

Merits of the Soul: Seekers of Knowledge

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Article

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... Those truly fear Allah among His servants who have knowledge... (Qur'an, 35:28)

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a) said: "Whoever acquires knowledge, acts upon it and teaches it for the sake of God, he is known in the realm of hidden heavens as "Great". For him it is said that he acquired knowledge for the sake of God, acted upon it for the sake of God and taught it for the sake of God."

[Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol. 1, p. 35, hadith # 6]

According to the teachings of Islam, seeking knowledge is one of the greatest and loftiest acts of worship. However, the aim behind seeking knowledge is considered more important than seeking knowledge itself. Seekers of knowledge, either of religious, physical or biological or any other sciences, fall into two major groups: those who have a divine aim, seeking it for pleasure of God and serving His creatures which is highly praised and those who have mundane, personal or worldly motives such as fame, power, wealth and material possessions, which is condemned in Islamic traditions as it leads to many other sins, corruption and is also a spiritual veil.

Kinds Of Seekers Of Knowledge

- Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a) said: **"The seekers of knowledge are of three kinds, so recognize them by their specific qualities and characteristics. One kind of them seeks it for the sake of ignorance and dispute. Another kind seeks it for the sake of domination and deceit. Yet another kind seeks it for the sake of (improving) understanding and intellect.**
- **The one who seeks it for ignorance and dispute is injurious and quarrelsome. He contests opinions in the gatherings of men, speaking of knowledge and describing forbearance. He puts on the garb of humility, though he is devoid of piety. As a result, God crushes his nose and severs his waist.**

- **The one who seeks knowledge for domination and deception is an impostor and a sycophant. He is dominating among those who are his likes but is humble in front of the rich, whose sweetmeats he ingests while he demolishes his own faith. As a result, God blinds his vision and wipes out his traces from the legacy of the learned.**
- **As to him who seeks knowledge for the sake of understanding and intellection, he is grief-stricken and awake at nights. Having tied his cap with loose end of his turban, he stands up in darkness of nights. He acts and is in trepidation. A caller overawed, engaged in his work, and acquainted with people of his times; he is apprehensive except of his most trusted brother. As a result, God strengthens his supports and grants him amnesty on the Day of Resurrection.”** [*al-Kafi*, vol. 1, kitab fadl al-'ilm, bab al-nawadir, hadith # 5]
- In the above hadith, the first two kinds are those who are in reality ignorant as they acquire knowledge for their personal, worldly and selfish aims of seeking dominance, power and becoming famous. They engage in disputes, discourses and debates and use deceptive tactics of hypocrisy, behaving haughtily to humiliate others by their words and deeds to show their superiority over others and to attract attention of wealthy and powerful for material benefits. However, their inner vision is blind and heart is devoid of light of knowledge.
- The third kind is the truly knowledgeable person. His knowledge creates grief, pain, and deep concern because of fear of return to God and distress of falling short in the performance of his duties and services. He has an illuminated heart with purity of intentions and actions leading to self-reform and commitment to the servitude and creaturehood. The light of knowledge takes away calmness from his heart as he has high self-expectations about his responsibilities. He derives pleasure in praying to God Almighty and spends his nights in wakefulness.

Praiseworthy Characteristics Of Seekers Of Knowledge

- Prophet of God (s) said: **“If a person dies while in the state of acquiring knowledge, he will meet God in a state where he will be one stage lower than the prophets.”** [*Mizan al-Hikmah*, hadith # 13772]
- Imam Ali (a) used to say: **“Knowledgeable person has three signs: Knowledge, forbearance and keeping quiet.”** [*Bihar al-Anwar*, vol.2, p.59]
- Imam Ali (a) said: **“Knowledgeable person is the one who is never tired of acquiring knowledge and also people are not tired of learning from him.”** [*Mizan al-Hikmah*, hadith # 13939]
- Imam Ali (a) said: **“A knowledgeable person cannot be called as truly knowledgeable until he is not jealous of those superior to him, doesn’t ridicule those inferior to him and doesn’t use his knowledge to acquire worldly gains and possessions.”** [*Mizan al-Hikmah*, hadith # 13931]
- Imam Ali (a) said: **“Self-love and stupidity cannot be found in the heart of a knowledgeable person.”** [*al-Kafi*, v.1, p.36]
- Imam Ali (a) said: **“A knowledgeable person recognizes an ignorant because he was himself ignorant before; however, an ignorant person cannot recognize a knowledgeable person because he was not knowledgeable before.”** [*Mizan al-Hikmah*, hadith # 13929]
- Imam Ali (a) said: **“Verily a knowledgeable person is the one whose knowledge leads him to God-wariness, piety to ultimate end (*fana*) and the invites him to love Paradise.”** [*Mizan al-Hikmah*, hadith # 13927]

Detestable Attributes Of Seekers Of Knowledge

- Prophet of God (s) said: **“The person who claims that he is knowledgeable is (in fact) ignorant.”** [*Mizan al-Hikmah*, hadith # 13943]
- Prophet of God (s) said: **“The person who acquires knowledge for ostentation and for being praised and then through it acquires worldly possessions, God takes away his blessings from him, makes his sustenance difficult and leaves him on his own and the one whom God leaves on his own is destroyed.”** [*Bihar al-Anwar*, v.77, p.100]
- Prophet of God (s) said: **“The person who acquires knowledge to give speeches so that he attracts hearts of people towards himself, God will neither accept any of his actions on the day of judgement nor give return.”** [*Mizan al-Hikmah*, hadith # 13858]
- Prophet of God (s) said: **“The person who acquires knowledge for four purposes will go to Hell: (1) To make show of his knowledge in front of scholars (2) To dispute and debate with ignorant persons (3) To attract attention of people towards himself (4) To acquire worldly possessions and wealth from rich persons.”** [*Bihar al-Anwar*, v.2, p.38]
- Prophet of God (s) said: **“The person who has beneficial knowledge and he hides it, God will put bridle of fire on his mouth on the day of judgement.”** [*Mizan al-Hikmah*, hadith # 13811]
- Prophet of God (s) said: **“The person who acquires knowledge without acting upon it, it is as if he has made joke with God.”** [*Mizan al-Hikmah*, hadith # 13855]

A Dialogue To Be Praiseworthy Seeker Of Knowledge

Seekers of higher education in the modern times are usually those with high IQ and intellectual abilities. Higher levels of knowledge in specialized fields with practical skills has become a source of better and peaceful family life, respect and desired social status in society and good financial status.

- An intelligent mind would think and explore the possibilities of better and long-lasting returns for the lifelong hard efforts through which such knowledge and skills were acquired. Shouldn't an intelligent mind think about the ultimate end of life and find a way to get ready for the next world and get much better reward for his knowledge and skills? Can these eternal returns be acquired by changing intentions, mindset, behaviour and becoming more responsible in daily life? Can these eternal returns be acquired through better use of knowledge and skills? Can these be acquired by being more insightful about himself? Or being more connected to the real source of all knowledge of the universe – The All-Knowing and All-Aware God? Shouldn't one whisper to God in private as:
- O Lord, I thank you for bestowing me with little knowledge that I have. I was born ignorant and helpless. You blessed me with sound physical, psychological and mental health, good teachers, opportunities to learn throughout my life, faculties of intellect, memory, thinking, seeing, hearing and speech, so that I could acquire knowledge. You also blessed me with creative ideas, passion and enthusiasm to acquire knowledge, guided me to make right decisions and showed me the right way to continue acquiring it in my whole career. It's all your blessing.
- O Lord! Let my little knowledge not be a veil for my own shortcomings and faults, let it not make me self-admiring, proud and dominating, seeking loftiness and disputes, using deception and uselessly arguing with ignorant, humiliating the learned and more knowledgeable than me, flattering and showing off humbleness, piety and virtuousness in front of wealthy and powerful, seeking worldly position, pomp, glory and fame, attracting attention, love, admiration and worldly respect of people, becoming jealous with my superiors and abusive towards my inferiors.
- O Lord! Bless me with more knowledge and insight of my own self, make me aware of my shortcomings and faults, make me conscious of my duties towards You and Your creatures, bless me with opportunities to serve Your creatures more with the knowledge and skills that You have blessed me, enlighten my heart with light of knowledge You have reserved for Your sincere friends, increase within me sense of ignorance as I acquire more knowledge, make me humble in front of knowledgeable, bless me with forbearance towards ignorant and illiterate, let me remember my death and day of judgement when I will be asked by Your angels about how I used the knowledge and skills You blessed me

with.

Conclusion

Imam al-Sadiq (a) said: “**Acquire knowledge even if you have to dive into the depths of seas and to put your life in danger.**” [*Bihar al-Anwar*, v.78, p.277]

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