

# A Translation of Imam Bazdawi's Preface to Usul al-Bazdawi

*Imam Ali b. Muhammad al-Bazdawi · adapted by Amjad Nawaz*

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Praise be to Allah, the Creator of souls and the Provider of sustenance, the Originator of marvels, and the Lawgiver of the divine laws of a pleasing religion, a radiant light, a reminder for mankind, and a means to the eternal abode of peace. I praise Him for His boundless grace and power, and I seek His help in attaining His Pleasure and the means of His Forgiveness.

I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, with no partners, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger. May Allah send blessings upon him, his family, his companions, and upon all the prophets and messengers and their followers.

Thus writes the esteemed Imam, the ascetic, Abu al-Hasan Ali b. Muhammad al-Bazdawi: Knowledge is of two types. The first is knowledge of the Divine Singularity and Its Attributes. The second is knowledge of jurisprudence, constitution, and law.

## THE FIRST TYPE OF KNOWLEDGE

### **Aqidah**

The fundamental purpose of the first is to hold fast to the Book of Allah and the Sunnah, to avoid whims and heresy, and to adhere to the Way of the Sunnah and Endoxa, the consensuses which the Sahabah and Tabi'in agreed upon, the righteous tread, and our teachers acquired, may Allah have mercy on them all.

Part of that consensus were our pious predecessors, namely, Imam Abu Hanifah, Imam Abu Yusuf, Imam Muhammad, and the rest of their acolytes.

Historically, Imam Abu Hanifah had a book written on the topic called al-Fiqh al-Akbar. Therein, he establishes the Divine Attributes and the concept of Predestination from Allah Most High for both good and bad, and that all occurrences are due to His Will. He demonstrated that we have the ability to perform our actions, as well as the fact that every action of every servant is created via the creative agency of Allah Most High.

He also wrote a book called al-Alim wa al-Muta'allim, and a third called al-Risalah. In al-Risalah, he writes that no one shall be anathematized for a sin, nor will he be excommunicated from faith because of it. Instead, mercy shall be sought for him.

Thus, he was, in the knowledge of credal fundamentals, a truthful doyen. It is reliably narrated from Imam Abu Yusuf, Allah's mercy be upon him, that he debated with Imam Abu Hanifah on the issue of the Quran's Creation for six months, and that by the end his opinion sided with his teacher's.

The same sentiment is also reliably transmitted from Imam Muhammad. As such, the various issues from our scholars, both in our tomes and in our shorter books, denote very clearly that they never leaned toward any form of Secessionism, or toward any other evil impulses.

Instead, they advocated for the truth of veridically seeing Allah with our vision in the Afterworld, the truth of sepulchral punishment for whoever Allah wills, and for the truth of the creation of Paradise and Hellfire.

They advocated for the truth of all the occurrences of the Afterworld as spoken of by the Book of Allah and the Sunnah. And this is all a chapter long in its exposition.

## THE SECOND TYPE OF KNOWLEDGE

### **Fiqh**

The second type of knowledge, the knowledge of jurisprudential branches, otherwise known as fiqh, is of three subtypes. The first is knowledge of legislation itself. The second is an elite recognition of legislation — in other words, knowing the canonical texts and their meanings, as well as having proper retention of legal principles and their subordinate issues. The third is praxis on those legislations, a goal until which knowledge by itself has no purpose.

If every single one of these subtypes is achieved, a person has achieved fiqh.

This idea is even denoted when Allah titles the knowledge of the Shari'ah 'Wisdom'. He Most Hallowed says: He gives Wisdom to whoever He wills. And whoever is given Wisdom has been given a Great Boon.

Ibn Abbas interprets 'Wisdom', wherever it appears in the Quran, as 'Knowledge of the Lawful and the Unlawful.'

Allah Most High also says: Call to the path of your Lord with Wisdom and Good Exhortation. Meaning: call to the path of your Lord with the fiqh of the Shari'ah, because the term 'Wisdom' is originally an expression for knowledge coupled with practice.

Likewise, the origin of this term, which is derived from the concept of fiqh, further supports this definition: knowledge characterized by elite precision, coupled with the practice of applying that knowledge.

A poet once said: I sent forth to them a studhorse to plunge stolidly in — an expert, an understanding practitioner, sailing from barge to barge. The poet called the studhorse a faqih because of its knowledge of how to breed properly and how not to breed properly, as well as its ability to apply that knowledge accordingly.

Anyone who understands this point will be an absolute faqih. If not, he will be an unformed faqih; a jurist from only some angles but not others.

Allah Most High reinforces this concept with His Exalted Verse: If only there was a group from every faction of them that stayed back, a group that could gain deep, practical understanding of religion and warn their people when they return to them.

The warning mentioned here is itself a form of practice, and it is made the purpose of the understanding that precedes it. Knowledge that terminates in itself is therefore not what the verse describes.

Our teachers, may Allah have mercy upon them, were unanimous that the student who memorises without acting has acquired the form of the science and not the science. This is the sense in which the early generations spoke of knowledge as a trust.

And it is upon this foundation that the chapters which follow are built.

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