

IMPORTANCE OF SEEKING KNOWLEDGE

Rating: 4.5 

Description: This lesson gives insight into the reasons behind Islam giving great importance to seeking knowledge and the fruits one may reap from it.

Category: [Lessons](#) › [Islamic Lifestyle, Morals and Practices](#) › [General Morals and Practices](#)

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Objectives

- To appreciate the unique importance given by the religion of Islam in seeking knowledge.
- To identify what kind of knowledge should be sought.
- To realize patience and devotion as being crucial elements in the process of acquiring knowledge.
- To learn about some of the measures a person should take to enable him to reap the fruits of knowledge.

Arabic Terms

- Hadith* - (plural – *ahadith*) is a piece of information or a story. In Islam it is a narrative record of the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad and his companions.

No other religion or institution gives as much importance to knowledge as the religion of Islam. The religion has made seeking knowledge incumbent upon all Muslims and has deemed that not doing so as a sin. The Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, said in an authentic narration (*hadeeth*):

“Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim.” (Al-Tirmidhi)

This obligation is not limited to a certain sex or class, but rather it is as much as an obligation upon women as it is for men, the young and the old, and the poor and the rich. Allah has raised the ranks and status of those who have knowledge, and has praised them in many places in the Quran. Allah says:

“Allah raises of those who believe and those who have been given knowledge many levels.” (Quran 58:11)

There is a great difference between a Muslim who has knowledge and one who does not. The Prophet described this in his saying:

“The excellence of a scholar over another (ordinary) worshipper is like the excellence of the full moon over the rest of the heavenly bodies.” (Abu Dawood)

He also said:

“The excellence of a scholar over another (ordinary) worshipper is like the excellence of me over the least of you.” (Al-Tirmidhi)

Why has Allah given such preference to those who have knowledge to those who do not? The role of the Prophets was to impart knowledge to the creation, knowledge directly from our Creator, about His Self and Attributes, as well as how humans are to please Him and avoid His anger. Here we see the importance of knowledge in the life of a Muslim. In order that He worship Allah correctly, do deeds which please Allah and avoid what angers Him, the Muslim must seek knowledge. If they do not, they will live their entire lives doing things which might actually oppose the teachings of the religion, causing him to earn the punishment of Allah instead of His forgiveness.

What Should I Learn?

So the question arises, if it is an obligation to seek knowledge of the religion, and the fields of knowledge within the religion are so vast, what type of knowledge is obligatory to seek? Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal, a great scholar of Islam, answered that it is obligatory for every Muslim individual to seek that type of knowledge which will allow him to practice his religion properly. The following are examples:

- 1) Islamic beliefs. This is by far the most important aspect of the religion a person must learn, for through this aspect a person actually becomes Muslim. The first thirteen years of the Prophet Muhammad’s call was devoted to correcting people’s beliefs about Allah, emphasizing that no worship was to be directed to any but Him Alone, while only a few of the other commandments were revealed at that time.
- 2) The knowledge of the obligatory aspects of worship. As we know, Allah has commanded Muslims to perform certain acts of worship. Many of these acts are obligatory and, in turn, one must know how to perform them. For example, Allah has obligated upon us to pray a minimum of five times per day, so it becomes obligatory upon us to know how to pray properly, bearing in mind what is permissible and impermissible for us to do during the Prayer. Also, as one of the conditions of the Prayer is to purify oneself, a person must know how to do so. This also holds true for the rest of the commandments of Allah.
- 3) Knowing what is permissible and impermissible in daily life. By the Mercy of Allah, He has encouraged us to enjoy a countless number of bounties which He created. At

the same time, He has also warned us from certain things due to the physical or spiritual harm resulting from their indulgence. It then becomes obligatory for us to learn these aspects of the religion so that we may not intentionally commit or accidentally fall into these impermissible acts. An important note to mention is that Muslims must be sure they learn those rulings related to their field of work, whether it be medicine, trade, law, or any other field, in order that they carry out their work according to the guidelines of the religion.

4) Last but not least, a person must also learn how to purify their hearts and deeds from blameworthy traits. Muslims must know how to purify their hearts from the love of wealth, status, and fame, and how to make one's love for Allah alone. They must also learn the lofty manners taught to us by the religion of Islam, and try to pattern our lives according to Prophet Muhammad.

Patience in the Path to Paradise

Learning knowledge is something which must be done, but it need not be done so all at once, as the great scholar az-Zuhri said, *“Whoever seeks knowledge in one go, it will leave him at one go. Rather, knowledge is only sought through the passing of nights and days.”* One should make a firm intention, and have patience throughout their search. Some aspects may be easy, but some might be harder to achieve. Bear in mind that when one tries to learn while it is hard for him, they will receive a double reward from Allah due to the effort they spent in seeking it, and Allah's bounty is indeed limitless. The Prophet said:

“Whoever reads the Quran and stutters while reading, due to its difficulty, will receive a double reward.” (Saheeh Muslim)

There are many ways to learn the religion, the best being directly learning it from a knowledgeable and righteous Muslim. But as they are not always available, one must look for other ways, such as good books, cassettes, and websites to fulfill this goal. Do not try to tackle those issues which require much study in the beginning; rather, prioritize the material of study in order of importance. One of the means to learn the religion is from this website, which has been established for you to learn the basics of your religion from authentic sources in an easy, step by step manner. We encourage you to read the lessons we have prepared for you, and to answer the questions related to each in order to test yourself. Do not proceed to the next lesson until you have fully understood the previous one, as these lessons have been prepared for your own benefit. Do not be concerned about the time it takes for you to fully understand the material, for you are gaining reward for each second you spend while doing it. Learning your religion will make easy for you the path to Paradise, as Prophet Muhammad said:

“Whoever treads a path in seeking knowledge, Allah will make easy for him the path to Paradise.” (Al-Tirmidhi)

Keenly Seek Knowledge

The Prophet, may Allah praise him, said:

“When Allah wishes good for a person, He makes him understand the religion.” (al-Bukhari)

The Companions, may Allah be pleased with them all, were very keen on gaining knowledge. Look at how keen Abdullah ibn Abbas, the cousin of the Prophet, was to seek knowledge. He devoted himself to acquiring knowledge in a wide variety of fields. He had a special admiration for persons like Zaid ibn Thabit, who was one of the scribes of the Quran, the leading judge and jurist in Medina, and an expert in the laws of inheritance and in reading the Quran. Once when Zaid intended to travel, the young Abdullah stood humbly at his side, and taking hold of the reins of his mount he adopted the attitude of a humble servant in the presence of his master. Zaid said to him: “Don't do this, O cousin of the Prophet!”

"This is how we were commanded to treat the learned ones among us," Abdullah replied.

Zaid said in return, "Let me see your hand."

Abdullah stretched out his hand. Zaid, taking it, kissed it and said: "This is how we were commanded to treat the members of the household of the Prophet."

Fruits of Knowledge

To conclude, seeking knowledge is an act of worship that requires you to keep your intention sincerely for Allah alone and none else, seeking His Pleasure and reward. Do not seek knowledge to show off or compete with others, or to enliven one's gatherings. The Prophet said:

“Whoever seeks that knowledge which is (usually) sought to seek the pleasure of Allah in order to gain some worldly benefit, he will not sense the scent of Paradise on the Day of Judgment.” (Ibn Maajah)

Also know that knowledge is of no importance if one does not reap its fruits, which is to practice the religion of Islam as Allah loves. So one should try to practice what one learns as *living* Islam is what takes a person to Paradise.

We close with some supplications which the Prophet Muhammad himself made in regards to seeking knowledge.

“O Allah! Bring us benefit by what You taught us, and teach us that which brings us benefit, and increase us in knowledge” (Ibn Maajah)

“O Allah, I ask you to grant us beneficial knowledge, good, pure and permissible sustenance, and deeds which are accepted by You.” (Ibn Maajah)

“O Allah I seek refuge in you from knowledge which does not benefit, a heart which does not humble itself in fear, an insatiable desire, and supplications which are unanswered.” (Muslim)

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