10324 - What Are the Codes of Etiquette of the Seeker of Knowledge?

the question

Allah has blessed me by causing me to seek knowledge. What is the etiquette which you advise me to follow?

Summary of answer

There is a certain amount of etiquette for seeking knowledge which the seeker of knowledge should follow such as patience, purity of intention in action, acting upon what you know, always being aware that Allah is watching, making the best use of time, being cautious, precision and focus, studying books, choosing a good companion, and having good manners towards the shaykh.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Etiquettes of the seeker of knowledge

There is a certain amount of etiquette for seeking knowledge which the seeker of knowledge should follow. We will give you this advice and this etiquette for seeking knowledge ; may Allah cause you to benefit thereby.

1 – Patience

My dear brother, seeking knowledge is one of the highest of pursuits, and heights cannot be scaled except by working hard and striving. Abu Tamaam said, addressing himself:

“Let me scale the heights that cannot be scaled, for reaching high things is difficult whilst reaching low things is easy.

You want to scale the heights without any effort, but honey cannot be gathered without bee stings."

Another poet said:

"You seek to attain glory, and those who seek to attain glory

Strive their utmost and roll up their sleeves for that purpose.

They strive hard but most of them become tired.

But those who have patience and perseverance attain the heights of the glory that they desired.

Do not think that attaining glory is as easy as eating dates;

You cannot attain glory until you swallow the bitterest medicine."

So be patient and persevere. If jihaad requires an hour of patience, then the seeker of knowledge must be patient until the end of his life. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning)

"O you who believe! Endure and be more patient (than your enemy), and guard your territory by stationing army units permanently at the places from where the enemy can attack you, and fear Allâh, so that you may be successful." [Aal 'Imraan 3:200]

2 – Purity of intention in action

Adhere to purity of intention in what you do. Let your aim be to seek the Face of Allah (i.e., the pleasure of Allah) and the Home of the Hereafter. Beware of showing off and the love of making oneself appear to be superior to one's peers. The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "Whoever seeks knowledge in order to compete with the scholars or to prove himself superior to the ignorant or to make the people look up to him, Allah will cause him to enter Hell." (narrated by al-Nasaa'i, 2654; classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Nasaa'i).

To sum up, you have to be pure both outwardly and inwardly from every major and minor sin.

3 – Acting upon what you know

Know that acting upon what you know is the fruit of knowledge. Whoever knows but does not act upon his knowledge is like the Jews whom Allah likened to the ugliest things in His Book, when He said (interpretation of the meaning):

“The likeness of those who were entrusted with the (obligation of the) Tawraat (Torah) (i.e. to obey its commandments and to practise its laws), but who subsequently failed in those (obligations), is as the likeness of a donkey which carries huge burdens of books (but understands nothing from them). How bad is the example of people who deny the Ayaat (proofs, evidences, verses, signs, revelations, etc.) of Allah. And Allah guides not the people who are Zaalimoon (polytheists, wrongdoers, disbelievers)” [al-Jumu’ah 62:5]

And whoever acts without knowledge is like the Christians, who are the “daalleen (those who have gone astray)” mentioned in Soorat al-Faatihah. With regard to the books which you should study, they are mentioned in Question # 20191 ; please refer to this Question as it is important.

4 – Always being aware that Allah is watching

You must always be aware that Allah is watching you, in secret and in the open. Your attitude towards your Lord must always be balanced between fear and hope, which for the Muslims are like the two wings of a bird. Turn to Allah wholeheartedly and let your heart be filled with love for Him, your tongue with remembrance of Him (dhikr). Be happy and rejoice in His rulings and His wisdom.

Always call upon Allah (du’aa’) in every sujood, asking Him to bless you and grant you beneficial knowledge, for if you are sincere towards Allah, He will support you and help you, and will cause you to attain the level of the righteous scholars.

5 – Make the best use of time

Make the most of your youth and your whole life by learning. Do not be deceived by procrastination and wishful thinking about the future. Every hour of your life that passes cannot be

replaced. Do away with whatever you can of distractions and obstacles which prevent you from striving your utmost to attain knowledge. Hence the salaf encouraged keeping away from one's family and keeping a distance from one's homeland, because when a person is distracted he will not be able to understand facts of knowledge and subtle issues. Allah has not given man two hearts in his chest, and similarly it is said that knowledge will not give you a part of it until you give it your all.

6 – Be cautious

Beware of being preoccupied in the beginning with the disputes among the scholars, or among people in general, because this confuses the mind. Also beware of musannafaat , because they will waste your time and make you confused. Instead, give your all to the book which you are reading or the topic which you are studying until you become competent in it. Beware of moving from one book to another (before completing the former), for that is a sign of boredom and failure. You must pay attention to each branch of knowledge, in order of importance.

7 – Precision and focus

Strive to verify that which you want to memorize so that you are certain of it, either from a shaykh or from someone else who can help you. Then memorize it properly and continually repeat it and review at specific times each day, lest you forget what you have memorized.

8 – Studying books

After you have memorized the summarized books properly, with their commentaries, and you have understood any difficult passages in them and understood the important points, then move on to studying the detailed versions, always reviewing what you have learned and noting the valuable points, subtle issues, strange minor issues, solutions to problems and differences between similar rulings, in all branches of knowledge. Do not think little of anything useful that you learn or any basic principle that you understand; instead, hasten to note and memorize it.

Let your concern to seek knowledge be uppermost; do not be content to learn only a little when

you are able to do more. Do not be content with a little of the legacy of the Prophets (may the blessings of Allah be upon them), and do not delay learning anything that you can, or be distracted or put off by wishful thinking. Delay is a problem, and if you learn something now you can learn something else later.

Make the most of your time, when you are free and when you are busy. Make the most of your youth when your mind is fresh and you have less distractions, before you become distracted by false ambitions and the desire for worldly possessions.

You should try to obtain as many of the books you need as you can, because they are the tools of learning. Do not make getting and keeping a lot of them (without benefiting from them) the only share of knowledge that you have, and collecting them the only share of understanding that you have. You also have to use and benefit from them as much as you can.

9 – Choosing companions

Strive to choose righteous friends who are preoccupied with seeking knowledge and are of a good nature, who can help you in achieving your aim, add to the benefits you have already gained, encourage you to seek more knowledge and stop you from feeling bored and tired; friends who are religiously-committed, trustworthy and of good character, who are sincere towards Allah and who are not merely messing about. (See Tadhkirat al-Saami' by Ibn Jamaa'aah).

Beware of the bad companion, for he may influence you and people are like birds, they will resemble one another [i.e., "birds of a feather flock together"]. So beware of mixing with people like that, for that is a sickness, and prevention is better than cure.

10 – Finally, good manners towards the shaykh

Knowledge cannot be gained only from books; you must also have a shaykh whom you trust to open the door to knowledge and keep you from making mistakes. So you must have good manners towards him, for this is the way to success, learning and strength. So you must honour, respect and be polite to the shaykh. Observe the utmost standards of etiquette when you sit with

your shaykh and speak with him. Ask questions in a proper manner and listen attentively. Be polite when studying the book with him and do not try to argue with him or compete with him. Do not initiate conversation with him or walk ahead of him or speak too much in his presence, or interrupt him or interrupt him when he is teaching. Do not pressurize him to give you an answer, and avoid asking him too many questions, especially in front of other people, for this will make you appear to be showing off and make him bored with you. Do not call him directly by his name or nickname; rather say “O my shaykh” or “O our shaykh” (Yaa shaykhi or Yaa shaykhanaa)

If you think that the shaykh has made a mistake, do not let that make him lose respect in your eyes, because that will deprive you of his knowledge. Who is there who is entirely free from error? See Hilyat Taalib al-‘Ilm by Shaykh Bakr Abu Zayd

We ask Allah to make you and us strong and steadfast, and to let us see the day when you will become one of the scholars of the Muslims and an authority in the religion of Allah and one of the imaams of the pious. Ameen, ameen.. We hope to meet soon, and peace be upon you.

And Allah knows best.