

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Speech of Abde-Ali bhaisaheb (bin Syedi Mazoon Saheb)  
In felicitation function of his PhD  
Evan-e-Husaini, Bombay  
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It is a great privilege and honour for me today to be standing here before you with a deep feeling of gratitude in my heart. Allah taala says in the holy Quran: وما بكم من نعمة فمن الله: لان شكرتم لازيدنكم  
all good fortune and bounties are the blessings of Allah, and

I take this opportunity today to express my deep gratitude and *shukr* to Allah taala for all his blessings and *ne'am* especially the blessing and *ne'mat* of '*ilm*. The greatness and magnitude of this bounty cannot be overstated. Amirul mumineen Ali b abi Talib SA has said: العلم خير من المال, that the wealth of knowledge is much more valuable than worldly possession, especially the eternal knowledge of the Quran [and Islam] which has been given to us by Allah taala through his messenger Muhammad SLA and his Ahlul-bait which benefits its student not just in this life but also in the hereafter. This is the power of '*ilm* which transforms the worldly into the heavenly, it enriches the soul and makes it worthy to abide forever in *jannat al-firdaws*.

Rasulullah SLA in this well known *hadith* has said: طلب العلم فريضة على كل مسلم و مسلمة, the pursuit of knowledge is mandatory upon all Muslim men and women. However, of the many thousands rather millions, it is but a few, such as the students assembled here today, who get the chance to pursue the higher degrees of learning. It is a great boon from Allah taala which the student must realise and act upon, grabbing this opportunity with both hands, sparing no effort, making steadfast endeavour, with a single-minded focus to achieve the goal now in sight.

Amirul mumineen SA describes this long journey toward obtaining knowledge in two *abyat* or lines of poetry:   
اخي لن تتال العلم الا بسنة ساتيك عن افصاحها ببيان  
ذكاء و حرص واصطبار و بلغة و صحبة استاذ و طول زمان

O brother, he says, with great affection, you will not attain knowledge except with six things: 1. intelligence, 2. aspiration, endeavour, 3. perseverance, endurance and forbearance, 4. competency, 5. association with a teacher and, 6. time.

1) Intelligence: The fifty-first Dai al-Mutlaq Syedna Taher Saifuddin said that it is the generosity of the Creator that He has given human beings a priceless jewel which is the mind. He has endowed this mind with intelligence. The mind shines in his soul as the moon shines in the sky. Syedna al-muayyad al-shirazi emphasises the importance of this fact. All men, he says, have a purpose in their actions. Then would not God almighty in his eternal wisdom have a purpose in the creation of this vast universe, in the creation of human beings as highly intelligent creatures. The purpose is to communicate to them the message of the hereafter through his messengers, the message of Islam through his messenger, Muhammad Mustafa SLA. True intelligence is in the acceptance of this message, which fulfils the purpose intended by the Creator in the creation of the mind.

2) Endeavour and Aspiration: *Hirs* can also be translated as greed. Amirul mumineen has said that only in the attainment of knowledge is greed a desirable characteristic.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century AD, 10<sup>th</sup> century hijri, Syedi Aminji bin Jalal, the son of Syedna Jalal, the 25<sup>th</sup> Dai al mutlaq, was an avid Fatimi jurist and scholar, and an exemplar in the service of Dai Dawat and community. He stayed up many a nights reading and authoring books of *fiqh*, or Islamic jurisprudence. His dedicated and loving wife confided to the then Dai Syedna Dawood that Aminji does not come to me even till late at night. Syedna suggested to her that she put less oil in Aminji's lamp, so that it might burn out early. She did that, but by the karamat of Allah taala, when the oil ran out, the lamp continued burning and Syedi Aminji continued writing as always. Syedna Dawood learning of this from Syedi Aminji's wife said to her that this was a *karamat* from Allah taala, and that she should leave things as they were. Thus Amirul mumineen Ali b abi talib has said that only three things warrant burning the midnight oil or staying up late into the night: 1. prayer, *ibadat*, 2. the pursuit of knowledge, and 3. in the companionship of one's husband or wife. [So students who are married need not loose sleep over Syedi Aminji's story.]

Syedna Taher Saifuddin, the 51<sup>st</sup> dai al-mutlaq, and father of our Dai Syedna Mohammad Burhanuddin and our Mazoon Syedi Khuzaima bhaisaheb Qutbuddin was the epitome of Islamic scholarship and learning. In his 53 years in office as Dai al-mutlaq he authored 53 volumes of Islamic philosophy, literature, and more than ten thousand verses of Arabic poetry. Even with his full schedule of programs as Dai, he taught up to 30 classes a day. Above all this he trained his successor, Syedna Mohammad Burhanuddin to perfection, to become Mazoon in his time and to eventually succeed him as Dai. Syedna Mohammad Burhanuddin, just as his father before him, became a paragon of scholarship and learning. Syedna Taher Saifuddin also trained his son Khuzaima bhaisaheb so thoroughly that Syedna Mohammad Burhanuddin elevated him to the lofty designation of Mazoon when he became Dai.

3. Perseverance, endurance and forbearance: In the mid tenth century AD, the mid 16<sup>th</sup> hijri, an avid young Indian scholar of Islam went to Yemen to pursue the highest level of learning from the Dai then based in Yemen. He was the most dedicated of the Dai's students, so much so that he did not open any of the letters that he received from his family in India for fear that one of them might contain, God forbid, worrying news, which might distract him from his studies. Only after many years of tireless learning whilst returning to India on a ship did he open the letters. His name was Syedna Yusuf Najmuddin, and he was appointed the 24<sup>th</sup> Dai al-mutlaq, the first in India as the base of the Dai's office shifted here from Yemen.

There are the shrines of two youths in Ahmadabad who lived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century AD / 11<sup>th</sup> century hijri. It is said that in the face of great adversity, risking their lives from the attacks of envious enemies, on the night of their marriage they were making their way to the secret abode of the Dai of the time for lessons from him when they were killed.

If examples as shining as these, of endeavour, perseverance, endurance and forbearance, do not inspire us as students, albeit in our humble capacities, to endeavour to persevere, to excel in our learning, then what will?

4. Competency: Many of our Du'at have said, especially Syedna Mohammad Burhanuddin TUS that we must recognise that knowledge is a progression. A child cannot run before it can walk, and therefore it is wise to be patient in achieving the competency which allows you to move higher and higher. The base of any building is the most important, so too is the base of the building of knowledge. It is obvious that a student who wishes to be a doctor must first become well versed in the basics of human anatomy, so too one who wishes to learn the highest philosophy of Islam must first become well versed with its basic tenets, the pillars of Islam, the fundamentals of prayer and belief. A true grounding and progression in the right direction can only be achieved with the aid of the right teacher.

5. Association with a teacher: It has been said by one of the great Dais, لا بد من معلم, in the pursuit of learning one must have a teacher, a guide, a mentor. Learning is a great and arduous journey, which requires a guide who shows the way, unravels the mysteries, and engraves the true meaning of the knowledge on the hearts and minds his students. A wise man once said: العلم في الصدور وليس في السطور, that knowledge is kept safe in the hearts of the learned, not in the lines of books. It is this knowledge which truly enlightens an enquiring mind.

In ancient times a great philosopher was breathing his last breaths. He saw that his students were all around him and they were all weeping. He said to them, why do you cry for me, the place that I go to is much more bountiful and carefree than the troublesome world of this earth; and even though I am pained to leave you my beloved students behind, I go to join the company of my peers. They replied to him, we do not cry for you, we cry for us, for who will guide us, teach us, show us the true knowledge, enlighten us and enrich us with pearls of wisdom when you are gone from our midst.

Syedna al-muayyad al-shirazi therefore said, never leave a true guide and teacher once you have found him, even if he puts you to the gravest test, for it is he who will lead you to the hereafter.

I have been more than fortunate to have had the *barakat* of Syedna Taher Saifuddin, the doa mubarak and nazarat of Syedna Mohammad Burhanuddin, and the doa and continuous guidance of my father Syedi Mazoon Saheb. There are no words that can express the gratitude that I feel in this regard toward my father, Syedi Mazoon Saheb tus who has been my guide my inspiration, my mentor, my teacher – for lack of anything more to say within the bounds of language and speech. It is you who showed me the way, who encouraged me, who kept me going in times of difficulty, who guided me, in learning and in life, and who above all, prayed for me, did doa for me always. It is to you that I dedicate my PhD.

From early in life Syedi Mazoon Saheb impressed upon us the importance of learning. He taught us that knowledge are the building blocks of life, and the hereafter, knowledge enlightens the mind, it makes us see and understand the world around us, but more than that it lets us comprehend those higher truths which are beyond the reach of our human senses: the meaning and purpose of life. Syedi Mazoon Saheb has always encouraged us to go to school, madrasa, college and university. I myself went to school here in Bombay. Syedi Mazoon Saheb and my mother then sent me to Australia for one year in the 9<sup>th</sup> standard, where I went to a school called the Geelong Grammar School, Timbertop. It was in the mountains, and we lived as groups, 15 boys in one log cabin. There was an emphasis on rigorous outdoor activities such as cross country running and hiking. Syedi Mazoon Saheb also visited the school and the headmaster was greatly impressed and very respectful, and seated them in the place of honour at the head table. Syedi Mazoon Saheb asked him what the main purpose of their rigorous program was. He said that the development of physical strength in our students is not the main purpose, rather, it is the development of mental strength so that our students when they go out into the world will be equipped and capable of facing any challenges that they meet. I was 15 years of age at the time. I was the only Muslim in the school, but they gave me a special room for prayer. My three brothers also went through the same experience and I am thankful to Allah taala that even at that young age and in that environment we were able to fulfil our duties of prayer and fasting. It was only because of the conviction, strength, and confidence in our own beliefs that Syedi Mazoon Saheb had instilled into our hearts since early childhood that we were able to do this.

In all my years of study, from a BA in Cairo in the American University, to MA in London to PhD in Manchester, 15 years, that conviction has always become stronger. It was in American University in Cairo that a Muslim professor objected to me coming 5 minutes late to class even after I had explained to him that this was because of namaz, and there was no other time I could pray in. He called me to his office and threatened to fail me regardless of my work and grades. I said, very respectfully, that my duty to Allah taala comes before everything and pray I will, and I am sure you will do right by me. I eventually got very good marks in that course. In London, in my MA final exams, the last paper was fixed for Aashura day. I asked my professor that this was impossible for me, as I was obligated to attend our Aashura function. He said this is a board exam, the only way is to convince the university board to change the date. I went to the board, they said we will take your request into consideration if you get all the other students in the same class to sign their agreement, I did just that, got the agreements, gave it to the board, and they changed the date to the day before. I caught the flight right after the exam to mombasa where Syedna Mohammad Burhanuddin was performing Ashara sermons, and attended the Aashura function, alhamdulillah.

When I graduated from AUC, an American professor there asked me to come to Columbia Graduate school of Journalism where she was going. Columbia is reputed to be the best for journalism from where major media personalities graduate. But Abbasab tus said that you must study something which is directly related to us and our khidmat and service of Dai, dawat and community, hence I went to London to study Arabic language and literature further. My father has always stressed to all us his children, my brothers

and my sisters all of whom have excelled in universities, that even in the western university forum we must pursue our traditions and our knowledge. In the attainment of education we must not forget our roots, our traditions, our values. As Amirul mumineen has said: *ما احسن الدين و الدنيا اذا اجتمعا*, it is ideal if the activities of this world are combined with the activities of the hereafter, if life is lived according to the values of religion, then the best of both worlds can be achieved, this world and the next.

An Egyptian businessman, sitting next to me on the plane from London to Cairo recently was so amazed by Syedi Mazoon Saheb sending his daughters and sons for higher studies the way he has, he called me from Alexandria, Egypt where he lives and said that the achievements of your father are such that all Muslims would be proud. He said it is a source of honour for Islam itself.

But more than all the studies in all the universities and all the professors combined, which is greatly valuable to me, it is the lessons with Abbasab tus that I have had the great fortune to receive which have been the life forming force for me. My father has always said that his journey from Xavier's college to the sabaq lesson of Syedna Taher Saifuddin in Saify mahal in Malabar hill was just a few miles distance, but for him it was as if a thousand miles from the earth to the sky. The depth, and meaning of Syedna Taher Saifuddin's words from the Islamic books of knowledge was of such magnitude. It is this feeling that I try to convey.

The decision to go abroad for further studies was made all the more difficult because of this, of having to miss Syedi Mazoon Saheb's lessons for long periods. But he himself encouraged us and said that we do this with the intention of khidmat, of service to Dai, to Dawat to Islam. And I believe that this is what has driven me to achieve my goals.

6. Time: the time required to attain knowledge is long, it has been said in our books that even a lifetime of learning, twice over, would not be sufficient to learn all that is to learn of the knowledge of Ahlul-bait, so vast are the oceans of that knowledge.

It took me seven years to do the PhD, 15 if you start counting from the BA, and it was only one aspect of the innumerable facets of the knowledge that is the *'ilm* of Ahlul-bait. It requires many years of commitment and perseverance to do a PhD. It was only the doa of Aqa Mola Syedna Mohammad Burhanuddin that kept me going. In Burhanpur, in the Qubba Mubaraka of Hakimuddin mola he put his mubarak hand on my shoulder and said that *khuda kamyab kare*. It is only the encouragement doa and support of my father that kept me going in difficult times. There are also times when you might feel that it is too difficult, but doa is such a potent energiser that it can overcome all adversity, as it did for me. Syedi Mazoon Saheb tus graced my convocation ceremony in Manchester. All the professors in London and Manchester that we met were greatly impressed by the humility, the knowledge and the presence of his eminence.

I wish to thank the governor for his presence here today which has been a source of great encouragement for all the students present and has gone a long way in making this function a success.

I offer humble gratitude to my father. I would not have come this far were it not for him. He is the world for me. I also thank him for this unique opportunity to express my gratitude to Allah and to share my experiences with so many fellow students.

My mother has always encouraged us to pursue our goals with courage. It was her dream that her sons and daughters achieve and make the utmost efforts to gain the *'ilm* and education to do khidmat of Dai and dawat. I would say she is the ideal mother, and I express my inadequate gratitude.

And All those who have made great effort to make this occasion a great success, my brothers first and foremost, and all the members of Ghulamane Husain.

In ending I pray to almighty Allah that may He by the vasila of his Prophet Mohammad SLA, give longest life till qiyamat to our Aqa Mola Syedna Mohammad Burhanuddin, and to his Mazoon, Molai Khuzaima bhaisaheb Qutbuddin.

May He give the Honourable Governor good health and the strength to serve the Muslim community and the nation towards great progress as he has been doing for many years, and may He strengthen the ties of mohabbat between us all. May He give all of us students to endeavour and persevere towards achieving our goals not just in this life but also the next. ربنا آتانا في الدنيا حسنة وفي الآخرة حسنة و قنا عذاب النار برحمتك يا ارحم الراحمين