

MODULE 2

Class Title: ‘Ilm gotta have it – part 1

(1st part of a 3 lesson series)

Aim of Lesson: To understand the meaning & purpose of ‘ilm in Islam

Category: Personal Development

Lesson Format: Power point presentation with narration. Discussion

(Greeting to students) *Assalam alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*

(*Taooz*) *Aoodhubillahi min AsShaytanir Rajeem*

(*Tasmiyah*) *Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*

(*Du’a*) *Rabbish rahli sadri wa yassirli amri wahlul uqdatum millisani yafqahu qawli*

(Surah At Ta-Ha 20: Verse 25-28)

(Slide 2)

What is written on the screen? So, what is your understanding of the word ‘ilm’?

Student: Knowledge.

Student: Learning.

Student: Knowledge about Islam.

Student: Education.

Student: To learn something new.

Teacher: Knowledge about Islam, understanding, learning, alhamdulillah, it is all of that put together. In the next two classes, we will talk about knowledge.

The Arabic word for knowledge is ‘ilm. Don’t pronounce it *ilm* with a *hamzah*. This is ‘ilm with an *ain*. How do you pronounce it? ‘*Ilm*.

(Slide 3)

Like you said, knowledge includes all these things; facts, data, information, know-how, skills, wisdom, education. These are all synonyms for what?

Students: ‘*Ilm*

Teacher: No, these are synonyms for knowledge not for ‘ilm. We are going to look at the difference between knowledge and ‘ilm.

What is the opposite of knowledge? Say it out loud. Ignorance! If you are not knowledgeable, you are ignorant. We all know that and this principle is not strictly Islamic. What is light? Light is knowledge and darkness is ignorance. Is this specifically

Islamic? No. The concept of light as knowledge and darkness as ignorance is accepted by all.

(Slide 4)

However, *`ilm* is a lot more than that. We say that Islam is the path of knowledge. Why do we say so confidently that Islam is the path of knowledge? Can somebody tell me?

Student: Because we Muslims have knowledge of many things.

Teacher: True, but why can we say confidently that Islam is a *deen* (religion/way of life) of knowledge?

Student: We've been given the book of guidance.

Student: Islam requires you to have knowledge.

Student: We are aware of what's going on around us.

Student: To be a Muslim, you have to know what to do.

Student: You need knowledge to know what's right.

(Slide 5)

Teacher: The thing about *`ilm* is that its not just knowledge. Knowledge can be just information and facts; it's a one-dimensional thing. *`ilm* is something that covers information, theory, and practice. It's more comprehensive.

(Slide 6)

Furthermore, there is no other ideology, no other deen, no other religion that has emphasized its importance as much as Islam has.

The first wahi (revelation from Allah (swt)) is what?

(Slide 7)

“*Iqra! Bismi rabbikallazi khalaq.*” (Surah Al ‘Alaq 96: Verse 1).

This was the first revelation sent by Allah (swt) to the Prophet (pbuh). Do all of you know that? Are you aware of it? Can somebody read this for me?

(Student recites Surah Al ‘Alaq 96: Verses 1-5).

Teacher: Masha Allah la qoowata illa billah. This is Surah Al-Alaq which is the 96th surah of the Qur'an. These five verses were the first revelation which the Prophet (pbuh) got. This is where Islam officially started. It started with what?

(Slide 8)

“Read in the name of your Lord Who has created. He has created man from a clot. Read! And your Lord is most generous, who has taught by the pen. He has taught man that which he knew not.” (Surah Al ‘Alaq 96: Verses 1-5)

Isn't it incredible that Allah (swt) chose learning and the tools of learning to be the first message that He sent us? You guys agreed that Islam is the path of knowledge and this is something which actually, solidly, proves it. That the first thing that Allah (swt) chose to tell us was what? A command to read, to acquire knowledge.

(Slide 9)

How is the Islamic concept of knowledge different from regular knowledge? That is what we are going to talk about today because there is a marked difference.

We aren't going to have a baby class. You guys are smart enough to keep up with me. This is going to be at a higher level so if anybody is not with me, raise your hand and ask. First, we are first going to look at the theory of knowledge and then its application.

(Slide 10)

The first thing that we need to know about the Islamic concept of knowledge is that all knowledge is from Allah (swt). Regular people, i.e. people who are not familiar with this concept of knowledge, always break up knowledge into two categories: Islamic and secular. Have you heard that? There is no demarcation like that in Islam; all knowledge is from Allah (swt). Period. Remember that. That's the first thing. Allah (swt) is the first teacher and the absolute guide of humanity.

(Slide 11/12)

Why is Allah (swt) the first teacher? Allah (swt) says, “And Allah has brought you out from the wombs of your mothers while you know nothing and He gave you hearing, sight and heart so that you may give thanks to Allah” (Surah An-Nahl 16: verse 78).

Look at our tools of learning! What do we learn with? Our senses. These are from Allah (swt). Another thing He has mentioned over here is our heart. That is something very important when you come to Islamic knowledge. You involve the heart, not just the senses, in the learning process. These are our basic tools of learning.

Who has given you these tools? Our Creator. So He would be your first teacher. Your first teacher is who? Allah (swt)! He says, “*Iqra, bi ismi rabbikallazi khalaq.*” He doesn't

say just '*iqra*' or read. This shows the extreme importance of starting all learning with the name of our Lord.

So the first thing: all knowledge is from Allah (swt). Second thing: Allah (swt) is the first teacher.

(Slide 13/14)

True knowledge in the Islamic sense is any and all knowledge that brings us closer to Allah (swt). If you don't understand that now, just bear with me a minute and you will get it. For now, do you understand the statement? True knowledge is what? Any information, any data, any know-how, any skill that brings us closer to Allah (swt). It's only then that we understand the purpose of our existence.

(Slide 15)

Allah (swt) says in Surah Adh-Dhariyat 51: verse 56, [read Arabic text], "And I created not the jinn and the mankind except that they should worship me." This is the purpose of our life. Who created our life?

Look at this computer. Somebody made it, right? They had a purpose in mind, true? What was the purpose of making a laptop? Only the creator of an object knows what the purpose is. Can I claim to know what the purpose is? Can I? It's the creator of the invention who knows. If you make a picture, make anything, or even just bake a cookie; you know why you're making it, right? It's for a party, for your friends or perhaps you want to eat it yourself but you are going to establish the purpose of that thing because you have made it. Similarly, Allah (swt) has made us. He is our Creator. So, He is telling us that this is the purpose why I have made you.

Now the interesting thing is, what if we say, what is worship? What do you understand by worship? Allah (swt) says that this is the only reason why I've created you. He's saying no other reason. Look at the statement. 'And I created not the jinn and the mankind except that they should worship me.' There is no other reason that we should be alive except that we should worship Allah (swt). And He's not saying why I made you Muslim. He's talking about all mankind. Allah (swt) is not just the Lord of the Muslims, He's the Lord of everybody. He's including the jinn here as well because that's the other intelligent being that He has created.

Tell me, what do you understand by worship? Quickly.

Student: *Dhikr*. (remembrance of Allah (swt))

Student: '*Ibadah*'.

Teacher: That's very abstract. Tell me exactly. When you say '*ibadah*', what do you mean?

Student: Praying.

Student: *D'awah*. (calling others to Allah (swt))

Student: Faith.

Student: To read the Qur'an.

Teacher: *Salah* (ritual prayer), *dhikr* (remembering Allah (swt)), fasting, reading Qur'an. What else?

Student: Giving thanks to Allah (swt).

Teacher: Now, how much time do all these activities take? How much time do you spend in doing your *salah* for e.g. how much time does it take for you to do your five prayers?

Student: Half an hour.

Teacher: *Masha Allah!* Long prayers. How long does it take you to do the four *rakah Asr salah* after this class? It takes you 25 minutes to do your snack and 2 seconds to do your *salah*. So when you divide your day and Allah (swt) says your purpose of existence is to worship Him, yet the *salah* that Allah (swt) demands takes so little time. What does that add up?

Student: Anything that you do in Allah's name becomes worship.

(Slide 16)

Teacher: Exactly! That is why we need to have knowledge. Do you see where this is coming from? First, you need to know the purpose of your existence and understand why you are here. So, only those people who understand this purpose are in the state of worship 24 hours a day. Those who are aware of this knowledge and act accordingly are not only benefiting themselves but they are beneficial to other people also.

On the other hand, those who aren't aware of this reality because, according to the Islamic concept of knowledge, true knowledge is what? Have you forgotten already? True knowledge is anything that brings us closer to Allah (swt). And those who don't understand this fact are ignorant and they fumble through life in a vain attempt to satisfy themselves. They follow *shaytan* (satan) or their own desires. Ultimately, they fail to understand why they were created in the first place.

It's like buying a fridge and using it as a cupboard! Since you don't know the purpose of the refrigerator's existence so all your life you drink hot water and never have ice cream because you just don't know how it works. You spend half your life using it as a cupboard. You were keeping your clothes in it. So, this is an example of a person who is

ignorant of life. They never get it. That is the reason why this emphasis on knowledge in Islam. It begins with knowledge.

“*Iqra bismi rabbikallazi khalaq*” (Surah Al ‘Alaq 96: Verse 1).

(Slide 17)

In another verse, Allah (swt) says, “Say! Are those who know equal to those who know not? It is only men of understanding who will remember.” (Surah Az-Zumar 39: verse 9).

This is just common sense. Just think, are those who know equal to those who don’t? Even in worldly terms, we can’t call them the same.

What do we say about 'gaining' knowledge? What is the word we use? Gain. Gain knowledge and what is the other thing about gain? No pain no gain. So, a lot of times when you want to gain something, you have to give up something.

(Slide 18)

Are those who know equal to those who know not? The answer is very simple, no, they’re not. Another very important thing. Knowledge comes before faith. Who understands this? Yes?

Student: You need to know what you believe in.

Teacher: Absolutely. You need to have knowledge about what you have faith in. Otherwise how can you have faith at all? You need to know what you believe in. This is very important to understand because many of us feel that we are born Muslims so we have faith. That’s not the case.

(Slide 19)

We become Muslims not through birth but through knowledge. The fact that everybody is born Muslim on their *fitrah* that means everybody is born on their nature and Allah (swt) has created everyone with a Muslim nature - a nature that submits to the will of Allah (swt).

That’s the meaning of that hadith. A lot of you know the hadith that Prophet (pbuh) said that, “Each child is born a Muslim and it’s the parents who make him a Jew or Christian or Zoroastrian.” [Bukhari & Muslim] Parents do this based on what? Based on their knowledge. Thus, we become Muslims when we know what we are talking about. Otherwise we aren’t Muslims, we don’t submit to the will of Allah (swt) until and unless we do it with knowledge about Allah (swt). Yes?

Student: What if parents teach nothing?

Teacher: If parents don't give them any knowledge of religion, they will pick up random things from somewhere because there is another rule of nature, courtesy of Allah (swt); nothing stays empty. It is always filled with something or the other. That's why your heart is never empty. If there is no *dhikr* of Allah then there is something else. Do you understand? There is no vacuum in your life. It's filled by something.

It is humanly impossible to just pray all the time or just sit and read the Qur'an all the time. That is the reason that we are going through all this pain, all this agony of sitting through this class. We are going through all of this to understand how our day can be filled with the worship of Allah (swt). How to seek the pleasure of Allah (swt) 24/7. This is the knowledge we are striving for. Is everybody with me? It's not complicated.

Alhamdulillah.

(Slide 20)

So we become Muslims not through birth but through knowledge. That's the reason that Allah (swt) told the Prophet (pbuh) to say [read in Arabic],

“O my Lord! Increase me in knowledge.” [Surah Taha 20: Verse 114]

What does that mean? What kind of knowledge is He talking about? He's talking about knowledge that brings us closer to Him. When we say “*Rabbi zidni 'ilma*”, all knowledge falls in that bracket. Remember the earlier statement? All knowledge is from Allah (swt). Period.

(Slide 21)

Now the question that comes to mind, is it Islamic knowledge only? No, it doesn't only mean sacred knowledge. We're not talking about just Islamic knowledge of the Qur'an, the Sunnah, *fiqh* or the *Shariah*.

(Slide 22)

Knowledge is a means to an end. It is not an end in itself. According to the Islamic concept of knowledge, you gain knowledge for a reason. What is that reason? I just explained it to you.

Student: Allah (swt)'s pleasure.

(Slide 23)

Teacher: Absolutely, to gain the pleasure of Allah (swt). That can be achieved through many types of knowledge. It doesn't necessarily have to be knowledge of the Qur'an or the Sunnah.

(Slide 24)

Knowledge must be transformative. Just like a healthy pupa turns into a butterfly, a healthy heart is transformed by knowledge. If there is stunted growth, what happens? The pupa stays as it is and dies; it never becomes a butterfly. If your knowledge is not affecting you in any way, by affecting I mean it is not transforming you in some way, from the inside as well as the outside, then there's something wrong. One must understand that.

(Slide 25/26)

For example, we all live in a Muslim country. How many of you have been studying Islam in school since you were so high? Raise your hands. All of you. How many of you have studied the life of the Prophet (pbuh)? All of you! Yet, we read and study the Prophet's (pbuh) life as if it is somebody's resume!

He was born at this time, he was this old when he got prophet hood, this was the first *wahi*, these were his wives, and these were his children. Then this happened and then that happened. Isn't it true? One piece of information after another. Now all those pieces of information about the Prophet (pbuh), how have they transformed your life? Now do you understand the difference between Islamic knowledge and knowledge just for the sake of knowledge?

You girls sitting in this room probably have more facts about Islam than anybody else. Since you go to school, you have to study Islam as a subject. This includes studying to pass tests and memorizing verses of the Qur'an.

How many of you know Surah Al-Fatihah? (all students raise their hands)

How has that changed your life? or how the *Seerah* of the Prophet (pbuh) that you have read since you were this high, has changed your life?

Student: We have learned a lot!

Teacher: I'm not asking you what you learned. Tell me how it changed your life, give me an example that I read the *seerah* of the Prophet (pbuh) and this happened to me.

Can you say that you read such and such in the *seerah* and this affected you so much that you became extra nice to somebody?

Try to understand the difference between knowledge and *'ilm*. *'Ilm* is something that transforms you from the inside. If you have *'ilm* of the *seerah* rather than 'knowledge' of it, then you love and adore the Prophet (pbuh); then you will go through any and every effort and try not to leave any Sunnah.

Student: He was always insulted by people yet he had this faith in Allah (swt). It made me feel that if he could have faith in Allah (swt) despite being under so much pressure, then so can I!

Teacher: *Alhamdulillah!* How did this piece of information manifest itself in your life?

Student: If you wear a scarf in school, it will bother other people but you'd still wear it because you had that example of the Prophet (pbuh) of perseverance and faith.

(Slide 27)

Teacher: *Alhamdulillah!* That's wonderful. Do you understand what I'm trying to say here? Analyze yourself to see how all that Islamic Studies that you've mulled over for so many years has affected you! If it hasn't affected your life - its not `ilm. It's just pieces of information. This is the problem of today's age: there are too many pieces of information, without having any tangible purpose, floating around.

Let's have a quick experiment. Come here sweetie, quickly. I'm just going to give instructions to Lubena (a student), so focus on Lubena and not on me. Lubena walk. What do you think Lubena is doing? No, focus on her not on me. See, she just stopped. Why did you stop? Do you see any purpose to her walking?

I gave her just a piece of information - to walk and she's aimlessly walking. She's wondering, 'Should I stop now? Is she going to say something to me?' Had I told her, "Lubena, walk to the door." that would've been a piece of information with a specific purpose, a specific direction. That's the difference between pieces of information and knowledge that is *'ilm*.

Otherwise it's just random. You guys love to use the word 'random'. Well, we have too much randomness in our lives. Plus, we have no clue what to do with it. It's just sitting there looking pretty and sometimes not even looking pretty. Mostly these pieces of information are just points without any sense.

When we approach knowledge, it is just pieces of information; it has no effect on us whatsoever. It has no effect on us because all we look at is data. That's what we are doing: bling bling bling 24 hours a day on the computer, the television or whatever. Its information overload yet where is it taking us? What purpose does it have in our lives? That is the difference between `ilm and just knowledge. *`Ilm* is purposeful, it does something. Points of information, just like Lubena walking around, is aimless knowledge.

(Slide 28)

Knowledge helps us to be successful in this life only if it has a purpose. That's the reason the Prophet (pbuh) used to pray, [read du'a in Arabic] "O Allah! I ask you for beneficial knowledge, acceptable action and good provision" [Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah]

(Slide 29)

He also use to seek refuge with Allah (swt) from knowledge which does not profit, which is not beneficial, a heart which is not submissive, a soul that has an insatiable appetite and a supplication that is not heard! [Abu Dawud]

(Slide 30/31)

Basically, there are two kinds of knowledge. Knowledge which is beneficial and knowledge which is not beneficial. Abu Hurairah (ra) narrated that the Prophet (pbuh) said, “It is part of the excellence of a person’s Islam that he should discard that which is of no benefit to him either in this world or in the Hereafter” [Tirmidhi].

Do you understand? Benefits in this world are also important. What was the Prophet (pbuh)'s most frequent prayer? Does anybody know? [Reads Arabic], (Surah Al-Baqarah 2: Verse 201) “O Allah! Give me *hasana* in this world.....” He would ask *hasana* or good in this world first, “..and also in the *akhirah*.....” so its not only for the Hereafter that we ask. The Prophet (pbuh) used to say this prayer most frequently. Are you all familiar with this du’a? So what are we asking Allah (swt)? To give us good in this world and in the *akhirah* (Hereafter). We’re not only asking for the Hereafter; we’re also asking for this world.

Any knowledge can become beneficial knowledge or vice versa. Let’s take an example. You could be a student of the Qur’an, a *taalib-e-ilm* (student) of the Qur’an and yet your heart and mind are empty of Allah (swt). It is very scary actually. It’s a very scary thought.

Student: It means that it is not *‘ilm*, it is just a piece of information.

Student: There is no transformation.

Teacher: There is no transformation, absolutely. Transformation doesn’t only mean putting a hijab (scarf) on. The outward appearance is a part of transformation, but only one part. True change involves a lot more than that. It involves the heart and mind. It requires a physical and a spiritual manifestation. You could be a scholar of Islam, you could go and register yourself in a *madrasah* (schools for sacred studies) tomorrow and still have no real transformation, if your heart is untouched.

We know that the *‘ilm* of the Qur’an and the Sunnah is pure *‘ilm* from Allah (swt). Are we agreed on that? Then the question is, how can that *‘ilm* not be beneficial? How? Yes?

Student: You read the Qur’an but you don't know Arabic so it doesn't change you.

Teacher: That could be included, reading the Qur’an so many times and not knowing what it means. However what about people who read the Qur’an with meaning or those like Arabs who understand what they read? The former put in years to learn Arabic or the

latter know the Qur'an in Arabic and it is still not beneficial for them. Why? Because they are not doing it to seek the pleasure of Allah (swt).

True knowledge is what? It is knowledge that gets us closer to Allah (swt). If you guys are coming here for a reason other than the pleasure of Allah (swt) then all you will get is information not *`ilm*. That is why you get sleepy or bored, why you count rubber bands, think about food, and whatever. This happens because all you are getting is information. Since the purpose of your coming over here is not the pleasure of Allah (swt), you gain nothing but information. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Take the example of Orientalists, do you know who they are? They are the non-Muslims who have more information about Islam than most of the Muslims put together. They have read the Qur'an, they know *fiqh* by heart, they are like scholars of Islam but they aren't Muslims. Since they learned nothing to gain the pleasure of Allah (swt), it had no effect on them.

That is a crucial point to understand in Islam. Islamic knowledge doesn't necessarily mean knowledge of the Qur'an and Sunnah. A 'Muslim' could have a very, very basic knowledge of the Qur'an and Sunnah but his *`ilm* level is here (raise hand high) in the eyes of Allah (swt). Why? Because whatever he does, he does for the sake of Allah (swt). He maybe a carpenter or a sweeper for example. Whatever knowledge he gains, whatever action he does, it is to please Allah (swt). Maybe his knowledge of pure Qur'an and pure Sunnah is very little compared to someone else, but his *`ilm* level is high as his every action backs up his *`ilm*. For example, he's making a table and he's saying I'm doing this because I want to earn a halal earning as Allah (swt) has asked us to.

It is a misconception that to have 'Islamic' knowledge means knowing the Qur'an. That is not so. If our intention is not for Allah (swt), then even the Qur'an will not be for us.

(Slide 32)

Look at the random information that clutters up our mind. What difference does it make in my life if I don't know Donald Duck's middle name? Or that only 1 person in two billion will live to be 116 or older. Or that Winston Churchill was born in a ladies room during a dance. All this is information, do you agree? Or for that matter, how many *sahabi* were with the Prophet (pbuh) during the battle of Badr? See some of you actually know it!

Student: We learnt it in school.

Teacher: You learnt it in school but what is it doing for you? You know you have to pray five times a day. You know *alhamdulillah rabbil aalameen*, (Surah Al-Fatiha 1: Verse 1). What benefit is it? It is up to you to transform a piece of knowledge for yourself.

Student: How do you do that?

Teacher: How do you transform knowledge? You build up a story around it, for example, you have the information on the life of Prophet (pbuh) and the battles that he was involved in. Look at the Battles of Badr or Uhud and draw lessons from them. See how you can implement these lessons in your life and then that piece of information will become part of the *`ilm* you have.

Student: You can learn that even though the Muslims were few, they didn't give up.

Teacher: *Alhamdulillah*. One lesson is that Muslims were massively outnumbered but their faith was so strong that they didn't give up. The main point is that what you get from other people is information. *`Ilm* is something that you gain for yourself. Everybody, even the teacher of the Qur'an can give you information, nobody can give you *`ilm*; you'll have to gain it. Like I said, no pain no gain. Put in effort. I am going to do this for Allah (swt). Only then will information become *`ilm*.

Any piece of information that brings you closer to realizing the purpose of your existence, realizing who your Creator is and working for the pleasure for your Creator, is *`ilm*. *Jazak Allah* for that was a superb example.

Our lives today are about 'Trivial Pursuit'! There is more information floating around today than in all the centuries that have passed before us and that includes Islamic information too. You can download anything these days, a whole Sahih Bukhari even! Isn't it true? You've got all sorts of things available on the Net but what does that do for you?

If it is doing something for you and you are converting that information fuel into knowledge for yourself, only then does it matter. Otherwise you have a car with a tank full of petrol, that is information, but unless you ignite, it's not going to work. It'll just stand there, wont it? All this trivia that we fill ourselves with, how can you convert this trivia into beneficial knowledge. You can do it but how? How can you convert playing 'Trivial Pursuit' into seeking the pleasure of Allah (swt)? Quickly someone. Yes?

Student: You learn lessons from it.

Teacher: how? Like from where Winston Churchill was born, anybody?

Student: By having fun to thank Allah (swt).

Teacher: *Jazak Allah khairan katheeraw*. You got it! I am playing 'Trivial Pursuit' for this half hour or whatever because I'm tired. I've done my chores and this seems like clean entertainment so rather than watching a movie which is going to have smoochie smoochie scenes, I'm going to sit and play 'Trivial Pursuit', which is in the bounds of the *Shari`ah* (Islamic law). There is nothing to it. You see what I mean? That is how I transform it.

Go and have ice-cream. I'm having it so I can thank Allah (swt). My sister is upset and I'm getting her this ice cream cone so she will feel better. Each and every action of ours, each and every piece of information can be transformed into knowledge by connecting it with our Creator.

Like she just said, I'm playing Trivial Pursuit. My intention is to relax so that I'm refreshed for my next chore or for reading the Qur'an or to thank Allah (swt) for all the blessings He's given me. I'm staying away from the haram and doing halal recreation. Does everybody understand this 'Trivial Pursuit' thing? This is extremely important because we aren't going to sit and read the Qur'an all day long.

(Slide 33/34)

So, permissible worldly knowledge is not at all secondary. Don't think that just because you're studying math or history or even sports or learning how to cook, that it doesn't count. It could be anything, it could be any branch of knowledge. Anything can be true knowledge if you think I'm going to be a well-educated Muslim to better help my *Deen*.

Inshaallah we will continue our discussion on *'ilm* next week.

Du'a for end of a gathering) *Subhana Rabbika Rabbul Izzati 'amma yasifun wa salamun 'alal mursaleen, walhamdulillahi Rabbil 'alameen*

(Parting salutation to students) *Assalam alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*

True Story related to knowledge

TRUE KNOWLEDGE

By Chad Earl

Last week I finished the last of my nine written exams to enter Al-Azhar. I had been preparing for these exams for months, but as the time drew near I realized that I hadn't put as much time into preparing for them as I should have, and felt a serious race against the clock was underway. My wife, an Egyptian who majored in Arabic in college, helped me tremendously with the four tests related to Arabic: *Sarf* (Morphology), *Nahwa* (Grammar), *Balaagha* (Eloquence), and *Adab wa Nosoos* (Literature). With her help I was able to cover the most important items for these exams before 'exam week', and reviewed each subject the night before taking its exam.

One night, as we were reviewing for *Sarf* and *Nahwa*, my wife was reading quickly through a portion of the book that we had covered before but had completely escaped my mind. As she was reading through it, sounding more like Chinese than Arabic to my mind as I struggled to recall the material, I felt increasingly frustrated and overwhelmed. I became short-tempered, and angrily told her, "Slow down! You're not helping me by reading it like that!"

Of course she was upset by my words, as she was only trying to help. As we continued reviewing, a strong feeling of regret came over me, and I started crying uncontrollably to the point I couldn't even speak for five or ten minutes. My wife, confused and worried, kept asking what was wrong.

What *was* wrong? This knowledge that we work hard to understand is supposed to bring us closer to Allah *subhanahu wa ta'ala* (exalted is He) and make us *better* people, both in our relationship to Him and with His creation. As the Prophet ﷺ (peace be upon him) said:

“أَكْمَلُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِيمَانًا أَحْسَنُهُمْ خُلُقًا وَخِيَارَكُمْ خِيَارَكُمْ لِنِسَائِهِمْ”

“The most complete believer regarding his faith is the one who has the best *khuluq* (character, manners, behavior), and the best amongst you are those who are the best to their wives.”¹

After working so hard over the past weeks preparing for exams, focusing so much on getting good results, I realized that I had forgotten my main goal. The purpose of seeking knowledge is to try and understand my faith, to get closer to Allah (swt), and to apply this sacred knowledge so that it will benefit me in this life and the next, as well as my community. True knowledge improves one's character and dealing with others, as this small incident with my wife helped me to remember and take a lesson from.

“وَاسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ وَإِنَّهَا لَكَبِيرَةٌ إِلَّا عَلَى الْخَاشِعِينَ”

“And seek aid in steadfast patience and prayer: yet this, indeed, is a hard thing for all but the humble in spirit,” (Qur'an 2:45).²

“اللهم علمنا بما ينفعنا و ينفعنا بما علمتنا و زدنا علما و عملا متقبلا و اهدنا و اهد بنا و اجعلنا سببا لمن اهتدى”

O Allah, teach us that which benefits us, and benefit us with that which you have taught us, and give us an increase in knowledge and deeds that are accepted by You. Guide us, and guide others by us, and make us a cause for those who will be guided!

Published: <http://www.suhaibwebb.com/personaldvlp/character/true-knowledge-2/>