بسم اللہ الرحمن الرحیم

Who Is an ʿĀlim and Who Is a Muftī?

Darulifta Ahlesunnat (Dawateislami)

Question

What do the noble scholars and jurists of Islamic law say about the following: Can a person who studies Islāmic books be referred to as an ʿālim (scholar)? Also, who is a Muftī? Can someone who knowns the rulings of fiqh, answers people's questions, and studies islāmic jurisprudence be called a Muftī?

Answer

An ʿālim is someone who is fully knowledgeable about matters of Islāmic creed and has the capability to find his necessary rulings in books. Studying dars-e-nizāmī (ʿālim course) is not necessary to become an ʿālim, nor is it sufficient to have a degree. Instead, having knowledge is the fundamental criterion, whether it is attained through reading Islāmic books or by sitting in the company of an ʿālim and learning the necessary creed and rulings. Therefore, if someone studies religious content, is fully knowledgeable about the basic matters of creed, and is capable of finding his necessary rulings in books by himself, then he can be called an ʿālim.
As for a Muftī, merely knowing the rulings of fiqh and finding rulings in Urdu and Arabic books and then conveying them to people is not sufficient to become a Muftī. A Muftī is someone who has a deep and comprehensive understanding of the texts of fiqh, regularly and extensively studies fiqh, has a strong grasp of Tafsīr, Ḥadīth, Usūl al-Ḥadīth, and many other crucial sciences. Along with this, he must have practically written fatāwā under the tutelage of an experienced Muftī and then, due to his scholarly ability and expertise, obtained permission from his Muftī teacher to issue fatāwā. Such a person is worthy of being called a "Muftī".
Regarding what an ʿālim is, a question was asked in Malfūzāt-E-Aʿlā Ḥazrat: "What is the definition of an ʿālim?" Aʿlā Ḥazrat, the Imām of Ahl as-Sunnah, Imām Aḥmad Razā Khān رحمۃ اللہ تعالی علیہ answered as follows:

عالم کی تعریف یہ ہے کہ عقائد سے پورے طور پر آگاہ ہو اور مُستَقِل ہو اور اپنی ضروریات کو کتاب سے نکال سکے بغیر کسی کی مدد کے۔

Translation: The definition of an ʿālim is someone who is fully knowledgeable about matters of creed, is steadfast in it, and is capable of finding his necessary rulings from books without anyone's assistance.
He was also asked whether one can only attain knowledge by reading books. He رحمۃ اللہ تعالی علیہ replied:

یہی نہیں بلکہ علم "اَفواہِ رِجال" (یعنی علم والوں سے گفتگو کرکے اور مسائل معلوم کرنے) سے بھی حاصل ہوتا ہے۔

Translation: This is not the only way. Knowledge can also be attained by speaking to (and asking questions from) the people of knowledge. (Malfūzāt-E-Aʿlā Ḥazrat, p. 58, Publ. Maktaba-Tul-Madīnah, Karachi)

How much knowledge is required to become a Muftī and what level of expertise in Islāmic sciences is required for this? Regarding this, Aʿlā Ḥazrat Imām Aḥmad Razā Khān رحمۃ اللہ تعالی علیہ states:

حدیث و تفسیر و اصول و ادب و قدر حاجت ہیأت و ہندسہ و توقیت اور ان میں مہارت کافی اور ذہن صافی اور نظر وافی اور فقہ کا کثیر مشغلہ اور اشغال دنیویہ سے فراغ قلب اور توجہ الی اللہ اور نیت لوجہ اللہ اور ان سب کے ساتھ شرط اعظم توفیق من اللہ، جو ان شروط کا جامع وہ اس بحر ذخار میں شناوری کر سکتا ہے۔ مہارت اتنی ہو کہ اس کی اصابت اس کی خطا پر غالب ہو اور جب خطا واقع ہو رجوع سے عار نہ رکھے۔

Translation: Expertise in Tafsīr, Usūl, literature, and sufficient knowledge of astronomy, geometry, the science of timekeeping, along with proficiency in them and a clear mind, a thorough insight, extensive engagement with fiqh, freedom from worldly occupations, and devotion to Allah, sincerity for the pleasure of Allah, and most important of all, divine help from Allah. The one who possesses these qualities can dive into this deep ocean. His expertise should be enough that his accuracy remains dominant over his mistakes, and when he does make a mistake, he should not be hesitant to retract. (Fatāwā Razawiyah, Vol. 18, pp. 589-590, Publ. Razā Foundation, Lahore)

To become a Muftī, practicing writing fatāwā under the tutelage of an experienced Muftī for an extensive period is required because knowledge of issuing fatāwā does not come only from reading. Thus, Aʿlā Ḥazrat Imām Aḥmad Razā Khān رحمۃ اللہ تعالی علیہ states in Fatāwā Razawiyah:

سند کوئی چیز نہیں، بہتیرے سند یافتہ محض بے بہرہ ہوتے ہیں اور جنہوں نے سند نہ لی اُن کی شاگردی کی لیاقت بھی ان سند یافتوں میں نہیں ہوتی، علم ہونا چاہیئے اور علم الفتوی پڑھنے سے نہیں آتا جب تک مدتہا (یعنی طویل مدّت تک) کسی طبیب حاذق کا مطب نہ کیا ہو (یعنی ماہر مفتی کی صحبت میں رہ کر فتوے نہ لکھے ہوں)"۔

Translation: A degree has no value. Many degree holders are void of knowledge. They are not even capable of studying under those who don't hold any degrees. Knowledge is required, and knowledge does not come merely by reading fatāwā, until one spends an extended period practicing with an expert physician (i.e., until one spends a considerable amount of time writing fatāwā with the guidance of an expert Muftī). (Fatāwā Razawiyah, Vol. 23, pp. 683, Publ. Razā Foundation, Lahore)

Faqīh-E-Millat, Muftī Jalāluddīn Amjadī رحمۃ اللہ تعالی علیہ writes in the preface of Fatāwā Mustafawiyah:

عالم اور خود مدرسے والے یہ سمجھتے ہیں کہ درس نظامیہ کا ہر وہ فارغ التحصیل جس کی کچھ صلاحیت ہو، وہ فتوی دے سکتا ہے۔ حالانکہ درسی کتابیں پڑھنے سے علم الفتوی حاصل نہیں ہوتا مگر جس پر اللہ تعالی کا خاص فضل ہو جائے۔۔۔۔ مفتی شریف الحق امجدی رحمۃ اللہ علیہ تحریر فرماتے ہیں کہ ذہین سے ذہین علماء برسہا برس تک مشاقی کرنے اور ماہر فن مفتی سے اصلاح لینے کے بعد اس پر قادر ہوتے ہیں کہ وہ ایک مکمل فتوی لکھیں۔

Translation: Scholars, and people affiliated with a madrasah, believe that a person who completes the dars-e-nizāmī and has possesses some capability can issue a fatwā. However, reading books of the curriculum does not teach the knowledge of fatwā writing, except for one upon whom Allāh bestows his special mercy… Muftī Sharīf-Ul-Ḥaq Amjadī رحمۃ اللہ تعالی علیہ writes: Even the most intelligent scholars only become capable of writing a complete fatwā after years of practice and receiving

correction and guidance from an expert Muftī in the field. (Fatāwā Mustafawiyah, pp. 7-8, Publ. Shabbīr Brothers, Lahore)

وَاللّٰہُ اَعْلَمُ عَزَّوَجَلَّ وَرَسُوْلُہ اَعْلَم صَلَّی اللّٰہُ تَعَالٰی عَلَیْہِ وَاٰلِہٖ وَسَلَّم

(Allah Almighty knows best and His Messenger صَلَّی اللّٰہُ عَلَیْہِ وَاٰلِہٖ وَسَلَّم knows best.)

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Ref No: FAM-958
Date: 15th Shawwāl al-Mukarram 1447 AH / 04th April 2026

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