

Seminary Students

Introduction

Amongst the *maraja*'s principal duties is to mentor and educate fully qualified scholars jurists and *mujtahids* in order to continue promoting and disseminating the teachings of the holy Qur'an, Allah's messenger, and the Ahl al-Bayt, peace be upon them, and to research and investigate matters concerned in order to respond to modern and developing issues. So, it is important to know the advices and recommendations the *marja*' makes to his students so that they are competent, from various standpoint, to address the issues that will face. Editors.

- ❖ If you wish to become a scholar and a preacher, you must be an exemplar and a role-model in observing the truth, forbearance and control one's wrath; and not that you would outburst for trivial reasons.
- ❖ The word, behavior, conduct, history and biography of the seminary student encourages the masses to observe virtue if he observes virtue. However, for merely not being so would propel others towards vice.
- ❖ It is imperative for the seminary students to be serious about their mission, to strive tirelessly, and to dedicate all their energy and abilities in the cause of seeking knowledge.
- ❖ It is imperative for the seminary students to strive as much as possible in the process of studying and seeking knowledge. They should not be lazy or sluggish, but rather they should dedicate all their energy. They should know that in return for all these endeavors and efforts they make fo

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-seeking knowledge, the Almighty would single them out for His favor and patronage. Without this favor, there would be no benefit in the great amount of knowledge obtained. This is not to mean to abandon studies, but we want to say that studies alone is not enough; it is only one of the pillars for one's knowledge, with the other being the Almighty's grace and favor.

- ❖ My brothers! You have put behind you great many number of issues concerning financial, familial, societal and other needs, and you have turned a blind eye on various matters all in favor of seeking knowledge. And what a good thing you have done! I congratulate you on this honor and success, which is indeed a great honor and success. Most people are deprived of this success that Almighty Allah has honored you with. However, you must make sure to reap the benefit of this strive and sacrifice... you should know that this does not come about from knowledge alone...; it is not through acquiring knowledge alone that those elevated stations are attained, but rather it is with the real knowledge which is the Light that Almighty Allah shines in the heart of whoever He wishes to guide.¹

- ❖ At the outset, we caution the seminary students about the hardship and the long road ahead; ... so that they are well-prepared for this mission, and have taken into account all the necessary measures.

- ❖ It is imperative for the seminary students to give high priority to adhering to virtues and morals; rather, to give it the highest priority so that they would excel in it. This is because the more they excel in it the more the people would subsequently adhere to it. This is one of the aspects which distinguishes morality (*akhlaq*) from other skills and sciences such as *fiqh*, *osool*, oratory, philosophy, wisdom, and suchlike.

¹ The last phrase is paraphrasing a hadith to this effect, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 67 p140.

- ❖ If the seminary students take the attainment of moral perfection lightly they would not make the first step given the difficulties they will face.
- ❖ Have you ever wondered why the number of seminary students is insignificant when compared to the number of college and university students? Is it because the Ummah does not need more preachers than the present number? Or is it because the promotion and encouragement for the religious sciences is less than that for modern sciences? The encouragement for the modern schools and colleges is prevalent, while on the other hand there is discouragement for the religious schools.
- ❖ If you want to know the reasons that distinguished Sheikh al-Ansari¹ from others, look at the terms he uses in response to those who differ from him in opinions, as this is evident in his works such as *al-makasib* and *al-rasa'il*,² and compare them with those used by others, such as scholars of Arabic, *fiqh*, and *osool*. The Sheikh, Allah's blessings and mercy upon him, responds with complete politeness and humility, even though he is totally convinced of the correctness of his opinion and the erroneousness of the other side's opinion. You won't find him using terms like "incorrect", "wrong" or "misunderstood" and suchlike, but rather he uses terms like "this is what he came to understand" or "in response to that opinion" and thus he does not talk about the author, but addresses the opinion.
- ❖ It is imperative that you do not boast if you enhance your knowledge; rather, you should be what you are when you used to study *jami' al-*

¹ Sheikh Murtada al-Ansari, 1214-1281AH (1781-1864AD), was one of the most illustrious jurist and Shia scholar of recent times, whose works continue to be used and taught at the various Islamic seminaries today.

² These works are used and relied upon today in the seminaries (*hawzah*) for teaching the advanced levels, and will continue to be so.

moqaddamat,¹ and that you should be what you are when you become a *marje'*,² or an eminent teacher in the *hawzah* (seminary).

- ❖ Relying on the teacher/mentor, using his expertise, guidance, and the books he recommends, and training at his hands, will enable the individual to attain the goal in the best and quickest manner.
- ❖ In reality we notice that more than 60% of those who started with enthusiasm, honesty, and good faith never finished the course to the end; and that less than 40% managed to overcome the great many difficulties on the road to seeking knowledge.
- ❖ If there were too many problems facing the seminary student, and a student did not want to waste one's life, by studying for thirty or fifty years, and then realizing one has not achieved the desired result, what is the solution to overcome these difficulties? The fundamental solution is embodied in the holy ayah [indeed it is with Allah's remembrance that the hearts find rest].³ Commentators have stated that by "Allah's remembrance" it is meant remembrance by tongue and heart together, and by "heart's remembrance" it is mean devotion to the Almighty.
- ❖ The seminary students should spend the appropriate time for their studies, but the important thing is the quality and not the quantity, and by quality I mean meticulousness and diligence. If you study the biography of the great amongst the scholars such as Sheikh al-Mofeed,

¹ These works are used in the seminaries for teaching elementary levels.

² A *marje'* is a fully qualified Islamic scholar or a religious authority on Islam and an expert of Sharia law, and thus able to issue Islamic ruling or fatwa. A *marje'* has followers who seek of his fatwa and opinions on various matters of concern.

³ The Holy Qur'an, 13:28

Sayyid al-Murtada, *mohaqqiq* al-Hilli, '*allamah* al-Hilli, Sayyid Bahr al-Olum, and Sheikh al-Ansari,¹ Allah's mercy upon them, you will find their dedication to work quality and meticulousness was greater than their care about quantity of work.

- ❖ In pursuing material gains one's success is typically proportionate to the effort one expends in obtaining them. So if one pursues wealth, for example, one can double such wealth if one is prepared to double up the time and effort one expends in amassing such wealth. The same goes for those seeking leadership or superiority. Their chances of achieving such aspirations will be greater the more they toil toward such goals. This is different in non-material, moral or spiritual matters where intangible and qualitative aspects such as relationships are concerned. For example, someone may try to be favored or liked by another, say a scholar, and over-reaches him with the purpose of getting close to him or for the purpose of gaining his attention. This behavior may have the opposite effect and may result in the scholar's resentment of him. One might think that had he spent less time with the scholar, it would have been more effective in gaining his attention. Thus one might conclude that intangible, non-material and moral gains are not measured in terms of the intensity of the effort expended as in material gains.
- ❖ From the outset, seminary students should pay particular attention to the two issues of lecturing and authoring; because these two are amongst the necessary aspects of successful scholarly and leadership traits. All prophets, leaders, and reformers enjoyed the talent and capability of

¹ The works of these grand scholars continue to be amongst the most important heritage and sources for the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt, peace be upon them. Sheikh al-Mofeed, 336-413AH (948-1022AD). Sayyid al-Murtada, 355-436AH (966-1044), *mohaqqiq* al-Hilli, 602-676AH, '*allamah* al-Hilli, 648-726AH, Sayyid Bahr al-Olum, 1155-1212AH, Sheikh al-Ansari, 1214-1281AH (1781-1864AD).

-public speech, while you would rarely find an eminent scholar who had not paid attention to writing.

- ❖ One of the issues concerning us the clergy who consider ourselves to be associated with Imam Mahdi, may Allah hasten his reappearance, is that we do not know whether or not our affiliation is accepted. This issue is particularly important for us, and it deserves ample time and effort in order to arrive at a conclusion, otherwise we are up to nothing, and no matter how much knowledge we have, it would be equal to nothing, if not worse.
- ❖ The caliber that the moralist, and especially seminary students, attain has a particular significance in fulfilling their role in society and in encouraging the masses to observe moral virtues and refrain from vices.
- ❖ Seminary students should not engage in *makrooh* acts on the grounds that the *makrooh* is permissible, and should not forgo the *mostahab* deeds on the grounds that it is permissible to forgo the *mostahab*; because this kind of attitude would lead members of the general public to begin to take lightly the obligatory and the prohibited deeds (*wajibat* & *muharramat*).¹
- ❖ If the seminary student sets about to observe the virtuous approach, i.e. refrains from the *makrooh* and observes the *mostahab* deeds, and that he would not suffice to observing the obligatory and refraining from the prohibited deeds (*wajibat* & *muharramat*), this would lead to the general public to being 'odool, i.e. they adhere to the Sharia framework in its entirety [by observing the obligatory and refraining from the prohibited deeds].

¹ The deeds or conducts are grouped into five categories. These are: *wajib* (obligatory), *mostahab* (recommended), *mobah* (permissible), *makrooh* (discouraged), and *haram* (prohibited).

- ❖ A seminary student should not say, “Having good manners is good but is not mandatory, so why should I observe it?” or “harsh manners, to a certain extent, is [merely] *makrooh* so why should I refrain from it?” and “performing prayers at the onset of its time is a virtue but it is not mandatory, and it would not prejudice my credibility and integrity if I was lenient about it.” and suchlike... Then he will try to justify his conduct by misusing the hadith “the most pious of the people is one who discharge one’s duties and obligations.”¹

- ❖ If the conduct of the scholar or seminary student was entirely based on “the most pious of the people is one who discharges one’s duties and obligations”, then the environment they live in and people who see their conduct and behavior would not even reach this minimum level (of discharging their duties) because they are normally less trained and educated than the scholar, and in that position there is nothing but entanglement in sins and abandonment of the duties and obligations. This is because if the layman sees, for example, his model or mentor performing his morning prayers a few minutes before sunrise, he would altogether trivialize the obligation itself, and if he sees him committing a *makrooh*, the layman would tolerate the prohibited. It would be as if the layman says, “If this scholar or holy man does this and that, what do you expect from me, the mere mortal?”²

¹ This is in reference to a prophetic hadith, al-Kafi, vol.2 p82

² The prophetic hadith is meant to state that the most pious is he who doesn’t compromise when it comes to fulfilling his duties and obligations meticulously, and it is certainly not encouraging to commit the undesirable (*makrooh*), nor is it discouraging the recommended (*mustahab*).

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- ❖ Allah's respect for knowledge and scholars is part of the Almighty's respect for His Laws – as they are the Laws' protectors.
- ❖ Almighty Allah values His Laws' protectors and those who observe them more than others.
- ❖ We, the seminary students, are confronted with the issue of sincerity more than others; because – as a result of our education – we may get to a position in society that Satan would attempt to lure us. This is because, if one of us is lured and made to stray, a great proportion of the masses would stray too, as a result.
- ❖ Given our position, we, the seminary students, face many various temptations in the course of our professional lives. If one of us assumes a leadership position, and gains people's respect, or if one is a *marje*'s representative, or a speaker, or has an eminent social position... these circumstances involve many great temptations, which requires us to be continually vigilant right from the outset.
- ❖ We, the seminary students, should realize that our challenge is greater than anyone else, because Satan targets us more than anyone else, and the temptations we face are many. It is for these reasons that the sincere are few, and the chosen ones are even less.
- ❖ There is no objection for one to study in order to become *marje*', or preacher, or a lecturer, or a religious scholar, but that should be for Allah's sake and reward. And if this is one's goal, then one wouldn't care what others say about him one way or another.

- ❖ There were scholars in the past, some of whom I had met, that one could tell of their sincerity from the signs manifested in them by Allah's grace and help. They used to study truly for Allah's sake, teach for Allah's sake, and work purely for Allah's sake.
- ❖ It is imperative for us to train ourselves so that our studying is for Allah's sake, our teaching is for Allah's sake, and our endeavor is for Allah's sake. We must discipline ourselves so that we become like that in the future if we are not so now, and through that [attitude and discipline] we will rub Satan's nose to the ground.
- ❖ It is imperative that we, the seminary students, pay attention to the danger of insincerity in our midst more than others. This is because our sincerity has certain signs that reflect on us and on others; it affects others and shines the path for them. On the other hand, insincerity in us will have the worst impacts, and perhaps its effect will remain in history, and many may follow the deviant path because of us due to our insincerity, or due to what they deduced from our conduct. It is therefore binding for us to pay particular attention to the issue of sincerity more than anyone else.
- ❖ Satan is more proactive amongst us, the seminary students, and shows us ways to present ourselves as sincere ones while we are not one of them.
- ❖ Our education and seeking knowledge should not be purely for the purpose of teaching, preaching, and providing guidance to others and replying to their queries. Rather, we should also study and continue research and debate for the benefit of ourselves, because discipline and purification of the self is obligatory just as enjoining good and prohibiting evil is an obligation.

- ❖ One of the most important issues for us is that our knowledge seeking should not be purely for the purpose of removing ignorance from others, rather, it should also be for the sake of removing our own ambiguities.
- ❖ Satan may creep in the seminary student's mind via his knowledge [and thus overconfidence] and it presents his deeds appealing, so he ends up committing the prohibited act, arguing that the prohibition needs to be proven, and gradually committing the prohibited becomes the norm for him.¹
- ❖ We, the seminary students, are more likely to think about paradise and endeavor to book a place in it than others, and that is because we, supposedly, abandoned everything for the sake of Almighty Allah, or that we did not own worldly things to begin with.
- ❖ The seminary students should think more about paradise than others; because if they were amongst those who did not have much worldly things and opted for this field they would care about their share in the hereafter and earn their place in paradise. On the other hand, if they had worldly things and despite that they forwent that for the sake of Allah and the hereafter, then they would qualify for paradise more than the rest.

¹ There is a general rule in jurisprudence (*fiqh*) that states: everything is permissible (halal) unless it's proven otherwise (haram). And that proof needs to be based on the Qur'an or hadith. However, this rule may not be taken for granted; thus if one didn't know enough, or misunderstood that certain things are halal, but the more knowledgeable scholars would have the proof for it being haram.

- ❖ Most of us, if we were not seminary students, would have done well financially. Now that we have forgone the world and have sold it off, even to a certain extent, let's concentrate a bit and make sure the price of this would be paradise.
- ❖ We, the seminary students, have willingly covered the first half of this course, let's finish the remaining half. We have endured half of the hardship, so let's endure the remaining. The opportunity is before us to try our fortune, so let's try our fortune, and begin with the simplest qualities; let's begin with a friendly and pleasant attitude to the people, which is easier than giving while in need, or being honest and observing justice even at our own cost.
- ❖ Let's look at the prohibited conducts that we might come across. Because every individual will come across certain of those proscribed acts, and let him resolve not to commit those forbidden acts he will come across. There might be some illicit conducts that one will not be able to do them, or come anywhere near. For example, a seminary student will not normally resort to drinking alcohol, because he will not be in a position to do so; rather he would not even think about it, and would not imagine himself doing it. Similarly for the case of stealing, or defrauding when giving measure for example. However, he might commit backbiting, or hurting or insulting others. So let him identify the prohibited acts he might come across and resolve to refrain from them.
- ❖ Amongst the obligation of the seminary students are self-discipline, giving guidance, and pleasantly expressing themselves.
- ❖ We, the seminary students, not only are responsible for our own selves, but also for those under our tutelage; for they monitor us for everything, every conduct, even minor, casual, or spontaneous acts.

- ❖ You shouldn't say, we are seminary students, we pray, fast, read the Qur'an, study, teach, give sermons, and write books [and so we are ok]; because Satan concentrates on you more than anyone else, and it [Satan] does not need anyone else while it itches for you; you are its first and greatest priority.
- ❖ It is imperative that you, the seminary students, are always busy studying, teaching, and writing books.
- ❖ You, the seminary students, who have, mostly, forgone most of life's pleasures for Allah's sake, why don't you complete the task by dedicating everything purely to the Almighty? You need to begin and try, and the Almighty will help you step by step until you achieve your goal. As for the hardship in that, it is something natural, and one needs to train and continue with the endeavor, and seek help from the Almighty.