

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Naming and praising your Teacher or Source

In the writings and lessons of the scholars of the past, one finds abundant citations from their respective teachers. They would not hold back in:

- 1) Naming their source and teachers, in addition to:
- 2) Praising them duly.

In fact, they would name their source even if it was someone junior to them. There are a host of books written on the topic of:

رواية الأكابر عن الأصاغر

Those seniors who reported from/cited their juniors.

Imam ibn Salah (rahimahullah) (643 A.H.) writes:

ويحسن بالمحدث الثناء على شيخه في حالة الرواية عنه بما هو أهل له، فقد فعل ذلك غير واحد من السلف والعلماء

‘It is recommended when one takes the name of his teacher, to praise him for what he is worthy, as many of the preceding scholars did so.

(Muqaddimah ibn Salah)

In fact, Khatib Baghdadi (rahimahullah) (463 A.H.) has a chapter dedicated to the topic:

من روى عن شيخ فأتنى عليه ومدحه وعظمه

‘Those who reported from their teachers and praised, lauded and respected them.’

(Al-Jami’u li Akhlaqir rawi)

The present state

Implementing the topic under discussion here with moderation, is actually in keeping with academic honesty. As a matter of fact, it illustrates the value that one has for his teacher/source.¹

¹ I have written more than one article on this topic, discussing it from different angles. See them on Al-Miftah.com

Sadly however, currently there are two methods used by speakers, writers etc;

- a) Those who over applaud their source to an extent that isn't acceptable.
- b) Those who are on the other extreme; and do not even cite their source or even their own teachers for that matter.

وكلا طرفي قصد الأمور ذميم

Both sides of moderation are reprehensible.²

Examples from the past

Khatib Baghdadi (rahimahullah) (463 A.H.) -in the above chapter, has cited over a dozen examples.

The following are some examples of praise they would use, based on sources besides the above mentioned book.

1. لم ير مثل نفسه (He has not seen anyone like himself/He hasn't met his match)

Imam 'Ali ibn Madini³ (234 A.H.) said this about Imam Bukhari (256 A.H.) - who was actually his student! (rahimahumallah).

(Siyar A'lamin Nubala. Vol.12 pg.420) ⁴

2. لم أر مثله (I haven't seen anyone like him)

قال الإمام أحمد بن حنبل: ما رأيتُ بعيني مثل يحيى بن سعيد القطان

Imam Ahmad ibn Hambal (rahimahullah) (241 A.H.) said: I haven't seen with my physical eyes, anyone like Yahya ibn Sa'id Al-Qattan (rahimahumallah) (198 A.H.).

(Sunan Tirmidhi, after hadith: 101.) ⁵

² It should be noted that this article does not address those individuals who have ulterior motives in naming or praising their teachers, nor those who seek fame through their claim of scholarship under a senior teacher!

³ See his bio in Taqribut Thahdhib, no.4760, for other amazing words of acclaim.

⁴ See another similar example in Siyar A'lamin Nubala, vol.7 pg.239.

⁵ See other examples in Tahdhibut Tahdhib, vol.4 pg.224 & Siyar, vol.6 pg.365, 367.

3. Imam Bukhari's Teacher; Ahmad ibn Ishkab (rahimahumallah) (217 A.H.) said:

مَا رَأَيْتُ مِثْلَ أَبِي حَفْصِ الْفَلَّاسِ ، كَانَ يُحْسِنُ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ

'I haven't seen anyone like Abu Hafs Al-Fallas;⁶ (249 A.H.) he was good at everything!' (rahimahumallah).

(Siyar A'lamin Nubala, vol.8 pg.540)

4. Imam Bundar (rahimahullah) (252 A.H.) said:

مَا رَأَيْتُ أَحَدًا أَحْسَنَ حَفْظًا مِنْ أَبِي أَحْمَدِ الزُّبَيْرِيِّ (مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ الزُّبَيْرِ الْأَسَدِيِّ)

I haven't seen anyone who memorised more than Abu Ahmad Az-Zubayri (rahimahullah) (203 A.H.).

(Sunan Tirmidhi, before hadith: 419, (آخر باب تخفيف ركعتي الفجر, 7)

5. رَضِيْتُ بِهِ حُجَّةً بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَ اللَّهِ

(I am satisfied with him as my proof in the court of Allah)

كَانَ أَبُو بَكْرٍ بْنُ الْحَدَّادِ الشَّافِعِيُّ كَثِيرَ الْحَدِيثِ وَلَمْ يُحَدِّثْ عَنْ غَيْرِ النَّسَائِيِّ ، وَقَالَ : رَضِيْتُ بِهِ حُجَّةً بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى .

The Shafi'i scholar; Imam Abu Bakr Al-Haddad (345 A.H.) had acquired Hadith from many sources, but he would only quote what he acquired from Imam Nasai (303 A.H.). He would say: I am pleased to use him as my proof in the court of Allah! (rahimahumallah).

(Siyar A'lamin Nubala, vol.14 pg.132)

6. الإمام بلا مدافعة (The unmatched Imam/leader)

Imam Abu Hatim Ar-Razi (rahimahullah) (277 A.H.) said:

اتَّفَقَ الْعُلَمَاءُ عَلَى أَنَّ أَبَا إِسْحَاقَ الْفَزَارِيَّ إِمَامٌ يُقْتَدَى بِهِ ، بِلَا مُدَافَعَةٍ

⁶ Also see Sunan Tirmidhi, after hadith: 409.

⁷ See another similar example in Siyar A'lamin Nubala, vol.5 pg.276.

'The 'Ulama were unanimous on Abu Is-haq Al-Fazari (185 A.H.) being an unmatched Imam worthy of emulation. (Siyar A'lamin Nubala, vol.8 pg.540) ⁸

7. Husein Ibn Dawud when citing a Hadith from his Teacher; Shaqiq ibn Ibrahim (Al-Balkhy) rahimahumallah (194 A.H.), quoted it like this:

حدَّثَنَا شَقِيقُ بْنُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الرَّاهِدِيُّ فِي الدُّنْيَا، الرَّاعِبُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ، الْمَدَامُ عَلَى الْعِبَادَةِ ... ، فَذَكَرَ حَدِيثَنَا

'Shaqiq ibn Ibrahim, the ascetic of the world, the real yearner for the Akhirah, who was persistent in worship ('ibadah) told me this Hadith...'

(Siyar, vol.9 pg.315)

8. Imam 'Abbas Al-'Ambari (rahimahullah) (240 A.H.) -who was the direct teacher of each of the authors of the 'famous six Hadith books' (Sihah Sittah) said;

قال الإمام العباس بن عبد العظيم العنبري: ما تعلمت الحديث إلا من عمرو بن علي.

'I actually learn't [the field of] Hadith from non other than 'Amr ibn 'Ali Al-Fallas.' (rahimahullah) (249 A.H.).

(Siyar A'lamin Nubala, vol.8 pg.540) ⁹

9. Ibrahim ibn Shammās (rahimahullah) (221 A.H.) said:

رأيت أفضقه الناس: ابن المبارك، وأورع الناس: الفضيل، وأحفظ الناس: وكيع بن الجراح.

'I saw [amongst my teachers]:

1- The greatest Faqih among mankind, who was 'Abdullah ibnul Mubarak (181 A.H.),

2- The most pious among the people; Fudayl ibn 'iyad (187 A.H.), and

3- The greatest memoriser of all the people; Waki' ibnul Jarrah (197 A.H.).'

(rahimahumallah).

(Siyar A'lamin Nubala, vol.8 pg.391) ¹⁰

The books of biographies are filled with countless examples of the likes of the above.

⁸ See other examples in Siyar, vol.14 pg.33, 131, & Ikmalu Tahdhibil Kamal, vol.2 pg.71.

⁹ See another similar example in Ikmalu Tahdhibil Kamal, vol.2 pg.71.

¹⁰ See another similar example in Siyar, vol.8 pg.388.

10. Recent Examples

- I have heard my Respected Teacher, Shaykhul Hadith, Moulana Fadlur Rahman A'zami (hafizahullah) repeatedly referring to his most senior Hadith Teacher; 'Allamah Habibur Rahman A'zami (rahimahullah) (1412 A.H.) with the following words, very passionately:

العلامة الكبير، المحدث العظيم

The senior most knowledgeable, the great Muhaddith.

And more recently, with the words:¹¹ أمير المؤمنين في الحديث في الهند

The leader of the Muslims of India, in the field of Hadith.

- There are countless occasions when I heard by beloved Father (hafizahullah) recollecting [sometimes with tears in his eyes] the fond memories of his most senior Hadith teacher; Muhaddithul 'Asr, 'Allamah Muhammad Yusuf al-Binnory (rahimahullah) (1397 A.H.). He would also add that 'Allamah Binnory would constantly praise his esteemed teacher; 'Allamah Anwar Shah Al-Kashmiri (rahimahullah) (1352 A.H.) for his memory and academic stature in his gathering (*majlis*).
- My Honourable Teacher; Al-'Allamatul Muhaddith, Shaykh Muhammad 'Awwamah (hafizahullah) too has this noble trait, and very accurately selects the proper title for each of his teachers, thereby affording each teacher his due level of praise.

Often when taking the names of his two most senior teachers, he is reduced to tears too. Those teachers being:

- a) Shaykh 'Abdullah Sirajuddin (rahimahullah) (1422 A.H.) and
- b) Shaykh 'Abdul Fattah Abu Ghuddah (rahimahullah) (1417 A.H.).

A Sad Reality

It is extremely sad to note how this noble trait has become extinct to a large degree. Besides a select few, one hardly finds a speaker, writer etc. quoting their teachers/sources, and neither praising them, when praise is due.

Imam Ibnus Salah (rahimahullah) has cited the statement of some predecessors:

عند ذكر الصالحين تنزل الرحمة

¹¹ The term أمير المؤمنين في الحديث (The leader of the believers in Hadith) is a title given to several very senior Muhaddithun in the past. Shaykh 'Abdul Fattah Abu Ghuddah (rahimahullah) has gathered several examples in his booklet on this topic. Also see Imam Ibn Mulaqqin's intro to his monumental commentary of Sahih Bukhari, titled: At-Tawdih li sharhil Jami'is Sahih.

*Mercy descends when the pious are mentioned.*¹²

Multiple benefit

Never underestimate the good effect of taking the names of your seniors, and praising them for what they deserve. One should give regard where it is due.

Obviously, over lauding any individual isn't desirable, even more-so in his presence. The praise should therefore be balanced. Further, the weight of that praise ought to be valued in accordance to the stature of its issuer. **Words of acclaim and praise should never be issued cheaply!**¹³

In addition to the above, among the other benefits of practicing this noble habit is that:

- a) If the teacher is still alive, people can realise his worth and thereby benefit from him duly.
- b) If he has passed away, what you quote from him will have added weight.

There are many a word of wisdom, that do not have the desired effect due to their source being omitted or not being identified properly.

Show the value you have for your source or teacher by implementing the above.

There's no blame in that when done with sincerity, whilst failure to do so carries blame and shame!

Addendum

The following is a passage I recently came across in a manuscript of Sunan Tirmidhi. This manuscript dates back to the year 558 A.H.

In this passage, the student of Imam Tirmidhi (rahimahullah) relates from Imam Tirmidhi (279 A.H.) himself some interesting information about one of Imam Tirmidhi's favourite teachers; Imam Hannad ibn Sary (243 A.H.), who was also the teacher of all the other authors of the six famous Hadith books (the sihah sittah). He was also well respected by even his own teachers. (namely Imam Waki').

¹² This is attributed to several pious predecessors, among them: Imams Sufyan Thawri & Sufyan ibn 'Uyaynah (rahimahumallah). Refer to footnotes of Shaykh 'Awwamah (hafizahullah) on Tadribur Rawi, vol.4 pg.539-540.

¹³ I usually suggest to fellow students: **'Don't accept [nor issue] titles, cheaply!'** My Honourable Teacher; Al-'Allamatul Muhaddith, Shaykh Muhammad 'Awwamah (hafizahullah) is very very particular about both aspects; issuing as well as accepting praise. At several gatherings, when he was praised and lauded in the welcome speeches, he [out of humility] sternly renounced that and cautioned the gathering against cheap praise. May Allah Ta'ala grant us moderation in all affairs.

Imam Tirmidhi met the Shaykh towards the latter part of the Shaykh's life (he lived till over ninety) and attended his lessons for ten months!

He later reported from him the forth most Hadiths in his book; Sunan Tirmidhi. May Allah be pleased with them all.

(One word in the script was unclear and is left blank in the passage below)

سمعت أبا عيسى يقول اختلفت إلى هناد بن السري نحواً من عشرة أشهر فما رأيتته تكلم في شيء من أمر الدنيا ولا انبسط إلى أحد من أهل المجلس في الكلام أو كما . . . [؟] إلا أنني رأيتته يوماً رأى قوماً من أصحاب الحديث قد انكب بعضهم على بعض في السماع فقال ما شأن هؤلاء؟

ف قيل له يا أبا السري فني ما عندهم فهم يسمعون في كتاب فقال وما عليهم لو استمعوا ولم ينظروا في الكتاب؟ ف قيل له لا يعدونه سماعاً إذا لم ينظروا في الكتاب، فقال هناد كان من قبلكم أشد ورعاً منكم وأسهل في السماع منكم، وأنتم أشد في السماع منهم وأقل ورعاً منهم. قال وكان له أربع وتسعون سنة وقالوا ما تزوج قط.

قال أبو عيسى وأخبرني بعض أصحابنا عن ابن أخته أنه قال: هناد يختم القرآن منذ سبعين سنة في يوم وليلة: مرة! وكان يسرد الصوم وكان متعبده المسجد.

I heard Abu 'Isa (Imam Tirmidhi) say that I frequently visited Hannad ibn Sariy for about ten months. I never saw Hannad speak about any worldly matter nor speak freely/casually with anyone....[?]

However, I saw him on one occasion commenting about a group of students of Hadith, who were crowded over each other whilst in the lesson. When Hannad enquired: "What is the matter with them?" Someone replied: "Oh Abu Sariy, that which they had is now gone [they do not have sufficient copies of the book they were studying/acquiring], therefore they are sharing a book in the lesson (fis sama'). Hannad replied, "Why don't they just listen and not look into the book? The reply was: "They do not consider it to be legitimate, if they do not look into the book itself [while hearing the Hadiths]. Hannad then said, "Those before you had more piety than you, but they were more lenient regarding the conditions of sama' (acquisition). You lot are stricter on the conditions of sama' (acquisition) but less pious than them!"

He (Imam Tirmidhi) said, "He was ninety-four years old, and they said he never married.

Abu 'Isa (Imam Tirmidhi) said: "Some of my companions have informed me that Hannad's nephew said: 'Hannad completed the entire Quran every day for the past seventy years. Moreover, he would fast consecutively, and his place of worship was the Masjid.'

-end of passage. May Allah Ta'ala fill his grave with mercy.

Comment

Imam Hannad (rahimahullah) was well known for his 'ibadah, and was labelled: The greatest worshipper of Kufah' (راهب الكوفة).

Refer to Siyar A'lamin Nubala, vol.11 pg.465 for more on his biography.

Note

It should be noted that I haven't seen the above passage in the available books that have the biography of Imam Hannad (rahimahullah) - which makes it more valuable.

Upon seeing this passage in the manuscript, My Honourable Teacher; Al-'Allamatul Muhaddith, Shaykh Muhammad 'Awwamah (hafizahullah) commented: 'This is a rare find which should be cherished.'

Lessons to be derived from the above

The following are among the many lessons to be derived from the above passage:

1. Imam Tirmidhi spent ten months in the company of this Shaykh (rahimahumallah). Ten months of the life of a senior at that ripe age is invaluable. This coupled with the retentive capacity of a master-student like Imam Tirmidhi (rahimahullah) actually equates several years of companionship today!
2. Imam Hannad's dedication to 'ibadah is remarkable. Despite his specialisation being the noble field of Hadith, he was an embodiment of 'amal (practice) too.
3. Sometimes, when being over-particular about formalities, we tend to lose focus of the realities...
4. One should spend more time in the masjid engaging in individual worship, over and above the congregational prayers.
5. One very important lesson from the above, is the habit of praising one's seniors for what they deserve. Imam Tirmidhi (rahimahullah) did not shy away from saying the above about his Shaykh (rahimahumallah).

May Allah Ta'ala accept the above and grant us the ability to practice with moderation and sincerity. Amin.

وآخر دعوانا أن الحمد لله رب العالمين

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19.3.2020.