161081 - How much Islamic knowledge should one acquire?

the question

I am a student in medical school, and you know the hard work that is required in this field, which usually makes it difficult to spend a lot of time in seeking Islamic knowledge. What is the minimum limit of Islamic knowledge that a person cannot do without learning and which, if he acquires it, he will have complied with the words of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), “Seeking knowledge is obligatory” and if he does not go beyond that, he will not have been negligent in learning about his religion?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Some knowledge is an individual obligation that every Muslim must learn, and no one who is ignorant of it will be excused when he is able to learn it. That knowledge includes the fundamentals and essential parts of faith without which one’s faith cannot be complete, such as acquiring knowledge of Allah as Lord, Sovereign and Controller, Who has no partner in His Lordship; learning that He possesses all attributes of perfection and majesty, free of any shortcomings or defects; believing in the names and attributes of Allah narrated in the religious texts, without distorting their meanings, misinterpreting them, denying them or likening them to the attributes of His creation; and believing in His divinity and that He alone is deserving of worship, and devoting all types of worship to Him alone, with no partner or associate, and not to anything or anyone other than Allah.

That also includes acquiring knowledge about His Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), believing in him as a messenger and final prophet, believing in what he told us, obeying him with regard to what he instructed us to do, keeping away from what he prohibited to us and disallowed, and not worshipping Allah except in the ways that he prescribed.

It also includes acquiring knowledge about the religion of Islam, which means learning about the definitive principles, what is definitively permitted and what is definitively prohibited, which the scholars referred to as any issue of religion that is well established and widely known among the Muslims, such as the knowledge that prayer, zakah and so on are obligatory; being aware of the prohibition on associating others with Allah (shirk), defiantly disobeying parents, fornication and adultery, consuming riba (usury), and so on.

In addition to that, it is obligatory to acquire that knowledge without which religious obligations cannot be done soundly, such as the rulings pertaining to prayer, which means learning about its essential parts, conditions, obligatory actions and what invalidates it; and learning what is connected to it of rulings on purification and the like. The same applies to every religious obligation that is required of you.

It also includes acquiring knowledge of rulings pertaining to any interactions: whether they are permissible or not, the conditions required for the transaction to be valid, and when this transaction may be deemed contrary to Islamic teachings. Examples include the rulings on marriage for the one who wants to get married, rulings on partnerships for one who wants to enter into a business partnership, and other kinds of interactions and transactions.

In all of these matters, you must acquire knowledge about how to worship Allah in the prescribed manner and how to conduct your interactions and transactions in the correct manner, without going against Islamic teachings.

Any Islamic knowledge other than the above is a communal obligation; if sufficient people undertake it, the sin [of not learning it] is waived from the others.

See: *Al-`Ilm* by Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin, p. 23.

But the matter is more straightforward than you think. Whatever the Muslim needs to know on a daily basis of the rulings on purification and prayer; and what he needs to know after that of the rulings on fasting, zakah and so on; and what he needs before that to ensure that his creed and faith are sound – all of that is readily available and may be acquired within a short time, without

much effort, either by reading books written in an easy style or listening to lessons from trustworthy scholars.

As for anything more than that, such as detailed rulings on interactions and transactions and the like, which is not needed on a regular basis, it is sufficient for him to ask scholars about any issue that arises, or ask them about anything he is thinking of doing before he does it. Allah, may He be Exalted, says, advising His slaves: {So [O people] ask those who have knowledge, if you do not know } [Al-Anbiya' 21:7].

But everyone whom Allah has blessed with the ability to understand and learn should strive hard to increase his Islamic knowledge whenever he has the opportunity and his circumstances allow him to do so, each according to his energy and ability, for this is one of the best ways to draw close to Allah and one of the greatest acts of worship, if his intention is sincere and his purpose is sound.

We ask Allah, may He be Exalted, to help us all to do that which is good and leads to a good outcome in this world and the hereafter. And Allah knows best.

For more information, see the answer to question no. 76010.