



33 Reasons For Tutorship

by Moulana Muhammad H Abasoomer

FIRST EDITION 2013

www.al-miftah.com

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Knowledge is attractive and it's something everybody needs. However, when the correct procedure is not followed, the desired results are lost. The trend of self-study that has become ever so popular in the current times actually contributes to the destruction of pure knowledge. The boom of the internet and its search engines have also contributed to this trend. What follows is an in-depth look at the “Need for a Tutor”

To acquire knowledge under the expertise of a fully qualified, Sunnah-conscious ‘Alim of deen is absolutely essential. Failure to do so will result in misguidance. In fact, the system of tutorship has been adopted throughout time and was even the practice of the Ambiya (‘alaihimusalam) and our pious predecessors. This is the only way in which one will acquire pure authentic knowledge. An added benefit is that one will also discover how to respect the people of knowledge.¹

A common supplication of the Salaf (pious predecessors) was:

التعوذ بالله من تشيخ الصحيفة

¹ Adabul ikhtilaf of Shaykh Muhammad ‘Awwamah, pg.162 & Ma’alim Irshadiyyah, pg.159

“They would seek refuge in Allah from having paper as their shaykh/tutor²

What follows are a few substantiations for this phenomenon;

Quranic Verses

1. In this world, there will always be a) Those who know, and b) those who don't. In this regard, Allah Ta'ala instructs us in the Qur'an, “Ask the people of knowledge if you do not know.”³
2. The Holy Qur'an was revealed by Almighty Allah Ta'ala for guidance and knowledge of the ummah. But, without the explanation of Rasulallah (sallallahu'alaihi wasallam) the meanings would definitely be misunderstood. Allah Ta'ala addresses Rasulallah (sallallahu'alaihi wasallam) in the Qur'an

“And we have revealed to you the Qur'an, so that you may explain to the people what was revealed to them.”⁴

This is the strongest, most evident proof for this issue.

² Ma'alim Irshadiyyah of Shaykh Muhammad 'Awwamah, pg.179

³ Surah: 21, Verse: 7

⁴ Surah: 6, Verse: 44

Substantiation from Hadith

3. Sayyiduna Mu'awiyah (radiyallahu 'anhuma) reports that Rasulullah (sallallahu 'alaihi wasallam) said:

«يا أيها الناس تعلموا، إنما العلم بالتعلم والفقہ بالفقہ، ومن یرد اللہ به خیرا یفقہه فی الدین»

“O people! Acquire knowledge, for it can only be acquired through tutorship. You will only understand if you are made to understand (i.e, by a teacher). Allah Ta’ala grants the understanding of religion to those whom he intends good for.”⁵

There are several narrations with similar wordings that can be seen in the above two sources.

The famed commentator of Sahih Bukhari; Hafiz ibn Hajar (rahimahullah) explains: “This means that reliable knowledge is only that which is acquired from the Ambiya (Prophets) and their heirs (the ‘Ulama)”

A similar explanation is echoed by ‘Allamah ‘Aini (rahimahullah) in his commentary of Sahih Bukhari.

They both have graded this narration as “hasan” (sound)

⁵ Tabarani & others; see Fathul Bari & ‘Umdatul Qari, before hadith:68

4. While emphasizing this point ‘Allamah Shatbi (rahimahullah) writes: “The proof for this in the Sahih Hadith: “Indeed Allah will not take away knowledge (from this world) by snatching it away at once, rather He will do so by taking away the ‘Ulama.”⁶

He writes further: “There is therefore no doubt that the keys to knowledge are its bearers.”⁷

5. Under the commentary of the above hadith, Hafidh Ibn Hajar (rahimahullah) quotes a narration from Musnad Ahmad that says: “Indeed, the departure of the people of knowledge is actually the exodus of knowledge itself.”⁸

The Pattern of the Ambiya (‘alaihimus Salam)

6. Nabi Dawud (‘alaihissalam) is said to have benefited immensely from Luqman al-Hakim, before Dawud (‘alaihissalam) received prophethood.⁹

⁶ Sahih Bukhari, hadith:100

⁷ Adabul ikhtilaf, pg.174

⁸ Fathul Bari, hadith:100

⁹ Tafsir Qurtubi

7. Luqman Al-Hakeem actually advised his own son with the same:

“O my son! Sit in the company of the ‘Ulama and stick your knees to theirs, for Allah revives the hearts with the wisdom (acquired from them) just as he revives barren land with the rain”¹⁰

8. Sayyiduna Musa’s (‘alaihissalam) sojourn to Nabi Khidhr (‘alaihissalam) is well-known and enshrined in the Holy Qur’an.

9. Sayyiduna Yusha’ ibn Noon (‘alaihissalam) stayed in the company of Nabi Musa (‘alaihissalam) for a long while before receiving prophethood himself.

Statements of the Salaf

10. Furthermore, during the era of the Tabi’un, whenever anyone would claim to have any knowledge, he would be questioned as to whom he had acquired that bit of knowledge from.¹¹

¹⁰ Jami’u Bayanil ‘ilm; ma’alim Irshadiyyah, pg.164

¹¹ Introduction to Sahih Muslim

11. Khatib al-Baghdadi (rahimahumullah), the famous muhaddith of the fifth century, states in his book, Taqyid al-Ilm,¹² “Many scholars of the classical times had - at the time of death – either destroyed their books themselves or instructed others to do so on their behalf. This was due to fear that it may end up in the hands of ignorant ones who would not understand its verdicts and would only take the apparent meanings there from.”

He thereafter cited the names of classical scholars who had done so. From among them were: Imam Abidah al-Salmani, Imam Shu’bah ibn Hajjaj, Imam Abu Qilabah and Imam ‘Isa ibn Yunus (rahimahumullah).¹³

12. When Imam Abu Hanifah (rahimahullah) was informed of a group of people that sit in a “halaqah” (circle) discussing Fiqh (Issues of jurisprudence) in the Masjid, he enquired: “Do they have a leader (Teacher)?” The reply was negative to which he responded: “These people will never acquire (true) fiqh ever.”¹⁴

13. Imam Malik (rahimahullah) was once asked if knowledge could be acquired from one who did not sit in the company of the ‘Ulama (& who sufficed with books only). He replied in the negative and said:

¹² pg.61

¹³ Taqyidul ‘ilm, Ibid pgs.61-62

¹⁴ Adab al-Ikhtilaf pg.164 & Ma’alim Irshadiyyah, pg.163, both of Shaykh Muhammad ‘Awwamah, Al-Faqih wal Mutaafaqqih, vol.2 pg.83

“Knowledge should not be acquired except from one who has memorized, accompanied the scholars, practiced upon his knowledge and has piety in him.”¹⁵

14. Ibn Rushd (rahimahullah) writes: “In the earlier times knowledge was found in the chests of men. Then it was transferred to books, but the keys still remain in the chests of men. Therefore a student definitely requires a tutor who will open up for him the discussions and ways of understanding.”¹⁶

15. Katib Baghdadi (rahimahullah) writes: “It is necessary for a learner to have a teacher under whom he could study, and one whom he could refer to for answers to difficult matters.”¹⁷

16. Imam Shatbi (rahimhaullah) mentions: “Books alone will not benefit a student in any way, unless there are ‘Ulama who will open up (the discussions & explain it) to them. This is common fact.”¹⁸

The System of the Salaf

One who studies the life of the Scholars of the past, will easily notice the lengthy periods they would spend on sojourn and in the company of their tutors. This is referred to as: “Mulazamah” or “Toolus Suhbah”.

¹⁵ Adab al-Ikhtilaf pg.165 & Ma’alim Irshadiyyah, pg.163

¹⁶ Footnotes on Adabul ikhtilaf, pg.174 & Ma’alim Irshadiyyah, pg.174

¹⁷ Al-Faqih wal Mutafaqqih, vol.2 pg.83 & An-Nasihah li Ahlil Hadith, pg.259

¹⁸ Adabul ikhtilaf, pg.178

This is clear in the lives of the Sahabah and Tabi'un and all those that followed. They acquired their knowledge from the bracket of believers before them. A Tabi'i could only attain the term "Tabi'i" after coming into physical contact with a Sahabi.

Merely sufficing on attending a few lessons (or a Maqra-ah, like has become common nowadays) isn't considered as "Mulazamah"-perseverance.¹⁹

17.Imam Malik (rahimahullah) said:

"Some men would sometimes attend the lessons of his teacher for thirty years!"²⁰

18.Here are ten examples from an exhaustive list:

- 1) Nu'aim Al-Mujmir (rahimahullah) spent twenty years in the company of Sayyiduna Abu Hurairah (radiyallahu'anhu).²¹
- 2) Thabit Al-Bunani (rahimahullah) spent forty years with Sayyiduna Anas (radiyallahu'anhu).²² Nafi' ibn 'Abdillah said: "I

¹⁹ Footnotes on Ma'alaim Irshadiyyah, pg.177

²⁰ Adabul ikhtilaf, pg.171

²¹ Adabul ikhtilaf, pg.171

²² Adabul ikhtilaf, pg.171

- spent forty years attending the lesson of Imam Malik (rahimahullah).²³
- 3) Al-Qa'naby also spent twenty years with Imam Malik (rahimahumallah).²⁴
 - 4) Imam 'Abdur Rahman ibnul Qasim (rahimahullah) spent seventeen years by Imam Malik.²⁵
 - 5) Muhammad ibn Ja'far was with Shu'bah (rahimahumallah) for twenty years.²⁶
 - 6) Abu Safwan, 'Abdullah ibn 'Abdil Malik was with Ibn Juraij (rahimahumallah) for ten years.²⁷
 - 7) Muhammad ibn Bashar was with Yahya Al-Qattan (rahimahumallah) for twenty years.
 - 8) Salamah ibn Shabeeb spent forty years by Imam 'Abdur Razzaq (rahimahumallah).²⁸

²³ Adabul ikhtilaf, pg.172

²⁴ Tartibul Madarik

²⁵ Tarteedul Madarik; see: Safahat min sabril 'Ulama, pg.116

²⁶ Khulasatul Khazrajy, pg.330

²⁷ Sahih Muslim, hadith: 3353

²⁸ Al-Jami'u li akhlaqir rawi, vol.2 pg.265

9) Imam Muslim accompanied Imam Bukhari (rahimahumallah) for six years.²⁹

19. The Hanafi Jurist, Ibn Nujaim (rahimahullah) explains the reason for this: "... and so it may become known that knowledge cannot be attained without constant referral, repeated effort and tutorship."³⁰

20.Imam Shatbi (rahimhaullah) mentions: "The proof for the success of this system lies in the fact that every upright scholar that became popular and acceptable to the masses in his era actually had a teacher who enjoyed the same in his time."³¹

Also see Imam Shafi'is (rahimahullah) advice at the end of this article.

21.Their lengthy sojourns

Another point of discussion here is the lengthy periods the salaf would spend on sojourn. Merely sufficing on the books doesn't force a person to travel abroad and remain there for the periods of time that the salaf spent.

²⁹ Siyar A'lamin Nubala

³⁰ Adabul ikhtilaf, pg. 172

³¹ Adabul ikhtilaf, pg.176

- 1) Imam Baqy ibn Makhlad (rahimahullah) had embarked on two separte journeys in search of knowledge; the first one lasted fourteen years, and the second: twenty years!³²
- 2) Imam Ibn Mandah (rahimahullah) spent forty five years away from home!³³
- 3) Imam Ya'qub ibn Sufyan Al-Fasawi (rahimahullah) said: "I remained on sojourn for thirty years"³⁴

22.Scanning the earth

During these journeys, the scholars would leave no city, village or town which had teachers of knowledge un-visited.

- a) Ibnul Jawzi (rahimahullah) writes regarding Imam Ahmad (rahimahullah): "He travelled the entire (Islamic) world twice before compiling his Musnad."³⁵

³² Safahat min sabril 'Ulama, pg.60

³³ Safahat min sabril 'Ulama, pg.65

³⁴ Safahat, pg.61

³⁵ Saidul khatir; Safahat min sabril 'Ulama, pg.54

- b) Ibnul Muqri (rahimahullah) said: “I travelled from the East to the West (of the Islamic Empire) four times, and I visited Baitul Maqdis alone ten times”!!!³⁶
- c) Several Muhaddithun have compiled booklets in which they narrated forty ahadith of forty different Sahabah, which they heard from forty diverse Shuyukh that lived in forty different towns!

23. Not just one Tutor!

The Salaf never appease themselves with just one or two tutors. Their teachers sometimes numbered in the thousands!

- 1) Imam Bukhari (rahimahullah) said: “I have written hadith from 1080 teachers”³⁷
- 2) Imam Ibn Hibban (rahimahullah) said: “I have perhaps written ahadith from more than 2000 teachers.”³⁸
- 3) Ibn Mandah (rahimahullah) had 1700 Shuyukh.³⁹

³⁶ Safahat min sabril ‘Ulama, pg.64

³⁷ Hadyus Sari, pg.670

³⁸ Tadhkiratul Huffaz, vol.3 pg.921

³⁹ Tadhkiratul Huffaz, vol.3 pg.1032

- 4) Imam ‘Abdullah ibnul Mubarak (rahimahullah) had acquired knowledge from 4000 teachers.⁴⁰
- 5) Imam Abu Hanifah (rahimahullah) is said to have had 4000 teachers from the Tabi’un only!⁴¹
- 6) Hafiz ‘Iraqi (rahimahullah) writes about Imam Qasim ibn Dawud Al-Baghdadi (rahimahullah): “He said: I wrote hadith from 6000 shuyukh”!!⁴²

Disdain towards those who failed in this regard

24. My most respected teacher, Shaykh Muhammad Awwamah (an unparalleled muhaddith of these times) mentions beautifully in his book, Adab al-Ikhtilaf: “They (the ‘Ulama) never paid attention to one who did not have any ustadh (teacher), neither would they consider such a person worthy of even being spoken to due to him being prone to mistakes.”

He further says: “Qadi Iyad (rahimahullah) and others have narrated that when Imam Ahmad ibn Hambal (rahimahullah) was requested by the ruler of his time (al-Mu’tasim) to discuss a certain

⁴⁰ Tadhkiratul Huffaz, vol.1 pg.276

⁴¹ Ibn Hajar Al-Haitami in Al-Khairatul Hisan; see Atharul Hadith, pg.176

⁴² Footnotes on Safahat, pg.64

matter with ibn Abi Du'ad, he (Imam Ahmad) turned his face away and said:

“How can I converse with a person whom I have never seen at the door of any ‘Alim ever!”⁴³

25. When Abu Ja'far Ad-Daudi objected to a view of the upright Scholars of his time, they retorted: “Keep quite! You have no teacher!”⁴⁴

26. Shaykh ‘Awwamah (may Allah protect him) also states: “All of us have a lineage. A student also needs a family tree for his knowledge, which consists of his teachers. One who has no teacher, is actually illegitimate in his knowledge; like a person whose identity and lineage is unknown. He holds no weight.”⁴⁵

The Harms of Failure

27. Imams Muhammad ibn Sireen, Hakam ibn Atiyya and Waki' ibn al-Jarrah (rahimahumullah) have all said that the primary cause for the

⁴³ Adabul ikhtilaf pg.144

⁴⁴ Adabul ikhtilaf, pg.164

⁴⁵ Golden guidelines -English-, pg.8, Ma'alim Irshadiyyah, pg.160 & Adabul ikhtilaf, pg.164

misguidance of the Banu Isra'il was the books that they inherited from their forefathers.⁴⁶

28. In fact, since the compilation of knowledge is also an indirect cause of the people slackening in attending the lessons of the 'Ulama, Imam Awza'i (rahimahumullah) said:

“Knowledge was sublime for as long as it was obtained from the mouths of the learned men. But when it ended up in books, its nur (divine light) disappeared.”⁴⁷

In one version he says:

“...when it ended up in books, those who were non eligible crept in!”⁴⁸

Note: The purpose of the previous 2 quotations is to prove that mere studying of books is incorrect and void of divine assistance. The ideal would be to study those very same books under the auspices of a learned teacher. Undermining the books of Shari'ah is not the intent.

29. Shaykh Muhammad 'Awwamah provides another angle to this discussion by saying: “How could we expect respect from one who hasn't acquired knowledge from the 'Ulama, and hasn't remained in their company for a lengthy period whereby he could have inculcated

⁴⁶ Taqyidul-Ilm pg.61 and its footnotes

⁴⁷ Taqyidul-Ilm, pg.64

⁴⁸ Sunan Darimi, hadith: 467

their habits? How could such a person recognize the value of the ‘Ulama? Hence when he criticizes them verbally or with his pen, it brings no surprise! It is guaranteed, that he who attends the gatherings of the ‘Ulama will indeed begin to respect them”⁴⁹

30. ‘Allamah Ibn Hajar Haitami (rahimahullah) writes: “Whoever attained knowledge from the books only, became a deviate that misled others too.”⁵⁰

31. Al-Shatbi (rahimahullah) writes: “Most of the deviated sects and individuals who opposed the sunnah were culprits of failing in this regard.” (i.e, they never had tutorship)⁵¹

Conclusion

32. It’s a sad trend nowadays that people attend a few lessons of a particular Islamic subject and then try to figure out the rest by themselves. It gets worse, when some merely engage in “self study” by relying upon books, computer programs or on searching the internet for information with which they fill up their “fatwas” or “articles” without any guidance or supervision of a qualified specialist in that field.

⁴⁹ Adabul Ikhtilaf, pg.172 & Ma’alim Irshadiyyah, pg.172

⁵⁰ Fatawa hadithiyah; see Adabul ikhtilaf, pg.165

⁵¹ Adabul ikhtilaf, pg.176

33.I end this discussion with the translation of a famous poem which is attributed to Imam Shafi'i (rahimahullah) and is quite famous on the tongues of the 'Ulama. He says:

Oh my brother!
You will never acquire knowledge
Without the following six essentials;
Intelligence, desire, poverty,
Sojourn, tutorship of a shaykh (teacher)

Accompanied by a long consistent period (of studying under him)⁵²

Whatever has been written above was done out of concern for the misinformed sincere seeker of knowledge.

The 33 quotations cited in this discussion are enough to convince such individuals against falling prey to this evil trend.

Final caution:

According to my seniors, online courses are not sufficient substitutes. This may be resorted to in extreme cases and for the purpose of learning the basics of deen only. It is not a justified means for higher Islamic study. This, as well the recent dangerous trend of "Maqra-ahs" (swift recitals of

⁵² Adabul ikhtilaf, pg.162, also see footnote on Ma'alim irshadiyyah, pg.174

Hadith books without any adequate commentary) needs a detailed discussion which I hope to engage in soon insha Allah.

And Allah Ta'ala Knows Best