21590 - He loves knowledge - how may he attain it?

the question

I am a young man aged 21. I observe the obligatory duties, praise be to Allaah, and I have memorized the Qur'aan completely. I have a very good memory and I love books very much. I want to seek knowledge, and I attend study circles and lessons in fiqh, 'aqeedah and hadeeth, but I am certain that this is not enough and that the seeker of knowledge has to work hard. I want to memorize, read and study, but I do not know how, with what or where to start. For a long time I have been jumping from one book to another without any method. My fear is that my precious life will pass in studying matters that were not worth spending so much time on. My wish is to follow in the footsteps of Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen (may Allaah have mercy on him) and earn reward like him and more, by the grace of Allaah, whether my life is long or short. This is what I want and this is what I will attain, by the will of Allaah, no matter what it takes. I will pay the price of that by giving up my youth, leisure time, happiness, sleep and laziness.

These are not just words spoken at a time of zeal; this is what preoccupies my thoughts night and day. I am serious and I hope that you can pay me some attention even if it only a reply to this letter. I want to know whether I can achieve that, i.e., what I have mentioned above – or if it is too late – and how I can do that. May Allaah reward you with good.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Who has given you these lofty ambitions, bestowed blessings upon you and guided you to the path of truth with the clearest proof.

And blessings and peace be upon the Prophet of this ummah, who explained the proof and guided mankind to the path to Paradise.

My dear brother, I offer you my warmest congratulations.

What a great blessing Allaah has bestowed upon you and what great favour He has given you. He has helped you to memorize the Qur'aan, praise be to Allaah in the beginning and at the end. Then He has made knowledge dear to you, and this is one of the greatest blessings. "Whomever Allaah wills good for, He causes him to understand the religion." And "whoever gains knowledge has gained great good fortune" – because Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Allaah will exalt in degree those of you who believe, and those who have been granted knowledge"

[al-Mujaadilah 58:11]

Then He blessed you even further, and gave you a sublime ambition and an ambitious soul, and we ask Allaah to increase you in goodness.

Having a sublime ambition is one of the greatest of things and an honour. So you have to be thankful to Allaah and do the right thing with regard to that which you have been given.

With regard to the books which you should study, they are listed in question #20191; please refer to this question as it is very important.

After you have memorized the summarized books properly, with their commentaries, and you have understood any difficult passages in them and understood the important points, then move on to studying the detailed versions, always reviewing what you have learned and noting the valuable points, subtle issues, strange minor issues, solutions to problems and differences between similar rulings, in all branches of knowledge. Do not think little of anything useful that you learn or any basic principle that you understand; instead, hasten to note and memorize it.

Let your concern to seek knowledge be uppermost; do not be content to learn only a little when you are able to do more. Do not be content with a little of the legacy of the Prophets (may the blessings of Allaah be upon them), and do not delay learning anything that you can, or be distracted or put off by wishful thinking. Delay is a problem, and if you learn something now you can learn something else later.

Make the most of your time, when you are free and when you are busy. Make the most of your youth when your mind is fresh and you have less distractions, before you become distracted by false ambitions and the desire for worldly possessions.

You should try to obtain as many of the books you need as you can, because they are the tools of learning. Do not make getting and keeping a lot of them (without benefiting from them) the only share of knowledge that you have, and collecting them the only share of understanding that you have. You also have to use and benefit from them as much as you can.

We ask Allaah to grant you strength. And Allaah knows best.