

A TRANSLATION OF

أَكَابُ الْمُعَلِّمِينَ وَالْمُتَعَلِّمِينَ

THE MANNERS OF
TEACHERS AND
LEARNERS

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رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ



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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

What follows is an English translation of Al-Shaykh Abdur-Rahman As-Sa'dee's (d. 1376H) short yet beneficial work on the manners of seeking and disseminating Islamic knowledge. In it, he ﷺ mentions a number of manners that both students and teachers should strive for, whether it be manners with Allah ﷻ - such as complete and absolute sincerity in their actions - or manners with each other.

A study of these types of books is more needed than ever, as attaining and spreading Islamic knowledge in recent times has become easier than ever with the Internet, yet sadly, very few truly have the manners and characteristics of the people of knowledge. Abdullah Ibn Al-Mubarak ﷺ said: "We are more in need of a small amount of manners than we are a large amount of knowledge."

- Nader Ibn Muhammad



It is incumbent upon the people of knowledge - teachers and students - to make the foundation of their matter, upon which they build their activity and inactivity, complete sincerity and seeking closeness to Allah through this worship¹, which is the loftiest worship and most complete and beneficial and comprehensive, and that they seek this lofty basis² in every subtle and lofty matter of theirs.

Thus, if they learn or study or research or debate or let others hear [them] or listen or write or memorize or revise their independent lessons or compare them or others to other books or sit in a sitting of knowledge or move their feet to the sittings of knowledge or buy books or whatever assists in knowledge, then sincerity to Allah and expectation for the reward and recompense shall be adhered to, so that their

¹ i.e. the act of seeking religious knowledge [Note: All the footnotes in this translation are the words of the translator, not the Shaykh رحمه الله]

² i.e. making sincerity to Allah the foundation of all their actions

engagement [in seeking knowledge] may all become [a means of] closeness and obedience and progression to Allah and His honor. Also, they therefore actualize his¹ statement ﷺ *“Whoever traverses a path seeking knowledge, Allah makes the path to Jannah easy for him.”*²

Therefore, every path, physical or non-physical, which is traversed by the people of knowledge that assists in knowledge or achieving it is included in this.

Then, after this, it is incumbent to begin with the most important then next most important of the religious sciences and whatever helps with that from the Arabic language sciences; and the specifics of this statement are known.

And he should tread the closest path that leads him to his goal as well as pick out the best, clearest, and most beneficial books of the science that he is busied with, and should make his major concern and occupation memorizing that book if able, or repeatedly studying it in a manner that allows its meanings to be understood and memorized; then, he should continuously repeat and reiterate what he comes across.

¹ i.e. the Prophet ﷺ

² Saheeh Muslim (2699)

And it is upon the teacher to look at the mind of the learner and the strength of its¹ ability or its weakness [in learning and understanding], thus not allowing him to be occupied with a book that does not suit his level, as this is from lack of goodwill. For indeed, the small amount that he understands and comprehends is better than a large amount which is prone to lack of understanding and forgetfulness.

He should also give clarification and validation of [the knowledge taught in] his class according to what his² understanding allows him to comprehend. He should not mix different topics with each other and should not move from one type of topic to another until the previous one is pictured and validated; [through] that, [there] is attainment of the previous [topic] and readiness to understand the next. If he, however, mixes different topics into each other, it is then a cause of neglecting the first and not understanding the next. He then becomes congested with different topics that he hasn't grasped and thus becomes disinterested and impatient in going back to them; therefore, this matter should not be neglected.

¹ i.e. the mind and intellect of the student

² i.e. the student

And it is upon the teacher to be sincere to the learner in every way he is able; of teaching and patience upon his lack of understanding and lack of manners and aversion, whilst being highly keen on whatever rectifies him and betters his manners. That is since a student has a right over his teacher, because he¹ engaged in knowledge which benefits himself and benefits the people, and because he proceeded to [that] teacher apart from others. Moreover, the knowledge that he holds is the very asset of his teacher which he preserves, grows, and pursues by way of its rewarding earnings. Thus, he is the true child of the teacher, his inheritor; Allah, Most-High, said:

﴿ فَهَبْ لِي مِنْ لَدُنْكَ وَلِيًّا (٥) يَرِثُنِي وَيَرِثُ مِنْ آلِ يَعْقُوبَ ﴾

“...So give me from Yourself an heir (5) Who shall inherit me, and inherit from the family of Ya'qub...”²

What is intended [here] is the inheritance of knowledge and wisdom.

¹ i.e. the student

² These are, as Allah informed, the words of the Prophet Zakariah, *Maryam*: 5-6

So, a teacher is recompensed and rewarded for the very act of teaching, whether he¹ understands or does not understand. Yet, if he understands what he is taught and benefits through it himself and benefits others, it is a continuous reward for the teacher as long as that benefit is successive and continuous, and this is [the type of] commerce that the successful compete for. Therefore, it is upon the teacher to strive eagerly to establish this commerce and grow it, because it is from his actions and the effects of his actions, Allah, Most-High, said:

﴿ إِنَّا نَحْنُ نُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ وَنَكْتُبُ مَا قَدَّمُوا وَآثَرَهُمْ وَكُلُّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ فِي إِمَامٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴾

“Verily, it is We who give life to the dead, and record that which they have put forth and their traces”²

“What they have put forth” is what they performed themselves, and “their traces” [are] the benefits and usefulness - or opposite of that - that were a result of their actions.

And a teacher should encourage the student in every way, and not bore him by engaging him with what is difficult upon

¹ i.e. the student

² *Ya-Seen*: 12

his understanding regarding the different sciences and their topics.

And it is upon the learner to respect his teacher and have manners with him however he is able, due to the general and specific right he has [over the learner]:

As for the general [right], it is because the teacher of good has prepared himself to benefit the people through his teaching and *fatwa*, thus his right over the people is the right [deserved by] good-doers, and there is no good greater and more beneficial than the good of one who guides the people to the issues of their religion and teaches them what they are ignorant of and points out what they are unmindful of. As a result of that, good occurs and evil is repressed and the religion and beneficial knowledge is spread; [that being] the most beneficial thing for those existing and those who come after them from their offspring and others.

For if it weren't for knowledge, the people would be like animals blundering in darkness and wandering in their misguidance. It is, then, the light which [one is] guided by in the darkness, and [it is] the life of the hearts and souls and religion and *dunya*.

And the country in which there is no one to clarify to the people the issues of their religion and guide them in what affects them, of which they are in need of, there is no good in residing in it. Thus, someone whose goodness and effects are such, how is it not an obligation on every Muslim to love him and respect him and fulfill his rights?

As for his specific right over the learner, it is for his effort in teaching him and keenness on that which guides him and leads him to the highest levels. Thus, the benefits of fathers and mothers is not comparable to the benefit of teachers who cultivate the people through minor knowledge before major knowledge. Those who spend their valuable time and pure thoughts in helping those seeking guidance to understand, in every way and means they are able.

And if the one who has done good to you through a monetary gift - that one benefits by then goes away and fades - has a big right over the receiver of good, then what about the gifts of numerous diverse beneficial knowledge? Whose effects remain continuously - according to the state of those gifts - as long as the servant is alive and [even] after his death?

In that event, he'll [come to] know his right and respect him and better his manners with him.

And he should not depart from his suggestions and guidance. He should sit before his hands in a well-mannered way and should show the utmost need for his knowledge, and should supplicate for him in his presence and absence. And if he gifts him with a benefit or clarification of knowledge, he should not show him that he knew it previously even if he was familiar with it; rather, he should listen attentively to him as a listener who is eagerly seeking the benefit. This [manner] is regarding the things he knows, so what about the things he does not know? For this reason, these manners are commendable with everyone in subjects and discussions, in religious matters and worldly ones.

And if the teacher errs in something, he should mention it to him leniently and kindly, according to the situation; he should not say to him, "you're wrong" or "it isn't like you said." Rather, he should use a gentle expression by which the teacher realizes his mistake, [in a way] that does not cloud his heart. For this is from the binding rights, and it is more likely to achieve what is correct, because a response that is combined

with bad manners and an agitated heart prevents [one] from picturing the correct [position] and seeking it.

Just as this is binding upon the student, it is [also] upon the teacher if he errs to return back to the truth. He should not be prevented by an opinion he held, then deemed the truth to be in another, from reconsidering the truth and returning to it; verily, this is the sign of fairness and humbleness to the truth. Thus, the obligation is to follow what is right, whether it comes from the young or old.

Also, it is from the blessings of Allah upon a teacher to find among his students those who point out his mistake and direct him to what is correct, and [thus], his continuing upon his lack of knowledge is ended. This is something he must thank Allah for, then thank the one whom Allah guided him through, whether he is a student or not.

And one of the greatest obligations upon the teachers is to say to that which they don't know, “الله أعلم”, and this is not diminishing of their status, in fact, this raises their status and is used as an evidence for their religiousness and search for what is right.

Also, there are, in him withholding from what he does not know, many benefits:

from them: is that this is the obligation upon him.

and from them: if he withholds and says, “I don’t know”, then how quickly does knowledge of it come to him, either through his own revision or the revision of someone other than him; because, if the student sees his teacher withholding, he becomes diligent and strives in attaining knowledge of it and benefiting the teacher with it, thus, what a good outcome this is.

and from them: is that if he withholds from what he does not know, it is an evidence of his confidence and proficiency of the issues he does affirm. Similarly, the one who is known for coming forward to speak about what he does not know, that is a cause to have doubts about everything he speaks about, even in clear issues.

and from them: if the students see that the teacher restrains from what he does not know, that is a lesson for them and guidance to this good way, because following [the example of] states and actions is more compelling than following words.

And from the things that help attain this goal is the teacher opening for the students the door of discussion of topics and debating them, and the goal should be one, and that is following whatever the argument and evidences support. Because, if he puts this matter in front of his eyes and their eyes, the thoughts are then enlightened and the reasoning and evidences become known, and the truth is followed and the fundamental goal - as well as the subsequent [goals] - becomes realizing the truth and following it.

And beware, beware, of fanaticism of opinions and those who hold them; and that is to make the goal of debating promoting the opinion held by himself or the one he reveres. For indeed, fanaticism does away with sincerity, removes the beauty of knowledge, blinds from realities, and opens the door of dispute and resentment. Whereas fairness is the adornment of knowledge and the sign of sincerity, goodwill, and success.

And he should be cautious of seeking knowledge for corrupt purposes and bad aims; of boasting, arguing, to be seen, to be heard, or to make it a means to worldly ambitions and leadership. For this is not the way of the people of knowledge who are really the people of knowledge in reality.

Also, whomever seeks knowledge and uses it for his evil goals or to show off or to be heard, he has no share in the Hereafter.

And one of the greatest obligations upon the people of knowledge is to exemplify what knowledge calls to, of manners and actions and teaching, for they are the most rightful people to exemplify beautiful manners and abandon every lowly manner. Also, they are the foremost people to carry out outer obligations and inner ones and abandon the forbidden, because of what they are distinguished by of knowledge and information which hasn't been attained by other than them. Also, they are a model for the people in their matters, and because they are more prone than others to opposition and criticism when they abandon what knowledge calls to.

Further, the *Salaf* would seek the assistance of actions in [attaining] knowledge¹, for surely, if he acts by it, it settles and remains and grows and its blessing increases, and if he abandons acting by it, it fades away or its blessing is eliminated. Thus, the soul of knowledge and its life and its support is only by upholding it through actions, manners,

¹ i.e. they would act by what they learned

teaching, and goodwill - and there is no ability nor power except through Allah.

And [one] should traverse the beneficial path when studying - [whether] learning or teaching. Thus, if the teacher delves into an issue, he should clarify it and convey it to the understanding of the learners in every way he can - through expressions and examples and picturing and clarification. Then, he should not move from it to another before establishing it and helping the learners understand it. He should not let the learners leave the subject that hasn't been established for another subject until they perfect it and understand it, because leaving one subject for another before completing it scatters the mind and prevents from benefit and mixes the different topics together.

And one should care for the memorization of the students and their knowledge through repetition, testing, and encouragement to study and review and repeat the class, because learning is similar to planting trees, and the class and studying and repetition is similar to watering them and removing harms so that they may grow and increase continuously.

And just like it is upon a student to honor his teacher and have manners with him, it is also upon him to honor and respect his peers who learn with him. Companionship in seeking knowledge includes many rights, since they deserve the right of brotherhood and companionship, and the right of respect for taking part in what benefits them and benefits the people, and the right of being connected to their teacher and being like his children, and a right for benefiting each other.

Due to this, it is befitting that he does not leave anything he is able to do regarding benefiting those whom he can benefit – from teaching him what he does not know, researching with him in order to cooperate upon good, and guiding him to what contains his benefit. Also, their gatherings at every time should be a profit wherein the one who is lagging learns from the one who is above him [in knowledge], and the one who knows teaches the one who does not know, as well as discussion of beneficial issues. They should restrict their motives to what occupies them¹, and they should be cautious of busying themselves with the people and

¹ i.e. they should be occupied with beneficial knowledge and avoid everything that distracts them from that

searching for their [personal] circumstances and criticizing them, for it is a present sin.

Also, a sin from the people of knowledge is greater than [a sin] from others, because the evidence against them is more established, and because others follow them – and whoever other than them has evil nature, he'll use them as his excuse. Also, being busied with the people wastes beneficial interests and valuable time and does away with the beauty of knowledge and its light.

Also, know that being content with little of sustenance and being moderate in the way of living is requested of everyone, especially those occupied with knowledge, certainly, it is like an obligation upon them. Because, knowledge is the job of an entire life or most of it, thus, whenever it¹ contends with worldly occupations and necessities, it decreases as a result of that, and moderation and contentment are of the greatest factors in minimizing worldly duties and turning to what he is dealing with².

¹ i.e. learning and seeking knowledge

² Of learning, teaching, researching, etc.

And from the manners of a scholar and learner is spreading beneficial knowledge according to [one's] ability, even if a person learns one matter and spreads it, that would be from the blessing of knowledge. The fruits of knowledge are people taking it from you, thus, whoever withholds his knowledge, his knowledge dies with him, and perhaps he forgets it while he's alive. However, the one who spreads his knowledge has a second life, and preservation for what he has learned, and Allah rewards him according to his knowledge.

And one of the greatest obligations is striving to bring together their¹ word and uniting the hearts upon that, as well as cutting off the causes of evil and enmity and hatred between them; they should place this matter at the forefront and [make it] a goal that they strive to in every way, because the aim is one and the intention is one and the benefit is shared. So, they actualize this matter by loving everyone who is from the people of knowledge and those who have a share in it or involvement or benefit, and they should not allow corrupt aims to own them and prevent them from this lofty goal. Thus, they [should] love each other and defend each other and

¹ i.e. the people of knowledge and their students

give advice to the one who they see deviating from the other and establish that minor issues that call to the opposite of love and unity are not put before the comprehensive principles that contain unity of word.

Also, they should not allow the enemies of knowledge - from the laymen and others - to corrupt what is between them and separate their word. For certainly, [there is], in actualizing this lofty goal and carrying it out, innumerable interests and benefits, and that is if it weren't for [the fact] that this is the religion that the legislator encouraged in every way; and the ones who are most binded by this are its people. Also, it is one of the greatest evidences of goodwill and sincerity - the two things which are the core of the religion and its soul. By this characteristic, the slave takes the character of the people of knowledge that are truly the people of knowledge, those whose good-mention and praises have come in the Quran and Sunnah - [so many] of which [that] this place is not enough to mention them.

Also, in that¹, there is an increase of knowledge and expanding [the means of] reaching it and diversifying its

¹ Meaning, in cooperating together and cutting the sources of enmity

paths that which is witnessed because, the people of knowledge, if their way is one, they are able to learn from each other and teach each other, but if every group of them is isolated from the other, withdrawn from them, the benefit is cut off and the opposite takes place and fanaticism and enmity and searching for the faults of the other group and their mistakes occurs - and all of this is in opposition to the religion and intellect and the obligation upon the people of knowledge and what the pious predecessors were upon.

Thus, the successful one, you find him to be:

- Sincere to Allah through his *Tawheed* and carrying out His worship outwardly and inwardly, with sincerity and expectation and completing it¹ according to his ability.
- Sincere to the book of Allah through faith in what it contains, and turning to learning it and learning what is related to it, [as well as] what branches out from it of all the sciences of the *Sharee'ah*.
- Sincere to His messenger through faith in all that he came with - from the principles of the religion and its branches - and

¹ i.e. his worship and servitude to Allah

putting forth the love of him before every love after the love of Allah, and actualizing adherence to him in the outward and inward legislations of the religion.

- Sincere to the Imams of the Muslims, of rulers and scholars and leaders, by loving good for them and striving to help them upon it through statements and actions, and loving the unity of the citizens in obeying them and not opposing them in a harmful way.

- Sincere to the common Muslims, loving for them what he loves for himself and hating for them what he hates for himself.

- Also, his outward self [should] validate his inner self, and his statements [should] validate his actions, and calls to this upright foundation and straight path.

Thus, we ask Allah *Al-Kareem* to grant us His love and love of those He loves, and love of the actions that bring us closer to His love, and to bestow, from Him, mercy, verily

He is *Al-Wahhab*.

وصلى الله وسلم على محمد وعلى آله وصحبه وسلم