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Khutbah

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: The Real Meaning of Tarbiya

DVD title: Tarbiya: a Deep Understanding of Education
An Attitude of Gaining Right Knowledge

Opening duas. *Asalaamu aleykum.* In Surah al-Wāqi'ah, Allah says:

Is it you who produced the tree, or are We the Producer? We made it a reminder for you, as a boon for the desert dwellers. So glorify the Name of your Lord Immense. And this I swear by the stations of the stars that, truly, it is a mighty oath if you but knew. Truly, this is a noble recital in a Book kept hidden, which no one may touch but the pure, sent down by the Lord of the Worlds.

And then also in Surah al-Hashr, Allah says:

If We had caused the Qur'an to descend upon a mountain, you would have seen it humbled, split asunder in the dread of Allah. We set forth examples for people in order that they may reflect.

Alhamdulillah-Llāh, these lessons for us today are very powerful statements, about the weight of this book, and the meaning of the Qur'an, and what is needed for us to understand the secrets that are hidden in the Qur'an. Even when it is in front of us, it is still hidden, Allah is telling us. To increase our knowledge means that we have to be realistic, and our *aqida* has to be right and good. Our knowledge is something that needs the right environment to grow in, and the right nutrients to sustain our growth—just like everything else that is created in this world.

In light of this, I'll speak a little about *tarbiya*, a word that comes from the same root as *rabat*, meaning to increase or grow, and to group together. We have to increase our knowledge, and link one aspect of it with another. It is not information; it's really education. Education is a process. The Prophet (sal) said, "***Seek our knowledge from the cradle to the grave.***" At the moment of our birth, we are gaining knowledge; and at the moment of our passing, we are gaining knowledge. Education means to return to the source. Educare in Latin keeps the same meaning – to return to the source of knowledge – which is to understand the links between everything in Allah's creations. In that way, each generation after each generation, each iteration of our knowledge base exceeds the previous one.

We cannot assume, however, that all that education is good. We gain knowledge of things that are not good, as well as knowledge of things that are good. I sent to some of you today a video about Google and technology. It's a good example of gaining information and knowledge. The root word of *tarbiya* means to grow up and to exceed more than what was before. That is a good definition for education. The implication is, not only do we learn, but we also in the process teach others. It is also our duty to teach others. To teach others in the way of Allah is to try to separate the good from the bad, the wheat from the chaff, in a sense. To increase has negative tendencies, also. Something positive also has its negative side. The Arabic language itself reminds us of the opposites. You find that in Farsi, in Hebrew, in these very ancient languages that the constructors of the linguistics have a way of understanding there are two sides to everything. We have to understand where the balance point is, where it moves from positive to negative. It's not the extremes that we have to be so much concerned with all the time; it's the point where it starts to shift.

If you increase your wealth in such a way that it leaves others at a disadvantage, for example, that's another way of looking at *riba*, which comes from the same root. *Riba* is interest. We have to educate ourselves to understand the point that where your benefit is

someone else's loss, you are then earning something unjustly (*riba*). [You gain] through no effort on your part, without taking on some of the risk and some of the labor for yourself. *Tarbiya* means to educate oneself and engage oneself fully in the process of learning also. It literally means "education" (also there is *ta'alim*. I have spoken on the differences between these before). It has yet an even more important meaning to it—not just education. As we engage with the Qur'an and begin to unveil the secrets of it, we see it to be something in this day and age, in this very moment, relating to the issues we are dealing with today. In other words, it has meaning to us, and it has an answer to us, and a guidance to us. It has the means for us to find answers, and that is what is required. The Qur'an also relates to us: "Do this, and you will find the answer in the *siratal mustaqim*."

So there is this other meaning in *tarbiya*, and that is a sense of attitude. This is where we find the relationship with *aqida*. Attitude, in the meaning of *tarbiya*, means breeding or upbringing. A person who is well-bred, who is brought up well, has a certain aplomb, a certain attitude, a certain confidence, a certain knowledge of who they are and what they represent, how important it is that they fulfill a certain role. Our upbringing stays with us and never leaves us. If we are clear we either have to totally adjust ourselves (if we come from an upbringing that is not good), or we have to reach back into our upbringing and take our goodness and sincerity from it and keep it with us. As we approach the school year again, and enter into education, it's not just *adab*. It is the upbringing of the community, of the family, of the culture, of the tradition. It is also extremely important and part of the process of being a well educated, well brought up, and well bred individual.

It is pretty deep, this word in this language. We have to take the goodness and the sincerity and use it. *Tarbiya* is how we create this community we live in. It is the basis for education and understanding the truth, how we extract the nectar of the truth from the Qur'an, and how it applies to day to day life for every single one of us. It's not that there's a tradition and you follow the tradition. It's dynamic. There are many forces that

act upon it. A *muribīn* is an educator, who has taken the process of *tarbiya* and now passes it on. They have an attitude. They have a commitment. They have a point of view. There is a certain kind of behavior, and the *aqida* has to be correct. If the *aqida* is not correct, the receptivity is not there. That's not to say nothing comes. Something that is well-built is going to stand the test of time more than something that is just thrown together. The *akhlaq* and the *aqida* has to be correct.

Part of the education is demeanor, attitude, behavior, respect, understanding, patience, tolerance. By the way, it goes in both directions. If the teacher doesn't model the right *akhlaq*, or have the right *aqida*, then the education is also affected by it. We've had those experiences also in our community. How one learns and how one passes on what one learns has to do with one's own presence, one's own attitude, one's sense of history, status, lineage, one's attitude in one's mind about one's own self. It has also to do with how one sees oneself in a situation – not just a situation one is familiar with, but a surprising situation, a spontaneous situation. It is how one sees oneself communicating with others, how one sees oneself in relationship to the truth, to al Haqq, to Qur'an, to Allah (swt).

Our attitude and presence establishes our status, our sense of placement in the historical reality of life and our lineage. We provide a means for what is best to continue forward with. That's at least what our intention should be and what our hope is. That's what we should do in breeding. Think about when you breed animals or plants. You try to breed in the best qualities, and in so doing, eliminate the ones that are negative, so the lineage continues as a healthy stock. Since we are not advocates of eugenics, we still are advocates of good qualities. We understand that those good qualities are passed on generation to generation. I don't think there is anyone here who would want their son or daughter not to investigate the family background, the people, the education, and the health history of someone they consider marrying. It's the way one preserves what is of quality.

This is the idea also in community. We should “breed” (excuse the expression) into the future generations of our community truth and right attitudes, and sense of self, and good education, and the rights that come with status and with that education, understanding what you represent and why you represent it. This is the educative process as given to us in Qur’an, and the one finds in the mysticism of every true path. This is the essence of *tarbiya*, not learning facts. This is the difference between information and education. This is the difference between *baraka* and *tarbiya*. *Baraka* means one feels the blessing of a place or a situation, and *tarbiyya* means one understands where that blessing comes from, and has deep understanding of the lineage from the Qur’an to this moment, from the Prophet (sal) to our *tariqah*, from your ancestors to today, from myself to the moment.

Whether it is a community or a nation, the rise and fall of nations starts in the hearts of people. That’s why they seek out the truth. What’s happening in the Middle East now? A person’s creed or belief is limitless in its power. Where does the power come from for that change? The Holy Prophet (sal) said that if a man is determined to possess more beyond the throne of creation, he will have it. There is no obstacle that can resist (in the long run) the spiritual energy that is based on a firm foundation of Haqq.

In our daily life, we imagine that we only deal with concrete situations or problems. But in reality, we move in a huge ocean of attractions and distractions. We even do that to the point there physicists recognize they are unable to place a demarcation line between consciousness and unconsciousness, between what is concrete and what is abstract, because you are dealing with dynamic energy. It’s obvious that a house doesn’t rise up without first being some abstract idea in the mind of some architect or designer. And the external realizations that come about before taking their respective material shapes are results of elaborate sets of concepts that are tried and discarded over and over again. The fact is, what transforms us is what educates us. An uneducated person is extremely

limited, even if they are following only their interests. They cannot make a link between X and Y and Z.

What informs us is our nearness to Allah (swt). What does that mean? It means the nearness to those abstractions that are manifest in our life [inform us of] love, kindness, peace, justice, etc. The transforming power of history has always sprung from an ever flowing source of beliefs and creeds and ethnic ideas and linguistics. The scientific attitude of a person who sits in a lab is one thing, but without being able to demonstrate what is postulated, what good is it? The idea of the laboratory is to try out the idea and test it, to implement it in some way, to apply it. It is the line between the theoretical and the applied. So too, the human being conducts his or her own affairs in day to day life, which require *iman*/faith and love, and also an organized belief system or creed that stands as the starting point of knowledge and action, that gives you the guidance and purpose.

This conception of our existence, needs, desires, hopes, duties and our rights by nature is one that is universal and connected to our emotional nature, our spiritual nature, our intellect, our physical state, the things of temporal life, belief in things of the Hereafter, our intellectual processes. There is no independent learning without the relationship to all these other things in life. When we think of our existence, it is connected to all of these things. If we disconnect them just because of selfishness, distractions, and preferences; not only are we not fulfilling our potential and taking proper part in the human dynamic and responsibility, we are cheating ourselves and those nearest and dearest to us of the capacity and capability we have. There are reasons for that; one can have a mental, emotional, or physical disease that causes distraction. But then Allah (swt) has also provided healing for most of these, environments for the healing of these—help, assistance.

The help and assistance comes from people who are educated. As much as we may praise someone who is a great scientist, or a great engineer, a great computer maven, someone educated that person. Some group of people educated that person to something. It might have been spelling, adding and subtracting, but someone did. So we are part of a continuum. When we think of our existence that's connected to all these things, we think about our bodies, or our beliefs. Or we don't think about them, and just respond to them. That's what is feeding us when we think about our own existence and who we are. All these things are formed by knowledge; mostly by knowledge of the external lives we lead. Then there is the inherent sense in our soul that we are responding to, the yearning, the *himmat*.

The role of a Muslim, the role of a Sufi is to bring some of that inner, inherent knowledge to a state of consciousness so that we can use it to realize who we are and what we are about, and what we can do, and what the purpose of this life education is, this class in world history, this class in literature or language. [What is the purpose of having] the ability to do algebra, the ability to understand the relationship between nature and learning?

The crucial problem is not to question the validity or the basis of our faith / *iman*. We shouldn't question our faith, or the necessity to have a believe system. It should be obvious that everything is part of a system. We must have a creed. The most urgent failing of humankind today is that people don't know the difference between what is true and what is false, what's right and what's wrong. They live for expediency, power and money. They don't know the value of a faith. They don't have the value of a creed. They might call themselves Muslim, Jew or Christian or whatever, but they don't know the value of it if, [at the same time], they diminish the value of it in someone else's life, and if they stand against it in the social and economic and intellectual world we live in.

In fact, human beings feel it is intellectual right to reject belief, when in fact there is no basis in believing that one should reject belief. The freedom to choose lies in belief and is what is so unique about the human capacity. That choice to choose not to choose is the basis of Islam. [We should] accept what we have and develop it, and admit that we cannot live in a world of ignorance, ignoring things, ignoring what we are facing, or trying to dance around it. It is just like what the politicians are trying to do for the next election cycle. They ignore the problems, as if they will get elected and then solve them. Well, you cannot solve insolvable problems if you keep creating them. Not only are they fools, they are the enemies of truth; therefore, they are enemies of democracy and of the world. They need rehabilitation.

The only way to deal with this is to educate ourselves and expand our understanding of what is *tarbiya*. We have to educate ourselves with a sense of attitude and presence and nobility. We have to have status in our own minds and hearts of who we are. So self-esteem is extremely important. Lack of self-esteem comes from ignorance of the self and of one's place. This is *tarbiya*, which comes from the Qur'an. This is *tarbiya* which speaks from the heart. As we educate ourselves, our heart opens and our faith becomes stronger, and we learn another part about *tarbiya*. There are rules and guidelines and regulations and interpretations, *fiqh* and *shar'ā*, and *tafsir* to learn about. But I am talking about educating our souls, a deep desire to understand and have the basis of making good decisions.

We have to understand that our faith corresponds to our *iman*, in the sense that our *aqida* and belief system has to be reflected in the way we live our lives, even if it is reflected for many, many years in struggle. What are we struggling to accomplish? "I should be doing something this way. *Astaghfiru-Llāh*, I didn't. I should know better. I should try better." And give the benefit of the doubt. Anyone who is on the path, who is striving, needs support even if they are failing or faltering, or tripping or stumbling. That's how you know that you know. It's better to know you know, than not to know. It's better to

know you don't know, than to seek out learning and think you know. It's very important that we have a good attitude. There is an attitude that comes along with *tarbiya* that is part of, but not just, what we would call normally education. *Asalaamu aleykum*.

O Allah, Your generosity and peace is the source of our well-being in our spiritual life, our worldly life, and our final life. You have the power over all things, Allah. Make order easy for us, and serenity in our hearts and in our bodies. We ask You for faith that is everlasting, for a submissive heart, for knowledge that is beneficial, for certainty that is genuine, for a religion that is straight, for well-being free from affliction, for complete and continued well-being, and for thankfulness for that well-being. O Allah, make our faces shine with the light of Your Attributes, and make us laugh and rejoice on the Day of Resurrection. Make us to be among Your Friends, and make Your Hand to be spread upon us, our families, and our children, and those who are with us by Your Mercy. Be a companion in our travels and a guardian in our family, and efface the faces of our enemies and freeze them in their places so they are unable to go or to come. Amin.