

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Prophetic Etiquette of Seeking Knowledge

The Qur’ān reads:

﴿ قَالَ لَهُ مُوسَىٰ هَلْ أَتَّبِعُكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ تُعَلِّمَ مِنَّا عِلْمًا رُشِدًا ۗ ﴾

“Mūsā said to him: “May I follow you, to the end that you might teach me the right conduct of that which you have been taught?””⁽¹⁾

Imām al-Rāzī رحمه الله has written that this āyah indicates how Mūsā observed various etiquette when he wanted to learn from Khaḍir عليه السلام:

- 1) He became subservient to him, evident by “*May I follow you?*”
- 2) He sought permission in affirming this submission; in essence, he asked: “Do you permit me to submit myself to you?” This is a monumental level of humility.
- 3) He said: “*That you may teach me.*” This is confession of one’s unacquaintance to such knowledge, while affirming his teacher’s superiority in it.
- 4) He said: “*Of that which you have been taught.*” The word ‘of’ shows partiality. This means Mūsā عليه السلام requested to be taught only some of what Allāh سبحانه had taught Khaḍir عليه السلام. It is, therefore, as if he asked: “I do not seek so much from you that I become your equal in knowledge; rather, I only ask a small portion of the abundant portions of knowledge you possess, just as the poor person seeks only a portion of wealth from among the plentiful portions of the wealthy one.”
- 5) He said: “*Of that which you have been taught.*” This is acknowledging it is Allāh سبحانه Who had taught Khaḍir عليه السلام that knowledge.
- 6) Mūsā’s عليه السلام mention of the “*right conduct*” is a request from him for guidance and navigation. Guidance is the very thing without which one will be in a state of deviance.
- 7) His statement “*you teach me of that which you have been taught*” means he is asking Khaḍir عليه السلام to treat him (Mūsā عليه السلام) the very way Allāh سبحانه had treated him (Khaḍir عليه السلام).
- 8) Following (*al-Mutāba’ah*) means to carry out the exact action of someone else due to it being that very person’s action. Therefore, when we say: «لا إله إلا الله», we are not following the Jews, who came before us and also recited this *kalimah*. This is because our reason for declaring the *kalimah* is not that the Jews had also said

⁽¹⁾ [Al-Kahf: 18/66].

it; rather, we declare it due to the existence of evidence necessitating its declaration.

On the other hand, when we perform our five daily *Ṣalāh* in full agreement to the Prophet's ﷺ method, we do this for the very reason that the Prophet ﷺ endorsed this method. So, with regards to the actions of the Prophet ﷺ pertaining to the five daily prayers, we *are* his followers, indeed.

Once this has been established, one can say that the statement of Mūsā ؑ, “*May I follow you?*” indicates that he will carry out the very actions of his teacher, purely on the basis that his teacher is doing them. This shows that the student is obliged, from the very beginning, to submit to his teacher and refrain from interrupting and debating.

- 9) His statement, “*I follow you,*” shows his request for absolute following of his teacher, with no conditions attached.
- 10) The books of *Ḥadīth* have established the fact that Khaḍir ؑ already knew:
 - a) Mūsā ؑ was the prophet of the *Banū Isrāʾīl*.
 - b) He was given the *Tawrāh*.
 - c) He was the man to whom Allāh ﷻ spoke, with no intermediary.

Despite the above virtues, in addition to his lofty status and honourable calibre, Mūsā ؑ approached Khaḍir ؑ with so many types of utmost modesty. This shows that Mūsā ؑ sought knowledge with maximum humility. This is precisely what befits his calibre: whosoever has more coverage of knowledge, his knowledge of what it entails is much greater; therefore, his passion to seek it would be much higher, as will be his reverence for the people of knowledge.

- 11) He said: “*May I follow you, to the end that you might teach me?*” Establishing his submission was the very first thing he did. Requesting that Khaḍir ؑ teach him was second in line. At first, he devoted to service; only at stage two did he request tuition.
- 12) He said: “*May I follow you, to the end that you might teach me?*” He made no mention whatsoever of any incentive. It is as if he said, “*I want, from this submission, neither wealth nor status; I have no motive except the seeking of knowledge.*”⁽²⁾

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⁽²⁾ Adapted from *Adab al-Ikhtilāf fī Masāʾil al-ʿIlm waʾl-Dīn* of Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAwwāmah حفظه الله pp. 194-196 [Dār al-Yusr and Dār al-Minhāj (Saudi Arabia) fourth edition (1430 AH / 2009 CE)].