

# ETIQUETTE OF THE LEARNER

IMĀM BADR AD-DĪN IBN JAMĀ'AH AL-KINĀNĪ

*Translation by* SHOAB SHAH

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*Author* Imām Badr ad-Dīn Ibrāhīm ibn Sa‘d Allāh ibn

Jamā‘ah al-Kinānī

*Translation* Shoaib Shah

*Editor* Mariam Madge Conlan

*General* Yahya Batha

*Editor*

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## CHAPTER 1

# THE EXCELLENCE OF KNOWLEDGE, SCHOLARS AND THE LEARNING AND TEACHING OF THAT KNOWLEDGE

### WHAT ALLAH SAYS ABOUT KNOWLEDGE AND SCHOLARS

Allah Most High says:

﴿يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ﴾

*Allah will raise those who have believed from amongst you and those who have been given knowledge, by degrees (58:11)*

[‘Abdullāh] Ibn ‘Abbās commented on this verse, ‘[Believing] scholars are superior to mere believers by seven hundred degrees; between each degree is the distance of a hundred years.’<sup>4</sup>

The Most High says:

﴿شَهِدَ اللَّهُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ وَأُولُو الْعِلْمِ﴾

*Allah bears witness that there is no god but He and [so do] the angels and those who possess knowledge. . . (3:18)*

Allah., glory be to Him, begins with Himself; secondly He mentions the Angels. He places scholars third in the list, which is sufficient to confirm their excellence, honour and loftiness.

The Most High also says:

﴿قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

*Say: Are those who know and those who do not know equal?*  
(39:9)

He also says:

﴿فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ﴾

*So ask the people of the Remembrance, if you do not know*  
(16:43)

He also says:

﴿وَمَا يَعْقِلُهَا إِلَّا الْعَالِمُونَ﴾

*But no one understands them except the knowledgeable ones*  
(29:43)

The Most High also says:

﴿بَلْ هُوَ آيَاتٌ بَيِّنَاتٌ فِي صُدُورِ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ﴾

*Rather, it [i.e. the Qur'an] is clear signs in the hearts of those who have been given knowledge* (29:49)

Allah Most High also says:

﴿إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ﴾

*Only those of His slaves fear Allah who are knowledgeable*  
(35:28)

He also says:

﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمْ خَيْرُ الْبَرِيَّةِ،  
جَزَاؤُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٌ عَدْنٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ  
فِيهَا أَبَدًا، رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ، ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ خَشِيَ رَبَّهُ﴾

*As for those who have believed and performed righteous deeds, those are the best of creatures. Their reward, with their Lord, is gardens of eternity beneath which rivers flow, in which they will abide forever. Allah is well pleased with them, and they are well pleased with Him. That is for whoever has feared his Lord. (98:7–8)*

The last two verses mentioned above necessitate two points: that it is the scholars who fear Allah Most High and that those who fear Allah Most High are the best of all creatures. Hence, it can be deduced that the scholars are the best of all creatures.

## WHAT THE MESSENGER OF ALLAH ﷺ SAID ABOUT KNOWLEDGE AND SCHOLARS

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

مَنْ يُرِدْ اللَّهُ بِهِ خَيْرًا يُفَقِّهْهُ فِي الدِّينِ.

Whomever Allah wishes good for, he gives them a deep understanding of the religion.<sup>5</sup>

It is also narrated from him ﷺ:

إِنَّ الْعُلَمَاءَ وَرَثَةُ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ.

The scholars are the heirs of the prophets.<sup>6</sup>

This status and rank should suffice to convince you of their nobility and honour. As there is no status like that of the prophets, similarly, there is no honour superior to that of the prophets' heirs.

It is also narrated from him ﷺ that when two people were mentioned in his company, one of whom was a worshiper and the other was a scholar, he said:

فَضْلُ الْعَالِمِ عَلَى الْعَابِدِ كَفَضْلِي عَلَى أَدْنَاكُمْ.

The superiority of a scholar over a worshipper is like my superiority over the most inferior of you.<sup>7</sup>

It is also narrated from him ﷺ:

مَنْ سَلَكَ طَرِيقًا يَطْلُبُ فِيهِ عِلْمًا سَلَكَ اللَّهُ بِهِ طَرِيقًا مِنْ طُرُقِ الْجَنَّةِ وَإِنَّ الْمَلَائِكَةَ لَتَضَعُ أجنحتها رِضًا لِطَالِبِ الْعِلْمِ وَإِنَّ الْعَالِمَ لَيَسْتَغْفِرُ لَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالْحِيَتَانُ فِي جَوْفِ الْمَاءِ وَإِنَّ فَضْلَ الْعَالِمِ عَلَى الْعَابِدِ كَفَضْلِ الْقَمَرِ لَيْلَةَ الْبَدْرِ عَلَى سَائِرِ الْكَوَاكِبِ وَإِنَّ الْعُلَمَاءَ وَرَثَةُ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَإِنَّ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ لَمْ يُورَثُوا دِينَارًا وَلَا دِرْهَمًا وَرَثُوا الْعِلْمَ فَمَنْ أَخَذَهُ أَخَذَ بِحِطِّ وَافِرٍ.

Whoever travels a path seeking knowledge, he will travel one of the paths of Paradise. Indeed, the Angels spread their wings for a student of knowledge because Allah is Pleased with him. All those in the heavens and the earth, even the fish in the depths of the sea, seek forgiveness for the scholar. The superiority of a scholar over a worshipper is like the superiority of a full moon over all the stars. Truly, the

scholars are the heirs of the prophets. The prophets have not left behind dinars or dir-hams; rather, they have bequeathed knowledge. So whoever takes it has taken a plentiful share.<sup>8</sup>

Know that there is no higher status than that of someone for whom the angels and others supplicate and seek forgiveness, and for whom the former spread their wings. People vie for the supplication of a righteous person—or one who is presumed to be righteous—so what of the supplication of the angels?!

The scholars have differed in their opinions regarding the meaning of the expression: '[the angels] spread their wings'. Some have said that the angels humble themselves before a student. Others have said that they descend and accompany him. Another opinion is that the angels honour and respect a student. Alternatively, it has been said that the angels lift the students on their wings, to help them achieve their goals.

As for the animals' seeking forgiveness for students of knowledge, scholars have said it is because animals are created for the benefit of people and to serve their purposes. It is the scholars who explain which animals are lawful to make use of and which are not. They also encourage others to treat animals kindly and not harm them.

It is also narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

مَا عَبْدَ اللَّهِ بِشَيْءٍ أَفْضَلَ مِنْ فِقْهِ فِي دِينٍ، وَلَفَقِيهِ أَشَدُّ عَلَى الشَّيْطَانِ  
مِنْ أَلْفِ عَابِدٍ.

There is no way better to worship Allah than to have deep understanding of the religion. Surely, a single scholar is more troublesome for Satan than a thousand worshippers.<sup>9</sup>

WHAT THE COMPANIONS AND PIOUS  
PREDECESSORS SAID ABOUT KNOWLEDGE AND

## SCHOLARS

‘Alī  said, ‘It is sufficient as an honour for knowledge that those not suited to it try to claim it and are pleased when it is attributed to them. And it is sufficient as a disgrace for ignorance that those engulfed in it try to distance themselves from it.’<sup>10</sup>

One of the pious predecessors said, ‘The best gift is sound understanding, and the worst calamity is ignorance.’

Abū Muslim Al-Khawlānī said, ‘The scholars on the earth are like the stars in the sky: people take guidance from them when they appear and they become confused when they disappear.’

Abū’l-Aswad ad-Du’alī said, ‘There is nothing more powerful than knowledge. Kings are the rulers of the people and the scholars are the rulers of the kings.’

Wahb<sup>11</sup> said, ‘From knowledge results [the following]: nobility though its possessor may be lowly, honour though he may be insignificant, nearness though he may be far, wealth though he may be poor and dignity though he may be humble.’

It is narrated from Mu‘ādh  that he said, ‘Study knowledge; for to study it is a good deed, to seek it is worship, to revise it is glorification of Allah, to research it is to struggle in His way, to offer it to someone brings you closer to Him and to teach it to one who does not know is charity.’<sup>12</sup>

Fuḍayl Ibn ‘Iyāḍ said, ‘The inhabitants of the celestial kingdoms supplicate greatly for the scholar who teaches.’

Sufyān Ibn ‘Uyaynah said, ‘The loftiest station in the sight of Allah is of those who are intermediaries between Allah and his slaves, and they are the prophets and the scholars.’

Sufyān also said, ‘No person in the world has received a greater gift than prophethood, and after prophethood there is nothing better than knowledge and deep understanding of it.’ Sufyān was asked who he heard this from. He replied, ‘From every jurist.’

Sahl<sup>13</sup> said, ‘Whoever wishes to see the gatherings of the prophets, let him look at the gatherings of the scholars. Know the prophets through the scholars.’

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