

Seeking knowledge

The one increase the Prophet ﷺ was instructed in the Qur’an to ask for was knowledge. The texts treat it as a road, with angels on it and a reward at its end.



★ The one thing to ask more of

وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا

“And say: my Lord, increase me in knowledge.” Of everything that could have been asked for, this is what was named.

Qur’an 20:114

★ Taught by the pen

الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ

“...who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know.” The first revelation opens on reading and writing.

Qur’an 96:4 • 96:5

★ Not equal

قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

“Say: are those who know equal to those who do not know?” The question is left standing as a question.

Qur’an 39:9

★ Who actually fears Him

إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ

“It is only those of His servants who have knowledge that fear Allah.” Knowledge is measured by what it does to the heart.

Qur’an 35:28

★ Raised in degrees

يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ

“Allah will raise those who believed among you, and those given knowledge, in degrees.” Faith first, then knowledge, in one sentence.

Qur’an 58:11

★ A road made easy

وَمَنْ سَلَكَ طَرِيقًا يَلْتَمِسُ فِيهِ عِلْمًا سَهَّلَ اللَّهُ لَهُ بِهِ طَرِيقًا إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ

“Whoever treads a path seeking knowledge, Allah will make easy for him by it a path to Paradise.”

Sahih Muslim, Kitab adh-Dhikr

★ Wings lowered for him

وَإِنَّ الْمَلَائِكَةَ لَتَضَعُ أَجْنِحَتَهَا رِضًا لِطَالِبِ الْعِلْمِ

“The angels lower their wings in pleasure for the seeker of knowledge.” And: the scholars are heirs of the prophets, who left knowledge, not coin.

Sunan Abi Dawud 3641 • at-Tirmidhi 2682 • sahih

★ Understanding is given

مَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ بِهِ خَيْرًا يُفَقِّهْهُ فِي الدِّينِ، وَاللَّهُ الْمُعْطِي

“Whoever Allah wishes good for, He gives him understanding of the religion — and Allah is the one who gives, and I only distribute.”

Sahih al-Bukhari 3116 • 71

★ How it is lost

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا لَمْ يَبْقَ عَالِمًا، اتَّخَذَ النَّاسُ رُءُوسًا جُهَالًا فَسِيلُوا، فَأَفْتَوْا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ، فَضَلُّوا وَأَضَلُّوا

“Allah takes knowledge by taking the scholars — until, when no scholar is left, people take the ignorant as leaders; they are asked, and answer without knowledge.”

Sahih al-Bukhari 100