230969 - How can the Muslim begin to seek knowledge?

the question

What is your advice to someone who wants to begin the journey of seeking knowledge, in terms of what he should begin with? And how can he do that?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The way in which Muslim should begin to seek knowledge is by starting with the most important matters. The seeker of knowledge should be keen to have a sound beginning, so that he can remain steadfast in seeking knowledge and not waste his time and effort.

The aim in seeking knowledge is so that the Muslim can rectify himself and others. So the seeker should begin with matters that are important for himself first of all, then for those around him.

The first step:

The seeker of knowledge should begin by attaining some general knowledge of the texts of revelation, because they are the main source for the religion of Allah, may He be exalted. So he should begin by memorising the Holy Qur'an, as much as his energy and free time allow, and he should be keen to understand what he memorises. For this purpose we advise him to study the Tafseer of Shaykh 'Abd ar-Rahmaan as-Sa'di (may Allah have mercy on him), because this author is one of those who are well-known for sound belief, and his tafseer is written in straightforward language and easy to read.

At the same time, the seeker should strive hard to study 'aqeedah (belief) and fiqh (jurisprudence); he cannot delay that because the seeker has a need for that for himself, and so that he can advise and guide the people around him.

With regard to ‘aqeedah, we have previously explained how to learn it gradually, in fatwa no. 226903.

With regard to fiqh, the best is for the seeker to begin with the madhhab that is most widespread in his own environment, for the following reasons:

1. because it will be easier for the seeker to find a shaykh who is well-versed in that madhhab, from whom he can learn and who can guide him;

2. because learning the madhhab of his fellow countrymen will help the seeker to call his fellow countrymen to the truth, because by doing so he will be able to seek help from the books that are available and the views of local scholars when there is a need for that.

Based on that, you can look for a shaykh in your local environment who is trustworthy in terms of his knowledge and religious commitment, and start studying with him, with the easiest text of the madhhab which will give you the view that is regarded by the scholars of that madhhab as more correct. The shaykh will be able to tell you of the evidence for every issue, without too much elaboration, and will help you to avoid a lot of the scholarly opinions that will not help you at the beginning of your quest for knowledge.

The second step:

As you memorise and study the first source of the law of Allah, may He be exalted, which is the Holy Qur’an, you can also begin to study the second source, which is the prophetic Sunnah beginning with the most important, then the next most important.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

There is no book better than the Book of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted. What I advise my brothers to do is to focus on the Holy Qur’an, memorising it, understanding it and acting upon it, for the Sahaabah (may Allah be pleased with them) did not go beyond ten verses until they had learned them and what they contain of knowledge and prescribed actions; they learned knowledge and put it into practice at the same time.

Then after that, you should focus on the hadiths that have been soundly narrated from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). It is well-known that the hadiths that have been soundly narrated from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) are very many, and the seeker of knowledge who is at a beginner or intermediate level cannot learn all of them, but there are some books on this topic which can be referred to, such as ‘Umdat al-Ahkaam by ‘Abd al-Ghani al-Maqdisi (may Allah have mercy on him); al-Arba‘een an-Nawawiyyah by an-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him); and other brief books. Then after that, he can move on to somewhat longer books, such as Buloogh al-Maraam and al-Muntaqa min Akhbaar al-Mustafa. Then after that, he can read further in the books of hadith, such as Saheeh al-Bukhaari and Saheeh Muslim.

End quote from Majmoo‘ Fataawa wa Rasaa’il Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (26/375-376).

After you have built a solid foundation in fiqh and gained an understanding of the most important issues of ‘aqeedah, you can prepare yourself for deeper study of the laws of Allah, learning about differences of opinion and how to determine which view is more likely to be correct, as there are specific tools for this task that you cannot do without, the most important of which are ‘ilm an-nahw was-sarf (study of Arabic language and grammar), ‘ilm usool al-fiqh (the funadamentals of fiqh) and ‘ilm al-hadith (study of hadith).

With regard to ‘ilm al-hadith, please see fatwa no. 153227, in which there is a detailed discussion of how to seek knowledge of hadith.

With regard to usool al-fiqh, the best is for the student to acquire knowledge thereof gradually, according to the books of usool of the madhhab that he is studying. So you should consult your shaykh from whom you are learning fiqh, so that he can advise you as to how you should begin studying usool al-fiqh.

With regard to ‘ilm an-nahw wa’s-sarf, you should begin with al-Ajroomiyyah and the commentary thereon, at-Tuhfat as-Sanniyyah by Shaykh Muhiy ad-Deen ‘Abd al-Hameed (may Allah have mercy on him).

Then Qatr an-Nada wa Ball as-Sada by Ibn Hishaam.

Then after that, Alfiyyat Ibn Maalik, with its commentary by Ibn ‘Aqeel (may Allah have mercy on him).

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

With regard to nahw (Arabic grammar), he should start with brief books first, such as al-Ajroomiyyah, which is a useful, blessed and brief book that is divided into portions that the beginner can grasp, especially if Allah enables him to find a scholar who can explain it to him. Then after that, I advise him to memorise Alfiyyah Ibn Maalik (may Allah have mercy on him) and understand its meanings, for it is a blessed Alfiyyah in which there is much good.

End quote from Majmoo ‘ Fataawa Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (23/376).

In addition to these books, there are other books that discuss details of morphology (sarf) that the author of al-Alfiyyah did not deal with. The student may choose whatever he thinks is easy for him.

The third step:

After the seeker has learned about the most important tools of ijtihad, he may begin the step of deepening his knowledge of different views and ways of determining which view is more likely to be correct, whether that is in the field of fiqh, tafseer or hadith commentary.

It is also essential for the student to observe the etiquette and manners of seeking knowledge, which has been explained previously on our website, in fatwa no. 10324.

And Allah knows best.