

# Rules Governing Knowledge

MAWLĀNĀ SAYYID ABUL ḤASAN 'ALĪ NADWĪ ﷺ

*Edited by*  
Sulaiman Kazi



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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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Mawlana Sayyid Abul Ḥasan Ali Nadwī delivered the present lecture on his second visit to Bhatkal\* in 1971. It has been variously published with the titles of “*Ilm Ka Bhi Ayk Kānoon Hai*”, “*Millat-e-Islāmia Ka Maqām Wa Payām*” and “*Tuḥfā-e-bhatkal*”.

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\*Bhatkal is a town in the Uttara Kannada District of the Indian state of Karnataka.

RULES GOVERNING KNOWLEDGE

I pray to Almighty Allāh that He accepts this publication and makes it a means of ins̄piring the seekers of prophetic knowledge. Āmeen.

—MAWLĀNĀ KHALIL AHMED KAZI

Madina Academy  
Dewsbury, England

23rd Shabaan 1442  
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أَلْخُفِدُ لِلَّهِ وَكَفَى وَسَلَامٌ عَلَى عِبَادِهِ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَى ، أَمَّا بَعْدُ  
أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ ، بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَلَيْسَ الْبِرُّ بِأَنْ تَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهَا ، وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنِ اتَّقَى ، وَأْتُوا  
الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا ، وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ البقرة ١٨٩/٢

*“It is not a virtue that you enter your houses from the back. Virtue is that you fear Allāh. Enter your houses by the doors. Fear Allāh so that you may be successful.”*

— *Al-Baqarah, 2:189*

*My dear friends and brothers! If you have studied Tafsir of Surah Al Baqarah you may be aware that in times of Jāhiliyyah those who used to embark on Ḥajj had an unwritten custom, which wasn't in Sharī'ah but, which they had*



imposed its adherence on themselves. This involved not entering their own houses through the front door, even if it was for some urgent business, until all the rites of Ḥajj were completed. They thought that, since they had not completed their visit to Baitullāh, they could not enter their own houses in the normal way. They would use the back door or climb up a wall or the roof to enter their houses. They considered this as an act of great virtue. It signified their respect and regard for Baitullāh.

Almighty Allāh, however, clarifies: *“It is not a virtue that you enter your houses from the back. Virtue is that you fear Allāh. Enter your houses by the doors. Fear Allāh so that you may be successful”* (Al-Baqarah 2:189). Thus, they were admonished and ordered to follow routine and common sense. The Qur’ān urges man throughout to do things naturally and properly. The Qur’ān is a complete guide and a book for all walks of life for everyone. It is sufficient for showing us the right path and it contains guidance.

## *Important Qur’ānic Words*

*Almighty Allāh orders: “Enter your houses by their doors.”* (2:189). This directive embraces man’s whole life. It is full of wisdom. The order is not specific to entering through the door; it extends to one’s entire life. One should employ the

correct means for achieving something. If one seeks to earn the skills of a particular trade, he should consult its experts and observe all the norms of that profession. If one fails to do so; does not use proper equipment; does not learn things gradually and refuses to follow the protocols and processes, he will never achieve success. There is a route for succeeding in any trade, be it as an ironsmith, carpenter, soldier or physician. Disregarding the rules and requirements will not allow one to succeed. For instance, if someone refuses to wear the army uniform or carry out the essential exercises and acts whimsically, he will end up a failure. He cannot succeed in becoming a soldier. He will not be able to grow into a professional. Similarly, as we need a door to enter a house, we also need to follow norms and conventions for doing anything. This is also the case in pursuit of Islāmic knowledge.

## *Encompassing Both Worlds*

*The Qur'ānic directive: "Enter your houses by their doors"* (2:189) encompasses every aspect of life, both in this world and the next. The law of nature and human experience has put into place rules for everything, including entry and exit. If one does not abide by these rules, he can never achieve his goal. He will not be destined for success.

Let me illustrate my point with an example. Someone may argue that the alphabet is too complicated and there is no point in learning it. Even though he may be intelligent, he will not grow into a literate person. It goes without saying that one who does not recognise alphabetical letters, such as A, B or C will not be able to read or write. This holds true for any language whether it is Urdu, English or Arabic. If a person was given three or even six months, confined to a room with provisions made available for life, not having any human interaction or distraction, he would still not be able to read a book without having first learnt the alphabet. He will remain as ignorant as he was before he entered the room. The reason for this is that he did not follow the law of nature, which is conveyed in verse 189 of Surah Al-Baqarah.

## *Student and Tutor Relationship*

*Some of you* may assume that there is no respect for tutors in Europe. It would be wholly incorrect to draw such an inference based on our colleges and universities in India, for these are neither eastern or western. They have no real concern for worldly or religious matters. I have travelled to Europe and observed first-hand their university tutorial system. For instance, I was surprised to note that such a system is still in place at the distinguished universities of

Oxford and Cambridge, where a tutor is assigned to each student upon admission. The student's choice of tutor is taken into consideration. The tutor will serve as a guide and mentor to the student during his time at university.

A student's relationship with his tutor is firm and deep as between a spiritual master and his disciple. The student consults his tutor and undertakes the study of books recommended by him, submits his notes and assignments to him to ensure his correct understanding of the subject matter. In this sense, the relationship between a student and his tutor is not dissimilar to the relationship between teacher and a devoted student in our Madrasas. The latter is dependent upon the former. Similarly, I have read in the study of Arab culture there used to be a class of people called Rawiya, who would learn by heart and recite couplets of the master poet.

In my student days, students were also assigned to a teacher. Generally, four students would be allocated to one teacher. The students used to be very devoted and dedicated towards their teacher, serving them in every possible way. They would diligently take notes and research studiously as directed by the teacher. This is how we pursued our studies and graduated. I have surprisingly learnt that this tutorial system is also in place at the leading British universities. Such a system of learning is essential for student progress. Once a tutor is chosen, then it is essential for the student to abide and follow his instructions in order to develop and progress.

## *Distinction of Religious Knowledge*

*There are some common points between the Islāmic and Western education system. After a certain point, however, there is also a marked difference. We are concerned with seeking the pleasure of Almighty Allāh. In this regard, we beseech Him sincerely, we pray to Him and strive our best. However, it is only Allāh alone who can bless us with knowledge. The following advice of Imam Al-Shāfi'ī<sup>1</sup> ﷺ (767–820) is worth bearing in mind. He said,*

شَكَوْتُ إِلَى وَكَيْعٍ سُوءَ حِفْظِي  
فَأَشَدَّنِي إِلَى تَرْكِ الْمَعَاصِي  
وَأَخْبَرَنِي بِأَنَّ الْعِلْمَ نُورٌ  
وَنُورُ اللَّهِ لَا يُؤْتَى لِعَاصِي

*“I complained to Wakī<sup>2</sup>, my teacher, about my poor memory.*

*He advised me to shun sins.*

*And he informed me that knowledge is Allāh's light, and  
Allāh's light is not granted to those who disobey Him.”*

The lines of demarcation between secular and religious education can be significant. A student of secular education can watch movies and fall prey to immoral acts without being

*Sayyid Abul Hasan 'Ali Nadwī* ﷺ

affected nor feeling that it will impact upon his exams or career aspirations. However, the student of Islāmic knowledge will remain totally committed to the cause of knowledge and seek Allāh's pleasure at all times. He will remain devoted to his teacher, earning his good wishes and blessings. He will try to emulate his teacher and assimilate all of his scholarly characteristics. You will learn from history that sometimes a student becomes so devoted to his teacher that he behaves like a sponge and absorbs all his knowledge. He then disseminates the knowledge to his own students.

## *Etiquette of Seeking Knowledge*

*Friends, this Madresa* is for seeking religious education. You are students at this institute and it has been established for imparting and disseminating knowledge. Islāmic knowledge has its own distinct norms and traditions. This is not knowledge designed for the arrogant who disregard people, teachers or books and behave capriciously according to their own whims and desires. Almighty Allāh has blessed us with intelligence and good health, so apply yourselves diligently and properly in pursuit of knowledge. Do not act boastfully. It is worth remembering that some people, despite their average abilities, have been immensely successful and left a mark on the world.

## *Intelligence Alone is Not Sufficient*

*I recall in Lahore* there used to be an individual who had digressed from the path. He was teaching at a college. No doubt he enjoyed mastery in rational science and was extremely intelligent. It is said even Dr Muḥammad Iqbāl<sup>3</sup> (1877–1938), the Poet of the East, recognised his academic standing. However, he was not able to write profusely on Islām or revive the Sunnah. He could not benefit the masses or serve the Islāmic cause in any significant way. He was unable to arouse God consciousness which should result from the company of the learned. It is said he used to speak disparagingly of Mawlānā Ḥussain Aḥmad Madanī<sup>4</sup> (1879–1957), referring to him as “An ordinary colleague from student days. Someone who did not stand out in class.” On the other hand, the individual himself was very well known and distinguished during his student days. However, despite his intellectual abilities, what benefit resulted from him? He was not able to benefit people as he should have.

Similarly, I came across someone who looked disparagingly about Mawlānā Ilyās Kāndhelvī<sup>5</sup> (1884–1944). He said: “Look at him! Whenever you see him, he is engaged in optional prayers.” Mawlānā Ilyās was known, in his student days, to preoccupy himself in optional prayers. However, look at his magnificent accomplishments. Through

the effort of Tablighi Jamāt, he caused a worldwide religious awakening. Its lasting effects are evident in America and Africa where his efforts have found widespread acceptance.

Brothers, I will take the opportunity to share with you some valuable experience. It is possible for someone with average ability who observes the essence of the Qur'ānic verse (“*Enter your houses by their doors*” 2:189) to attain such a rank which is not achieved by another who is arrogant and prides himself on his intelligence, effort and hard work. The latter will not be blessed in his learning and teaching. He will not be able to benefit people. Along with knowledge, effort should be made to follow the Sunnah, rid oneself of Bid'ah, detest sins and be mindful of obeying Allāh. This will generate spiritual light inside you. The ability to work towards these objectives can only be accomplished by one who is obedient to his teacher.

In Syria, there was an eminent scholar by the name of Allāmah Bahjatul Baytar<sup>6</sup> ﷺ (1894–1976). He told me, “One day we could not visit our teacher due to extreme cold weather.” In Syria, it can be bitterly cold with snow. “When we visited him the next day, he questioned us. We told him that it was very cold. Upon hearing this, he poured a bucket of cold water over our heads and told us: “This is real coldness!” Allāmah Baytar ﷺ then said: “We would tolerate our teacher and never begrudge him.” Today, he is known as the distinguished scholar Allāmah Baytar ﷺ.



Someone else also shared a similar experience. In the past, our teachers used to make us work for them and they would also teach us. In those days, the teacher was not simply a teacher but also a kind of spiritual master. In his company, students would learn how to offer prayers with concentration and devotion, practice the Sunnah and learn to observe the norms of correctly entering and leaving the mosque. We learnt much from them. This practice is now increasingly on the wane.

## *Lack of Competence*

*Nowadays, it is hard to find accomplished scholars. If we are unable to have such distinguished scholars as Imām Al-Muzanī<sup>7</sup> (791/2–878), Imām Al-Nawawī<sup>8</sup> (1233–1277), Shaykh Al-Islām Ibn ‘Abd Al-Salām<sup>9</sup> (1181–1262) and Ḥāfiz Ibn Ḥajr Al-Asqalānī<sup>10</sup> (1372–1449) then let us at least have someone of the stature of Ḥāfiz Ibn Ḥajr Al-Haythamī<sup>11</sup> (1503–1566) . However, there is a dearth of competent scholars not only in India but also in Egypt too. In the past, Al-Azhar University used to produce remarkable scholars who possessed insights into faith. This is no longer the case. Political motives have destroyed the institution. It is common knowledge that Al-Azhar has not been training proper ‘Ulemā for some time. In every country, it is observed that there is a lack of competent and well-trained*

scholars. In view of this grim situation, it is all the more important that students remain punctual in class and teachers be respected. Students should be encouraged to study and prepare adequately for class. Mawlānā Ashraf Ali Thānwī<sup>12</sup> ﷺ (1863–1943) ruefully remarked: “It is fairly common that students do not read, either on their own or in class. They should prepare adequately by studying beforehand what is going to be discussed in class. They should read the lesson several times and revise it. Regrettably, this practice has now been abandoned by students.”

If we follow best practice Allāh’s law, which remains unaltered since time immemorial, will produce the same good results. Alhamdulillah intelligent people are born all the time. Allāh provides everyone with sustenance. In earlier times, there was a prevalence of malnutrition which affected mental development. Quite often poor students could not get rich foods, fruits or meat. Yet, in the face of all adversity they accomplished much. Their achievements bewilder us even today. Some could only smell bread and not afford to buy it. They remained unnerved and devoted themselves wholeheartedly to seeking knowledge.

## *Enter the House of Knowledge Correctly*

*The crux of the talk is summed up by the verse referred to at the outset: “Enter your houses by their doors” (2:189). Therefore, let us enter the house of knowledge by correctly entering the door of knowledge. Learn to observe its norms: namely, follow rules, show respect, remain disciplined, study diligently and be hardworking. Brothers, if you do all this, you are destined to success. Insha Allāh, you will become celebrated and bring honour to your country and the Millat. Otherwise, you will remain mediocre and hardly be able to answer fiqhi issues or undertake any serious academic work. I think these pieces of advice should suffice for you. May Allāh protect us against every evil and calamity. May He grant us sincerity and respect for His book and the ‘Ulema who serve His Word, Āmeen.*

وآخر دعوانا أن الحمد لله رب العالمين

In the end, all praise is to Allāh, the Lord of the worlds.

## *Biographical Notes*

1 *Imām Al-Shāfi‘ī* ﷺ (767–820) – was one of the four great Sunni Imāms, whose legacy on juridical matters and teaching eventually led to the formation of Shāfi‘ī school of fiqh (or Madh‘hab).

2 *‘Waki‘ ibn Al-Jarrāh* ﷺ (745/47–812) – was among the most prominent ḥadith scholar of his time. He was based in Kufa, Iraq.

3 *Dr Muhammad Iqbāl* ﷺ (1877–1938) – was a Muslim poet and philosopher, widely known as ‘Allāma Iqbal. He wrote poetry in Urdu and Persian. His poetry is considered to be revolutionary.

4 *Mawlānā Ḥussain Aḥmad Madanī* ﷺ (1879–1957) – was an Indian Islāmic scholar, serving as the shaykhul ḥadeeth of Darul ‘Uloom Deoband. He played a leading role in the struggle for Indian independence.

5 *Mawlānā Ilyās Kāndhelvi* ﷺ (1884–1944) – as an Indian Islāmic scholar who founded the Tabliḡhī Jamaat Islāmic revivalist movement, in 1925, in Mewāt, India.

6 *Allamah Bahjatul Baytar* ﷺ (1894–1976) – was born into a religious family that came to Syria from Algeria. He studied under the great scholars of his time. He authored a number of books and taught Tafseer and Ḥadith in Makkah and Damascus.

7 *Imām Al-Muzanī* ﷺ (791/2–878) – was an Islāmic jurist and theologian and one of leading member of Shāfi'ī school. A native of Cairo, he was a close disciple and companion of Imam Shafi'ī ﷺ.

8 *Imām Al-Nawawī* ﷺ (1233–1277) – was a Sunni Shāfi'ī jurist and ḥadith scholar. He authored numerous and lengthy works ranging from ḥadith, to theology, biography, and jurisprudence.

9 *Shaykh Al-Islām Ibn 'Abd Al-Salam* ﷺ (1181–1262) – was a famous mujtahid, theologian, jurist and the leading Shāfi'ī authority of his generation.

10 *Hafiz Ibn Hajr Al-Asqalani* ﷺ (1372–1449) – was a classic Islāmic scholar and polymath "whose life work constitutes the final summation of the science of Ḥadith." He authored some 150 works on ḥadīth, history, biography, tafsīr, poetry, and Shāfi'ite jurisprudence, the most valued of which being his commentary of the Sahīh of Bukhārī, titled *Fatḥ al-Bārī*.

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11 *Ḥafiz Ibn Ḥajr Al-Haythami Al-Makki* ﷺ (1503–1566) – was an Egyptian muhaddith and theologian. He specialised in Islāmic Jurisprudence and is well-known as a prolific writer of the Shāfi‘ī school.

12 *Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Ali Thānwī* ﷺ (1863–1943) – was an Indian Sunni scholar and a Sufi mentor of the Ḥanafī school. He wrote around 1000 books, including the tafsīr Bayān-Ul-Qur‘ān and Bahishtī Zewar.

In *Rules Governing Knowledge*, Mawlānā Sayyid Abul Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī ؒ offers timeless advice to the seekers of prophetic knowledge. He deploys his customary eloquence to inspire, revive and revitalise those who are engaged in Islamic knowledge, exhorting them to remain faithful to the tradition and aspire to new horizons by striving for excellence.



MAWLĀNĀ SAYYID ABUL ḤASAN ‘ALĪ NADWĪ (1914-1999) was one of the most widely read and influential Muslim scholars of his time. He hailed from a family which produced scholars and spiritual masters such as Shāh ‘Alamullāh Naqshbandī ؒ (1624-1685) and Sayyid Aḥmad Shaheed ؒ (1786-1831). He was Rector of Nadwatul ‘Ulamā in Lucknow, India and was associated with a number of Islāmic organisations and educational institutions worldwide. For his services to Islām, he was awarded the King Faisal Award and other numerous accolades. He was a powerful orator and writer, both in Urdu and Arabic. Some of his books which have been translated into English include: *Islām and the World*, *Stories of the Prophets*, *Muḥammad: The Apostle of Mercy* and *Saviours of Islāmic Spirit*. The unifying theme of Mawlānā Syed Abul Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī’s tireless commitments, as a scholar and Dā‘ee, was the spiritual well-being of Muslims, emphasising to them their relationship with Allāh and each other, and their response to Western cultural influences.