

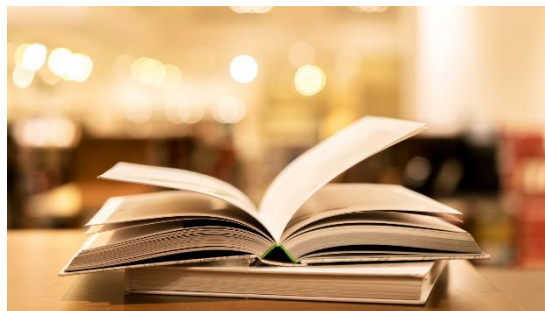
بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The Superiority of Knowledge Over Other Righteous Deeds

(Compiled by Abu Muhammad Yahya)

1. The Foundation: The Hadith of the Three Everlasting Deeds

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "When the son of Ādam dies, his deeds come to an end except for three: a continuous charity (ṣadaqah jāriyah), beneficial knowledge ('ilm yuntafa'u bihi), or a righteous child who prays for him." (Sahih Muslim 1631)



This hadith is a cornerstone in understanding the everlasting impact of knowledge. It places beneficial knowledge as one of the only three types of actions that continue to generate reward even after death, which indicates its immense rank and unique status in Islam.

2. Commentary of the Salafi Scholars

Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān رحمه الله said, quoting Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Āl ash-Shaykh رحمه الله:

"The continuous charity may eventually come to an end, and the righteous son may die. But beneficial knowledge will remain and continue to benefit others. The person who spread it will continue receiving reward as long as people benefit from it."

This clearly distinguishes knowledge as more sustainable and further reaching than other righteous actions.

Shaykh al-Fawzān also emphasized in other places that spreading knowledge benefits both the individual and the entire Ummah, especially when that knowledge is the correct understanding of Tawḥīd, 'Aqeedah, and the Manhaj of the Salaf.

3. The Testimonies of the Salaf on the Virtue of Knowledge

Ibn Mas'ūd رضي الله عنه said: "Learning knowledge is better than performing voluntary acts of worship." (Ibn Abī Shaybah in al-Muṣannaf)

He was referring to *nafl ibādāt* (extra fasts, prayers, etc.) — which although noble — cannot match the collective benefit that sound, authentic knowledge brings to the hearts, minds, and practices of the Ummah.

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī رحمه الله said:

“A single scholar is more formidable against Shayṭān than a thousand worshippers.” (Jāmi‘ Bayān al-‘Ilm by Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr)

This illustrates that knowledge protects the religion, wards off innovation, exposes deviance, and preserves Tawḥīd, whereas mere worship without understanding can sometimes lead people to extremism, innovation, or error.

4. Why Is Knowledge Superior to Worship?

Let’s look at the reasons and evidences why the scholars say knowledge is superior to other righteous deeds:

1. Knowledge is a Foundation for All Actions

No act of worship — whether Ṣalāh, Zakāh, Sawm, or Ḥajj — is valid unless preceded by knowledge.

Imām al-Bukhārī رحمه الله titled a chapter: "Knowledge Before Speech and Action" (الْعِلْمُ قَبْلَ الْقَوْلِ وَالْعَمَلِ)

He then quoted the verse:

﴿ فَاعْلَمُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ ﴾ *"So know (O Muhammad) that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah..."*
(Surah Muḥammad 47:19)

Knowledge comes before actions and statements, because correct ‘Aqeedah and worship cannot be established without it.

2. Knowledge Benefits Others, While Worship Is Primarily Personal

- The person of ‘ilm teaches others.
- Corrects deviant beliefs.
- Revives the Sunnah.
- Suppresses falsehood.

Sufyān ath-Thawrī رحمه الله said: “The excellence of knowledge is that one scholar benefits an entire nation, while a worshipper only benefits himself.” (*Adab al-‘Ālim wal-Muta‘allim*, p. 39)

3. Knowledge Continues After Death—Without End

Whereas ṣadaqah jāriyah may end, and a righteous child may stop making du‘ā or die, beneficial knowledge spreads, multiplies, and becomes a legacy.

- People teach what you taught.
- Books remain.
- Online lessons spread.
- Students of students continue to benefit for generations.

This is why we continue to make du‘ā for the likes of:

- Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal
- Imām al-Bukhārī
- Imām Muslim
- Shaykh al-Albānī
- Shaykh Ibn Bāz
- Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymīn
- Shaykh Muqbil and others رحمهم الله

Even though centuries or decades have passed — their knowledge lives on, and they continue to receive reward.

5. The Qur‘an and Sunnah Elevate the People of Knowledge

Allah says:

﴿يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ﴾ “Allah raises those who believe among you and those given knowledge by degrees.” (Surah al-Mujādilah 58:11)

The Prophet ﷺ said: "Whoever treads a path seeking knowledge, Allah makes a path to Paradise easy for him..." (Sahih Muslim)

"...The scholars are the inheritors of the Prophets." (Abū Dāwūd, authentic)

Just as the Prophets left behind no dinar or dirham — they left knowledge, and those who carry and teach it are counted among their inheritors.

6. Knowledge Is a Shield Against Misguidance

Where worship without guidance can lead to ruin or misguidance, knowledge helps:

- Distinguish truth from falsehood.
- Clarify Tawḥīd from shirk.
- Uphold the Sunnah and repel bid‘ah.

Imām ash-Shāfi‘ī رحمه الله said:

“All people are dead except the scholars. And all scholars are asleep except those who act. And all those who act are deceived, except those who are sincere. And the sincere are always in danger (of falling).”

Thus, seeking authentic knowledge upon the Manhaj of the Salaf is the safest and most noble pursuit.

7. Knowledge is Jihād, Worship, and Da’wah — All in One

The scholars of the Salaf used to say: “The ink of the scholars is more sacred than the blood of the martyrs.”

Because the martyr protects lives, but the scholar protects hearts, beliefs, and eternal souls.

Allah says:

﴿وَجَاهِدْهُمْ بِهِ جِهَادًا كَبِيرًا﴾ “And wage a great jihad against them with it [the Qur’an].” (Surah al-Furqān 25:52)

Ibn ‘Abbās and Mujāhid said: “The great jihad here is through knowledge and clarifying the truth.”

Conclusion: Knowledge is the Root and Radiance of Islam

- It is a shield against misguidance.
- It purifies the heart and corrects the ‘aqedah.
- It spreads far and wide, even after death.
- It is the inheritance of the Prophets.
- And through it, entire generations are guided.

As Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah رحمه الله said:

“There is no deed after the obligations more beloved to Allah than spreading knowledge.”

Let us honor our scholars, follow their paths, preserve their legacies, and become part of this noble chain of beneficial knowledge that uplifts the Ummah and lights the path to Jannah.

May Allah have mercy on the scholars of the past and present who guided us upon the Sunnah and taught us the correct understanding of the Qur’an and the noble way of the Salaf.