

Shaykh Muhammad ibn Saalih al-Uthaymeen

KNOWLEDGE

A Definition, its Virtue and the Ruling
Concerning its Acquisition



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*Knowledge – A
Definition, its Virtue
and the Ruling
Concerning its
Acquisition*

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(raheemahullaah)*

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Preface

This is a translation of three chapters from the book *‘Knowledge – A Definition, its Virtue and the Ruling Concerning its Acquisition’* by one of the esteemed scholars of the *Sunnah* in the contemporary era, namely Shaykh Muhammad ibn Saalih al-‘Uthaymeen, may the mercy of Allaah be upon him.

The book contains much in the way of advice to the seekers of knowledge and serves as an admonishment to the sincere seeker, causing one to reflect about their search for the divinely revealed knowledge.

Shaykh ‘Uthaymeen was born in the town of ‘Unayzah in Arabia on the 27th of *Ramadaan* 1347 AH. The Shaykh memorised the whole Qur’aan as a young boy with his maternal grandfather ‘Abdur-Rahmaan ibn Sulaymaan Aali Daamigh (*raheemabullaah*) and then furthered his search for knowledge by studying writing, arithmetic and some other subjects.

The scholar ‘Abdur-Rahmaan as-Sa’adee used to get two of his senior students, Ali as-Saalihee and Muhammad ibn ‘Abdul-‘Azeez al-Mutawwa’ (may the mercy of Allaah be upon them all) to teach the younger students. Under whom, Shaykh ‘Uthaymeen studied

an abridgement to *Aqeedat ul-Wasitiyyah* and *Minhaj us-Saalikeen fee'l-Fiqh*,¹ as well as studying *al-'Ajroomiyyah* and *al-Alfiyyah* in Arabic grammar and morphology. He also studied the laws of inheritance and *fiqh* under Shaykh 'Abdur-Rahmaan ibn 'Ali ibn 'Awdaan. Shaykh 'Uthaymeen also studied under the noble Shaykh, 'Abdul-'Azeez bin Baaz, to the extent that he was regarded as his second teacher.

In 1371 AH, the Shaykh began to teach in the congregational mosque and when the educational institutes opened in Riyadh he signed up with them in 1372 AH and then graduated after two years and became a teacher in educational institute (*Ma'abad Ilmee*) in 'Unayzah. In the meantime, he continued his studies under as-Sa'adee (*raheemahullaah*) and with the *College of Sharee'ah*.

When Shaykh Abdur-Rahmaan as-Sa'adee passed away (*raheemahullaah*), Shaykh 'Uthaymeen was appointed Imaam of the congregational mosque in 'Unayzah and a teacher within the central library of 'Unayzah in addition to Shaykh 'Uthaymeen's other teaching responsibilities. He would later move on to teaching in the faculties of *Sharee'ah* and *Usool ud-Deen* in the Qaseem branch of *Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University*. Moreover, he became a member of the *Council of Senior Scholars* in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

¹ These works were compiled by as-Sa'adee (*raheemahullaah*).

Shaykh ‘Uthaymeen played a large and active role in the field of *Da’wah* (calling) to Allaah and teaching the Muslims from all levels of the society. For this reason, Shaykh ‘Uthaymeen is renowned for his beneficial lessons and sermons given in ‘Unayzah, Qaseem. He was thus known for his classes during the nights of *‘Itikaaf* during *Ramadaan* every year. He was also known for his compendium of religious rulings (*fatawaa*) issued to the masses of Muslims from the east and west during *Hajj* or published within journals, magazines, on the radio programme ‘*Light Upon the Path*’ (*‘Noor ‘alaa ad-Darb*’). The Shaykh was particularly known for this and his wholesome responses to the various questions that were posed to him day in day out.²

² See the biography section of al-Manhaj.com

Chapter One

Defining Knowledge

Linguistically: Knowledge eliminates ignorance, being a sure and firm comprehension of something.

Technically: Some of the people of knowledge have said that knowledge is awareness, contrary to ignorance. Whilst others have stated that knowledge in and of itself is clear, (not needing a definition).

That which concerns us here is *Sharee'ah* knowledge. Meaning by that, clear knowledge and guidance that has been sent down by Allaah upon his Prophet. The praiseworthy and admirable knowledge that facilitates knowledge of the religion, and the Prophet Muhammad (*may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*) said that *“the Prophets do not leave behind Deenaars or Dirhams, rather they bequeath knowledge.”*³

³ Abu Daawood and Tirmidhi

It's known that the Prophets don't leave behind anything except knowledge of Allaah's *Sharee'ah*. The Prophets (*may Allaah's peace be upon them all*) did not leave behind knowledge of mundane human endeavour or anything in connection to this. Rather, what we find the Prophet (*may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*) doing during his life when he came to Madeenah and found the people artificially inseminating the palm trees saying to them, words to the effect of, "*there is no need for you to do this,*" and lo, the crop failed. Then the Prophet (*may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*) commented on this saying "*You know more about your own worldly affairs.*"⁴ So if this was the knowledge that is praiseworthy then the Messenger (*may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*) would have been the most knowledgeable person about it, because the most exemplary person due to his knowledge and acting by it is the Prophet (*may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*).

⁴ Saheeh Bukhaaree, '*The Book of Knowledge.*'

The *Sharee'ah* knowledge is praiseworthy and highly regarded for the one who acts according to it. However I don't deny that there is a use and benefit in other kinds of knowledge, however the benefits have two limits: That it helps in obedience to Allaah and the triumph of the religion of Allaah and benefits the servants of Allaah, herein this knowledge is good and beneficial. This kind of knowledge and its study is already compulsory in certain instances, if it falls under where Allaah, *The Exalted*, says,

“...And prepare what you are able against them from strength and steeds of war...”

{Soorah 8 al-Anfaal: 90}

And many of the people of knowledge have already noted that learning knowledge and sciences for human endeavour are a collective responsibility. This is because it is a must for people to cook by this knowledge, and drink by this knowledge and accomplish other matters of human endeavour in which people benefit. So then if there was not present anyone to establish these worldly sciences, its learning becomes a collective responsibility for the Muslims.

Yet this is a point of disagreement amongst the people of Islamic knowledge, which is understanding of the book of Allaah and *Sunnah* of His Messenger (*may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*). Except for that knowledge, skill or science which would be a means to good or to evil. It will thus be ruled according to what the knowledge or skill is a means to.

Chapter Two

The Virtues of Knowledge

Allaah, *Glory be to Him, The Exalted*, praised knowledge and its adherents and encouraged His servants towards increasing in knowledge and thus the *Sunnah* is untainted.

As knowledge is the most righteous action and the most glorified act of worship that is done voluntarily. Indeed knowledge (and its acquisition) is a type of struggle (*Jihaad*) in the way of Allaah, as the religion of Allaah is only established with two matters: one of them being with knowledge and clear proofs. The second: fighting and *as-Sinaan* (armed combat) as there is a necessity for these two affairs, as it's not possible to establish and manifest the religion of Allaah except with both of them together.

The first matter takes precedence over the second, so for this reason the Prophet Muhammad (*may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*) didn't change people until he had first informed them with the call to Allaah, *The Mighty and Majestic*. Knowledge definitely precedes fighting.

Allaah, *The Exalted*, says:

“Is the one who is devoutly obedient during periods of the night, prostrating and standing (in prayer), fearing the hereafter and hoping for the mercy of his Lord (like the one who does not)?”

{*Soorah 39 az-Zumar: 9*}

So the question here then is that there must be one who is contrary. Is one who is standing devoutly obedient during periods of the night and day, the same as the one who doesn't do this?

And is the one who is devoutly obedient during periods of the night, prostrating or standing (in prayer) fearing the hereafter and hoping for the mercy of his Lord, the same as one who is arrogant towards obeying Allaah?

The answer is: No! They are not equal to the one who is devoutly obedient hoping for Allaah's reward and fearing the hereafter. But does he do this with knowledge or out of ignorance? The answer: With knowledge, therefore Allaah has said:

“Is the one who is devoutly obedient during periods of the night, prostrating and standing (in prayer), fearing the hereafter and hoping for the mercy of his Lord (like the one who does not)? Say, “Are those who know equal to those who do not know?” Only they will remember (who are) people of understanding”

{Soorah 39 az-Zumar: 9}

The one who knows is not equal with one who doesn't know, as unequal as the living and the dead, and the hearing and the deaf (to Allaah's divine orders), and the seeing and the blind (to the truth of Allaah's revelation and His Prophets).

Knowledge is a light by which humans are guided and takes one out of darkness into light. Allaah raises in degree whomsoever He wills from His creation with knowledge.

“Allaah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge by degrees...”

{Soorah al-Mujaadilah: 11}

So for this reason we find that the people of knowledge have been given a praised and esteemed rank, speech in which they were actually noted and praised, and this in itself raises them in this life. As for the hereafter then they are raised by degrees according to what they established of calling to Allaah and also on account of their righteous actions.

Truly, the worshipper is the one who worships His Lord with clear insight and after the truth has become clear to him, as this is the way of the Prophet.

“Say, “This is my way; I invite to Allaah with insight, I and those who follow me. And exalted is Allaah, and I am not of those who associate others with Him.””

{Soorah 12 Yoosuf: 108}

So a man who purifies himself knowing that he is following a divinely legislated path, is similar to one who purifies himself because he sees his mother and father doing likewise?

Which one of the two are more serious to actualise worship? On one hand, a man who purifies himself because he knows that Allaah has commanded purification, and that it is the purification of the Prophet Muhammad (*may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*) so he purifies himself in compliance with the order of Allaah and in following the way of the messenger of Allaah (*may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*). Or on the other hand, a man who purifies himself because this is customary to him?

The answer: There is no doubt that the first one who worships Allaah with insight is more serious, so is this or that (other one) equal?

The one who worships Allaah out of knowledge and insight, hoping for the reward of Allaah, *Mighty and Majestic*, and fearing the hereafter and feeling that he is indeed following the Prophet, *may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*.

So I ask, do we truly feel that our *Wudoo* is in compliance with the command of Allaah, *Glory be to Him*, wherein He states,

“O you who have believed, when you rise to (perform) prayer, wash your faces and your forearms to the elbows and wipe over your heads and wash your feet to the ankles”

{Soorat ul-Maa'idah (5): 6}

Is man truly cognisant about these verses pertaining to his *Wudoo*, making *Wudoo* in compliance with the command of Allaah?

Does man really feel that this is the ablution of the Messenger of Allaah and that he makes ablution following the Messenger of Allaah, *may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him?*

The Answer: Yes, because in reality there are some of us whom are cognisant of that, therefore with such sincerity we will be following the Messenger of Allaah.

We all know that the *intention* is one of the conditions of *Wudoo*. It is thus desired that the intention is an action and we are conscious of this great command.

So we should be aware and establish worship that complies with the order of Allaah, so as to attain sincerity. We are also to be cognisant that the Messenger, *may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*, done this action, so it's for us to follow him to fulfil obedience.

As for the conditions for correct action, they are sincerity and obedience. So those who actualise the declaration of faith that there is none deserving worship except Allaah and that Muhammad is His Messenger, do so with these two conditions.

So we thus return to what we mentioned initially regarding the virtues of knowledge, it is with knowledge and insight that man worships his Lord. Then he attaches his heart to worship and illuminates his heart with it and becomes one who acts due to worship not customs and cultural habits. Therefore, if one prays according to this then he has truly grasped that which Allaah informs about, that the prayer prevents immoralities and sin.

The Most Important Virtues of Knowledge:

1. It is the inheritance of the Prophets, as the Prophets, *may Allaah's peace be upon them all*, did not leave behind *Dirhams* or *Deenars*, only knowledge. Whoever takes from the knowledge and has thus taken from the inheritance of the Prophets. So you are now in the 15th Islamic century and if you're from the people of knowledge left by Muhammad, *may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*, this is indeed one of the greatest virtues.

2. Knowledge remains whilst material things vanish. Abu Hurayrah, *may Allaah be pleased with him*, was from amongst the poorest of the companions of Muhammad. To the extent that he would sometimes collapse with hunger as if fainting. So I ask you by Allaah, is mention made of his name amongst people during our time or not? Yes indeed, greatly, there's a reward for Abu Hurayrah for the beneficial *hadeeth* he has narrated. So then, if knowledge remains and material things all come to an end, it's upon you oh student/seeker of knowledge to firmly grasp knowledge, as it is verified in the *ahadeeth* that the Prophet, *may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*, said "...*When a person dies, his actions end except for three,*

charity that he gave, beneficial works or a righteous son that can supplicate for him.”⁵

3. Knowledge doesn't harm the one who possesses it and guards it. Because if Allaah bestows knowledge upon you, it enters the heart and doesn't need boxes, keys or anything else. Knowledge is safeguarded in the heart, and safeguarded in the soul and knowledge *itself* also guards and protects us (from Allaah's punishment). Because knowledge keeps you away from danger by the permission of Allaah, *The Mighty and Majestic*, as knowledge protects you. Yet some of you look after your money safely, placing it in safe-boxes under covers, yet after all of that, you're still not reassured!
4. Man certainly attains knowledge so as to become one of those who bear witness to the truth. The evidence of this is Allaah's statement:

“Allaah witnesses that there is no deity worthy of worship except Him, and (so do) the angels and

⁵ Bukhaaree – *'The Book of Waseeyah'*

***those of knowledge – (that he is) maintaining
(creation) in justice”***

{*Soorah 3 Aali Imraan: 18*}

Did Allaah say ***“and those of financial standing?”*** No not at all, rather Allaah said ***“...and those of knowledge (that he is) maintaining (creation) in justice.”*** So it is sufficient honour for you the student of knowledge to be from among those whom Allaah witnesses that there is no deity worthy of worship except Him, with the angels, those who bear witness to singling out Allaah, *The Mighty and Majestic*, alone in worship.

5. The people of knowledge are one of two kinds of people in authority whom Allaah ordered obedience towards in His statement, *The Exalted*,

“Oh you who have believed, obey Allaah and obey the Messenger and those in authority

among you” {*Soorah 4 an-Nisaa: 59*}

The people in authority here include the people of in authority from the rulers and leaders, and the Islamic scholars and the students of the divinely legislated knowledge. The authority of the people of knowledge is in the exposition of the divine Islamic legislation of Allaah and

calling the people unto it. As for the authority of the leaders this is in applying the legislation of Allaah and obliging people to stick to it.

6. The people of knowledge are upright with regards to the command of Allaah, *The Exalted*, until the Last Hour is established. The *hadeeth* of Mu’awiyah, *may Allaah be pleased with him*, indicates this, wherein he, *may Allaah be pleased with him*, says “I heard the prophet, *may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*, say “*whoever Allaah wants good for, He gives him understanding of the Deen. So I am only an oath-taker by Allaah and there will never cease to be those who stand upright in this ummah, obeying the commands of Allaah, and their opponents will not harm them, up until the time when the command of Allaah will (i.e. the day of Judgement).*”⁶ And Imaam Ahmad, *may have mercy on him*, said about this group: “*If this isn’t the people of hadeeth then I don’t know who they are.*” Then al-Qaadee ‘Iyyaad, *may Allaah have mercy on him*, said “*Ahmad meant here the people of hadeeth and whoever believes and accepts the school of thought of hadeeth.*”

7. The Messenger of Allaah, *may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*, didn’t desire for anyone to envy another due to the favours that Allaah has bestowed

⁶ Muslim – ‘*The Book of Knowledge*’

except in two favours which are: a) Seeking knowledge and acting by it and b) A wealthy man that uses his money to serve and aid Islaam. From Ibn Mas'ood, *may Allaah be pleased with him*, who stated: “The Messenger of Allaah, *may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*, said “Let there be no envy except in two (matters): With a man whom Allaah has given wealth and spends it righteously, and with a man whom Allaah has given wisdom and acts according to it, teaching such wisdom to others.”⁷

8. The *hadeeth* that has been verified by Bukhaaree from Abu Moosaa al-Ash'aree, *may Allaah be pleased with him*, from the Prophet, *may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*, who said “The example of how I have been sent is akin to rain hitting the earth. Some earth has fertile soil that absorbs water thus bringing forth abundant vegetation and foliage. Yet there is also dry ground that stores water so that people can drink from it and also irrigate their land for cultivation. Another portion of earth is barren which can neither absorb water nor bring forth vegetation (infertile land). The first type of earth is the example of the person who truly comprehends Allaah's religion and benefits from that (knowledge) which Allaah has revealed through me, learns and then teaches it to others. The last type is the example of a person who doesn't care

⁷ Bukhaaree – ‘The Book of Knowledge’

*about (the knowledge) and doesn't accept Allaah's guidance in which I was sent.'*⁸

9. The search for knowledge is the path to paradise, as indicated in the *hadeeth* from Abu Hurayrah, *may Allaah be pleased with him*, that the Messenger of Allaah, *may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*, said “*Whoever takes a path in search for knowledge, Allaah will facilitate for him a path to paradise.*”

10. The *hadeeth* of Mu'awiyah, *may Allaah be pleased with him*, who said “*I heard the prophet, may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him, say “whoever Allaah wants good for, He gives him understanding of the Deen.”*⁹ This is whoever Allaah makes a *faqeeh* (scholar) in the religion of Allaah. So understanding and comprehension of the religion should not be intended to mean understanding particular rulings from the people of knowledge in relation to Islamic judicial rulings *only*. Rather, the intention is knowledge of worshipping Allaah alone (*Tawheed*) and the principles of the religion (*Usool ud-Deen*) and whatever is connected to the divinely revealed legislation of Allaah, *The Mighty and Majestic*.

⁸ Bukhaaree – ‘*The Book of Knowledge*’

⁹ Bukhaaree

And if there were no texts from the Book and the Way of Muhammad except for this *hadeeth* about the virtue of knowledge, it would be sufficient and complete enough as an incitement to search and seek knowledge of the divinely revealed law and comprehending it.

11. Knowledge is a light that illuminates the servant's path so as to know how to actually worship and serve Allaah. And how to enact his worship so as to become in that knowledge and foresight.

12. Indeed the learned one is a light that guides people in their religious and day-to-day affairs. Is not the story of the man from the Children of Israel enough for us? Wherein he killed 99 people. He asked the wisest people on the earth (at that time) and he saw a pious man and asked him "*is there any repentance for such a killer?*" The pious man viewed the matter as very serious and replied "*No!*" So then the man killed him as well, making it 100 slain. So then the killer went to another learned man to ask. The learned man informed him that there is still time to repent and that nothing can come between him (the killer) and sincere repentance to Allaah. So the learned man showed the killer the way to a land of righteous people, so then the

man immediately went to find them. Yet during his travel in search for the righteous people, the man who had killed all of these people met with death himself.¹⁰ The story is famous, so look and pay attention to the difference between the learned man and the ignorant one.

13. Indeed Allaah raises in degree the people of knowledge in the hereafter and in this worldly life. As for the hereafter then Allaah raises them in degrees according to what they established from calling to Allaah, *The Mighty and Majestic*, and also according to the righteous actions that they done. In this life, Allaah esteems and raises in degree between His servants according to what has been established by them. Allaah, *The Exalted*, says:

“Allaah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge by degrees”

{Soorah 58 al-Mujaadilah: 11}

¹⁰ Bukhaaree

Chapter Three

The Ruling on Seeking Knowledge

Seeking divinely revealed knowledge is a collective responsibility when one establishes it, it becomes a *Sunnah* for many others. So certainly seeking knowledge is compulsory upon mankind, it is personally obligatory in individual aspects of worship that one does or social interactions one wishes to enjoin.

So with this then, it is necessary for one in such a state to know how to adequately worship Allaah and how to enjoin and establish these social interactions. The exceptions to that are when knowledge is a collective responsibility and the student of knowledge should actually feel himself that he is in a state of establishing a collective responsibility and that in his search for knowledge he will obtain a reward from Allaah, as he is actually fulfilling a responsibility for the acquisition of knowledge.

There is no doubt that seeking knowledge is one of the best actions, rather it is part of the struggle and striving (*Jihaad*) in the path of Allaah, especially in our era wherein innovations into the religion have begun and surfaced throughout Islamic societies, these innovations thus becoming widespread and disseminated throughout Islamic societies. Furthermore, manifest ignorance has emerged from many of those who have risen to give religious verdicts (*fatawaa*), with no knowledge whatsoever. Huge disagreements have also emerged amongst the people. These three matters should particularly concern the youth so that they guard their pursuit of knowledge (from such issues):

Firstly: Innovations have begun and become apparent.

Secondly: People rising to the occasion in order to give verdicts and rulings without any knowledge whatsoever.

Thirdly: Massive disagreements, argumentation and disputation amongst people with regards to issues that are clear to the people of knowledge. So it's not for anyone with no knowledge to dispute and argue about such issues.

And more glorious than that is that we are in dire need of referring to people of knowledge who are well established, perceptive and wise. Who have understanding and comprehension of the religion of Allaah and have wisdom in guiding the servants of Allaah. As many people nowadays obtain theoretical knowledge of certain topics, yet the theory doesn't involve the rectification of creation, with regards to the education and upbringing of creation. So when they make a conclusion vis-à-vis an issue, this actually becomes a means to far greater evil, the extent to which only Allaah knows.