84018 - Studying Islamic knowledge (sharee’ah sciences) in order to get a certificate and a job

the question

What is your opinion on someone who gets a university certificate in sharee’ah sciences and his motive is to get a job? Is that included in the hadeeth which contains a warning or will repentance erase that from him? If he gets a job using this certificate, are his earnings from that haraam?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

One should have a good intention when seeking knowledge, and should seek it with the aim of attaining Allaah’s pleasure by doing so. He should intend to rid himself and others of ignorance. If he strives to obtain a certificate for the sake of getting a job, there is no sin in that, and he should intend to use this job to help him to obey Allaah and serve the Muslims.

But if his motive is limited only to getting the job for the sake of getting a salary or position and other worldly interests, and he does not intend to use it to help him obey Allaah and serve the Muslims, or any other good intentions, then he is in grave danger and is included in the stern warning that is narrated in the hadeeth in which the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Whoever acquires knowledge which should be sought for the sake of Allaah, but he only learns it in order to attain some worldly goal, he will not smell the fragrance of Paradise on the Day of Resurrection.” Narrated by Abu Dawood (3664). Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Abi Dawood.

He has to correct his intention, and repent to Allaah, for repentance erases the sins that came before it. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The one who repents from sin is like one who did not sin at all.” Narrated by Ibn Maajah (4250); classed as hasan by al-Albaani in Saheeh Ibn Maajah.

As for the earnings that come from the job he gets with this certificate, it seems that there is nothing wrong with them, so long as the work that he does is permissible.

The Standing Committee was asked: Is it permissible to undertake religious studies in order to get a certificate?

They replied: There is nothing wrong with studying in order to get a certificate, but he must strive to ensure that his intention in studying is for the sake of Allaah alone, and that getting the certificate will help him to obey Allaah and His Messenger and serve the Muslims.

End quote from Fataawa al-Lajnah al-Daa'imah (12/103).

Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen (may Allaah have mercy on him) was asked: Some seekers of shar'i knowledge feel awkward about their seeking knowledge and a certificate. How can the seeker of knowledge rid himself of this awkwardness.

He replied:

That may be answered in several ways:

1 – They should not seek the certificate for its own sake, rather they should use these certificates as a means to work in fields that will benefit people, because jobs nowadays are based on certification, and people usually cannot benefit people except through this means. Thus the intention will become sound.

2 – The one who is seeking knowledge may not find it anywhere except in these colleges, so he may enter them with the intention of seeking knowledge, and it does not matter if he gets any certificates after that.

3 – If a person intends to attain two types of goodness at the same time – goodness in this world and goodness in the Hereafter, there is nothing wrong with that, because Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"And whosoever fears Allaah and keeps his duty to Him, He will make a way for him to get out

(from every difficulty).

3. And He will provide him from (sources) he never could imagine. And whosoever puts his trust in Allaah, then He will suffice him. Verily, Allaah will accomplish his purpose. Indeed Allaah has set a measure for all things”

[al-Talaaq 65:2-3]

This is an encouragement to fear Allaah with regard to worldly affairs.

If it is said: If a person seeks some worldly goal in his work, how can it be said that he is sincere?

The answer is that if he is sincere in his worship and does not intend to show off or seek people’s praise for his worship, rather he is seeking some material benefit from this worship, then he is not like one who shows off and tries to draw closer to people by doing something that should be done only in order to draw closer to Allaah, wanting them to praise him for it. However, his seeking this material gain could detract from his sincerity and could become a kind of shirk, and his status could become lower than that of one who seeks the Hereafter only.

I would like to take this opportunity to point out that when some people speak about the benefits of acts of worship they speak only of worldly benefits. For example, they say that prayer is a kind of exercise and calms the nerves, and the fasting helps to remove toxins and organize one’s eating. We should not make worldly benefits the be-all and end-all, because that will lead to a weakening of sincerity and failure to seek the Hereafter. Hence Allaah stated the reason for fasting in His Book, namely that it beings about taqwa (piety, fear of Allaah). The religious benefits are what really matter, and the worldly benefits are secondary. When we speak to the common people we should tell them about the religious aspects, and when we speak to those who are not convinced by anything but material matters we should tell them about both the religious and worldly aspects. For each there is a time and a place. End quote from al-‘Ilm by Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allaah have mercy on him).

And Allaah knows best.