

أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَنِ الرَّجِيمِ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ كَمَا هُوَ أَهْلُ الْصَّلَاةِ وَالسَّلَامِ عَلَى سَيِّدِ الْعَبْدِ وَرَبِّ الْأَدَمِ كَمَا يُحِبُّ وَيُرْضِي إِنَّمَا يُصْلِلُ عَلَيْهِ

Allah Almighty, in Whose Name we begin, The Most Compassionate,

The Most Merciful

All Praise is due to Allah Almighty, Countless Peace and Blessings be upon  
His Beloved Messenger – *may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* – his family & his  
companions – *may Allah be pleased with them all*

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## The Role of Religious Institutes

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There is no doubt that Islam has always encouraged the seeking of knowledge and made this a main stabilising factor in the life of a Muslim. This was first established at the very beginning of Islam when the Holy Prophet - *may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* - emphasised the importance of knowledge.

When we look at the Holy Qur'an we will see that the acquisition of knowledge has always been based firstly on the knowledge of the Holy Qur'an. The Qur'an informs us that we should read the Qur'an and study it further. The first teacher of the Qur'an was the Holy Prophet - *may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*. The Holy Prophet - *may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* - had also stated that, "I have been sent to teach." He taught the blessed Ashaab and they taught others and this system has continued.

This is the reason that from an early age, the Madressah used to be based in the actual Jamia Masjid and people coming to the Masjid used to gain knowledge there. However, as the years passed by, this system began to expand and many different faculties were created. At the same time, when the students learned properly, they also had their own group of students and their students also developed their own students, etc. As a matter of fact, depending on the country, it was said that this is a Shirazi group or a Kharkhi group, etc. and in every Masjid, there was also a library.

At the same time, the dissemination of knowledge was not only confined to the Masjid. It continued in places where travellers spend the night, in houses, etc. Those who were in power or had wealth used to call the teachers to their houses or palaces to give personal tuition to their children or other members of their family.

### **The very first Madressahs**

There is no doubt that when we look at the history of Islam, we will find that giants of knowledge in different subjects were born over the ages. Most of them did not have a proper Madressah under their control as we have in the present climate.

The historians are unanimous in the fact the first official Madressah was established in the middle of the 5th Century of Hijrah by the advisor of the Saljuqi Dynasty and also the advisor of Sultan Alap Arsalan, namely Nizaamul Mulk Tusi. The type of knowledge being given in this Madressah also played a large part in spreading its message. It had different faculties such as a religious faculty, a faculty for Islamic Jurisprudence, language or linguistics, etc. Following this example, many Sultans and leaders of their era copied this and they also started to give this education free of charge.

Among the famous patrons of this was Sultan Noorudeen Zanghi - *may Allah be pleased with him*. He established Madressahs in cities such as Damascus, Halb, Hums, etc. After him, Sultan Salaahudeen Ayyubi - *may Allah be pleased with him* - also established his own Madressahs. They were established in the same format as the one before it. He established these Madressahs in Cairo, Alexandria, Baitul Muqaddas, etc. Those who came after him also followed his example. It is said that these major Islamic institutes in that period reached nearly twenty five in number.

In the period of the Uthmaniyyah Dynasty, the first person to establish a Madressah was Sultan Awra Khan (761 A.H.). After him, many of his successors also did the same. The most famous Madressah was one which was built and established by Sultan Salim. In Damascus, the number of Madressahs were nearly twenty and nearly thirty existed in Baghdad Shareef. The same occurred in Andalusia. All of these Madressahs in Andalusia were built on the same format as found in Baghdad Shareef. At the same time, as much as the teacher was famous, in like manner more students attended that Madressah. The more students appearing in another Madressah also meant that the teachers in this Madressah were also gaining popularity as well. Education was opened to all sections of the community. It did not matter whether the person was a servant, a slave or an ordinary labourer.

### **The golden age of Nizaamul Mulk**

It is said that when Nizaamul Mulk started to establish these Madressahs, someone filled the ears of the King with all types of deceit by informing him that Nizaamul Mulk had wasted large portions of the country's wealth which would have been better spent in the army. As a matter of fact, the amount of wealth spent would have also been sufficient to take care of a large army.

When Nizaamul Mulk was called to answer these accusations by the King, he replied, "My son! I am a simple and poor non-Arab. If I speak in front of someone, no person will give me more than five Dinaars. However, you are a Turk and someone who is white and if you speak, perhaps they would give you more than thirty Dinaars. However, you are immersed in your wordly enjoyment and pleasures, you do not have time from your hunting, play and sport. As a matter of fact it is mostly your sin and transgression which reaches the Divine Court of Allah. Your army is the same. They are also immersed in drinking, in play and sport and in enjoyment. However, I have created such an army for you who are considered as the army of the night. During the night when your army sleeps, this army remains awake standing and remembering their Creator. They send as gifts their tears in the Divine Court of Allah. Their tongues are wet with His Dhikr and they spread their hands making Du'a for you and your army. Therefore, in actuality you and your army are protected by them! It is through them that you get sustenance and difficulties are removed from your path."

When Malik Shah heard these words, his entire attitude changed. These words had a great impact on him and he also thanked the wise councillor for giving him this advice.

Therefore, the first person to establish a Madressah in a Muslim country was Nizaamul Mulk Tusi in Baghdad Shareef calling it “Madressah Nizaamiyah”. He was also patronised by a person called Abu Saeed Sufi who donated many shops and other commercial property for its upkeep.

It should also be borne in mind that prior to Madressah Nizaamiyah in Baghdad Shareef, there were other Madressahs also established in places like Nishapur which was the capital of Khurasan. These were Madaaris such as Madressah ibn Forak, Madressah Bahiqiyah established by Imam Bahiqi - *may Allah be pleased with him* - himself and many other smaller Madressahs. The reason that Madressah Nizaamiyah in Baghdad Shareef became so famous is because it was the largest Madressah in the Muslim empire. At the same time, the system in this Madressah was also well established. Education was free, students were given monthly stipends, all the necessary items which a student needed were also given to him and students came from far and wide. Many giants of Islam also qualified in this Madressah which made it even more famous. At the beginning, when Sultans or rulers came into power, the first thing they did was establish a connection with the ‘Ulama because they understood that being close to the ‘Ulama also meant that the people in general would support them.

Another key factor was that people like Nizamul Mulk Tusi also established centres for the ‘Ulama. He established accommodation for them and he also established a monthly income for them. This was in countries like Syria, Iraq, Diyar-e-Bakr, Khurasan, Samarkhand, etc. The expenses for these Madressahs ran into the millions if we had to calculate in the present time.

**Nizaamul Mulk Tusi** - His full name is Hasan bin Ali Tusi. His appellation is “Qawwa mudeen” – “A highly intelligent and resourceful person.” When he entered the court of Sultan Alap Arsalan, he was nominated as a minister and advisor. As a matter of fact, such was his influence that it is said that he actually ran the government. He was also nominated to this position by Malik Shah Saljuqi. As we have seen, he established many Madressahs in Baghdad Shareef and other places. He was martyred in an act of deceit by someone in the royal court.

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