

Ilm, worldly education and wealth

There are two basic types of education: 1) Our Deeni education, which is the most important and superior, which will lead us to recognize our Allah, teach us how to please Him, serve Him, be loyal to Him and make Him happy, as a result of which Allah will make us happy, since He is not in need of the things of this world to make us happy and to grant us comfort. This will also be a means of preparing for our Akhirah, which is the everlasting home towards which we are all heading, wherein we will have to reside forever. This knowledge is directly from Allah himself.

2) Worldly education which is a temporary necessity and will have to be acquired according to the necessity. Allah has taught the basics of this knowledge, which man later developed and augmented through his experiences. However, Allah has laid no emphasis upon it.

To understand the difference in value between these two types of knowledge, consider the following incident which Moulana Salmaan (the son-in-law of Shaykhul Hadith Moulana Muhammad Zakariyya) has narrated: “About eighty to hundred years ago, at a time when it was a rare occurrence and a very complicated task to travel overseas for acquiring a degree for the people of India, and few people in the country were able to achieve this ‘prestige’ who would then consider themselves to have reached the heights of honour, a very rich man in Delhi bore the heavy costs and sent his son to London to study medicine. After completing his studies and becoming a doctor, he returned. His father was delighted and overjoyed. The father decided to take his son to Moulana Muhammad Ilyas (r), the founder of the movement known as the effort of ‘Da’wat and Tabligh’, who he considered to be one of the senior Mashaayikh and seniors of Delhi, to share this happiness with him and to inform him, “My son has just returned from London with a top degree in medicine.” After meeting Moulana and boasting over his sons achievement, Moulana understood that the father was so over-impressed with the value of worldly knowledge that he assumed that none is more learned than his son, due to which he has brought his son to me. Moulana lovingly asked them to take a seat, congratulated them (as the acquisition of the knowledge of medicine is in no way impermissible, rather it is a means of benefit for mankind) and spoke to them in a heartening manner. However, as the pious distribute the treasure of Deen to all their visitors and make sure that none of their visitors should remain deprived of this, Moulana felt that this son was so impressed by his Western college education and his degree that he attached far more value to it compared to the Islamic Uloom (knowledge) which a student studies in a Madrassah. He said to the doctor in the presence of his father and other friends, “My dear Doctor! You have made great effort and sacrifice to acquire this knowledge, for which you must have also spent a great amount of money. I want you to understand this one aspect. The Quraan has explained to us that our father Adam (ﷺ) was created from sand and clay. As soon as he was created, Allah inspired him with knowledge.

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ (31-2) قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ (32-2) قَالَ يَا آدَمُ أَنْبِئْهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ فَلَمَّا أَنْبَأَهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَكُمْ إِنِّي أَغْلَمُ غَيْبَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَأَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُونَ وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ (33-22)

“Allah taught Adam all the names (of everything).”

On receiving this knowledge, the angels who were created from nur (divine light) were commanded to prostrate before Adam (ﷺ) who was a product of sand and clay. A form made of sand and clay is in no way

worthy of being prostrated to. Sand and clay are by nature low and insignificant, which always inclines downwards and is tramped upon by people's feet. Its products cannot be honourable and distinguished. In spite of that, the beings created from nur (divine light) were commanded to prostrate before this sand and clay. From this, we learn that the knowledge which is attributed to Allah, which descends directly from Allah, which in this case was the knowledge of Asmaa'-the names of the items of this world which is far inferior to the knowledge of Wahy, Shariah, Halaal and Haraam and other aspects which were brought by Rasulallah (ﷺ), on receiving this knowledge, Adam (عليه السلام) became worthy of the sajdah of the angels. By commanding the angels to prostrate before Adam (عليه السلام), Allah has indicated to us that if anything is worthy of respect and honour, to the extent that even sajdah be allowed before it, it is only that knowledge which is attributed and linked to Allah and descends directly from Him. All other knowledges do not deserve such a level of respect and honour, although they are necessities which are permissible to acquire. The fact of the matter is that the knowledge which Allah had granted our master Rasulallah (ﷺ) in the form of the Quraan and Ahaadeeth is of a far higher and superior rank than the knowledge of 'names' granted to Adam (عليه السلام), as this knowledge links man and joins him to Allah Himself, and engenders within man the love, recognition and connection to Allah. Therefore, if any knowledge is worthy of respect, honour, conviction over its truthfulness and the firm belief that it will render its seeker successful in this world and the hereafter, according to the teachings of Allah and His Rasul, it is only that knowledge which has come directly from Allah and descended from the skies, which is today being taught in the madaaris."

All virtues and rewards of knowledge which have been mentioned in the Quran or Hadith apply to Deeni knowledge, and not to worldly knowledge. No special rewards are promised for carrying out one's necessities, like worldly education, since these are necessities, not virtues. Yet, Allah in His kindness has made our Deen so perfect and balanced that He grants reward upon fulfilling our necessities on condition it was carried out with the correct intention and in accordance to the Shariah and Sunnah, although it is not a special form of Ibaadah by itself. It would however be foolish to condone such education if it entails contravention of Allah's command, such as immoral dress codes, intermingling of sexes, study of kufr ideologies like Christian beliefs, Darwin's theory of evolution, secularism or materialism which ultimately leads to the weakening of one's imaan, etc. It is clear that acquiring such education which is mingled with Allah's disobedience invites the anger and wrath of Allah upon man. Therefore, it is our duty to ensure that we endeavour to fulfil this necessity in accordance with the laws of Allah. Along with that, obsession in such worldly education which does not allow one time and opportunity to acquire Islamic knowledge, through attending the makaatib, frequenting the gatherings of the Ulama and spending time in the path of Allah, will be a cause of great regret and great losses in the hereafter. Therefore, while fulfilling this necessity, all learners and their parents should make an exerted effort to ensure that Islamic education is never neglected.

Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi (r) has narrated the following incident: A man who was a resident of the town of Gawaaliya, India, engaged his son from childhood in the acquisition of Western and English (secular) education. He expended a considerable sum of money in his son's worldly education. (After reaching the pinnacles of Western (secular) education which the institutions of India could offer,) The father despatched his son to London to obtain the highest qualifications, which he passed. Upon returning to India, he fell seriously ill. His condition deteriorated to the extent that he was on the verge of death. The father, (stricken with grief), sat at the head-side of his dying son and wailed, "O my son, I have spent twenty five thousand

rupees for your education, but I have not got a chance to see the fruits of my efforts.” The son suddenly opened his eyes and exclaimed, “O my beloved father! Why are you wailing and crying now? When you observe me in the Akhirah burning in the fire of Jahannam, then you will really cry. By spending those twenty five thousand Rupees, you have made sure arrangements to have me despatched to Jahannam. You have purchased Jahannam for me with this amount. The reason I say this is that you deprived me of Deeni education in the process. Right now, I realize that all that I had studied and learnt is futile and of no benefit. The angels of death are arriving. By spending such a large sum, you have not shown friendship to me, but you have actually displayed your open enmity for me and proved that you are my enemy.” (Wa’z-Al-Hudawal Maghfirah, as quoted in Fataawa Rahimiyyah v.3 pg.131)

The great value of Islamic knowledge can be understood from the following statement of Sayyiduna Aliؓ, who explained its great virtues, in comparison to worldly knowledge and wealth:

Knowledge is more virtuous than wealth in the following ways:

- 1) Knowledge is the inheritance of the Ambiyaa ﷺ, whereas wealth is the inheritance of the Pharaohs.
- 2) Knowledge does not decrease by spending, as opposed to wealth.
- 3) Wealth is in need of guards, whereas knowledge guards its owner.
- 4) When a man dies, his money remains above the ground, whereas knowledge enters the ground with its owner.
- 5) Money is attained by a believer and disbeliever, whereas knowledge of din is only granted to a believer.
- 6) People of the whole world are in need of learned scholars for their religious matters, whilst the people of knowledge are not in need of the wealthy.
- 7) Knowledge enables one to tread on the straight path, contrary to wealth, which actually prevents man from doing so.
- 8) Loving the possessors of knowledge is an ibaadah of Deen which takes you closer to Allah, while loving the wealthy and rich is no act of virtue.
- 9) Knowledge brings in its wake obedience for its possessors during their life-times and praise for them after their death. On the other hand, all benefits of wealth are lost as soon as it leaves ones possession (whether one loses it or dies and leaves it as inheritance). Nor are the wealthy obeyed due to the wealth they once possessed, nor does their praise perpetually remain on the tongues of people after their death.
- 10) The Ulama are alive forever in the hearts of people, even though they may be deceased (as their teachings are never totally forgotten or lost, but continue influencing the lives of people). The rich and wealthy who hoard this wealth, even while alive, are really dead (spiritually and psychologically due to tension and depression etc.).
- 11) The people of knowledge will be granted higher ranks in Jannah on account of every additional aspect of knowledge they had acquired, while the wealthy and rich will be questioned regarding every additional cent they had earned; how did they earn it and how did they spend it. (Collected from various narrations quoted in At-Tafsirul-Kabir of Imam Raazi, Kanzul Ummaal, Tambihul-Ghaafileen)

May Allah grant us the ability of appreciating this valuable treasure of Ilm (divine knowledge). Aameen