

Understanding of the Religion

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[Series of questions and answers concerning the correct
methodology to attain knowledge in the Religion of al-Islam]

Part 1 of 2

Version 1.2

Allaah the Blessed and Exalted stated,

“Out of every troop from amongst them, a party only should go forth, that they may get instructions in the Religion, and so that they may warn their people when they return to them, so that they may beware.” [Sooratut-Tawbah 9:122]

The Messenger of Allaah (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said, “Whosoever Allaah wishes good for, He gives him understanding (*fiqh*) of the Religion.” Related by al-Bukhaaree (no. 71) and Muslim (no. 1037)

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INTRODUCTION:

All praise is due to Allaah, we praise Him, seek His aid and His forgiveness. We seek refuge with Allaah from the evils of our souls and the evils of our actions. Whomsoever Allaah guides there is none to misguide and whomsoever Allaah misguides there is none to guide. I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship besides Allaah, alone, without any partners and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and messenger.¹

Allaah said,

“Out of every troop from amongst them, a party only should go forth, that they may get instructions in the Religion, and so that they may warn their people when they return to them, so that they may beware.” [Sooratut-Tawbah 9:122]

And Muhammad (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*), the servant and Messenger of Allaah said, “Whosoever Allaah wishes good for, He gives him understanding (*fiqh*) of the Religion.”²
To proceed:

So understanding of the Religion results in acts of obedience, the best actions to bring one closer to Allaah for the one who has a good intention and he wants to raise the ignorance from himself and his brothers. Imaam Ahmad (d.241H) - *rahimahullaah* - said, “The search for knowledge will not amount to anything for the one who does not rectify his intention.” And he - *rahimahullaah* - held the view that gaining understanding in the Religion and seeking knowledge is better than supererogatory acts of worship. That is because the supererogatory acts of worship only benefit the one who performs them, whereas the search for knowledge is an action that stretches into benefit others as well as the one who is seeking it.

And the current reality testifies to this. So - O noble reader - you must consider the feats of our truthful, working Scholars, from the likes of the noble 'Allamah, Shaykh 'Abdul-'Azeez Ibn Baaz, the Noble Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Saalih al-'Uthaymeen, the Noble Shaykh Saalih Ibn Fawzaan al-Fawzaan and many others besides them.

So in the forthcoming pages we shall present to you - O noble brother - this splendid and beneficial meeting about understanding in the Religion of Allaah the Exalted with the Noble Shaykh Saalih Ibn Fawzaan al-Fawzaan; a member of the Committee of Major Scholars - *hafidhahullaahu ta'aalaa*. So on to the meeting, and may Allaah protect you.

¹ This is a translation of the first in a series of booklets called, *at-Tafaqquh fee Deenillaahi Ta'aalaa* by Shaykh Saalih al-Fawzaan.

² Related by al-Bukhaaree (no. 71) and Muslim (no. 1037)

THE EXCELLENCE OF UNDERSTANDING IN THE RELIGION OF ALLAAH THE EXALTED:

[Q]: O Noble Shaykh, in the beginning of our meeting, we would like to speak about the excellence of gaining understanding in the Religion of Allaah in light of the Book and the *Sunnah*.

[A]: The praise is for Allaah, Lord of the worlds, and may the peace and greetings of Allaah be upon our Prophet Muhammad, upon his family and all of his Companions.

The meaning of having understanding in the Religion is to have an understanding of its prescribed rules and regulations in the Book and the *Sunnah*, because *fiqh* in the Arabic language means understanding. Indeed, the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Whosoever Allaah wishes good for, He gives him understanding (*fiqh*) of the Religion."³ So this *hadeeth* is one of the signs that when Allaah wants goodness for the Believer, He grants him *tafaquh* (understanding) in the Religion of Allaah the Mighty and Majestic. So the *fuqahaa'* (people of understanding) of the Religion of Allaah have a magnificent virtue:

Firstly, they benefit themselves by worshipping Allaah upon *baseerah* (insight, sure knowledge).

Secondly, they benefit the people by guiding them, solving their problems and answering their questions, since they are the ones entitled to judge between the people with the truth. And they issue *fataawaa* concerning the important affairs for the people to refer back to. This is a great goodness for them and for the *Ummah*.

So the presence of *fuqahaa'* (people of understanding) in the *Ummah* is a sign of goodness and the shortage of absence of *fuqahaa'* in the *Ummah* is a sign of evil. Due to this, there have occurred narrations which state that in the later times there will be many reciters and few *fuqahaa'*.⁴

³ Related by al-Bukhaaree (no. 71) and Muslim (no. 1037)

⁴ **Translator's Note:** Stated Ibn Mas'ood (*radiyallaahu 'anh*), "There will not come upon you a time, except that it is more evil than the one before it. I do not mean a leader better than another leader, nor a year better than another year. However, your Scholars and *fuqahaa'* will disappear and you will not find anyone to succeed them. Then there will come a people who will give verdicts according to their opinions." Ibn Hajr related it in *Fathul-Baaree* (13/24), by way of ash-Sha'bee, from Masrooq, from him. Likewise, he said in another wording, "It is not due to an abundance of rain, nor due to its scarcity. Rather, it is due to the disappearance of the Scholars. Then there will come a people who will give verdicts upon matters by mere opinions; and thus they will destroy Islaam." The *muhaddith* of his era, Imaam Muhammad Naasirud-Deen al-Albaanee said, "It must be known that his (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) statement, "A time will not come upon you, except that that which comes after it will be worse - until you meet your Lord." [Related by al-Bukhaaree (no. 7068)] So this *hadeeth* must be understood in light of the preceding *ahaadeeth* as well as in the light of others - such as the *hadeeth* about the *Mahdee* and also the descent of 'Eesaa (*'alayhis-salaam*) which show that this *hadeeth* is not be understood as having no exceptions. Rather, it is general and has exceptions.

And in this *hadeeth* is that which suggests that from the signs that Allaah wants evil for the servant is that He does not grant him understanding in the Religion. So the one who is deprived of understanding (*fiqh*) is therefore deprived of goodness. And Allaah the Sublime and Exalted has rebuked those who do not have understanding. So He said in informing about the hypocrites,

“However, the hypocrites do not understand.” [Sooratul-Munaafiqoon 63:7]

And Allaah the Exalted said,

“So what is wrong with these people that they fail to understand any word?” [Sooratun-Nisaa' 4:78]

So there is much goodness and great benefit in *fiqh* of the Religion. And Allaah the Sublime and Exalted incites towards that. Allaah the Glorified and Exalted said,

“And it is not proper for the believers to go out to fight all together. Of every troop of them, a party only should go forth, so that they who are left behind may get instructions in the Religion, and that they may warn their people when they return to them, so that they may beware.” [Sooratut-Tawbah 9:122]

This is an incitement from Allaah the Glorified and Exalted to form a group from amongst the Muslims from those of them who rise up being qualified to seek knowledge by traveling and seeking it at the hands of the Scholars. So this is from that which proves that this knowledge is to be taken as narrations from the people of knowledge and interaction with them, not from merely reading books. Knowledge is only to be taken by way of interacting with and narrating from the people of knowledge, and if this means having to undertake an arduous journey and traveling from one's land in search of knowledge, then this is going out in the path of Allaah. Then Allaah the Glorified clarified that the objective of gaining understanding in the Religion is not only so that a person can be a *faqeeh* for his own sake, even though this is part of the intended purpose. However, he must add onto that the benefit of others besides himself.

“So that they may warn their people when they return to them, so that they may beware.” [Sooratut-Tawbah 9:122]

Thus, it is not permissible to cause the people to understand it as being restricted, such that they fall into despair – which no Believer should have as an attribute. Allaah says,

“Indeed, no one despairs of the mercy of Allaah, except those who disbelieve.” [Soorah Yoosuf 12:87].
Refer to *Silsilatus-Saheehah* (1/8).

THE EXTENT OF FIQH REQUIRED FOR THE COMMON-FOLK:

[Q]: Noble Shaykh, we have learned the excellence of *tafaqquh* (understanding) in the Religion of Allaah in light of the Book and the *Sunnah*. However, what is the extent of *fiqh* required for the general masses of the people?

[A]: Understanding (*fiqh*) in the Religion is divided into two categories:

The First Category: It is that which is binding upon every Muslim. There is that which is obligatory upon every individual and no one is excused from being ignorant of it. It is that without which the Religion of a person cannot be correct, such as knowledge of his *'aqeedah* which includes the meaning of the *shahaadatayn* (two testimonies), knowledge of the rules and regulations of Prayer, the rules and regulations of *zakaat* (obligatory alms), rules and regulations of fasting and the rules and regulations of his *Hajj* and *'Umrah*. It is inevitable that every Muslim must have knowledge of these five pillars of Islaam and knowledge of their rules and regulations, even if it be a very general knowledge. The knowledge of these five pillars must be correct, because they are the pillars of Islaam.

The Second Category: It is that which is *fard kifaayah* (collective obligation). This is knowledge which is not obligatory upon every individual Muslim. It is only obligatory upon those from amongst the *Ummah* who are prepared to carry out that obligation and to preserve this knowledge for the *Ummah*. It is understanding of the rules and regulations of business procedures (*mu'aamalaat*), the rules and regulations of inheritance and wills, the rules and regulations of marriage and divorce, the rules and regulations of general manners and the rules and regulations of judgement and issuing verdicts. So learning this knowledge is a collective obligation. If those who are able have already carried out the study of this knowledge, then the rest of the *Ummah* are relieved from the sin of not knowing it. And if everyone has left it off, then they are collectively sinning, because it should absolutely be present.

As for the issue of whom this affair is obligatory upon, then we have already explained that the first category is obligatory upon every Muslim. No one is excused from being ignorant of it, and it is that without which the Religion of the servant cannot be correct. As for what remains from that, such as the rules and regulations of *mu'aamalaat* (business procedures) and whatever is connected to it, then this is only obligatory for those who are prepared to carry out this knowledge by establishing it, spreading it amongst the Muslims and benefiting themselves as well as the rest of the Muslims with it.

MANNERS THAT ARE BEFITTING FOR THE MUTAFAQQIH IN THE RELIGION OF ALLAAH THE EXALTED TO ADORN HIMSELF WITH:

[Q]: Noble Shaykh, there are manners that are obligatory for the student of knowledge or *mutafaqqih* (one who possesses *fiqh*) in the Religion of Allaah to adorn himself with. So perhaps you will inform us in this meeting, O Noble Shaykh, about the manners that are befitting for the *mutafaqqih* to adorn himself with.

[A]: It is obligatory for the *mutafaqqih* in the Religion of Allaah and one who is knowledgeable concerning the rules and regulations of the *Sharee'ah* to adorn himself with attributes that do not display anything besides that which is desired from the search for knowledge:

Firstly: Sincerity of intention for Allaah the Mighty and Majestic: So the student of knowledge and the one possessing understanding in the Religion of Allaah must have a sincere intention for Allaah. And his desired goal must be the Face of Allaah the Glorified and Exalted. He must seek the pleasure of Allaah the Mighty and Majestic, because the search for knowledge is worship, and worship cannot be considered correct, except with the proper intention. The Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said, "Indeed, actions are by intentions and every person will have that which he intended."⁵ Indeed, the first one from amongst the people who will be brought and thrown into the Fire on the Day of Judgement will be the student of knowledge who covets the worldly life due to it, or he desires thereby to show off or he seeks a high rank amongst the people. It is also said that he will be a reciter or a scholar.⁶

So this one will be the first to be thrown into the Fire on the Day of Judgement, because he was not sincere in his intention for seeking knowledge of Allaah the Mighty and Majestic. He only desired the luxuries of the world, or he desired to show off or to seek worldly status. And there is no might, nor power, except with Allaah.

Secondly: To act in accordance with what Allaah has taught: So knowledge was only revealed to be acted upon. So it is obligatory upon the servant to act in accordance to his knowledge so that it can serve as an evidence in his favour in front of Allaah the Glorified and Exalted, not an evidence against him.

Indeed, there also occurs in a *hadeeth* that in the Fire there will be a man who is carrying a load upon his back that causes him to develop a hunchback, and he will be circling around just as the donkey circles around the millstone. So the people of the Fire will gather around him and say, 'O so and so, did you not used to command us with good and

⁵ Related by al-Bukhaaree (no. 1) and Muslim (no. 1907)

⁶ Related by Muslim (no. 1905)

prohibit us from evil?' So he will say, 'Yes. However, I used to command you with goodness, but I would not approach it myself. And I would prohibit you from evil, but I myself would fall into it.'⁷ And Allaah the Sublime and Exalted said,

“O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do. It is highly detested by Allaah that you say that which you do not do.” [Sooratus-Saff 61:2-3]

So it is obligatory upon one who has learned knowledge to act in accordance to it himself firstly, then to call the people to it.

Thirdly: It is upon the student of knowledge to be patient upon the search for knowledge and not to become dissatisfied. So there is no doubt that the student of knowledge will encounter hardship, toil and exhaustion,

*‘And whosoever has not tasted the degradation of learning for a time;
Then he will be drinking from the cup of ignorance for the entire extent of his life.’*

So there is no escape from patience, nor is there any escape from long term endurance and making one's soul used to the search for knowledge. If this does not happen, then the person will become irritated and dissatisfied. The poet said,

*‘Seek knowledge and do not become dissatisfied.
So the student is in danger of becoming dissatisfied.
Do you not see that continuous drops of water;
Affects a hard boulder?’*

⁷ Related by al-Bukhaaree (no. 3267, 7098) and Muslim (no. 2989)

MUHADDITH OR FAQEEH?

[Q]: Noble Shaykh, there are those from amongst the people who do not distinguish between a *muhaddith* (scholar of *hadeeth*) and a *faqeeh*. In your view, O Noble Shaykh, which of the two are better for the student of knowledge to become? A *muhaddith* or a *faqeeh*?

[A]: It is better to be a *muhaddith* and a *faqeeh*. So by becoming a *muhaddith*, one will be able to relate the *ahaadeeth* with their *asaaneed* (chains of narration) and he will know their narrators, he will know their levels and he will understand their meanings.

So the *muhaddith* is the one who is concerned with the narration of the *hadeeth*, its *isnaad* and its narrators. He knows the *saheeh* from the *hasan* and *da'eef*. He knows what is fabricated or forged, this is the *muhaddith*. And the *faqeeh* is the one who understands the meanings of these texts and he derived rules and regulations (*ahkaam*) from them. So it is befitting for the student of knowledge to combine between two affairs: between relating the texts and distinguishing their *saheeh* from their weak; then he must have knowledge of their meanings and whatever is extracted from them in terms of *ahkaam*. So these ones are the people of narration and investigation (*riwaayah wad-diraayah*), and they are called *fuqahaa'ul-muhadditheen*. Indeed, the Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said, "The example of my being sent is like the rain that drops upon the earth. So from the earth is that area which absorbs the water and sprout herbage. So the people drink from it and graze around it..." This is the example of the *muhaddithul-faqeeh* who preserves the texts for the people and remains concerned with them. He understands their meaning and explains their meanings and secrets to the people. "And the rain drops upon another area which has dry soil, so it does not sprout herbage. It holds the water and the people are able to irrigate and take drink from it..." This is the example of the *huffaadh* (memorizers) who are not concerned with memorizing the meanings of the *Qur'aan*. They are only concerned with retaining it and keeping free from alien elements. So there is a great excellence in this as well. There is a benefit for the *Ummah* when the *Ummah* protects the texts of its *Sharee'ah* and honour from alien elements. So they have a great virtue. However, they are at a lower level than those who came before them from the people of *ar-riwaayah wad-diraayah* (narration and investigation). These ones are to be called the people of *riwaayah* (narration) only.

And the third group - and refuge is sought with Allaah - is plain land which holds no water, nor does it retain any herbage. This is the example of those who do not accept the guidance of Allaah which His Messenger (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) came with. And they do not raise their heads with it.⁸

⁸ Related by al-Bukhaaree (no. 79) and Muslim (no. 2282)

BOOKS THAT ARE OBLIGATORY FOR THE BEGINNER SEEKER OF KNOWLEDGE TO TAKE FROM:

[Q]: Noble Shaykh, with regards to seeking knowledge, what are the books that you advise us to refer back to and to read? May Allaah reward you with goodness.

[A]: The obligation upon the seeker of knowledge is to begin with the shorter books about every science. So he should memorize the shorter books about *hadeeth*. And he should memorize the shorter books about *fiqh*, for example there is *Zaadul-Mustaqni'*. And he should memorize the smaller books about Arabic grammar, such as the text of *al-Qatr* of Ibn Hishaam and the *Alfiyyah* of Ibn Maalik. So the memorization of the shorter books in every science will be the foundation which he can build upon and after which he can delve into what is at a higher level from the areas of knowledge.

As for the one who begins the search for knowledge by going through the lengthier books and leaving off the shorter ones, then he is like the one who comes into the houses through their backs instead of their front doors. He will not be able to attain anything, and Allaah the Glorified and Exalted said,

“And it is not from righteousness that you come into the houses from their backs. However, he is righteous who approaches the houses from their front doors.” [Sooratul-Baqarah 2:189]

Indeed, the Scholars - *rahimahumullaah* - have spoken concerning this with a good word and profound wisdom. They said, ‘The one who neglects the foundations, he will find the goal unattainable.’ So the one who does not memorize these texts, begin with them and delve into what is at a greater level thereafter, he will have neglected the primary foundations. So it is not possible for him to reach his goal, he will not be able to reach it. So the affairs have to be prioritized one after the other. One cannot begin with the highest of affairs. The affairs are to be taken from their foundations firstly, then whatever follows thereafter. And the Scholars did not write these shorter books, except due to learning experience and intelligence. And they wanted to benefit the Muslims. And Allaah the Sublime and Exalted said,

“However, be *rabbaaniyyoon* (learned men who teach the people in accordance to their levels) because you have learned the Book and you teach it.” [Soorah Aali-'Imraan 4:79]

Some of the Scholars have stated that the *rabbaaniyyoon* are those who teach the people the smaller knowledge before teaching them the larger thereof.

This is from the foundations in *tarbiyah* (education), to teach knowledge in levels, in order of importance. And the texts must be memorized and their meanings must be explained. However, the meaning should not be explained until the text has been memorized. As for

explaining the meaning without memorizing the text, then this is something futile and it will not remain in the memory of the student of knowledge. As for when one starts out by memorizing the text and becoming sure of it, then its meaning is explained and clarified to him, then it will become firmly rooted in him and then he can delve into knowledge that is at a higher level. And those who forsake memorization and abuse its people, then they are a people without any insight (*baseerah*) or knowledge about seeking knowledge. So there is no consideration for them.

MEMORIZING THE TEXT COMES BEFORE THE EXPLANATION:

[Q]: Therefore, O Noble Shaykh, do you feel that memorizing the text must come before the explanation?

[A]: Yes, there is no doubt that memorizing the text comes first. Then there is the explanation so that the knowledge can become firmly grounded in the knowledge and so that it can remain in his memory.

GOOD WISDOM:

[Q]: Noble Shaykh, there is a statement, and I do not know the extent of its correctness. Indeed, it is, 'The one whose Shaykh is a book, his errors will be more than his correct views.' What is your opinion concerning this statement O Noble Shaykh?

[A]: This is good wisdom and it is said due to experience. So the one who learns from books and restricts himself to them, does not go to the Scholars, does not sit with them in the circles of remembrance and does not have a systematic way of learning, then his book will be his Shaykh. This is because he will be taking knowledge from a book, and books have whatever they have from correctness and error and they have whatever they have of hidden schemes. It is also in need of explanation and clarification, and books alone are not capable of providing that. No one can distinguish the authentic from the weak except for the Scholars, and no one is capable of explaining the texts except for the Scholars. So there is no doubt that after relying upon Allaah the Glorified and Exalted, one must rely upon the Scholars. As for the books, then they are means which are still in need of being taught and clarified by the people of awareness. So for example, a man reads the books of medicine, and then he comes out to the people and says, 'I am a surgeon, I can perform surgery upon the heart, I can perform surgery upon the eye and I can perform surgery upon such and such.'

So we ask him, 'What has prepared you for this affair, and how have you attained proficiency in it?' So he says, 'I read through the books of medicine.' Is there anyone who will trust him? Is it possible that anyone will allow him to perform surgery? The answer is no.

So when this is the case in the issue of medicine, then what about the issue of *Sharee'ah* knowledge, *halaal* (lawful) and *haraam* (unlawful) and speaking about Allaah the Glorified and Exalted and His Messenger (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*)?! The affair is more dangerous and more severe.

MEMORIZING THE NOBLE QUR'AAN AND WHATEVER IS EASY FROM THE PROPHETIC AHAADEETH:

[Q]: In your view, O Noble Shaykh Saalih, is it better to memorize the *Qur'aan*, or to learn *Sharee'ah* knowledge?

[A]: It is better to do both of them. That which is obligatory first is to memorize the Noble *Qur'aan* and to memorize the *ahaadeeth*, or whatever is easy from the Prophetic *ahaadeeth* and to do all of that in front of the Scholars. They will help him to memorize these things, to become certain about them and they will explain them to him. So he must carry out two affairs: memorization and understanding the meanings, he must do all of this in front of the people of knowledge and the teachers. The *Salafus-Saalih* used to first bring up their children upon memorization of the *Qur'aan*. So the *Salaf* would make their children memorize the *Qur'aan* at an early age, before reaching the age of ten. From that which proves that memorization precedes understanding is memorization of the *Qur'aan* would begin from the earliest age of discernment.

THE HUMAN BEING IS PRONE TO ERROR:

[Q]: There remains at the end of this meeting, O Noble Shaykh, a question about the errors which some of the *mutafaqqiheen* of this Religion have fallen into.

[A]: Yes, the human being is prone to error. However, this is divided into two categories:

When an error occurs from a *faqeeh* and *mujtahid* who is capable of performing *ijtihad* (independent reason for an issue concerning which there is no clear text to be found) and the condition of *ijtihad* are amply found in him, and he strives hard to understand the ruling from the text, yet he has erred in that. So this one will have one reward and his error is forgiven. This is because he strove hard for the answer, but he did not end up in conformity to the correct view which was sought. As for when he reaches the correct *Sharee'ah* ruling, then he has two rewards, as the Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said, "When the judge performs an *ijtihad* and he is correct, then he has two rewards. And when he performs an *ijtihad* and he errs, then he still has one reward."⁹ And his error is forgiven.

As for when he strives hard to reach the correct view, yet he is not accredited with *ijtihad*, nor is he capable of this affair and he did not approach the affair from this angle, nor with its foundations, then he is a sinner regardless of what the case may be. This is because it is not his right to enter into an affair that he is not deserving of. So it is upon him to learn how it must be entered, how the ruling is derived and how one comes to know the *Sharee'ah* rulings from their evidences. So the affair has various aspects and foundations (*usool*) which are inevitable for one to know. So this is the case that applies to many of the people who feign knowledge in this present age, where they come out to the people with strange ideologies.

END OF PART ONE

⁹ Related by al-Bukhaaree (no. 7352) and Muslim (no. 1716)