175320 - Female student is asking about guidelines and limits in her relationship with male teachers?

the question

I am a new student in the University, specifically in the College of Shari`ah and Islamic Studies. Please advise me about the etiquette of receiving knowledge from the shaykhs: what are the things I should be keen to do and what are the things that I must avoid? The reason for my question in particular is that they are men, and dealing with them is not like dealing with women, because there are some restrictions on interacting with them. Therefore I would like to know my limits in detail. The shaykh I am learning from is like a father to his students, but I need to know what is permissible and what is not permissible.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim man and woman. The type of knowledge that a woman must learn is that which has to do with carrying out her religious duties and duties towards the family. The most appropriate people to teach her this knowledge, which will guarantee privacy and dignity for her, are her family, such as her father, mother, brother, sister, paternal uncle and maternal uncle, or her husband if she is married. In this way she will fulfil what is required of her in terms of seeking knowledge, and she will also fulfil another obligation, which is staying in her house. If she has no family member or husband who can teach her, then in that case she may learn from a fellow woman. If that option is not available to her, then there is nothing wrong with her seeking knowledge from men, provided that they are trustworthy and sincere, such as elderly shaykhs, not young men.

Ibn al-Jawzi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: A woman is an accountable person like a man, so she must seek knowledge of the religious duties are required of her, so that she will know what she is doing when she fulfils them. If she has a father, a brother, a husband or a mahram who can teach her the obligatory duties and how to do what is required of her, that is sufficient for her. If she has no close family member who can do that, she should ask and learn. If she is able to find a woman who can teach her that, she may learn from her, otherwise she may learn from older shaykhs and elders, without being alone with them, and learning from them only as much as is necessary. If something happens that requires a religious verdict, she should ask about it without feeling shy, because Allah is not too shy to tell the truth.(*Ahkam an-Nisa'*, p. 7).

Secondly:

The female student who is seeking knowledge from men must adhere to the conditions that make it permissible for her to learn from them. These conditions are:

1. Not being alone with the shaykh, no matter what the reason, whether that is in a classroom or his office.

It was narrated that Ibn `Abbas said: I heard the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) deliver a khutbah in which he said: "No man should be alone with a woman without there being a mahram present, and no woman should travel unless she has a mahram with her."

Narrated by al-Bukhari (1763) and Muslim (1341).

`Umar ibn `Abd al-`Aziz said: O Maymun ibn Mahran, I am going to give you some advice, so do not forget it: Beware of being alone with a woman who is not your mahram, even if you think that it is justifiable because you are going to teach her Quran.(*Hilyat al-Awliya'* by Abu Nu`aym al-Asbahani, 5/272).

In Hashiyat ar-Rawd al-Murbi` (6/2388) it says: It is prohibited to be alone with a non-mahram woman even for the purpose of teaching Quran, so as to bar the means that may lead to what should be avoided of temptation and being overwhelmed by a natural inclination towards the

opposite gender. End quote.

2. Adhering to correct hijab as prescribed in Islamic teachings

In the answers to questions no. 214 and 6991 you will find a description of hijab as prescribed for the woman in Islamic teachings.

3. Averting the gaze and being careful to avoid that which may lead to temptation and provocation of desire when learning

Allah, may He be Exalted, says: {Tell the believing men to avert their gaze [from that which is forbidden] and restrain their carnal desires; that will be more conducive to their purity. Verily, Allah is well aware of all that they do} [An-Nur 24:30].

4. Not speaking softly or in an alluring tone when asking or answering questions and reciting Quran.

Abul-`Abbas al-Qurtubi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: No ignorant person should think that when we say the woman's voice is `awrah that we mean her regular speech, because that is not correct. We allow women to speak to non-mahram men and converse with them when there is a need to do so, but we do not think it is permissible for them to raise their voices, elongate vowels, soften their voices or break up words, because these things may be tempting for men and may provoke their desire. Therefore it is not permissible for women to give the call to prayer.(*Kashf al-Qina` `an Hukm al-Wajd was-Sama`* p. 70).

Shaykh Muhammad ibn Salih al-`Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked:

A woman is saying: What is the ruling on beautifying the voice when reciting Quran for female students in front of the male teacher in the college, even though she is not required to do that?

He said: I do not think that she should beautify her voice, because Allah, may He be Exalted, says: {So do not speak too softly, lest one in whose heart is a disease should be moved with desire; but speak in an appropriate manner} [al-Ahzab 33:32]. So if the female student recites Quran in a

manner like singing, beautifying her voice, there is the fear that this could lead to temptation. Hence it is sufficient for her to recite Quran at a normal pace.(*Al-Liqa' ash-Shahri*, 41/question no. 11).

5. She should not study with men in mixed classrooms or universities.

We have quoted the evidence for the prohibition on mixing in the answer to question no. 1200.

Male and female students and male and female teachers should beware of temptation and the influence of desires. How much evil, temptation and sin takes place in educational institutions and universities. The Muslim should not be deceived by the fact that he is seeking or teaching Islamic knowledge, and think that he is not likely to be tempted; rather the Shaytan is very keen to mislead good and virtuous people so that he can tempt them to do that which incurs divine wrath, and he has his own special ways of making virtuous men and women fall into his traps, which no wise person can be unaware of, starting with admiration and with some Islamic phrases such as supplication and praise, then people may quickly continue in that path, following the footsteps of the Shaytan until they fall into that of which the consequences are not good.