأفتوا بغير علم، فضلوا واطلوا.

“Allah Ta‘ālā will not remove knowledge by snatching it away from people, but He will remove knowledge by taking away the ‘Ulamā’. When no scholars remain, people will take the ignorant as leaders; when consulted, they will issue verdicts without knowledge, thus going astray and leading others astray.”¹

¹ Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Ḥadīth: 100



2. Create a Habit of Research:

Make it a habit to check references and return to original sources whenever something is quoted; whether by your ustādh in class, a lecturer, or in a book. This is not due to doubting them, but to build and strengthen yourself.

Do this even once a week (e.g. fix a certain time on Friday night or Saturday morning when you do not have class). It will greatly develop your ability to research and benefit you. Throughout the week, note down whatever interests you, and later search for it in the library.



3. Do NOT Use Maktabah Shāmilah²:

In the past, students were told to give *Maktabah Shāmilah* three ṭalāqs (ṭalāq mughallaḏah)³. Nowadays, because of how times have changed, you should give it one irrevocable ṭalāq (ṭalāq bā'in).

Why? A student truly increases in knowledge by physically turning pages, exploring, and searching. If information comes instantly, with hundreds of results shown in seconds, the depth of research and understanding is lost. The addiction to instant gratification is one of the major modern challenges. True enjoyment and growth lie in the effort of the search itself. Maktabah Shāmilah may be used later, once you have mastered proper research methodology.

² Maktabah Shāmilah is a digital library software containing thousands of classical and modern Arabic Islamic books with powerful search tools.

³ Ṭalāq mughallaḏah refers to an irrevocable triple divorce, used humorously here.



4. The Benefit of Researching:

There are two main benefits of physically doing research, without the help of an aid like Maktabah Shāmilah:

1. You will progress in ‘Ilm quickly and steadily, acquiring the skill of being able to hold fruitful discussions with senior scholars and easily understand their speech.
2. You may also discover when a minor mistake is made, such as referencing the wrong book or misquoting a passage, and can respectfully bring it to the teacher’s attention.



5. Our 'Ilm Needs to Be Refined:

As students of knowledge, our journey never truly ends. No matter how much we study, we must always return to our books, refresh our memories and strengthen what we have learned. The end of the 'Ālim course is not the end of our journey with 'ilm and our books.

Graduation from the 'Ālim course does not make us independent of our books, rather, it reminds us to remain attached to them. One of the most beautiful ways to refine our 'Ilm is to link new knowledge with what we have already learned (إلحاق القديم بالجدید), deepening our understanding and making it more meaningful with time.



6. How we Practice Our Religion is Dependent on our ‘Ilm:

If ‘ilm becomes corrupted or lost, the Dīn will disappear. Imām Muslim raḥimahullāh, in the Muqaddimah of his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, records the statement of Muḥammad ibn Sīrīn raḥimahullāh:

إن هذا العلم دين، فانظروا عمن تأخذون دينكم.

“This knowledge is your religion, so be careful from whom you take your religion.”

Knowledge is not restricted to the institute where you study; it also includes what you read or listen to, whether social media posts, online lectures, or casual advice. Always ensure your sources are authentic. Be careful who you seek ‘ilm from, and always make sure to go back to original sources to verify ‘ilm taken out of institutions of knowledge.



7. Verify the sources of 'Ilm:

Ensure that the knowledge you seek comes from reliable and trustworthy sources. If you are unsure about a speaker, author, or online teacher, it is safer to abstain. Learning from unreliable sources can mislead both you and others.

As a student, your teachers and seniors are your reference points. Whenever you come across something new, verify it with them. Never feel shy to ask questions, and never be too proud to seek clarification. Excessive shyness and arrogance both prevent a student from gaining knowledge. If you miss a lesson, ask a classmate to share their notes with you, or review the lesson with you, and ensure you verify your understanding of the topic to avoid confusion.



8. Do Not Be Shy to Learn:

Imām al-Bukhārī raḥimahullāh recorded the saying of Imām Mujāhid raḥimahullāh:

لا يتعلمون العلم مستحي ولا مستكبر.

*“Two qualities prevent a person from learning:
excessive shyness and brazen arrogance.”*

A shy student avoids asking questions, even when he does not fully understand, while a proud one pretends to know, even when he does not. Both remain deprived of true knowledge. Always ask with ḥayā’ (modesty and respect), but don’t be so shy that you remain silent and lose out on knowledge. Those who humbly ask and seek understanding will be elevated by Allāh in rank.



9. Advice of Shaykh Muḥammad Nimr al-Khaṭīb raḥimahullāh:

During Mawlāna Muḥammad's days of studying in al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah in 2001, Shaykh Muḥammad Nimr al-Khaṭīb raḥimahullāh was living in al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah. He was an old Palestinian Shaykh who studied in Egypt and lived in al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah for many years. He was delighted when students visited him, and he was very hospitable to them. He would always encourage regular visits.

This is immensely beneficial for students of the sacred sciences. Visiting the 'Ulamā' builds a student's motivation and vigour. Shaykh Muḥammad Nimr al-Khaṭīb raḥimahullāh was famously known for saying: "Our need for 'ilm (sacred knowledge) is far greater than our need for food and water. If we die without food or a drink, we will not be held accountable, but if we die without learning what we were obliged to learn, we will be held accountable before Allāh."



10. Always Remain Connected to your Teachers:

A student's bond with his teachers should never end at graduation. True benefit lies in remaining connected, seeking guidance, and consulting them throughout life.

Our pious predecessors in 'ilm maintained lifelong ties with their teachers. Even great scholars, while publishing their own works, continued to write to their teachers for clarification on miniscule matters, sometimes even a single word or concept. They never felt shy or too proud to ask, and this humility brought them barakah in knowledge.

Shaykh Muḥammad 'Awwāmah ḥaḍīrahullāh often relates incidents of when his teacher, Shaykh 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah raḥimahullāh, would correspond with his own teachers decades after he had formally studied with them, sometimes merely to find out the meaning of one word.



11. The Benefit of Remaining Connected to your Teachers:

Imām al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, the most authentic book after the Qur'ān, was written at the suggestion, and under the guidance of Imām al-Bukhārī's raḥimahullāh teachers. Likewise, many other great compilations of ḥadīth were authored at the instruction of senior scholars. Their lifelong connection to their teachers was the secret to their success.

For example, Imām al-Haythamī raḥimahullāh authored *Majma' al-Zawā'id*⁴ at the suggestion of his teacher and father-in-law, Imām Zayn al-Dīn al-'Irāqī raḥimahullāh.

Your teachers are like flowing rivers connected to the reservoir of knowledge that is passed down from generation to generation. By staying connected to them, you too drink from this pure stream that flows mightily. If you leave this river, you will be left with scattered drops.

⁴ *Majma' al-Zawā'id* is a collection of Aḥādīth which do not appear in the al-Ṣiḥāḥ al-Sittah but are found in the following books: Musnad Aḥmad, Musnad Abū Ya'īla, Musnad al-Bazzār, al-Mu'jamal-Kabīr, al-Mu'jam al-Awsaṭ and al-Mu'jam al-Ṣaḡhīr.



12. Building a Ḥadīth Library:

Many students and graduates wonder which ḥadīth books they should acquire after completing the ‘Ālim course. Usually, you would already own the *al-Ṣiḥāḥ al-Sittah* (the six major ḥadīth collections), *Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn* and *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ*.

Two other highly valuable additions to introduce to your library are:

- *Majma‘ al-Zawā’id* by Imām al-Haythamī raḥimahullāh
- *Al-Targhīb wa al-Tarhīb* by Imām al-Mundhirī raḥimahullāh



13. Always Have Questions:

Listening attentively to your teachers in class and taking proper notes is especially important, but it should not end there. A true student of ‘ilm is always thinking, reflecting and asking questions. The more we think, the more questions we will have.

Muftī Ebrahim Desai rahimahullāh would often advise,
“Do not sit in class as though you are in a khānqāh⁵ before your Shaykh, where silence and submission are required. In the classroom, learning thrives through curiosity, inquiry, and discussion.”

⁵ A place specific for spiritual reformation.



14. Eating Pure Ḥalāl Food Helps Us to Do ‘Ibādah:

It is essential for those seeking ‘ilm to eat pure, ḥalāl food. We are, in essence, what we eat. When our food is pure and wholesome, it nourishes our souls and enables us to do good actions. However, when what we consume is doubtful or impermissible, it darkens the heart and weakens our ability to perform virtuous deeds.

There was a woodcutter in Deoband who would save a portion of his earnings throughout the year. Once a year, he would use this money and invite the ‘Ulamā’ of Dār al-‘Ulūm Deoband for a meal. Many of the ‘Ulamā’ would eagerly await this occasion, saying that they could feel the blessings of that meal for forty days thereafter.



15. Six Steps to Attain 'Ilm:

أول العلم النية، ثم الاستماع، ثم الفهم، ثم الحفظ، ثم العمل، ثم النشر.

“The beginning of knowledge is intention, then listening attentively, then understanding, then memorising, then acting upon it and finally, spreading it.”

These six processes are vital for a student of knowledge to implement. We should not miss any one of these important processes, because they allow us to benefit from our knowledge, to act upon what we learnt, as well as impart our knowledge for others to benefit. These are all vital parts of the journey of knowledge and directly impact each other.



16. Practice Before Sharing:

The main objective of seeking 'ilm is to practice upon it and implement what we have learnt in our lives. If our focus in learning is only to share knowledge, then that attitude will pass on to others; they, too, will learn merely to share without practicing. This creates a chain of knowledge without action.

When we learn something new, our first goal should be to implement it in our own lives. If our intention is practice, when we eventually teach or speak about it, our words will carry sincerity and have a lasting effect on others. True benefit begins with action.



17. Sin Deprives Us of ‘Ilm:

Sins are a major obstacle in the path of knowledge. Bad company, harmful speech and other distractions can deprive a student of understanding, even if you complete your studies. You may attend classes, read the necessary books, and even graduate, but due to heedlessness and sin, much of the knowledge will be forgotten and lost along the way.

At times, sin can even lead a person to abandon the path of ‘ilm entirely, despite it being one of the noblest paths after the path of prophethood. True success is to remain on this path until the end of your life, despite the trials you may face, such as loss of loved ones, illness, poverty, or any other hardship. Make du‘ā’ daily that nothing prevents you from seeking knowledge until your last breath.

Imām Muḥammad raḥimahullāh said, *“This pursuit of ours (seeking knowledge) is from the cradle to the grave.”*

Just as a police officer represents the law whether on duty or off duty, a student of ‘ilm is always a student, inside or outside the classroom.



18. Du‘ā’:

As students of ‘ilm, we should make du‘ā’ a daily habit. Du‘ā’ connects us to Allāh and brings divine assistance in our studies, understanding and practice. Below are two du‘ā’s that every seeker of knowledge should recite regularly.

Rasūlullāh ﷺ would make the following du‘ā’ daily after Fajr Ṣalāh:

اللهم إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ عِلْمًا نَافِعًا، وَرِزْقًا طَيِّبًا، وَعَمَلًا مُتَقَبَّلًا.

“O Allāh, grant me beneficial knowledge, pure sustenance, and accepted actions.”

The father of Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī raḥimahullāh would make the following du‘ā’ daily:

اللهم لَا تَعْقُبْنِي عَنِ الْعِلْمِ بِعَائِقٍ، وَلَا تَمْنَعْنِي عَنْهُ بِمَانِعٍ.

“O Allāh, do not place any obstacle (before me) that will distract me from knowledge, and do not place any obstacle that will cut me off from knowledge.”





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