

**Shaykh Abdus-Salām ibn Barjis ibn Nāsir āl Abdul-
Kareem (رحمه الله)**

**From the Impediments of Seeking
Knowledge:**

**ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE
FROM THE YOUNG ONES¹²**

Truly, the acquisition of knowledge from the young ones has become a widespread phenomenon amongst the students of knowledge during these times. And this phenomenon, in reality, is a chronic and deep-seated disease which deprives the student of knowledge of achieving his objective and diverts him from the safe path that leads to [true] knowledge. And this is because, acquiring knowledge from the young amongst the people—those whose feet are not firm in knowledge and whose beards have not grown white whilst acquiring this knowledge, along with the presence of those who are senior in age and whose feet are firmly grounded in knowledge—will only undermine the foundation of the apprentice [in knowledge] and deprive him of the experience of the major scholars and from acquiring their noble characteristics and mannerisms that have been refined and defined by knowledge and time.

From among these statements that have a lasting impression is the statement of Ibn Mas'ood:

لَا يَزَالُ النَّاسُ بِخَيْرٍ مَا أَخَذُوا الْعِلْمَ عَنْ أَكْبَرِهِمْ فَإِذَا أَخَذُوهُ عَنْ أَصَاغِرِهِمْ وَشِرَارِهِمْ هَلَكُوا

The people will remain in a state of good as long as they take their knowledge from their elders, their trusted and their scholars. For if they take their knowledge from their youngsters and their evil ones then they will perish.

¹ **Translation:** Abu Ameenah AbdurRahman Bennett.

² From the Book *'Anwā'iq al-Talab* (29).

It has been authentically proven on the authority of Abu Umayyah al-Jamhi that Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said,

إِنَّ مِنْ أَشْرَاطِ السَّاعَةِ ثَلَاثًا إِحْدَاهُنَّ أَنْ يُلْتَمَسَ الْعِلْمُ عِنْدَ الْأَصَاغِرِ

Verily from the portents of the Hour are three. One of them is that knowledge will be sought from the young ones.

The people have differed with regard to the meaning of the term الْأَصَاغِرُ (the young ones). Ibn Abdil Barr has commentated on this in his work *al-Jāmi'* (1/157), and so as ash-Shātibi in his work *al-Itisām* (2/93). Ibn Qutaybah was of the view that the term الْأَصَاغِرُ means **“those who are young in age”**. He also said about the aforementioned narration from Ibn Mas'ood,

He meant that the people will remain in a state of good as long as their scholars are the elders (*mashāyikh*) and their scholars are not the youngsters. And this is because the elder (*shaykh*) is no longer in the clutches of the gratification of youth – its edginess, hastiness and foolhardiness. He conducts himself with the know-how and experience and his knowledge is not seized upon by doubts. He is not overcome by desires and nor is he tempted by ambitious aspirations. The shaytan does not cause him to fall as he does the young. Alongside advanced age comes dignity, honour and respect.

The young one, however, could be compromised by any of these matters from which his elders are safe, and if he does become compromised whilst passing religious verdicts then he will be destroyed and he will destroy others. Ibn Abdil-Barr reported from 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb that he said,

I know when the people are upright and when they are corrupted. Whenever a matter of fiqh is presented by the young ones, their elders rebel against them. However, whenever a matter of fiqh is presented by their elders, the young ones follow them and thus both are guided.

Ibn Abdil Barr also reported from Abu Ahwas who reported that Abdullah said, **“Indeed, you will remain in a state of good as long as knowledge remains amongst your elders. For if knowledge is present in your young ones then the young ones will make fools out of their**

elders.” In these two narrations, we have good reason why to not take knowledge from the young ones. Another reason, beside the reasons mentioned by Ibn Qutaybah, is the fear of affirming something as knowledge when it comes from the young ones.

In any case, the term الصَّغِير (the young one) is a broad term that includes its literal and figurative meanings. That is not to say that there are no exceptions to the general rule, since a group of the Companions and their Successors used to pass religious verdicts and teach in the presence of their elders when they were still tender in age. That being said, it is a rare thing to find the likes of such people in the generations that come after them. If the likes of such were found and their uprightness was well-known, their knowledge was examined and appeared to be firm whilst none of their elders from whom knowledge can be sought were present then knowledge was taken from them.

The intent here is not that the young should be shunned for their knowledge whilst their elders are present. No not at all! Rather, the intent here is only that people should be assigned their proper positions. So the right of the young gifted student is that he is utilised for his worth in research, reminders and investigation. As for issuing religious verdicts and questions being put forward to him then definitely not! Since that will be the death of him, a tribulation and a temptation.

Fudayl ibn ‘Iyād said, **“If you see a man gathering the people around him then I say that this person is insane. What person gathers the people around him and loves not that the people laud him for his speech!”** He also said,

It reached me that when the scholars of the past used to learn, they used to act accordingly. And when they acted accordingly, they became engrossed [in acting accordingly]. And when they became engrossed, they went missing. And when they went missing they were sought after, and when they became sort after, they fled.

So O seeker of knowledge, if you want to gain knowledge from its sources then look no further than the major scholars before you, whose beards have become grey and whose bodies have become frail, whose power has withered in the pursuit of knowledge and teaching. So accompany them and stick to them before you are deprived of them; discover their treasures before they are buried alongside them. In the darkness of night the moon disappears.

NB: The yardstick used by the masses to evaluate the [real] scholars has become defective during these times. And so they label anyone who delivers an eloquent admonition, a meaningful lecture or an improvised Friday lecture as a scholar and a reference point for seeking religious verdicts and as someone from whom knowledge should be sought. This is a painful disaster and a manifest loss with its evil going airborne and its harms becoming epidemic. For when knowledge is attributed to other than its true possessors and others are relied upon then look for the Hour. So let the student of knowledge beware of taking knowledge from such people unless such people are from the reputable people of knowledge. For not everyone who is skillful in expressing himself is a scholar and not everyone who captures the people's attention by speaking on matters pertaining to the leaders or by mentioning the number of deaths due to AIDS and other similar data is a scholar. This does not mean—as some have understood it to mean—that we should not listen to or benefit from their exhortatory talks. Not at all! What it means is that we should not take Shari'ah-based knowledge from the likes of such people and that we should not elevate them to the rank of the scholars.