

February 5, 2009

Thursday

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title - [Iqra: Understand, Remember, and Apply.](#)

DVD title: Iqra: Read, Understand, Teach and Apply
The Task of Acquiring Real Knowledge

Bismillah ir Rahman ir Raheem. The first word that Allah speaks to Prophet Mohammed (sal) is 'iqra. Technically, it means to read. It also implies to understand, memorize, apply, and teach. There wasn't anything to read, [and] he couldn't read, anyway. So, it had to mean to "hear this, and understand it, memorize it." At the time, the things that were the most important were written, like the Torah, and the Injil. Knowledge was something that was written down. But He gives this to someone who cannot write or read. It's like saying, "Don't think of knowledge as something that is only written, but something that is written on your heart." [It is] something that you know. You memorize it, but you understand it and apply it and you teach it by applying it. Experiential knowledge: applied Sufism. It is Sufism in the sense of being the study of the heart, in the heart, by the heart; knowledge of the reality of worship, the result of submission and worship; the result of understanding, and applied. Teach it; apply it in your own life.

Neither the Prophet (sal) nor anyone came to this moment of 'iqra with a heart that was empty, or a mind that was empty, for that matter. It was filled with things. We know that because he was overcome and afraid. There was a kind of almost inherent resistance to changing the norm, shifting the paradigm. Sure, he went to the mountain and sat. He sought something. Maybe he didn't believe he would ever find it. Maybe he thought it was all in the seeking, until the response came. The response to his own sincerity and

yearning came, and it scared him. Maybe [he thought], “What am I to do with this, now?” The prerequisite to really receiving this was having to empty the heart of what was there, and surrender the mind to what was coming. It’s not like it came in one sentence at any one time. It came over 23 years with constant surrendering, constant opening, and the constant necessity for there to be space. Each revelation found its home at the right time and place, under the right circumstances. Room was constantly being made by what had poured into the heart before. What came out of his heart, off of his tongue—knowledge, we know. But when his tongue was sucked, knowledge came.

*Remember the story of the man who visited the wali and said, “I don’t understand these issues. How can a mujtahid who is in some remote place understand it? I’d like to learn about the dīn so I can teach my ummah about it.” The wali asked him if he would like tea. The wali kept pouring and pouring the tea until the cup overflowed. The man said, “Why are you not stopping? The cup is full!” He said to him, “Just like this cup, you are overflowing with your own nafs (self). Empty your heart of your nafs and clear your conscience so there is space for Allah. Then you can learn about Allah Swt.” Remember in the Hadith Quds, Allah tells the Prophet Mohammed (sal), **“The heavens and the earth cannot contain Me, but the heart of a mu’min contains Me.”***

We can search and search: where is happiness, peace, understanding, harmony and love? But we search like we are living in Las Vegas in a casino. Why do I say that? Because it’s like we are throwing the dice. Every once in a while we put a coin in the slot machine and get something back. You get enough back to keep you playing, but mostly you lose. So you have to walk away. The road to Jannah, the road to eternal beauty and peace, love and understanding, tolerance and justice begins in our hearts. It’s for the person who takes a step on that road. It’s made easy for the person who acquires the real knowledge.

Rasulallah said, ***“Allah makes the road to Jannah easy for one who takes a step on the road to acquiring knowledge.”*** It is *marifah*, not information, not a degree in Islamic studies, but a kind of heart and mind that absorbs, and can absorb other things. Now you can buy this cloth that absorbs 100 times its own weight. No longer do you need paper towels. You can use this cloth, squeeze it out, use it again and again, and wash it and use it again. You have to be able to absorb knowledge and information, and be able to distinguish between the two. When you practice the knowledge and apply it, then it becomes knowledge.

Rasulallah (sal) said, ***“The treasures of knowledge are opened by asking questions. May Allah bless you. Ask questions, four persons are rewarded when questions are asked. The one who asks, the one who answers, the one who hears, and the one to whom it is related.”*** Then he said, ***“Preserve your knowledge in writing. Scholarly discussions enliven dead hearts, provided they lead to Allah and His commands.”*** And, ***“Teach others what you know so that the foundation of knowledge may become strong. Seek knowledge from others so that the level of your information may increase.”*** This is something that is *wajib* (necessary, preferred) on every Muslim, male or female. It doesn't matter. It is not *fard*; it is *wajib*.

What transforms information into knowledge is not just repeating it? It's not just making some external effort, though that is necessary. What's necessary for the person who seeks real knowledge and understanding, the person who really wants to understand life and reality and transform their heart is to first have an intention in your heart. Not the intention to have knowledge. Not the intention to fulfill your dreams. Not the intention

even to be a good Muslim, but the intention to please Allah. What pleases Allah Swt is to remove ignorance from us, and to help remove ignorance from the hearts and minds of others, and to revive, on a daily basis, Islam. Islam is very, very rarified. It wants to float. Not that it dies, not reviving it in that sense, but reviving it in the sense of always giving. Islam is a reality because of the people who live it and practice it; therefore, you revive it by living and practicing it. It's not a religion. It's only an idea until it is practiced. When it is practiced, it has all this capability for transformation. It transforms us. You revive it by trying to do good; trying to resist what is wrong and evil, and encouraging others to do the same.

'Iqra. Understand it. Read it. Teach it. Apply it. This process requires patience and perseverance, especially at the times of difficulty. During those times, if we make the effort to do our very, very best; not to give into our laziness or desires, not to give in to our fears or opinions, our ego and arrogance, or to whatever we claim as ours, when things are difficult, then we can say there is success or reward. At the same time, we should not be overly critical of our own self, or allow ourselves to think we are worthless. We shouldn't belittle our own worth. We shouldn't be greedy. We shouldn't allow our prejudices or biases to have any traction. None of us can do this by ourselves. Even Prophet Mohammed (sal) couldn't do it by himself. We can say he could have, but he didn't know it. He came running home to Khadija, shivering, quaking, and afraid. What is happening? She knows where he is. It's not like he was at the local bar, hanging out. He's up on the mountain. She knows what a good man he is. After all, he's al-Amin. Everybody knows what a good man he is. Everybody respects him. Look what he does. He breaks from tradition and marries a woman older than him, who is a businesswoman. He works for his wife. And he comes back to her.

His ego had already started to be destroyed. In fact, he has no ego but he didn't know that. He was *masūm*. He was awakening to a reality. The Qur'an has already been fully revealed, but it was going to come out over 23 years in linear time. He had already been chosen. His light had come before Adam. But you have to know this; to realize it. It's not just a fact. He comes home, and he's scared. She tells him, "Calm down. It's okay. This is what you've asked for, and you deserve it. Something is coming to you, don't turn it away. Don't run away from it." In modern language, that's what she said. Already the semblance of self is dissolving. Why? Because the truth is coming through him, and he is allowing it to come through him. We can't do it by ourselves (that's how I got to Khadija (ra)), and that's why we have to have teachers, guides, examples. We have to look at the piety of our elders. We have to ask questions and inquire about study, and take it seriously before our time runs out.

Sometimes we set the alarm and fall asleep, confident we will get up. It happened to me just today. I woke up and it was light out, instead of dark. There was just too much light in the sky. I had been up at 3:00, 4:30 as usual. Then I fell asleep. And there was too much light in the sky. How did this happen? I was so careful to set my alarm. But if you set your alarm on a BlackBerry, there is this little pearl. The difference between AM and PM is 1/32 of a turn of the pearl. Everything was perfectly right, except it was PM. When I checked, it was AM. But when I pushed it down to save it, I must have pushed it a little. I didn't re-check it. That's how close we can come and how far we can be away. I was 12 hours off. Do we spend any time looking at the earth, looking at the fruits of this creation? Do we look at who we are around? Do we understand that we are fruits hanging from a tree, surrounded by other fruits? (I don't mean that in any disparaging

way. I'm being totally inclusive.)

You go out to work every day. You are not necessarily surrounded by fruits—by lots of good people, I'm sure, but they are not the fruits of Allah's tree. We are all hanging fruits from the tree of Allah Swt. We can actually know a person by who they associate with, who they hang out with. Then, we have to contribute to this world, in a way the contribution can be used. There is a saying, "If you write, write legibly." Don't write too big and take up too much space and waste paper. Don't write too small, so nobody will be able to read it. When you die, people will know that something important has been copied, and they will curse you because can't read it. We have to make a contribution to this world, not arrogantly, but one that can be realized by others, too. And we have to have *adab*. There's a saying, "Don't sit too close to the teacher unless there is an emergency." There has to be *adab* in our life. There's a saying, whoever exerts themselves to seek something will find it. Three people have to show this kind of exertion: the student, the teacher, and who do you think the third one is? The father of the student. Can anyone tell me why?

(Student responds) That's one reason. The other reason is, when your kids come home from school with homework, you have to make sure they do it. You have to put effort in also. You have to make sure they stay on the path. One Sufi said, "*The person who stays awake at night makes their heart happy during the day.*" How do we live? How many of us really care about how we care for our body and our own mind, let alone our souls and hearts? We all do things we shouldn't do for our bodies. We fill our minds with things that are best left out of them. We do things that dull our minds. So we need guidance, help, and understanding. We need to develop understanding of this path we are on. Even

though it is a path of love, even though it is just a path of appreciation, gratitude, caring and caring for others, it takes effort. We easily get so involved in our own self and what we are doing in the moment. Every day I practice trying to get up from my computer and my desk, and it's hard. We are supposed to work at this from the cradle to the grave.

When we are young, we have all this opportunity. We say, "By 30, I'm going to do this. By 40, I'm going to do this. By 50, I'm going to do this. By 60..... by 70..." Then we look back and say, "By 40, I didn't do that. I have to try to do that by 50. Oh, I didn't do it by 50. Now I have to try to do it by 60." What is it we are trying to do: *tahajjud* prayer? "By next year I'm going to be getting up for *tahajjud*. I'm going to learn this much Qur'an. I'm going to complete this task." How many years go by so fast, and it's not completed? "I'm going to get up and make Fajr sitting, because I don't want to get to the end of my life having not done it, and if I had, things would be different." "Oh, no, I don't have to do that. I can just get to the end of my life and blame the Shaykh." "I'm going to take some time after Maghrib to sit. I'm going to really think about this circle I'm in, and what it means. I'm going to go look for it in the Qur'an and Hadith. I'm going to look for it in nature." Then you start to compute how long the night is, and how short life is, how many years we have slept away, and how much darkness we have brought to the daylight by the things we have said and done. Did we learn enough to be pious?

There is a beautiful saying. Grasp this saying. "*Knowledge is a pride which has no humility. It cannot be reached except by humiliation which has no pride.*" Real knowledge has to have humility. Tomorrow, try to remember to sit facing the *qibla* while you are doing some reading. Don't sit and read anything without facing the *qibla*. If you are going to talk on the phone, face the *qibla* while you talk on the phone. See if you can

remember that. How hard is it just to remember that for one day? I'm putting together for you different *salat*, prayers for different occasions. One prayer everyone can do is the prayer of submission: two *rakas*. A good time to do it is before *dhuhr*. Try it. See how it messes up your day to add an extra prayer. If you have your day all figured out so you can do your prayers, throw in an extra one just to see how it messes up the timing of your day. It makes your day better, [but] it's hard. Do you know how hard it is to remember it and to do it, and not get out of rhythm; to add it to what you are doing, instead of it being a subtraction or a distraction?

The Prophet Mohammed (sal) said to Hillal Ibn Yasser, ***“Is the inkwell with you?”*** Meaning, you'd better write this down. A person who carries a notebook captures wisdom. He's also saying, “Remember it. Write it on your heart.” Rabia helps people remember things [working with the brain fitness program]. I'll give you a formula of the Prophet Mohammed (sal). ***“Before breakfast brush your teeth a number of times a day, eat honey, eat 21 raisins. That will increase your memory.”*** Later on, he said, ***“You can eat apples and coriander. You can recite Ayat al Kursi, and pray Salat ul Layl. And you can read Sūratu-l-A'lā, especially in the first raka of Fajr. And try to remember to reflect on the things that are important.”*** If we can package that, we can sell franchises and become very wealthy. How much do we forget every day?

How much good there is to go in the world. We can do the good, and also remember why we do it. I've taken a lot of time tonight to talk about something very simplistic and basic, and I hope, very challenging for all of us. Remember what I said some time ago: Allah resides in the heart of the believer. But you can only hear the beating of your heart when everything is very quiet. Remember I talked about that and reflecting on the direction of

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your life. *Insh'allah*, we'll do that.