

January 8, 2010

Khutbah



Title: [“Which of the Favors of Your Lord Will You Deny?”](#)

DVD title: The Greatest Gift of Knowledge: Learning How to Use It

Opening Duas

Asalaam aleikum. Allah, the Most High, reveals in Qur’an in Suratu-r-Rahman:

The Universally Merciful taught the Qur’an. He created the human being. He taught him clear speech. The sun and the moon move according to the precise reckoning. And the stars and the trees prostrate themselves. He has raised to the sky and set the balance -- that you might not transgress His balance. And so weigh with justice and do not skimp in the balance. And the earth -- He set down for all creatures -- and there are fruits and palm trees with sheathed clusters and grain in the blades and fragrant herbs. Which of these favors of your Lord would you deny? (55:01-13)

Allah says in another ‘*āyah* in Suratu-n-Nisā:

We sent messengers as bringer of good news and warners so that the people have no argument with Allah after the messages have come to them. And Allah is mighty and wise. But Allah bears witness to that which He has revealed to you. He has sent it down with His Knowledge and the Angels bear witness as well. And Allah suffices as Witness. (4:165-166)

These two statements are statements, my dear brothers and sisters, of reality, of observation, of value. It is not what has been said, but what has been proved by Allah (swt). It tells us about the intricacy and power of knowledge and also the power which is knowledge that Allah has given us as a gift to humanity. We see to what degree to what exactness He has created with this creation, given human beings a tremendous capacity to do good with the good things that He has sent us, to do good with the knowledge that is intrinsic in the human capability and their consciousness. Yet every day we see how this inherent gift of knowledge is not an absolute guarantee of goodness. We see that this knowledge itself is a process to know how to learn. Not just how to learn, but on what basis do we learn?

We have said in the past, “To learn how to learn.” But first comes something else—to unlearn. The problem is that in the world we live in today, there is very little unlearning. Especially in the technological realities of the world we live in today. If we come to the conclusion that, for example, the internet is bad and is causing tremendous difficulties, like in the radicalization of young people in Muslim community, which it is playing a part in, the dye is cast. There is no end to the internet. We understand that the predator planes are being flown out of Nevada by a pilot who has never flown an airplane, who is an 18 year old drop-out of high school, who is “gaming” and killing. Or maybe he is older, and he is a lieutenant or a captain who goes to work, and for 12 hours a day he is dropping bombs on people, some bad, and some good, unfortunately. Then he goes home and sits down with his family at the dinner table.

The strange thing has happened where the military people are, more and more, not at the war; and the civilian people are loading the planes, and they are the ones who are in danger on the ground. There is not going to be any end to drones. The dye is cast. Just as the nuclear dye was cast. Just like the swords were cast. Just like gunpowder was cast. And the knowledge increases, and cyber wars increase. When you go on YouTube and you look for battle scenes, they are now set to music, like music videos. This is a

tremendous change in mentality that has taken place. I recommend you listen to this young man, P.W. Singer, at Brookings, who wrote a book on this subject. What does the future bring ethically, morally? Long distance battles with people that you never see nor do you see the battle.

In fact, the post traumatic syndrome is sometimes in greater number for the people who are absent from the battlefield than for the ones who are actually fighting the battle, because they have this juxtaposition of gaming, warring and going home to the families. But this is knowledge, and there is no end to knowledge. There is no way of guaranteeing that it is good and there is no way of backing away from it. There is no end to that. Well, there might be, unfortunately, but that would be the end. The real end.

When we say, “unlearning” what do we have to unlearn. What do we have to learn how to learn? Where are the moral and ethical principles here? Who cares? Is there really a desire among human beings to have peace and end war? History would tell us something different. *Inshā'a-llāh*, God tells us that there can be peace. It is the name of our religion, the name of our path.

The guidance and signs come in many different forms of this gift of knowledge. Knowledge which, by the way, Allah has not given to any other creature. Because with knowledge, there has to be consciousness. There has to be a sense of awareness. There has to be a sense of history. There needs to be many, many aspects that come into play for good decisions to be made, but the decisions are not only made by those people who have those capabilities, are they? There is awareness of knowledge which has been seen. Indeed, awareness of the Creator of all Knowledge. The birds, the insects, the fish in the sea, they have an inherent knowledge in that they know how to migrate, how to build a nest, how to reproduce, even in the subtlety of finding themselves miles and miles in the ocean to the streams where they were born, just at the last minute, to be caught by the paw of a Grizzly bear before (or after) they spawn. How miraculous Allah's Creation is.

They don't check the calendar and say, "Let's see what the day is today. I am going to build a nest." They have been given a sense of time. They do not think about the origins of their tools or the elements that surround them. From the dimension and depth of knowledge that has been given to the human being, it is quite different because the function is different. He has given us knowledge in order to fulfill the function of *khalifa*, protector, deputy, vice-regent upon this earth in order to make us able to do that job with efficiency and a sense of urgency, with love, with compassion, with a concern for others as well as for Allah. [He has given us knowledge] to do it properly and make our own inherent capabilities, which are the characteristics of the *Sifāt*, the Attributes of Allah (swt), the shadows or the reflections of those attributes, real. [He has given us knowledge] to sustain the resources of nature in such a way that we support the intention of this creation, reflecting in some small way, the work of our Creator. That is why Allah says that He created us in His Own image with His Own hands in His Own imagination as beings that could do this work.

But history tells us something very different: how we human beings have squandered the gifts; how we human beings have awakened to this capability and then fallen back to sleep again. Though the dimension and the depth of the knowledge that has been given to human beings are quite different because our function is different, it does not mean that we shouldn't strive to use that knowledge in a good way. Probably the greatest gift of Allah (swt) besides love is knowledge. Prophet Mohamed (sal) said, "***Seek out knowledge from the cradle to the grave.***" Unfortunately, in many parts of the world, there is not much distance between the cradle and the grave. Every mother whose son or daughter's life is saved by a drone or a predator is very grateful for that. And every mother whose child is taken by that is very angry about that.

As the technology increases, we now learn, that there will be such drones that will be flying, not for days, not for hours, not for months, but for years whose wingspan will be

as long as football fields. And some are the size of insects. I heard these two stories on the news today. They told the story about how in the 1960's, one of the government agencies decided that the spies would go outside so that they could not be heard [by the planted devices inside]. We could not monitor them because we didn't have the satellites in those days. They devised a way to listen in on their conversations. They wired a cat. Literally. They made the tail of the cat the antennae and they put wires on the cat and microphones under the skin. They put electrical stimulus in the cat, because you cannot tell a cat to go here or to go there. A cat goes where it wants to go. They tested it out and they spent 15 million dollars wiring this cat.

They parked next to the Russian Embassy in Washington DC. They were going to have the cat stroll along, and they would listen in. They were all excited about that, so they set the cat out of the door. The cat starts to walk across the street and he gets hit by a car. Walahi. They could think out the technology, but they could not think out the rest of it. It is funny but it is sad. We say, "Nothing replaces human intelligence." The news people tell us that is what it is called in the intelligence community. But it is human intelligence used in such an unintelligent way. But we understand the necessity for it. Of course there is necessity. As long as people do not have a common goal, a common commitment, a common understanding, have no common love for humanity, have no common sense of responsibility, have no common duty, this is going to happen.

This greatest gift that Allah (swt) gave us [is He] taught us the use of the pen, how to keep knowledge flowing, if you will, from one generation to another. There are verses in the Qur'an which mention that there are so many oceans of untold knowledge and untold treasures of wisdom that it would be impossible to find enough ink to write about the beauties of Allah. In the first verse of Surah 'Iqra', the mystic pen, the mystic record are symbols of permanent revelation. Everywhere you look, Allah symbolically showed the depth and breadth of our capabilities and the knowledge we could have and can have if we trust in Allah.

He speaks about power and He speaks about words that people can understand, but everything that Allah (swt) has spoken to us has many meanings, and unfortunately, too many interpretations. All we have to do is find a way of extracting a true meaning of it, *ma'ruf*, the goodness—*ma'ruf* and *munkar*. The root of *'iqra* also means to examine, to study, not just read. It includes the whole concept of knowledge, therefore, in it. Allah says, **“Iqra bismi rabbika. Read in the Name of your Lord. Read.”** It is not just the simple idea of reading, but to read and understand, to investigate it. Look where you want to look, you will find wherever you look, that truth. It is impossible to translate the whole meaning of the phrase in which Allah says, “to read or to teach.” It really is impossible, because it means something different in every circumstance.

It talks about writing with a pen, and implies that the writing of knowledge is to be read, therefore. If somebody is going to write something down, the idea is that somebody is going to read it. If you read it, the idea is that you are going to learn something from it. That is knowledge. It means skills within an individual have to be there to be developed in order to just read and understand and to apply. That is why we have school. It means that all knowledge of oneself, knowledge about spirituality, knowledge about the human condition, knowledge about the community, knowledge about the world, knowledge about creation, all of it has a potential to be understood and put into a context that is integrated.

There is another meaning. It implies to reach for something. When we try to gain knowledge, we try and reach for something we didn't know, to grasp. We say that: “Do you grasp what I am saying?” We are not just reaching for information. We are reaching to know things that Allah (swt) has emblazed and engraved and inscribed on all the doorways to nature. If you look at a tree trunk, it is engraved with knowledge. If you look at a flower, it is emblazoned with the light of knowledge. When you look at a deer

running through the forest, they are emblazoned with the light of Allah (swt). These are all doorways to knowledge.

In sleep and awareness, awakesness and consciousness, even in our arrogance, even in our fears in our own self, we review our self and we reach outwardly and inwardly. We look at topics very deeply, and we reach into the different kingdoms that have been created—the animal and the mineral and the vegetable kingdoms. We reach to learn the mysteries of those communities, and how they can assist human life, hopefully in health and well being. Everything is a doorway to knowledge. Then how we use it, that is the issue. We look at the outside and we say, “How did this thing get created?” Even the drone: who thought of a little bug created out of some sort of plastic or metal with a little microphone and TV camera? We don’t think so much about that. But how did it get that way? What is it used for? Even if it was devised for a good purpose, somebody is going to turn it into a bad. Is there going to be a deterrent theory on predators? I doubt it.

The prophets come and the prophets go, and they give us some direction. They disseminate the Truth in some comprehensive meaning of *‘iqra*, and it refers to a particular individual on occasion; but the term also means or implies, I think, a universal understanding, a universal direction. The comprehensive meaning we see running throughout the whole Qur’an, as those people who understand as well as those people who don’t understand are talked about. Qur’an tells us about those who understand and don’t understand, who see and don’t see, who hear and don’t hear. In other words, those who reach for knowledge and those who read and investigate, who research and question, who seek knowledge, they are the people who understand that they are reaching and searching for the knowledge for the good. And that is what we need to be.

It is not what we understand, but *that* we understand, and that we *care* to understand, and we take responsibility for that understanding. We find peace and happiness in the pursuit of that understanding. We are given knowledge which distinguishes us from the other

creatures and gives us superiority, supposedly, over them; though, I am not too sure about that. We are given the pen and the ability to pass on what we know, and to read and to write. If it was not for that, human beings would not be able to learn from one another. They would not be able to protect their heritage and their knowledge. They would not have the history of that knowledge and they could not fulfill their function. But having history and understanding history is another thing. [Without that] we couldn't really be the vice-regents of Allah, because there would not be a civilization.

Imam Ali (as) said that it was by the sheer grace of Allah that He gave His servants knowledge that they did not know and thus brought them out of darkness into the light of knowledge and gave them the desire to gain more and gave them writing which has multifarious benefits. But are we always going to use these things for our benefit? The truth is that we can come to understand anything that we want to understand, and we can choose not to understand anything we don't want to understand. We might not like what we understand. We might not agree with things we find to be contrary to what we thought or believed, [contrary to] our ideology. But eventually, if we really seek to understand and not minimize things and not reduce them to the most simplistic of things, not to reduce them to doubts or accusations or justifications; if we truly understand the different facets of knowledge, of love, of events, of circumstances, of relationships, then we really gain understanding of this verse.

Surah 'Iqra communicates that Allah (swt) intended our education to be continuous. Then we are educated in schools and experiences of life, and we are educated by our own attempts to educate ourselves. It goes on and on and on, but Allah (swt) gives us the mind and the intelligence which are the greatest means of knowledge. But who can make them use them? Then He gives us open proof, all around us, of the perfection of His power over nature and the control over things. We gain a lot just by our visual or our dialogue with one another. Every day we get new information. The problem is that we process it through old ways. We have to evolve new ways because the world is changing.

We are not two people standing on a battle field with swords. How do you define a hero today?

There was in the report that I heard today, [this story] of the time when the first predator was shot down. The commander wrote a letter of condolence to the pilot over his loss. Then he wrote in the letter, “but I would rather be writing to you about the loss of the predator than to be writing a letter to a mother whose son had died.” When they failed (failed meaning that they didn’t hit the right targets; they hit a series of civilian targets) a number of times (you can read this for yourself), the report was sent to the commander. He said, “It was a design flaw.” Meaning, it had only to go back to do more research to adjust the design. The mentality has changed.

Allah says in Qur’an: **“It was He that brought you forth from your Mother’s womb when you knew nothing. He gave you hearing and sight and intelligence and reflection that you might give thanks to Him.”** But one of the best ways to give thanks to Allah is to provide others with the same hearing and sight and affection and love and compassion and understanding. I guess you could call that winning over the hearts and minds of people, which will never be done by technology. It takes people to do that. How are you going to win the hearts and minds of people when you are fighting a war with them from a long distance away? How are we going to win the hearts and minds of the young people today when we don’t engage with them and explain to them what this Islam really is? It is just another name. It is just another name for love and care and compassion and concern. But it is not as exciting as a video game.

You can kill on the video game, destroy things on the video game, blow things up and go, “Yeah!” without anyone saying to you, “Yeah, what?” Go on Second Life. You never smell the death, never see it, never hear the groans and moans of the parents who lost their children, never hear the wailing of those who have been injured—never, ever. Things have changed. There is a separate life: the gaming life and then the real life. But

your gaming life is somebody else's real life. Your real life is played like a game, sometimes.

Here we are: this bundle of potential which is born. Allah gives us this environment and these circumstances from all these sources He has, and we have choice. The fact that some people use their power of choice to deny Allah, that is one thing. Another thing is that they use their power of choice to accept Allah, and then and then do things that are totally against Islam. and totally against any moral or ethical principle of any religion or any good philosophy. The fact that people use these powers to deny Allah or to use them in that way is a terrible and harsh reality of the world we live in today. It is good to be affectionate and tolerant and learn peaceful ways and constructive ways and at the least pray for the paradigm to shift, for somehow, the Mothership has to come.

It takes up the whole sky and says, in our own languages, simultaneously, "If you don't stop this stuff, we are going to blow you away. Watch!" and then Poof, blow something away—not people *inshā'a-llāh*. Maybe that is what it will take. Really. I don't know what else could do it. Something so overpowering. I have contacted the Mothership, but they are 12 light years away and are busy with another society that has screwed up.

Does a man see that it is He that created him from a drop, yet behold he stands as an open adversary to success and strikes out likenesses of Us and forgets his own Creator and Creation? (36:77-78)

Welcome to the world we live in. So it has to be from the hands of love and understanding that is given to us from the core of our own heart that we can make change. We have to keep trying. If we don't understand something, we can understand that we need to come to an understanding. If we begin to understand, we can see that understanding as a blessing from Allah. But we don't just have to hold fast to the rope of Islam, we have to hold fast to those who have been sent by Allah (swt) to help humanity

to assist us, to guide us, to comfort us and to make peace with us and for us and to share that love and that perseverance; otherwise, we are just contributing to this human desire and human commitment to Armageddon. There are people who do that. And with that uplifting *khutbah*, I say, *Asalaam aleikum*.

Closing prayers.