

*LETTER ONE*  
**CONCERNING KNOWLEDGE, HUMILITY, AND  
ACTION**

With His Glorious Name ﷺ  
Allah, Allah, Allah

Dear *Hadrat*<sup>2</sup> *Maulānā*<sup>3</sup> Abdul Wāhid (may the legacy of our scholars persist):

*As-salāmu ‘alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuhu.*<sup>4</sup>

I received your letter. This *faqīr*<sup>5</sup> is bound by the principles of our *tariqah*<sup>6</sup> to pass on what has been transmitted from our predecessors. Note that the further a *sālik*<sup>7</sup> progresses in his spiritual journey [*sulūk*], the more likely it is that he will be caught and reprimanded on seemingly trivial matters. This is reflected in

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<sup>2</sup> *Hadrat* literally means, “venerable” and is a term of respect used for persons of religious authority.

<sup>3</sup> *Maulānā* literally means, “our protector” and is a title used for a religious scholar.

<sup>4</sup> *As-salāmu ‘alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuhu* means, “May peace, the blessings of Allah ﷻ, and His mercy be with you.”

<sup>5</sup> *Faqīr* literally means, “poor, dependent person.” Here it is used by the *Shaykh* to humbly denote his poverty before the Self-Sufficient Lord ﷻ and his perpetual dependence upon Allah’s ﷻ mercy.

<sup>6</sup> *Tariqah* literally means, “path” and refers to the traditional path of Islamic spiritual development which, derived from the principles of the Holy Quran and the *sunnah*, concentrates on the spiritual development of the heart and soul of a Muslim.

<sup>7</sup> *Sālik* is a term used for a seeker traveling on the spiritual path.

the famous statement, “Many good deeds of the righteous would be considered blameworthy if done by those nearest to Allah.”

I trust that you will read carefully and adhere to my advice. Know that the heart cannot recognize spiritual realities and distinguish between right and wrong unless it refrains from blameworthy intention and sin. Knowledge is not of any benefit without action, just as a lamp is not of any benefit until it is lit.

Prophet Luqmān ؑ advised his son, “I have worked with and carried many heavy stones in my life, but I have not lifted anything as weighty as religion.” No one can become a scholar unless he acts upon his knowledge. Those scholars of the Children of Israel who acted contrary to their knowledge have been compared to donkeys in the Holy Quran: “*The similitude of those who are entrusted with the Law of Moses, yet apply it not, is that of a donkey carrying books.*” (62:5) A person who has the knowledge of a scholar, but the heart of an ignorant man is to be pitied. Such an individual is comparable to a vulture, which soars high but consumes dead meat.

Imām Mālik ؑ advised Imām Shāfi‘ī ؑ to make his actions flour and his knowledge salt. What did he mean? Bread is made from much flour, to which only a pinch of salt is added. Such should be the combination of knowledge and action within a scholar.

Knowledge knocks on the door of action: it enters if the door is opened, but leaves if it does not receive a reply. He who fails to

act upon the knowledge that he has gained is forever deprived of the ecstasy of supplications.

Scholars were once the stars of the sky. Today, they are not even the flickering flames of a lamp. The early scholars would not fill their stomachs with lawful earnings. It is a sad irony that today their successors are willing to trade their souls to fill their stomachs with the unlawful. There was a time when wealth was spent to acquire knowledge. Today, knowledge is spent and squandered to acquire wealth. The acquisition of and increase in knowledge are worthless unless they are accompanied by an increased fear of Allah ﷻ in the heart. “*Indeed only the learned (truly) fear Allah,*” states the Holy Quran. (35:28)

In times of heavily overcast skies the Companions ﷺ of the Prophet ﷺ, terrified, would go to the mosque [*masjid*] in order to spend time in prayer. The Messenger ﷺ of Allah would remain worried until the clouds cleared. The Noble Companion Abū Bakr’s ﷺ anxiety was such that he would say, “I wish I were a bird...I wish I were a blade of grass.” Other times he would say, “I wish my mother had never bore me.”

The Venerable Attār ﷺ related levels of fear and humility to nearness to Allah ﷻ. It is found in a *hadīth* that the Messenger ﷺ secretly told the Noble Companion Hudhayfah ﷺ the names of the hypocrites of Madinah. The Noble Companion ‘Umar ﷺ summoned Hudhayfah ﷺ during his Caliphate and said, “I know that the Messenger ﷺ of Allah told you the names of the

hypocrites of Madinah and swore you to secrecy. I will not ask you these names, but please tell me if the name of ‘Umar is among them.”

This is the same exemplary Companion about whom the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “If there was to be a prophet after me, it would have been ‘Umar.” It is related that ‘Umar ؓ used to cry when relieving his thirst. He would say, “Could it be that we are being rewarded here such that there will be nothing for us in the Hereafter?” Allah ﷻ Himself testifies to the faith of the Companions ؓ in the Holy Quran; nonetheless, they would remain fearful and wary of Allah ﷻ.

The Venerable Hasan al-Basrī ؓ would weep so much in fear of Allah ﷻ that people who later passed by would think that somebody had performed ablution at that spot. The Venerable Rābi‘ah Al-Basrīyah ؓ would cry so much that her tears would flow on the ground. The Noble Companion ‘Umar ؓ would weep so severely that his face would be marked with traces of tears just as the route of a river marks a mountainside.

Hasan al-Basrī ؓ would walk with such fear and grief-stricken humility that passers-by would think he was returning from a graveyard after burying his father. Upon hearing him, people would say his speech was that of a man condemned to death.

While teaching a lesson, once Abdullāh ibn Mūbārak’s ؓ face became so white that his students thought he would die right in front of them. He finished the lesson in this state, and his

students asked about his condition. He said, “Didn’t you see? A cloud came over me during the lesson and I feared lest I be showered with stones.”

When fatally ill and dying, the Venerable Abdullāh ؑ asked his students to place him on the ground, which they did with great respect. Once on the ground, Abdullāh ؑ began to rub his forehead in the dust. He said, “O Allah, please have mercy on Abdullāh’s old age.” Such was the humility and fear of a scholar who used to instruct forty thousand students at any given time.

While making the call to prayer [*adhān*], once the Venerable Hasan ibn Sālih ؑ trembled and fainted in fear while calling out, “God is Great [*Allahu Akbar*].” His brother then approached the minaret and completed the call to prayer. The Venerable °Alī ibn Fudayl ؑ would faint with fear upon listening to *sūrah Al-Qāri’ah*<sup>8</sup> and *sūrah Az-Zalzalah*<sup>9</sup>. The Noble Companion °Umar ibn al-Khattāb ؓ once fell in fear while reading the Holy Quran. The Noble Companion °Uthmān ؓ would weep so much while reflecting on the grave that his beard would be soaked. The Noble Companion °Alī ؓ would tremble when entering the *masjid* such that people would say, “O Commander of the Faithful, you are the lion of Allah ﷻ and the lion of His

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<sup>8</sup> *Sūrah Al-Qāri’ah* is chapter 101 of the Holy Quran.

<sup>9</sup> *Sūrah Az-Zalzalah* is chapter 99 of the Holy Quran.

Messenger ﷺ, why this look of terror on your face?” ‘Alī ؓ would reply, “You have no idea whose chambers I am entering.” History is full of examples where our elders have fallen, and in some cases died, from shock when reading or listening to the Holy Quran and the *hadith*.

It is indeed a blessing if we can achieve even a grain of the fear that these people had in their hearts. The Holy Quran states, “*Allah has sent down the most beautiful Message in the form of a Book, consistent with itself (wherein promises of reward are) paired (with threats of punishment), whereat the skins of those who fear their Lord tremble, and then their skins and hearts soften to Allah’s remembrance.*” (39:23) May Allah ﷻ bless us with such a state.

*How do I express the ache in my heart when I cannot find inspiration?*

The Venerable Abdullāh ibn Mūbārak ؓ would advise his students as follows:

- (1) Stop your eyes from wandering and you will attain the pleasure of the fear of Allah ﷻ.
- (2) Leave blameworthy pursuits and you will attain wisdom.
- (3) Eat less and you will become steadfast in worship.
- (4) Stop finding faults in others and you will progress.

This *faqīr* advises you likewise. A mere sign is enough for the intelligent.

Given our age, you and I must consider ourselves among the dead. People are given many warnings, but there is no greater warning than old age. The farmer reaps his crop when it is ready for harvest. Undoubtedly, the time for harvest is near.

An old man came to a *shaykh* and said, “Your Honor, I want to repent but I have come too late.” The *shaykh* replied, “To repent before death is not late.”

Both the sun and the moon give light, but nothing illuminates more than a clean, pure heart. The heart is enlightened through remembrance [*dhikr*], reflection [*murāqabah*],<sup>10</sup> and a connection with one’s *shaykh*. It is as the Holy Quran states, “*For this (the blessings of the Garden) let all aspire.*” (83:26)

Currently this *faqīr* is traveling and we are at opposite shores. The time difference between Pakistan and California is twelve hours. Try to understand what I have hurriedly written here. It may be that these words will serve to strengthen your spiritual

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<sup>10</sup> *Murāqabah* is a spiritual exercise wherein a seeker [*salik*] clears his mind of all foreign thoughts and reflects on Allah ﷻ, the Merciful and Majestic Lord. For more details see “Letter Two.”

connection. Please convey my greetings to the community [jamā'ah].

*Was-salām ma' al-ikrām,*

*Faqīr Zulfīqar Ahmad Naqshbandī Mujaddidī*