

Race for Success in Tests

Friday Sermon Presented by

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Arranging priorities is a distinguished excellence of the believer. When the youths understand this important rule, they can realize the importance of the stage they live in from time to time. Most often, some youths talk about many interests of theirs, especially in the stage of studying, that make them fall behind fulfilling their duties required by this stage.

For example, we often hear about youths who make proselytizing or the like, the priority of their interest in the stage of their study, but they disappoint us by falling behind and by becoming careless persons. They fail in educating and developing themselves in this stage they live in.

As students are about to begin the final test of the scholastic year, I'd like to allot today's sermon to emphasize what I have formerly talked about concerning the value of time which is a lesson that we all may benefit from. It is a lesson that is not only related to the youth. It is rather an important issue to whoever is concerned with the youth affairs, in addition to emphasizing the importance of valuing time, that is, as I said formerly, care for time and giving full attention to this stage, whether it is related to getting knowledge or at work or in any other field.

Consequently, it is definitely dispraised for the Muslim youths, who go to mosques, to retard in their study, as it is contradictory to the characteristics of the mosque and to the identity of Islam. Islam aims at making every Muslim, including the youths, forerunners and advanced

in every field of life. It aims at making the youths always in the front row, prior to all other rows.

Talking about science, education and learning, especially when we knock at the doors of examinations by diligence and hard work, it is incumbent on us to present an introduction as a reminder of the importance of knowledge in Islam. Many Westerners asked me: "Is there any contradiction between science and Islam?"

I said to them: "How funny it is this question! Such contradiction never exists in our religion, because our religion calls to getting knowledge. It is the religion that sets up the foundation for knowledge. The first word that was revealed to our Prophet is 'Read'. The words 'Know'; 'you should know'; 'See'; 'So that they may understand' are frequently repeated in the Holy Qur'an".

Consequently, Islam is a religion that sets up the foundation for knowledge, for reflection, and for rationality".

Hence, in no case should we admit the contradiction, which is present in the West imposed by certain ceremonies in certain historical period, to be ascribed to our religion that calls for knowledge, and raises its children to become the masters of the world in knowledge.

Sorrowfully enough, the retardation in research or in getting knowledge that exists among the Muslim youths of today is due to the fact that Islam is not understood quite properly. Islam is considered only as exhortation that directs man to the unseen and distracts him from the present. In fact, as Islam ties man's soul to the unseen, it, at the same time, sets up the foundation for effective productive activity in reality.

Getting knowledge is greatly valued in Islam. The student who gets ready for the examination should recall to mind this Islamic value that is greatly esteemed by the Exalted Allah.

Your Lord, Who created you, taught you, and guided you, has great regard for knowledge and its value, so how can you, the slave and creature of Allah, take no regard for the value that your Lord has esteemed greatly?

Hasn't the Exalted Allah said: "Allah will raise up, to {suitable} ranks {and degrees}, those of you who believe and who have been granted {mystic} knowledge" (Al Mujadilah, 11) honoring thereby all the seekers of knowledge?

Accordingly, our Lord, Exalted He is, joins faith with knowledge, for faith cannot exist without knowledge, nor can knowledge be of any value without faith.

If man wants to soar high to the highest degree of nearness to the Exalted Allah, he should fly with the two wings, faith and knowledge.

The Prophet (PBUH) said: "One Faqih (jurist) is stronger than one thousand worshippers against Satan". Oh brethren, worship that moves you to spirituality and communicates you with the unseen is worthless if it is not associated with knowledge.

Oh student, recall to mind that the angels of the unseen worlds are honored worshippers who do not flinch from executing the Commands they receive from Allah, and do precisely what they are commanded. Recall to mind that these creatures that the Exalted Allah makes cognitive of these facts, honor and values knowledge greatly.

Read the following Hadith of the Prophet (PBUH): "The angels shade the seeker of knowledge with their wings. They step one upon another till the space between them and the sky of the world is fully covered with them due to their love of the sought knowledge". Angels crowd in the assembly of knowledge, where seeking knowledge is the only concern of the congregation, so that they, angels, throng and no space is left in the assembly, that they

step one upon the other till they reach the dome of the sky.

It is an over crowdedness, unknown to mankind, the children of Adam, for the sake of knowledge. It is an over crowdedness that reaches the stage of layers, one upon the other, for the sake of attending the assembly of knowledge.

According to our religion of Islam, this is the great value of knowledge that is unlimited and absolute.

After this introduction, I'd like to present eight pieces of advice to our students, so that they might be as doors (as Paradise has eight doors) while they are getting ready for the examination.

The advice I am going to presented is to every seeker of knowledge that might not be only at a school or at university. He might be seeking knowledge elsewhere. The seeker of knowledge does not graduate from this university of knowledge until he departs from this life.

This is how the Muslim understands the journey for knowledge.

The first advice :

1-write down the information in order to memorize. This is an important statement according to the people of knowledge. Imam Ash Shafi'l (MBUH) used to say: "Whoever wants to learn by heart, let him write down the information".

The more senses you use, the quicker and more firmly established knowledge becomes in your memory.

One of the most helping means in learning is to see, to hear, and to write. Thus, when all senses participate in the process of learning, the information becomes more firmly established.

Some students make their ears hear their voices while studying. It is a good way of studying, but if the information is written down, it will be more fixed in the mind.

It is mentioned in Sunnan of Ad Darami, from Mansur As Salami, who said: "I said to Ibrahim An Nakha'i (who is one of imams of religious knowledge) that Salem (who used to relate from Nafe' from Ibin Omar) is more accurate than you in relating the Hadith", (i.e., he memorizes more than you do, and is more accurate in what he memorizes than you). Ibrahim answered: "That is because Salem used to write down what he wants to memorize".

Thus, the first piece of advice I present to the seekers of knowledge is: "Do not dispense with writing".

2- Concentrate on knowledge and be resolute to understand it, and do not turn to other preoccupations however important they are. The seeker of knowledge should forget about all other concerns, for if there is more than one concern in his mind, learning becomes hopeless for him.

Oh student, if you want to join another concern with your learning, you will not get knowledge. Omitting other preoccupations from your heart and your mind is inevitable. If you are concerned only with learning, and cut your connection with the other concerns, you will be able to get the knowledge you seek and make it fixed in your mind. The Exalted Allah tells us about this fact saying:

"Allah has not made for any man two hearts in his {one} body" (Al Ahzab, 4), i.e., man can comprehend only the prior object he is concerned with. So when you are concerned with knowledge and be resolute to get it, you will be successful and distinguished.

What helps you to be resolute is to take the opportunity of studying in the calm night, especially, if there is no attendance of lessons during the day. Many are the students who become distinguished because they avail themselves of the tranquil night and its calmness to concentrate on their study in it.

From Ibn Abbas (ABPWH) who said: "Learning knowledge in the night is better than spending it in worship".

The student may be mistaken if he believes that he should spend the night in supererogatory prayer. He is ignorant of the fact that getting knowledge is better than the supererogatory prayer, and that worship in the night is not restricted to one form of ritual, which is prayer only. To the Exalted Allah, learning is more valuable and nearer to Allah than supererogatory prayer.

The student should be engrossed in learning as Ash Shafi'i (MBUH) did. Ash Shafi'i used to spend the whole night trying to deduce one Hadith from Al Mustafa's Hadiths (PBUH). He availed himself of the night. After performing Al Isha' (the obligatory night prayer), he had a short slumber, or sat to deduce as much as he could from one Hadith, after which, he stood to perform the dawn prayer and prayed it with the ablution of Al Isha' .

This was the practice of our ancestors (ABPWTH).

3-Be diligent so that, after the results of the examination are announced, you prove to be one of the outstanding and the distinguished, to represent the Islamic identity that requires you to be of the forerunners. Haven't you read the following verse in the Holy Qur'an:

"And those Foremost {in Faith} will be foremost ({in the Hereafter})" (Al Waqi'a, 10-11)?

Haven't you noticed in this verse how priority is associated with nearness to Allah?

Consequently, you are required, by the Islamic identity, to be distinguished. But if you fall behind, you will be in contradiction with your Islamic identity.

A lot of youths ask me: "What is the daily litany you advice us to recite repeatedly?"

I usually answer them saying: "Your daily litany should be your scholastic book. It should be your resolution to

graduate from your study getting high level through which you represent your Islamic identity.

4-Purify the container of knowledge from the filth of darkness. The Exalted Allah draws the attention of the seeker of knowledge and the contemplative to this important fact. He said:

"Do they not then earnestly seek to understand the Quran, or are their hearts locked up by them?" (Muhammad, 24).

The Exalted Allah aims at making us understand that what prevents us from reflection and understanding is accumulation of the darkness of sins. Sins cover the heart with stain, thus learning and memorizing are not prevented. Hence, if you do not prepare the container of knowledge in your heart and purify it from the filth of darkness you will not be a forerunner.

Ash Shu'bi said: "The one who seeks this knowledge should be qualified with two qualities: intellect and piety, that is, he should be pure and wise, void of sins. He should be open-minded as is mentioned in the previous verse: "Allah will raise up, to (suitable) ranks (and degrees), those of you who believe and who have been granted (mystic) knowledge" (Al Mujadilah, 11) .

Mind is raised when it is pure. So, if righteous prudence is missing, or purity that makes the believer enlightened and be away from all the filth of dark sins is lost, one will not get knowledge. But when one has intellect and he is pure of blemishes and sins, only then one can be knowledgeable.

The following lines are ascribed to As Ashafi'i:

I complained to Waki' difficulty in my memorizing,

He advised me to give up wrongdoing.

He told me that knowledge is light,

And Allah's light is never presented to the disobedient.

5-Do not be keen on success with ignorance, so that your leaning be unbeneficial.

Some students believe in the rule that says: "what is important is to get a good result", and they neglect the side of knowledge. Such a student aims at getting a paper on which the following is written: "Degree and scores are so and so...". He does not aim at application of this knowledge to get humanity out of its darkness and its backwardness.

Oh student, you are not in need for a degree. Moreover, if the teacher is really knowledgeable, he may put questions to test the student's knowledge. But this cannot be a common practice by everyone who puts the questions. Some teachers put the questions to test the student's ability of memorization, not his knowledge, and how far is the difference between memorization and knowledge! Knowledge produces application, activity and reaction, but memorization only changes man into a photocopying machine that is unable to produce practical applications.

Be keen on learning because of your Islamic identity. But do not be interested in success with ignorance. The Prophet (PBUH) said: Ask Allah beneficial knowledge, and seek refuge with Allah against useless knowledge".

The statement: `Ask Allah beneficial knowledge` summarizes the subject we are concerned with. If knowledge has no application, nor benefit, or practical mechanism that changes it into reality, it will go on being stored and it can never be beneficial.

The statement 'useless knowledge' seems to me as if the Prophet (PBUH) referred to the one who memorizes knowledge without application.

6-Be careful of the value of time, for the moment that passes is very precious, so beware of wasting it uselessly.

Today, you have a great capital, that is time. So give full attention to it, and do not waste it unprofitably.

I'll present to you an example of our good ancestors. Jaber Bin Abd Allah Al Insari went to Egypt to meet

Maslama Bin Mukhallad, both were honored Companions. Maslama had moved from Medina to Egypt. Jaber Bin Abd Allah heard that Maslama had heard a Hadith from the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), so he travelled from the Enlightened Medina to Egypt to ask Maslama about it. Maslama's house was in the second floor.

Jaber knocked at the door of Maslama. The latter looked down from his high house, and said: "Welcome Jaber, Shall I get down, or you come up to me?"

Jaber said: "Do not get down, neither shall I go up to you. I have heard that you relate a Hadith from the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) concerning the covering of the 'believer's faults. Hence I've come here to hear it from you", i.e., he wanted to make sure of the Hadith to relate it.

Maslama realized the value of time to Jaber, for he had had travelled from Medina to Egypt seeking knowledge of just one Hadith that Maslama had heard from the Messenger of Allah (PBUH). Maslama wanted to entertain Jaber in his house and make him rest for sometime so that they might have a little chat together, but Jaber said: "No, I am leaving now, just listen to me while you are up there. I don't want to waste time".

Jaber said: "I have come to hear a Hadith I was told you have heard it from the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) concerning covering the believer's faults".

Maslama said: "I heard the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) say: 'Whoever screens the believer's faults, it would be as if he brought to live a buried alive she-child' ". After hearing the Hadith, Jaber Bin Abd Allah struck his camel and went back to Medina.

How valuable time was to him!

He spent long days till he reached Egypt to listen only to one Hadith!

This was inevitable behavior to him.

Nowadays, time has been stenographed, and man becomes able to save time due to recent means of transportation. In spite of the fact that in the past man used to ride a camel, he was keen on not wasting time uselessly.

My instructor of Fiqh told me that when he was a student in Al Khusrafiyyah (i.e., the religious college), one of his friends wanted to visit him in his room. He said to him: "I can receive you only for five minutes". The Sheikh now is still living, and he is more than one hundred year old. He added saying: "When my friend entered, I put the clock before me to count the time. If the five minutes passed and he would stay more, I would knock at the book and listen to him no more".

If you go and ask this religious scholar in any matter in Fiqh, you will be astonished to find how accurate he is, though he is over one hundred years, and his peers are in the worst age when they become feeble and know nothing after knowing much.

He said to me: "When the five minutes ended, I knocked at the book and considered my friend as non-existent".

My instructor entered school with this seriousness and diligence (as he told me) when he was seventeen year old. Though he was illiterate before that, and was unable to distinguish the noun from the verb, he became later on, one of the forerunners and distinguished students, due to his perseverance and hard work. Once, he told me: "the cause of getting knowledge is not intelligence. It is rather perseverance".

As my instructor said, the major cause of getting knowledge is not cleverness. It is rather perseverance. The one who perseveres in learning and is serious in his resolution to learn will definitely attain his goal.

7-Oh seeker of knowledge, try to counterbalance between the needs of your body (food, sleep), and the

duty of comprehending knowledge. If this balance is broken, it will not be good for you.

The Prophet (PBUH) said: "Your soul has a right on you" (related by Ibn Majah).

The Prophet (PBUH) said to one of his Companions: "Why do I see your body so lean?", The man said: "Oh Messenger of Allah, I don't have food in the day", he means he ate only in the night as he used to fast every day.

The Messenger of Allah said to him: "Who ordered you to torture torment yourself?". This is not the path of Islam, nor is it the method of establishing renaissance. Islam is the religion of balance between material and spirit. It rejects spirituality that is at the expense of the material, or vice versa. It rather constitutes a unique balance between the material and the spirit.

8-Do not think of getting success by deception because this contradicts your Islamic identity, even if deception is available to you and is presented to you on a golden tray.

Certainly, this is not the Islamic identity. The Prophet (PBUH), as related by Imam Muslim in his Sahihhi, said: "Whoever deceives us is not from us".

The Prophet (PBUH) renounces the deceivers, so how can you accept to be renounced by the Messenger of Allah (PBUH)?

In conclusion, I'll summarize the eight pieces of advice so that the seeker of knowledge may have them in mind:

1-Write down in order to memorize.

2-Be determined to understand knowledge, and do not be occupied with other concerns however important they are.

3-Exert your best effort to be one of the forerunners and distinguished students to represent your Islamic identity.

4-Purify the container of knowledge, which is your heart, from the darkness of sins.

5-Do not be keen on attaining success with ignorance so that your learning becomes beneficial.

6-Beware of the precious value of time, and do not waste it uselessly.

7-Make a balance between the needs of your body (food and sleep) and your obligations in comprehending knowledge.

8-Do not aspire to attain success by deception, because it is in contradiction with your Islamic identity.

Oh student, if you are keen on applying these pieces of advice, I invoke the Exalted Allah to make you among the successful and distinguished.

Allahum..., guide us to You favorably, and make us from those who listen to wisdom and follow the best of it.

I say my words and ask Allah's forgiveness.