

CONDITION OF THE *UMMAH*

PART 13

TIME TO REFLECT: AN ADVICE FOR MUSLIMS

January 22, 2000

There is a big difference between acquiring knowledge and applying that knowledge. For instance, take a person who consumes harmful or unhealthy food despite being knowledgeable about their dangerous or harmful effects on his body. How is his knowledge benefitting him? Likewise anyone who possesses knowledge but does not put it to use cannot benefit from it. Knowledge or expertise has to be put into actions because mere talking does not help anyone. Same is the case with the knowledge of Islam.

Islam is a commitment between a slave and His Master, Allah SWT. It is a way of life which requires constant monitoring and vigilance. The strength of a person's Islam is reflected in his manners, character and behavior. This article explores a series of some very basic questions that all Muslims claim to know the answers for, but let's reflect over them and determine how much of this knowledge is actually manifested in our lives.

The irony of the situation of the Muslim *ummah* is that Muslims claim that they believe in Allah SWT and the Qur'an and when someone gives them knowledge of Islam they acknowledge it and agree with it, yet their behavior, their style of life, and the way they think is the same as non-believers. This article is a plea for an honest reflection for Muslims. Please read these questions carefully, reflect, make a lot of *du'a* and beg Allah SWT to make us real believers!

What should we learn?

People learn different things which they are drawn to by either their innate interests or by being influenced by an idea or a person. But the most important knowledge is always the foundational knowledge. For example, unless a person knows basic physics, he cannot develop a complicated machine. The same goes for all other subjects including Islam. Islam is like a deep ocean with vast amount of knowledge. We cannot dive into the ocean unless we know how to swim. This ability to swim is the foundational knowledge that every Muslim needs. This is the basic knowledge which can save a person from being drifted off by a current and from drowning.

This foundational knowledge is the knowledge of *iman*; of the oneness and greatness of Allah SWT. Just like when we give *da'wah* to new Muslims and instead of talking to them about the intricacies of Arabic grammar or the importance of scholarly tradition in Islam,

we talk to them about submission to the Creator. This is the most important knowledge in Islam and this is what all Muslims need—the knowledge of the relationship between us and our Creator. It is the relationship of slaves to their Master. Slaves only do what their Master asks of them.

Let's reflect over our lives as individuals and a nation to see how this relationship influences our lives. Are we slaves living according to the wishes of our Master? Are we happily fulfilling His commands or are begrudgingly carrying out some of them? Every honest reader will arrive at the conclusion that we are too far away from the pure teachings of Islam. We might carry out some rituals but have certainly not embraced Islam wholeheartedly.

Who is Allah?

Allah SWT is the Creator, the Master, and the Owner of this world and everything in it. He is the Provider, the Giver, the Taker, and the Controller. He is the One who confers all the benefit and success in this life and the hereafter; we cannot receive any benefit or success unless He gives it to us.

Allah SWT is our Lord and we are supposed to be His slaves. He gives us only what is best for us and takes from us just to test our trust, faith and obedience. He is our *Rabb* who we can never thank enough for His limitless bounties on us.

What is Rabb?

Rabb in Arabic encompasses many meanings— owner, ruler, protector, provider, caretaker, all the names of Allah SWT can be incorporated inside the word *Rabb*. We as Muslims believe that Allah SWT is our *Rabb* and we acknowledge it each time we pray:

All praise is for Allah, the 'Rabb' of the Worlds. (Al Fatiha 1:2)

The manifestation of this knowledge is reflected through our belief and actions. It is when we behave in a way which shows that He is the provider, not me; He is the ruler, and I can't do anything without His permission. It is when my love and devotion is to Him SWT. It is when I fear only Him and therefore take all precautions not to make Him upset of me. Everything physically, spiritually, from my mind, body, heart and soul, is all for my *Rabb*. I rely on Him for all my needs and return all matters to Him. It is when all my actions are according to the likings of my *Rabb* and for His pleasure.

We cannot call ourselves Muslims unless we consider Allah SWT as our *Rabb*. Now let's see how much this knowledge is reflected in our lives. Our lifestyle is such that we have ourselves as well as *shaytaan* as our *Rabb*, and not Allah SWT as our *Rabb*.

Allah SWT becomes our *Rabb* only when we consider what He wants from us, what He wants us to engage with and do, and how He wants us to spend our time. *Rabb* overtakes our heart. We have a *Rabb* when there is no love for anybody in our hearts except for Allah SWT. We still can love the creation but it is a love of mercy and kindness, not devotion. Our *Rabb* is *Al-Hayy*, the One who is alive and will never die. Instead of connecting ourselves to other slaves like us who will live and die, we need to realize who our *Rabb* and Master is and get closer to Him. The more we surrender to Allah SWT wholeheartedly, the more He SWT will connect us to Him until the treasure of Allah SWT will become ours and we will receive from His bounty.

What is Deen?

Deen is often translated as religion but it is not only religion, it is *manahj haya*—way of life. The way we act, think, talk, rationale, love, or deal with others...is all part of our *deen*. In other words, our *deen* is the way we behave.

As Muslims, our behavior should be according to Muhammed SAW since he is our teacher and role model, and particularly since Allah SWT has commanded us to love him and follow him. The love for the Prophet SAW is expressed through our obedience to him SAW.

Hypocrites have multiple *deens*. Allah SWT said in the Qur'an:

Allah has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing, and over their vision is a veil. And for them is a great punishment.

And of the people are some who say, "We believe in Allah and the Last Day," but they are not believers.

They [think to] deceive Allah and those who believe, but they deceive not except themselves and perceive [it] not.

In their hearts is disease, so Allah has increased their disease; and for them is a painful punishment because they [habitually] used to lie.

And when it is said to them, "Do not cause corruption on the earth," they say, "We are but reformers."

Unquestionably, it is they who are the corrupters, but they perceive [it] not.

And when it is said to them, "Believe as the people have believed," they say, "Should we believe as the foolish have believed?" Unquestionably, it is they who are the foolish, but they know [it] not.

And when they meet those who believe, they say, "We believe"; but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say, "Indeed, we are with you; we were only mockers."

[But] Allah mocks them and prolongs them in their transgression [while] they wander blindly.

Those are the ones who have purchased error [in exchange] for guidance, so their transaction has brought no profit, nor were they guided.

Their example is that of one who kindled a fire, but when it illuminated what was around him, Allah took away their light and left them in darkness [so] they could not see.

Deaf, dumb and blind - so they will not return [to the right path].

Or [it is] like a rainstorm from the sky within which is darkness, thunder and lightning. They put their fingers in their ears against the thunderclaps in dread of death. But Allah is encompassing of the disbelievers. (Surah Al-Baqara 2:7—19)

Ask yourself...who am I?

What is the difference between Muslims and hypocrites?

Muslims have only one *deen*. They have one way, one behavior, one teacher, one teaching, and one way of living; all their actions are according to the teachings of the Prophet SAW. Even if a Muslim is weak and commits sins, he admits, repents and resolves to be good again. Hypocrites on the other hand have many *deen* as can be seen in the above verses. A hypocrite is like a chameleon who transforms and changes colors based on any given situation or setting. For instance, when he is with Muslims he acts like them, and when he is with non-Muslims he transforms and is like them.

Let's reflect over our lives and question ourselves:

who am I and where am I going?

What is my deen?

Is my way of life the way Allah SWT wants and chose for me?

Allah SWT said in the Qur'an:

This day I have perfected for you your deen and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as deen. (Al Maida 5:3)

Allah SWT didn't say I completed the Qur'an. Qur'an is our book but our way of life encompasses more. It shows that Qur'an is our constitution which explains to us and governs our *deen*—our way of life—according to the teachings of the Prophet SWT.

What is the purpose of our creation?

Allah SWT says in the Qur'an:

And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me. (Adh Dhariyat 51:56)

So does Allah SWT want us to worship Him round the clock?

Yes!

But what does worship really mean?

Worship is not only about salah, fasting, hajj and charity. These pillars of Islam are all very important but they are also very limited aspects of worship. Salah is the most frequently performed form of worship, but if we add up the salah for the entire day it would barely exceed an hour. So what about the other 23 hours of the day? What do we do then?

Worship is a broad category which incorporates many things:

- Having humble and humility in our dealings with others is worship.
- Dealing with others according to the teachings of Allah SWT and His Prophet SAW is worship.
- Loving others for the sake of Allah SWT is worship.
- Leading our life in obedience to Allah SWT is worship.
- Being kind and considerate towards our family and spending quality time with them is worship.
- Pleasing our spouses for Allah SWT is worship.
- Remembering Allah SWT is worship.
- Spending for Allah SWT and doing good deeds is worship.
- Any action that we do to enhance our spiritual life and to please Allah SWT becomes an act of worship.

Worship is intention!

If our intention is to lead our life for Allah and to worship Him SWT, then every action of ours becomes a form of worship. Even if we go on vacation for instance, but our intention is to appreciate and praise the greatness of Allah SWT, it becomes an act of worship. It is this constant thinking about Allah SWT which makes every action that we perform as a form of worship. Allah SWT wants this constant thinking and remembrance from us, and this is what the true meaning of slavery is.

Are we in this state of slavery to Allah SWT?

Are we leading our lives in a state of worship?

We might be on different levels of slavery but majority of us Muslims are not in this state. We have to go back to basics of Islam and work towards building this status in our hearts.

Why don't we have successful Islamic activities in masjid?

It is very difficult to hold successful and consistent Islamic activities in the *masjid* because the Houses of Allah SWT are no longer pure for Him SWT. Sadly, there is a lot of politics involved. People prefer to hear fancy feel-good talks and ideologies instead of the bitter truth about our reality. The bureaucracy involved in getting board approval for the speakers and the credentials they require hinders actual *da'wah* and teaching. And at the end, the activities are not according to the needs of the community and their benefit, rather they are according to the convenience of the organizers.

Unfortunately *masajid* have lost their original purpose and have become grounds of contention between different ideological groups and it has become very difficult to hold programs for the sake of Allah SWT. At least, we see some semblance of Islamic activities in *masajid* in the West, but majority of the Muslim countries have limited the role of *masajid* to only places of rituals and have deprived people of a vibrant part of their *deen*. That is why the best places to do *da'wah* to Allah SWT are at people's homes. This is how Islam began; it started at homes in Makkah and spread from house to house. It has to start at home where it is embraced and lived by people who then take it to the *masajid*. If people do not establish Islam in their own homes, they cannot establish it in the *masajid*. For example, since there is no Islam at homes, that is why we see men who have been involved in activities in the *masajid* for years but their manners have not changed for the better. Why? It is like trying to fill an empty cup from an empty jug, can it be filled? If the person teaching at the *masajid* does not have proper manners, how can he possibly give it to the ones who are learning from him?

It is true that worshipping in *masajid* is far more virtuous than at home since it brings unity of the hearts and thinking but today we are facing calamities from all fronts and the condition of *masajid* is one of them. *Masajid* have become political grounds of power struggle between various ideological groups where people would rather air their own understandings than talk about Allah SWT. This situation can only be changed through purity of *iman*. Unless true *iman* is developed, nothing will benefit the Muslims.

Note: Imagine metropolises like New York City, Houston, Detroit, or Chicago where *masajid* have people from all over the world, of various backgrounds, races, ethnicities, and understandings, and there is no proper leadership to unite them as one! All of these people bring along their baggage of cultural and spiritual illnesses, misunderstandings, misconceptions, confusions and diseases of the heart, and often the appointed leader is the worst among them (except in some rare cases). In this climate of spiritual anarchy how can we implement the teachings of Islam and develop brotherhood, love, and compassion?

When division and bureaucracy override the concern for the community, how can we accomplish anything? When most of the *masjid* funds are spent over miscellaneous instead of the Islamic activities, how can we expect real change? *Masajid* are supposed to be the light houses illuminating the darkness of the world. The light is generated not by the building but rather by the *iman* and sincerity of the individuals that occupy the building! Unless this light of *iman* is developed in individuals, the rest will never be accomplished.

How can this iman be developed?

What should we aim for, what should we learn?

In order to answer this question, we need to understand a very important concept, which is the chain of knowledge.

A student needs a teacher in order to learn and grow. Our teacher is Rasul Allah SAW. Who is his teacher? Angel Jibreel (AS); who received the knowledge from Allah SWT. What did Allah SWT teach Angel Jibreel? Allah SWT taught him the knowledge He wants in the sequence that He knows will benefit humanity. If we want to know about Allah SWT, His wisdom and knowledge, who should we go to? Allah SWT Himself! How can we do that? It is through the Qur'an, especially through the chapters that were revealed in Makkah.

Let's take a quick glimpse at the structure of the Qur'an...

Qur'an was revealed over twenty three years period in two different locations...Makkah and Medina. The needs of the Muslim community in Makkah were very different from its needs in Medina; therefore the themes and messages of the revelations in these two places are very different. Two-thirds of the Qur'an was revealed in the first thirteen years of Prophet-hood in Makkah which talks mainly about building faith and sacrificing for Allah SWT. One-third of the Qur'an that was revealed in Medina during the last ten years of Prophet-hood focuses on rules and regulations according to the needs of the developing community. An important point to consider here is that the chronological order of revelation is very different from the order of the chapters in the Qur'an. If we really want to understand the messages of the Qur'an with the focus on developing *iman*, we need to follow the Qur'an according to its chronological order.

Since the most important knowledge we need is foundational belief in Allah SWT, therefore the only way to gain knowledge is to follow the sequence of revelation.

Makki Qur'an will teach us the core of our faith. It will teach us who Allah SWT is, for how can we believe in someone we do not know? The more we know Allah SWT, the more we will believe in Him and be ready to implement His commandments.

After this initial division of Qur'an between Makki and Medini periods, we can further divide Makki chapters into three categories:

1. Allah SWT introducing Himself to us. When we study these, our *iman* increases.
2. Severe warnings for unbelievers, disbelievers and hypocrites, and glad tidings for believers; with examples of what will happen to them in this life and the hereafter.
3. Stories of Messengers and Prophets, and the nations before us.

What is the purpose?

Why does Allah SWT give us all these stories?

This is how Allah SWT shares wisdom and knowledge with us. One of the ways to understand what is going on in our life is to study the lives of the Messengers and Prophets and their nations, and compare it to our life now. It will allow us to understand what Allah SWT wants from us. We are supposed to take these stories and compare our lives with the people in the past. Since the *sunnah* of Allah SWT never changes, what happened in the past will happen now and in the future. If we behave the way people in earlier times did, we will receive what they received—whether it was a reward or a punishment, a blessing or a curse. This makes us solely responsible for our actions.

The end of each surah gives advice to Muhammed SAW and every Muslim. Just imagine who it is that is giving an advice! It is Allah SWT Himself advising us on what is best for us. But are we listening?

If we learn the advice given to the Prophet SAW and his companions in a given situation and then put it parallel to our lives, we will learn how to deal with our situations and problems according to His SWT's advice. Once we do that, we will understand Allah SWT, His message, and what Islam is all about. After that we go to our teacher Muhammed SAW and learn how he SAW conducted himself in various circumstances and how he SAW taught us to behave. This is what will give us real *iman* and true understanding of life!

What will it do?

This is when we will begin to enjoy the sweetness of faith and the true joy of slavery! At this time all our rituals, prayers, good deeds, dealings with others will be to please Allah SWT.

A Few Advices:

- Study the chapters of the Qur'an revealed in Makkah (known as Qur'an Makki)
- Before reading, ask Allah SWT for wisdom and understanding.

- Stop at each chapter and study what is the wisdom that Allah SWT is sharing with us.
- Study the stories of each Messenger and Prophet. Learn the wisdom behind each of these stories. Ask yourself, why did Allah SWT add it in the Qur'an? Allah SWT has said:

And We have already sent messengers before you. Among them are those [whose stories] We have related to you, and among them are those [whose stories] We have not related to you. And it was not for any messenger to bring a sign [or verse] except by permission of Allah. So when the command of Allah comes, it will be concluded in truth, and the falsifiers will thereupon lose [all]. (Ghafir 40:78)

Meaning Allah SWT sent many more messengers besides the Ones He mentioned in the Qur'an but He didn't tell us about them.

Why? Why did He choose to share the stories of certain Messengers and Prophets with us in the Qur'an and not others?

The stories mentioned in the Qur'an cover all aspects of lives; no matter what happens in our life, we cannot say it didn't happen before. Any condition we encounter has passed before our time; may be in different shape and form, but it has happened! Through these stories Allah SWT tells us how to deal with the situation, how to solve our problems and how to cure ourselves from spiritual ills.

- Stop and ask yourself, where am I in this story? Allah SWT asked this Prophet to do such and such, his people did not listen and this is what happened...what about me? Where do I fit in this story? What am I doing?
- In every chapter Allah SWT gives us advices. Collect all the advices of Allah SWT and question yourself whether you are living according to these advices. Take them seriously. Even if you are unable to implement them, ask Allah SWT to give you the ability.

All of this is very simple, but it needs an honest, truthful, and sincere person! Once we are sincere, Allah SWT will lift the veils and allow us to see beyond what is apparent. He will give us the vision and comprehension to understand the situation and how to deal with it properly.

After establishing the relationship with the Qur'an we have to acquaint ourselves with the life of the Prophet SAW, step by step, in sequence. This absence of sequence has destroyed the Muslim *ummah* today. Everyone is trying to learn and implement what they are not spiritually ready to handle and that is why the *iman* is not flourishing!

What do we really need?

We need the wisdom of Allah SWT and to build *iman*. We need to develop the understanding behind our faith and why we do what we do. Before we learn how to pray we need to know Who we pray to! Learning to perform *wudu* (ablution) and *salah* is a small topic; how to prepare ourselves internally for the meeting between us and Allah SWT during this *salah* and believing in what we are doing is the big topic!

How many of us really have this awareness? Most of our *ummah*, young and old alike, are lacking this understanding and that is why we are so far away from Islam. The challenge lying ahead of us is to build true understanding of our *deen* according to Allah SWT and His Prophet SAW and to spread this understanding among the *ummah*.

Where should we start from? Why?

Once again we have to start from Makkah time by building *iman* and *yaqeen* in Allah SWT until our hearts are pure from materialistic attachments and dedicated purely towards Allah SWT.

Why?

Because this is what Allah SWT wants! If Allah SWT revealed the Qur'an a certain way, who are we to change it? Can any other way of learning the Qur'an be better than what Allah SWT has chosen? Do we know more than Allah SWT, Angel Jibreel and Prophet Muhammed SAW?

Once we have inculcated the reality of *iman* in our hearts and once it comes alive in our lives, then we can move to Medina because Qur'an in Medina has many rules and regulations. If we approach the regulations with a heart full of *iman*, they will be easy to follow. It is better to be in a state that we have a heart full of *iman* though we haven't fulfilled all the obligations of our *deen*, then to fulfill the obligations while our heart is lacking *iman*!

Not only is it obligatory for us to live the teachings of Islam ourselves, it is our duty to pass it on to the future generations. But how can we give what we do not have within us? Our children will either take us to jannah or Jahannam based on what we teach them. In all honesty, we are the ones responsible for destroying Islam, and not the enemies of Islam. We already have the remedy of our situation—Qur'an, but we refuse to take it!

What is the problem? What is holding us back?

The problem is not how to reach Allah SWT because the path to Allah SWT is clear and simple. The real problem is lack of sincerity, honesty and truthfulness, and without it we cannot do anything!

Are we really honest?

Are we really sincere?

Honesty and sincerity is judged by the sacrifice of a person! Sacrifice is the key word here! The more honest and sincere we are, the more we will make sacrifices. Instead of giving our bare minimum to Allah SWT, we will give our best—in terms of time, effort, money, everything! We should question ourselves everyday:

What have I done for Allah SWT?

What have I done to save myself?

Those who are sincere and honest will see a difference in their lives. They will be able to accomplish more in limited amount of time. Their thinking, aims, abilities, productivity will be enhanced and they will put them to better use. Those who are always occupied with materialistic pursuits and do not have time for Allah SWT are actually suffering from a form of torture from Allah SWT because they lack sincerity.

No one knows the sincerity of a person except Allah SWT. Those who claim they are sincere are in fact too far from it. None of us are really sincere; we might be trying but even our efforts are too weak. Allah SWT will open the doors of guidance for us according to our efforts, since He SWT is the only one who can open and He does so only for the truthful people.

How can we rectify our situation?

We have to sincerely reflect over our lives and hold ourselves accountable. Let's look at time...

When people have a certain priority, they schedule the rest of their day around it. Take World Cup Soccer for example. During the game the streets are empty, people finish their miscellaneous chores beforehand, take sick days or vacations, or they do whatever possible to be able to watch the game. Those who are more fanatic watch their favorite team play at the venue and to root for them, regardless of what country it is in. They are sincere and they have priorities! Others, who are even more sincere, make sure they get the best seats money can buy! Those who are even more sincere, gamble on their team because they believe and have faith in what they are doing! This is what faith does! It makes people move, surrender, spend and sacrifice.

This is just one example of sincerity to our own desires, though we see the same thing at the time of weddings, vacations, graduations, or while buying a new house or a car etc.

Similarly, if a Muslim truly believes in Allah SWT, it will reflect through his actions. Let's reflect on our lives...

How do we spend our time daily?

When a Muslim really believes in Allah SWT, all his life becomes devoted to Allah SWT. He will sacrifice most of his time for Allah SWT, one way or another. The more a person sacrifices, the more Allah SWT will open; and the more Allah SWT opens, the more he will see, comprehend, understand, and enjoy the sweetness of faith. This in turn will motivate him to sacrifice even more. He will be willing to give up anything in order to preserve this sweetness of faith and will not care for anything in return except the pleasure of the Most Glorious Lord!

What is the way of learning and developing the reality of faith?

Consistency! There is no way we can learn anything without consistency and proper supervision. Today, we are playing games with our life. We have no consistency in learning and applying the knowledge, or even in making the effort to learn.

Can we register for a college class, show up to the class once during the semester, hand in a few assignments only and expect to pass? What will happen? The professor will never give us a passing grade!

What then about Islam?

We have no consistency or sequence of gaining Islamic knowledge. We are running from one *masjid* to another, from one *halaqa* to another, from one teacher to another; acting like Tarzan swinging from tree to tree. At least he knew where he wanted to go, we don't even know that! We have no purpose, direction, vision, goal, or curriculum. We show up when we want to at the class we like. What are we going to gain? That is not learning!

Any form of studying requires three elements:

1. *Talib*, literally a seeker. A person who really wants the knowledge.
2. Time and environment. One cannot learn without devoting time and having an environment that is conducive to learning.
3. *Sohba*, companionship and role model. The only way to judge a person's knowledge is by accompanying him, not by his speech. A student needs to have someone he can imitate in every possible way. That is why the followers of the Prophet SAW were called companions because they accompanied the Prophet SAW. It is important to accompany the person so the student can see knowledge in action.

The prerequisite of gaining knowledge is the purity of intention! What do you want the knowledge for: So people can praise and complement your knowledge? So you can be

respected in community? The only knowledge that is acceptable to Allah SWT is that which is gained sincerely for Allah SWT. And the only knowledge that is beneficial to the person is that which he implements. Every other knowledge is useless and will be a source of torture on the Day of Judgment. May Allah SWT save us all!

The Messenger of Allah SAW said: "Whoever acquires knowledge by which the pleasure of Allah is sought, but he only acquires it for the purpose of worldly gain, will not smell the fragrance of Paradise on the Day of Resurrection." (Ibn Majah)

On another occasion the Messenger of Allah SAW said: "Whoever seeks knowledge in order to argue with the foolish, or to show off before the scholars, or to attract people's attention, will be in Hell." (Ibn Majah)

It is said that people belong to three categories: *talib* (seeker), *naaqid* (critic) and *muktafi* (the one satisfied with himself). The first one will be saved while the other two are on a dangerous path leading to hellfire.

According to various sayings of the Prophet SAW, a successful person is either seeker of knowledge, or a teacher, or the one immersed in the remembrance of Allah SWT, or doing good deeds, or inviting to good and forbidding the evil.

Everything else in this transitory life is against us, not for us.

How do we gain knowledge?

It all starts with sincerity and forms a full circle back to sincerity:

- One cannot gain knowledge unless he is sincere →
- if he is sincere he will give time →
- Since the person is sincere, he will not give left over time instead he will sacrifice and schedule his life around gaining the knowledge →
- The more he sacrifices, the more he will value it →
- The more he values the knowledge the more it will bring him closer to Allah SWT and increase his sincerity!

Once the person reaches this level, then he is willing to lose everything in life but not closeness to Allah SWT! Today, we gain knowledge of Allah SWT during our left over time. We gain knowledge *if* we have time, *if* we remember, *if* we are not too tired...everything is according to our mood and convenience. It is shameful because this is not at all how we behave when it come to our job or college studies!

If we act like this, Allah SWT will take the *iman* and vision away from us and fill our hearts with hypocrisy as a punishment from Him SWT. He SWT will seal our faculties so we cannot

listen, comprehend, see the truth and act upon it. It is one of the forms of torture to hear and know the truth but not be able to act upon what you know.

Those who are weak and cannot implement the knowledge that they are hearing, should:

- be honest and cry to Allah SWT, confess their weakness to Him, and ask Him for strength and ability to live the knowledge. At this time, though weak, they are honest, sincere and are making an effort between them and Allah SWT by connecting their heart to Him.
- start to really make time and devote it to Allah SWT regularly. The more a person does that and show Allah SWT that he is sincere, the more Allah SWT will give him the ability to continue and open his heart for further guidance.

People who are sincere will be elevated by Allah SWT. They will become hungry for more knowledge and no one will be able to stop them from pursuing it. When a person is really hungry, he will eat whatever he can get his hands on—sour, salty, sweet, whatever it is. Similarly, a real believer is hungry to please Allah SWT; hungry to imitate Rasul Allah SAW; hungry to save himself from hellfire; hungry to enter paradise. He is hungry to make up for all the lost years in his life when he was misguided and unaware of His Lord. He is burning up from the inside to do something to gain the pleasure of Allah SWT. When Allah SWT sees this explosive volcano in him, He SWT will open doors for him to accomplish what he wants.

All of us have 24 hours and 7 days a week. All of us have the same amount of time but some people are able to accomplish a lot during that time while others cannot get much done. What is the difference? The difference is the status of the heart and priorities!

What about conditions and situations that might hinder you from devoting yourself?

Conditions are from Allah SWT. If you connect yourself to Allah SWT and sincerely seek His support, you will see what Allah SWT will do for you! What is required is honesty! Those who lie and give excuses for their behavior, blame and complain about others, Allah SWT will leave them in their condition and they will not be able to change.

It is incumbent upon every Muslim to gain knowledge. Allah SWT has told us in the Qur'an:

So high [above all] is Allah, the Sovereign, the Truth. And, [O Muhammad], do not hasten with [recitation of] the Qur'an before its revelation is completed to you, and say, "My Lord, increase me in knowledge." (Taha 20:114)

The Messenger of Allah SAW has said that "Seeking knowledge is a duty upon every Muslim" (Ibn Majah)

He SAW also said, "May Allah cause his face to shine, the man who hears what I say and conveys it (to others)." (Ibn Majah)

Knowledge is unlimited. What kind of knowledge is it that Allah SWT and His Prophet SAW are commanding us to pray for and seek?

Prophet SAW has given us the answer for that. We are supposed to ask our Lord:

O Allah! I ask You for knowledge that is of benefit, a good provision and deeds that will be accepted. (Ibn Majah)

Who is the most knowledgeable one alive on earth at the moment?

Who is the highest scholar in the world?

Who has the knowledge of all the revelations from the first to the last?

Shaytaan! He has all the knowledge. None of us can compete with him in knowledge. But did his knowledge do him any good? Did it benefit him?

So the important question here is why didn't his knowledge benefit him?

The root of all his problems was arrogance and jealousy! His arrogance, stubbornness, jealousy and envy did not allow him to act upon his knowledge.

Let's analyze our condition...

Most of us are not willing to hear anything about ourselves. We act like we know it all; we feel what we are doing is right; and no one needs to tell us anything. Why would Allah SWT guide us then? If we act like we know it all, then Allah SWT will leave us to our own devices until we destroy ourselves!

Rasul Allah SAW said,

"A person who has an atom's weight of pride in his heart will not enter Paradise."

A person asked: "But one does like to wear good clothes and shoes!"

The Prophet SAW replied: "Indeed Allah is beautiful and loves beauty! Pride means to reject the truth and to look down on others!" (Muslim)

If we truly understand this hadeeth, we will cry out of fear and be ever vigilant about our behavior. None of us can claim that we do not have arrogance. Muslim scholars conclude that those who believe that they are not arrogant are in fact full of arrogance. One of the reasons that cause a person to become arrogant and reject the truth is material comforts

and luxuries, which is why it is harder for most wealthy people to be fully submissive to Allah SWT.

However those who are humble and seek beneficial knowledge from Allah SWT, Allah will give it to them. Once He gives them, He will test them to see what they will do with what they know. How will this knowledge be manifested in their personalities and reflected in their manners and character. If the lifestyle of the person does not change, it shows that he has hypocrisy in his heart and he is living a lie.

Allah SWT gives a person who is seeking knowledge just like He gives the one who asks for wealth. Knowledge comes with responsibility just like wealth comes with responsibility. If the person who has wealth becomes stingy and instead of sharing his blessings with others, he hoards them, this wealth becomes a form of punishment from Allah SWT for him in this life and the hereafter. Just like sharing the wealth is incumbent upon the one who has been blessed with it, sharing the knowledge and spreading it is incumbent upon the one who has been granted it. For example, there is a big difference between a person who has money but he uses it for himself only without benefitting anyone else, versus the one who spends his wealth for the benefit of others. Similarly, there is a vast difference between the person whom Allah gives knowledge with which he only benefits himself versus a person whose knowledge becomes a source of salvation for many others.

Only Allah SWT knows where we are going. Our duty is to pass on the pure message of Islam to others, as a reminder and as a sign of our sincerity and concern for the *deen* of Allah SWT. *La ilaha illa lah* is a commitment between us and Allah SWT. Once we commit to Allah SWT, we cannot change it just because our spouses or children do not approve. All things including family, wealth, status, comforts are expendable for the *deen* of Allah SWT. Once we really believe in our duty as a Muslim, we will ache and will be an unstoppable force of goodness.

What are the etiquettes of relationship between teachers and students?

Relationship between a teacher and his students is very high. Traditionally, Muslim students used to travel far distances to accompany a teacher for years in order to gain maximum benefits from him. They used to take these teachers as mentors to help them shape their character, behavior, and mind frame. The sacrifice of being in a different environment, living away from one's known comforts and accompaniment of pious knowledgeable people has blessings which should not be underestimated. Knowledge does not come with some memorization in the comfort of one's home. It needs time, sacrifice, devotion, consistency, and effort. Today, we cannot even give a couple of hours a day for our knowledge.

There is a difference between a speaker who motivates us to do good deeds and a person we take as a teacher. The rights and responsibilities towards them are different, as well as their commitments toward us.

The speaker has no obligation to disclose his personal life to us. We have to respect and understand the privacy of people, especially those working for Allah. When people devote themselves for the sake of Allah SWT and for spreading His message, they are more heavily trialed than others. If we do not understand their circumstances and their motives, we might misunderstand and misinterpret their personal lives and hold it against them. It is best to receive the message from them and leave their personal life alone. If we hear rumors about them, we should not pay heed, instead we should make du'a for them since they are trying to please Allah SWT.

However, if we take someone as our teacher and role model, and we accompany them like a true seeker of knowledge, then we have the right to investigate who they are including their personal lives.

How can we gain wisdom?

One of the signs of the End of Times will be that Muslims will be heedless, majority of people's hearts will be dead and they will have no Islam. The only One who can give us the ability to see and the only one who can give us the wisdom to comprehend the situations is Allah SWT.

Wisdom is a gift of Allah SWT that He bestows on His slaves. Allah SWT has said:

He grants wisdom to whom He pleases; and he to whom wisdom is granted receives indeed a benefit overflowing; but none will grasp the message but men of understanding. (Al-Baqara 2:269)

Ali (RA) said that Allah SWT sends his wisdom in the hearts of whom He wants but He SWT will not give it to the following:

- Those who love *duniya* (material wealth);
- Those who worry about the future;
- Those who look to others with *hasad* (envy);
- Those who do not have *adab* (proper Islamic manners and etiquettes) and do not rely on Allah SWT.
- Those who have long hope (materialistic ambitions).

Those who do not receive wisdom from Allah SWT will not have *baseerah* (vision). If they do not have *baseerah* it means they will not have light from Allah SWT, and this absence of light means they will be blind and will not receive guidance from Allah SWT.

In the End of Time, Allah SWT will blind many people. This begs us to ask, what will happen if we do not make an effort and we stay the course with the status quo?

May Allah SWT save us from being among the blind and heedless ones. Instead may Allah SWT make us among those who will receive His *noor* (light), *baseerah*, *hikma* (wisdom) and *qabool* (acceptance), and may Allah SWT allow us to spread His light and mercy among His creation. *Ameen!*

What do we really want?

Today we treat Islamic activities like an entertainment session or a movie. We want to spend a short amount of time in front of the teacher, take quick notes, feel accomplished that we have done our part and go back to other 'more important' things in our life. We are at least willing to spend two hours in front of movies but any Islamic activity for two hours appears too long.

How much time do we waste each and every day by sitting in front of TV, gossiping, cooking, cleaning, things that are of no real benefit to us? How many hours of our lives have we lost like this? How much are we aiming to do? What do we intend to do? Our faith is so weak and corrupted that we do not even have intention of doing anything, let alone actually doing something!

The very foundational knowledge of Islam is that Allah SWT gives us according to our intention!

Rasul Allah SAW said:

"Verily actions are by intentions, and for every person is what he intended." (Bukhari & Muslim)

We have no right to blame anybody! The more truthful our intentions and our commitment to Allah are, the more He will give us the ability to live Islam. Majority of us are sinners barely obeying Allah SWT. Our sins are most likely greater than our good deeds. We are all only just trying to live Islam. If we want to know how much Islam we have, we need to compare our lives with that of the Companions of the Prophet SAW.

Rasul Allah SAW has told us to follow them as they are our role models. He SAW said:

"Whatever is brought to you from Allah's Book, it is obligatory to practice it, there is no excuse for leaving it; if it is not from Allah's book, then a *sunnah* established by me; if not one of my *sunnahs*, then what my Companions said; verily, my Companions are equivalent to the stars in the sky: whichever of them you pinpoint, you will be guided, and the differences among my Companions are a mercy for you." (Kanz al-'ummal)

When we compare ourselves with the Companions of the Prophet SAW, we will be ashamed at our lack of sincerity and our inability to live the message of *la ialaha illal lah*. If we keep their lives in front of us, we will never be able to make arrogant claims that we have Islam.

CONNECTING THE CIRCLE

Today Muslim *ummah* is in a chaotic state. Islamic scholars, groups and *masajid* have their own understanding of what is the priority in Islam. Some stress on the importance of learning Arabic, others consider the study of *shari'ah* to be the priority, yet others believe that we need to educate ourselves about *sunnah*, *tafseer*, *jihad*, *khilafah*...

How can people have all that knowledge when they do not have iman?

Where do we start?

All these topics are very important part of our deen but of what use is all this knowledge if there is no real iman in our hearts and our intentions are not pure?

Considering we might die tonight, what should be a higher priority in our lives...learning the Arabic language or getting the knowledge to build basic faith in Allah SWT?

The salvation lies in having pure *iman* in Allah SWT!

Once a person's heart is filled with *iman*, he can learn Arabic, Qur'an, *sunnah*, whatever else he needs; at that time he will know how to implement the knowledge and the knowledge will actually benefit him.

A very important point to remember is that if we die now and we do not have much Islamic knowledge but we are struggling to establish a connection between us and Allah SWT, then we will be successful, InshaAllah! Meanwhile, if we have all the knowledge in the world but our *iman* in Allah SWT is shaky, all the knowledge we have gained will be a waste!

Living the belief through our actions takes precedence over gaining knowledge. For example, if we master Arabic language but our heart, tongue and manners are not right, what good is the language going to do? How many knowledgeable people have passed who had amazing linguistic and oratory abilities, but their actions had nothing to do with Islam!

That is why we need useful knowledge; the knowledge that we gain purely for Allah SWT. The most important knowledge is to learn to have Allah SWT in our hearts, so when we die, we die with the love and trust of Allah SWT. This cannot be gained through a lesson, speech, course or a book. We have to struggle and sacrifice to earn it!

How can we earn it?

- Do a lot of *dhikr* (remember Allah SWT)

- Talk to Allah SWT (make *du'a*)
- Rely in Allah SWT
- Build good habits that are pleasing to Allah SWT
- Spend consistent time and effort on learning about Allah SWT
- Cry to Allah SWT
- Connect your heart to Him SWT
- Hurry to spend money for any cause in the path of Allah SWT

Once you do that, now you can go ahead and be a scholar and you will be beneficial to yourself and others. No one can stop you. Allah SWT will take care of you according to your intention.

This is our deen! Are we living it?

May Allah save us from our base selves, our devils, and from the temptations of *duniya*. May Allah SWT save us from His anger and may He SWT replace the hypocrisy in our hearts with the reality of *iman*. May Allah SWT fill our hearts with sincerity, truthfulness and sweetness of *la ilaha illal lah* and allow us to meet Him with the purity of *iman* in our hearts. May Allah SWT give us the *noor* of knowledge, wisdom of knowledge, Rahma of knowledge, barakah of knowledge, and comprehension of knowledge. And most of all, may Allah SWT allow us to live according to this knowledge and make this knowledge witness to us and not against us. *Ameen*.