

May 21, 2010

Khutbah

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: [The Many Dimensions of Knowledge](#)

DVD title: The Process of Our Spiritual Path
Humbly Seeking in the Ocean of Knowledge

Opening *du'ās*. *Asalām aleikum*. In Holy Qur'an, Allah (swt) reveals:

In the name of Allah. The Merciful, the Beneficent, has made known the Qur'an and has created man with clear utterance. The sun and the moon are made punctual. The stars and the trees adore the sky. He has uplifted and kept the measure so that you not exceed the measure, but observe the measure strictly nor fall short thereof, and He has appointed for His creatures the fruit of the palm trees and scented herbs. Which then of the favors of your Lord do you deny? (55:1-13)

I have been speaking in many different ways recently about knowledge and the acquiring of knowledge, and I think it's important that we realize there are many dimensions and many levels of knowledge. For those of us who find it very important to try to understand or appreciate the intricacies of Allah's creation by seeing the interrelatedness between all these elements of creation within our own self, we are not satisfied with putting our head down on the mat and just doing the rituals. It is important to understand, not just the movements and the moments when we do that, but the reasoning behind it, or what the reality behind it is.

This is a process of understanding not only the depths of our actions, but the depths of our language, the depths of our responsibilities, the interrelatedness between ourselves

and others, the interrelationships between ourselves and creation. What is this creation? Where does it come from? All these questions may intrigue us at times, and I think they are the most important questions for those who would be on this path. Allah (swt) tells us in Qur'an that this process is a process of gaining knowledge. He goes on and says:

I sent Messengers of good cheer in order that mankind will have no argument against Allah after the Messengers. Allah is Mighty, Wise. But Allah Himself testifies concerning that which He has revealed to you. In His Knowledge He has revealed it, and the angels also testify, and Allah is Sufficient Witness.

(4:165-166)

Well, it is on its surface what it is and it is easy to understand. But beyond that it is also a testimony to the fact that the messengers are containers of knowledge and process. Their role, the essence of their presence in creation is to reveal the interrelationships of things, of knowledge, to reveal knowledge to us in a way that we can benefit from it as an understanding of our purpose, of our life, the reality of our existence. In that last *'āyat* we have two statements of value and two statements that are fairly intricate of the power of knowledge that Allah alone has given to us as a gift. This knowledge is a gift given to us; it is for human beings. It is not that other entities may not have some form of consciousness. But the pursuit of knowledge, the pursuit of the reason for our existence and our place in the universe and our role in the universe, that is different.

Then we wonder why human beings, for the most part, are not interested in that? Or they make arrogant assumptions over the power that it gives them but there is no humility that goes along with it. Over the past two weeks, certainly there has been sufficient evidence of that, whether we look at the wars, or we look oil spill in the gulf, or at the behavior of the people in government. [When you hear] the kind of arrogant statements made by politicians, you have to turn the clock back on humanity's kindness or concern for other human beings. Why are people so absent in their questioning, so arrogant that they have

no humility and no appreciation? Yet we turn around and we see the exactness with which He has created this creation. He has asked us to understand the measure of that creation and not to exceed it. There are boundaries. In a *maqam*, we can have infinite amounts of improvisation but we dare not go outside of those boundaries. We look again at human beings, and we see how human beings do go beyond their boundaries. We see how human beings, in their arrogance, have such insecurities.

I want to say, if I may be psychological, that they become control freaks. They want to control everything. They do not look to the history and say, “Oh, I want to control. Why do I want to control? Why do I want to deny (in the sense of Suratu-r-Rahman, “Which of the favors of your Lord do you deny?”)? Why would I want to deny my place, the humble place that Allah (swt) has put me? Where is my humility, my tolerance, my understanding? What is it that I am really defending? Is it what I am saying I am defending or is it I am defending my own ego? If you listen to the testimony of people from the oil companies or you listen to the ideological idiocy of the man who ran for Senate in Kentucky, [you have to ask], “What is it they are defending?” Yet we don’t see it in our self. We don’t see our own control issues, our own insecurities, or the fear that we place in others, and the anxiety that we place in others. It is such a shame. It is such a waste.

There is a measure to everything, not just a measure with this inherent gift of knowledge. It is not just knowledge of information, but knowledge of life and its interrelationships, knowledge of others in this creation, and our relationships between ourselves and creation. With this inherent knowledge, at the core of it, we should know how to move, how to create, how to affirm what is right and what is good and what is best, not only for ourselves but for our children and for others. [We should] not play out, in our assumptions and in our arrogance, what we are ourselves are lacking, through others and through our children. That is what Allah calls migration in Qur’an, moving from one place, *maqam*, station to another.

We see it repeated in nature. The word migration is a very good word to be used. We see out of necessity for survival, even the animals migrate from one place to another for their sustenance. In that case, it is a geographic migration. Allah (swt) gives us knowledge in order for us to fulfill very specific functions. *Inshā'a-llāh*, if we qualify, one of those functions is to be *khalifa*. That is to say, it is to be the representative of Allah (swt) on this earth, and [Allah's knowledge will] enable us to do that with efficiency with a sense of accountability, a sense of love and a sense of concern. We know that if we put, equally, our concern for everyone in any moment, in any decision; and if we put, equally, our concern for humanity as well as our family, as well as our neighbor or our friends in a decision, we would be a lot more equitable than we really are. We would do things a lot more properly. I use the word "properly" in a way that maybe you can all relate to, that is to say, with *'adab*, with a sense of humility, a sense of propriety.

So many of us in our lives do things only half way or partially right—sometimes improperly. If we trace the reason for that, it is because we are not applying the knowledge that we have or that we should have through our inherent capabilities to see and to understand. We don't know how to refine, or we don't allow ourselves to learn how to refine our inherent abilities to make them balanced and harmonious with the people around us and everyone around us. We stake out our little ghettos, whether they are defined by our families, our community, our ethnic group or our religious group. Most people live their lives struggling to have their own fulfillment, their own happiness, their own joys, their own successes. That is fine. But the part that is not fine is when you don't care about anyone else, when you don't exert your knowledge in a way that will be helpful to others. Or you are influenced by people who are negative and people who are destructive. It is not how Allah (swt) created this world.

Allah (swt) created the universes integrated and reflecting each other—metaphorically and actually—reflecting His attributes and qualities. Everything is linked. Everything is

related. The fruit of the trees are interrelated with the seasons, the flowers too, the animals and their migration and their growth and their sacrifices, also. The stars and the heavens are all reflective of this movement and this development and constant cycle of creation. Allah (swt) tells us in Qur'an that everything is interrelated, but in our arrogance we think ourselves as being first. It is difficult to think of ourselves with equality, let alone think of others before ourselves—very difficult. That is perhaps the whole reason, the only reason for human existence, perhaps.

We could go back to the questionable *hadith* that has been repeated many times over, “***I was a hidden treasure yearning to be known.***” But what is that yearning? Even if we take it as absolutely true as a Sahih Hadith, which it is not, even if we took it that way, what does it mean, “***yearning to be known***”? That too is being placed in the hearts of the human being, a yearning to be known, to be understood, to be loved, to share. It makes sense. If we have yearning in our self, then there has to be some kind of yearning in Allah, because everything is a reflection of Allah (swt). It is proven again and again and again, and I never get tired of speaking about it. You may get tired of hearing me say it, but I never get tired of saying it. To me, it is a revelation every time I say it.

To develop some level of submission, to have some success, also to have errors, make mistakes, repent of them and correct them, to know that Allah (swt) is always forgiving and always understanding means that there is that capability within ourselves to be forgiving and understanding. We can look around at the examples in our lives. We can look at our parents. We can look at people who we grew up with, and we see where our habits came from. We want to focus on those good habits. We want to respectfully leave the others behind, and transform ourselves from those habits, not pick and choose what makes us happy, or pick and choose the things that fulfill my own personal needs, or even my family's personal needs, but try to allow myself and ourselves to respond in a proper way to the circumstances. I don't think any of us can safely say with full knowledge and full authority that we have gotten past that lesson.

The question is when do we remember the lesson? If we don't remember at the time that the lesson is absolutely needed, which is not the best time to remember it, the best time to remember it is in your day-to-day life, so that it becomes your default when you need to know. I think we have to reflect in some small way on the work of Allah. That is why Allah (swt) says He created us in His own image, with His own hands. We have discussed that in many ways in terms of *khayal*/imagination. It is not in "His image," as if He looks like a human being, but the quality and attributes that comprise that who we attribute the name of Allah to. It is also the quality that we have where we can imagine ourselves to be better, imagine ourselves to be more peaceful, imagine ourselves to be more calm, and imagine ourselves to be more trusting and more open hearted—and more than anything, imagine ourselves to be more forgiving, to change our behavior, to imagine ourselves as a sacrifice, as a *qurba*/sacrifice. To do that, it takes a cognitive capability called knowledge, which is probably one of the greatest gifts Allah (swt) has given us. He mentions this many, many times in Qur'an.

He taught us the use of the pen. Those verses and others that mention this in Q'uran indicate that there is much knowledge, an ocean of knowledge, untold treasures, untold wisdom that can be plumbed. If the oceans were ink, there would not be enough to write the miracles of Allah (swt)'s creation. It is not that there is a defined amount of knowledge, but there is an endless amount of knowledge, which is why there seem to be endless oceans, an endlessness of water in the oceans. When Allah says, "**Iqra bismi-rabbika,**" that mystic pen and the mystic record are symbols of some kind of permanent revelation, permanent unfoldment of revelation, a constant unfolding of revelation. They are symbolic of the foundation of each human being's knowledge. Everywhere we look, Allah (swt) has symbolically shown us the depth and breadth of our capabilities, of our knowledge that we could have if we applied our attention to it. Allah speaks words of knowledge about the power that people can understand, because we can come to an understanding that even the smallest amount of knowledge is a great humbling gift.

How do we get the meaning of it? In Arabic, the word *qira* means to read, to study, to investigate, to research it; however, includes another concept, the concept of knowledge itself, what we are studying. You find it in other languages too. Who is it that cares about it? They are the mystics, the people who are trying to understand more, not just the people who are trying to do the rituals. They are the people who are trying to understand more, because this mysticism transcends definition. It takes us into a world of metaphors and analogies, a world that is constantly unfolding itself. It is impossible to translate the whole meanings of these phrases, but Allah (swt) says to read and to teach. He talks about the pen and writing with the pen. If you write something, the implication is that it is going to be read. Why would you write something that is not going to be read? Why would you read something if you were not interested in learning what it said?

The implication of the act of writing what you know is the same creative process of passing on information and knowledge, the perpetuity of knowledge. Just the fact that you can write, that you have the tool, that you have something to say, you write it with the intention that somebody will read it, and that person will read it because they will want to understand it is the creative process of the human being, also. It means that the science or the knowledge of about oneself, the knowledge of spirituality and of human conditions, the knowledge of human relationships and of human communities are all here for us to grasp and to understand. But there is another alternative meaning, too, for that word *qira*. It is to reach out. It certainly is what we do when we try and gain knowledge. We reach out into unknown areas, or partially known areas. We reach for something that we didn't know. We are faced with circumstances that we are supposed to extract knowledge from, like the bee extracts the nectar from the flower which then converts into something different, something useful, something healthful, something healing and it serves the laws of nature. We reach to know things.

Allah (swt) has emblazoned everything, provided and disclosed to us, [with] doorways of knowledge in nature and in ourselves, in our waking state and in our sleeping state, in our

work and in every aspect of our consciousness. Our children go to school. They learn subjects. Some they like, some they don't like. They read books. Some they like, some they don't like. But they have to understand that that process defines them as human beings. They are explorers. Even if they are sitting in their school up the hill, they are adventurers, explorers, in the realm of the unknown. Every day they learn something they didn't know. Just that pattern itself, hopefully, will continue throughout their life. They will continue to want to know new things, but within known parameters; not just helter skelter, but presented in a curriculum, presented in a way that it is understandable, presented in a way to show a linkage between history and geography and civics and science and spirituality. *Inshā'a-Llāh*, that is how it is done. That pattern will become instilled in the human being.

We know that there are parameters, and when you stay within those parameters, within those boundaries, you will dive deeper. You will gain more and more knowledge, and you will learn the secret of gaining more and more knowledge. Even in our arrogance, even in our fears and doubts, there are things to learn from them, and at night when we sleep there is also work going on. Everything, even wakefulness and sleep, is a doorway to knowledge. Arrogance is a doorway to knowledge. It does not mean that we should be arrogant. It means that if we find arrogance in ourselves, then we can learn from it. We can even learn from our fears.

If we understand that this sojourn, this wandering in this world is more about gaining knowledge than it is about gaining contentment, or the ability to earn a better living or earn a better salary. If we understand it is about peace, submission and trust in Allah, then whatever the other things that have come to us in life are, we are thinking that we have the means to deal with them. We are not just thinking about gaining wealth, name and fame. If everything is a doorway to knowledge, if knowledge/*marifa*, gnosis is our goal, if it is true that knowledge makes you free, then those difficulties, trials and tribulations,

the vicissitudes of day-to-day life can either be seen as things that imprison us, enslave us and keep us from real knowledge, or they can be doorways to true knowledge.

If they enslave us and imprison us, it is because of our own jealousies, our own desires, our own fears, our own history. We won't be able to understand real peace and real contentment and real friendship and real relationship, unless we understand that this is a journey in knowledge. That is why I asked you to write your history and look at your history. Everything is a doorway to knowledge. Everything can be a doorway to knowledge and learning. The prophets come and give us some direction. They disseminate the Truth. They give us some comprehensive meaning. *Aqra'a* (someone who recites or reads) comes from *qira*. It only refers to a particular person, *aqra'a*, a particular type of individual on occasion. But it gives us a direction, a universal kind of direction. This comprehensive meaning we see running throughout the whole of the Qur'an as those who understand, those who see or those who know, those who reach out for knowledge, those who read and investigate, those who question. Not those who try and seek knowledge to prove a point. Not to use knowledge to get what they want, but to seek knowledge as Allah presents it to us.

Sometimes we have to submit to that knowledge. As we already know, sometimes we have to accept it and feel confident with what we already know. We have been given knowledge that has distinguishes us from those other creatures. It gives us superiority over them we are told in Qur'an. How do we use that superiority? We are given a pen, the ability to read and to write, to transmit that knowledge. That is a great gift. But if it were not for that, human beings would not be able to learn from one another. We wouldn't be able to protect our heritage. We wouldn't have a history of that knowledge. We wouldn't be able to fulfill that function. And we would certainly not be vice-regents. Imam Ali (ra) said:

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 the darkness of ignorance into the light of knowledge, and created in them the desire to gain more knowledge and to learn the art of writing, which has many benefits.

The truth is that you can come to understand anything you seek to understand, if you have entered the door of knowledge. We might not like what we have to understand. We might not like the way we are taught. We might not like what we have to do to receive that knowledge. We might not like what that knowledge tells us what we have to do. We might not even agree with what we are being taught. We might find it against some pre-disposed custom, cultural idea or ideology. Eventually, though, if we really seek to understand and not minimize or reduce things to doubts, accusations, justifications, mass generalizations, fears and jealousies, we will begin to learn the different facets of life and love of that knowledge, and love of the events, circumstances, and power of relationships that knowledge brings. We will understand them from a greater sense, and we will grow from it. We will be better people.

We can not give up the understanding that simple or emotional answers are not sufficient, until we embrace knowledge. This education of ours is designed to be continuing. We even call it continuing education in our school system. When you go and get your degrees, you are continuing education. The teachers get continuing education. In this case, it means never ending. We begin our education in the womb, then at the breast of our mothers, then in the socializations, then the schools, and then... all along we are being educated by life, by our attempts in understanding ourselves. But if we focus and affirm that search for knowledge, if we affirm the role that our spirituality plays as the impetus for knowledge – “Why do I exist and what is my purpose, and how can I best fulfill it, and what are my duties and my responsibilities? How do I use this mind and this intellect and this intelligence? How do I use this energy that I have? What is the greatest means that I can contribute?” – then we find that Allah gives us proof after

proof after proof after proof, in Qur'an and in the lives of the prophets, how important knowledge is and how important this process is.

Knowledge is put into our minds, and instinctively, intuitively we accept it because it seems right. We have these mental dialogues and we don't have any idea how much more is added to our capacity and how much more is added to our knowledge base. We have to take *adab*, good intentions, good attitudes, love, love for humanity, respect for one another, and put that together with knowledge, then you have something that is the greatest gift of Allah (swt). You have hearing and sight and intelligence, and all you have is gratitude. Allah says in Qur'an, **"It is He that has brought you forth from the womb of your mothers when you knew nothing. And He gave you hearing and sight and intelligence and affection that you may give thanks to Him."** We have to choose to continue to learn what is good and to apply it. We can see from the world we live in today that sometimes it is not such an easy choice. *Asalām aleikum.*

Closing duas.