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SKYWALKER
THE ART OF FAITH-LIFE BALANCE

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In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the universe. And peace and blessings be upon His beloved Messenger Muhammad ﷺ, his family, and his pious followers who follow his guidance.

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INTRODUCTION


In this hadith, the Prophet ﷺ compares a gathering of knowledge to a garden amongst the gardens of Paradise. When we pass by such a gathering of knowledge, we should stay there.

FIVE ASPECTS OF LIFE

This class will focus on the following five points: mental, physical, spiritual, social, and financial. But why study the topic of faith-life balance to begin with?

The Muslim should be balanced in all five aspects, and such a balance should manifest itself in our lifestyle. Dr. Nasser has lived in many different countries and many different Muslim communities. He realized that unfortunately, people wish to focus on their strengths while neglecting their weaknesses.
EXAMPLES OF IMBALANCE
People may excel physically, socially, spiritually, and financially, but they may lack the mental component of life. They may fail to challenge themselves intellectually and rarely read books. Some people may excel in the various aspects of life with the exception of physical health. They neglect their own bodies, saying that life that should be filled with dhikr and lectures instead; they try to use the temporary nature of life to justify such imbalance. However, Allah does not want such an imbalance from His servants.

There are certain individuals who are only nominally Muslim because they lack the spiritual component of life. They may uphold the other aspects of life, but when someone discusses going to the masjid or reading Qur’an, it’s almost like a foreign language to them.

When people lack the social component of life, such a void can result in devastating effects. Even though such people may excel mentally, physically, spiritually, and financially, they can sometimes hold grudges with their own family members for years. They won’t even visit their parents or let them see their grandchildren. They cut off family, friends, and community members due to poor character and lack of social balance.

Dr. Nasser knew a very religious brother in the community who was serious about Qur’an and organizing events. Despite his strong sense of religiosity, he kept getting into fights and arguments with several people. Dr. Nasser spoke with this individual, saying that it was unlikely all those people were conspiring against him – and that maybe he needed to work on his character. However, this brother had so many defenses and walls to protect his ego that he refused to accept the advice.

Some people may excel in all areas of life except the financial component. On one extreme, some will claim to have “full tawakkul on Allah” while doing nothing; they ultimately justify their laziness, saying that working hard to get a good degree and a good job is kibr (arrogance). On the other extreme, some will excel financially but refuse to help others. They experience financial stability and have extra money to spare, but they fail to help the Ummah or leave some kind of lasting legacy, saying that their money belongs to them.

Clearly, imbalance surrounds us. We need to analyze ourselves in light of each of the five aspects. What goals can we set to help us achieve balance? How will we push ourselves? What weaknesses do we need to focus on? At the end of each section, write down specific goals for yourself and ways you will achieve those goals.
CHAPTER 1: MENTAL

Even before Islam and revelation came, the Prophet ﷺ was a righteous man who was concerned about humanity. He contemplated the purpose of life; he decided to seclude himself from the rest of society in order to reflect upon existence, meditate, and pray.

Dr. Nasser believes that every Muslim needs this “Cave of Heraa” experience in which we look at the world objectively. Is it really the case that we were born on this blue ball that floats in space? Where are we? We as human beings need this moment where we take a step back and look at life. Why are we here? What is the point of our existence? The Prophet ﷺ did this, and he actually received a response from the Divine Creator.

“Recite in the name of your Lord who created.” Surah Al-'Alaq, 96:1

LIGHT AFTER 600 YEARS OF DARKNESS

‘Isa عليه السلام was the prophet sent to the people 600 years before Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. After 600 years of darkness, humanity receives the first light of revelation through the word “Read/Recite.” The fact that revelation comes in the form of words is fascinating. Words are fleeting as they pass by. However, the words of the Qur'an have outlasted kingdoms, civilizations, castles, and great nations. They have lasted longer than anything else – so fleeting, yet so firm.

Revelation did not come in the form of wealth or power. It instead came as information, as words! We as Muslims need to focus on education while ensuring we are a literate community. We must be people of Iqra’, people of books. Iqra’ serves as the light that pierces through the darkness. If we cannot properly fulfill the very first commandment from Allah ﷻ, then what can we do? Ironically, the society that was illiterate would find solutions to its problems by reading.
From a historical context, Catholicism was quite popular. The Catholic Church had a stranglehold on religious knowledge, and people were only permitted to read the Bible through the Priest. People could not pray directly to God, requiring Jesus as a kind of intermediary or the Priest to send off your prayers through confession. The word *Iqra’* removes such *shirk* and intermediaries. You can read the Qur’an directly yourself. You can pray to Allah 중앙* directly yourself. The Qur’an is Allah speaking to you while *du’a* is you speaking to Allah. Thus, it is a direct conversation. Revelation comes down, and *du’a* goes up.

We should still take advantage of our scholars to learn the interpretation of the Qur’an, but we understand that they do not have a monopoly over the *deen*. They cannot claim that the knowledge they possess is private information; rather, they must share their knowledge with others and provide the necessary resources to help others understand the *deen* as well.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF SQUEEZING**

Jibril السَّلام squeezed the Prophet ﷺ! One interpretation explains that squeezing makes a person wake up and better sense the close teacher-student relationship. Knowledge is best conveyed heart to heart. People nowadays only want to read books or listen to lectures; they depend on the Internet for knowledge while isolating themselves from the *masjid*, community, and Imam. YouTube lectures and books are beneficial as supplemental information, but they do not replace learning directly from a learned teacher and immersing oneself in the local Muslim community. **There is nothing wrong with studying on your own, but that should not serve as your primary source of knowledge. You should learn directly from a scholar;** such a connection not only permits you to learn the religious knowledge itself, but also character and manners.

Squeezing can also serve as a means to put extra pressure on someone to motivate him or her to excel. When a teacher sees potential in a student, he or she will ask extra difficult questions in order to bring the best out of the student. Some interpret squeezing to signify that the journey ahead will not be easy; a difficult path awaits the Prophet ﷺ, and he has to prepare from now. He will have to bear a heavy burden as Allah 중앙* says:

> إنَّا سَتَّلِقُ عَلَيْكَ فَوَلَّا تَفَيلَّا
> "Indeed, We will cast upon you a heavy word.” Surah Al-Muzzammil, 73:5

Another interpretation of squeezing is to emphasize the short and fleeting nature of life. A moment ago you thought you were all alone in the middle of a mountain, thinking no one could reach you. Then, all of a sudden, this being pops up and squeezes you to the point where you think you might pass out. Human beings are frail and fragile. They are like bags of blood: one poke can make it bleed and die! You’re not going to live forever, so make sure to stay focused on the task ahead of you.
The Prophet did not react to this incident by saying, “Thank you for this position. I’m very honored. Let me start my mission of da’wah.” Rather, his reaction was one of doubt. After such a traumatizing incident, the Prophet rushes to Khadijah who comforts him. She tells him that Allah would never disgrace him and that he is someone with an upright character. She was more or less saying not to have doubt.

DOUBT IS A NORMAL HUMAN REACTION

We need to recognize that doubt is a healthy and normal sentiment. The Prophet himself experienced doubt. Such a feeling is not evil. Doubt can actually fuel research: when you have doubts, the best thing to do is study, read and learn! The doubt that was created by Iqra’ is ultimately solved by Iqra’ itself. It’s amazing that the first word in the Qur’an tells us how to alleviate the doubts that came from that word!

When a young child feels scared by an intimidating math equation, he or she has to study and learn until it becomes easy and clear. The same holds true for every subject; the concepts may seem doubtful and intimidating at first, but they become manageable through studying.

When Jibril squeezed the Prophet, the Prophet said that he could not read. He was basically saying that he wasn’t ready. None of us truly feel ready to bear the burden of da’wah as we engage with others and teach them the deen. Khadijah reassured the Prophet that he was ready and that he can handle it. In the end, no one is going to be completely ready for life’s challenges. You can’t learn how to swim by just reading about it; you have to jump in the pool, splash around like a fool for a bit, mess up, and then learn. Same goes for riding a bike – you have to fall a few times before you grasp the skill.

THE IMPORTANCE OF IQRA’

Allah could have revealed “Worship Me” as the first word or command – that would have been legitimate. Yet, He did not begin with that. However, what is the last verse of the Surah?

“No! Do not obey him. But prostrate and draw near [to Allah].” Surah Al-‘Alaq, 96:19

By starting with the command “Read,” Allah tells us that He wants us to learn first so that we can understand the purpose behind our worship. We often find that when young people have doubts about Islam, their parents say, “Astaghfirullah, they have a Jinn!” or “They are crazy!” Parents need to acknowledge that doubt is natural. Children may have doubts because they do not have any education. They are taught how to worship but not WHY – they have been taught Fiqh, but nothing more than that.
When people live in a Muslim country, they have a certain understanding and acceptance of Islam because they are accustomed to it. But when they bring their family to the West, they start to question things – we cannot get upset about this. It is important for people to understand WHY.

**Every circumstance becomes better with knowledge. And every circumstance becomes worse with ignorance. Knowledge will always create something beautiful.**

The Prophet ﷺ received this command of Iqra’. The word Qur’an comes from the Arabic root “qa ra a.” The word Qur’an also comes from the word pattern of fu’laan which adds an element of exaggeration and continuous nature. This means that it is the most read and most recited Book!

The Prophet ﷺ spent his life reading and obeying this command. We also need to do this, and we need to recognize that it is not just about the Qur’an. The command to “Read” is left open-ended! Read anything – be a person of knowledge.

When was the last time we read a full book? Most of us would have a tough time remembering. How many books did we read in 2017? Our answers would be embarrassing! We would not really know what to say because we did not set goals for ourselves. Some think they have an infinite amount of time to read and learn. This is not true – we have a finite amount of time on this planet.

How many years did our parents invest in our education? We learned the alphabet, words, sentences, paragraphs, papers, and now we are graduating and writing a thesis which is almost a book. All that took years! 20-25 years of our lives are dedicated towards mastering Iqra’ – then the moment we graduate, we sit back and watch Netflix. How many years have been put towards this skill only for us to never use it again?

**We need to be people who set goals for ourselves – in any subject! Study anything, but be people who read, people of books. This has to be a quality of Muslims.**
THE MIRACLE OF THE QUR'AN

The Qur’an is a mu’jizah. Someone who is ‘aajiz is weak or incapable. A miracle renders someone incapable. ‘Ajaza is to make someone weak, and a mu’jizah is someone who makes the other person weak. For example, Musa عليه السلام tells Fir’‘aun that he is doing something wrong and that he should worship Allah سُبْحَانَهَُوََتَعَالَى. Fir’aun wants to argue back, but Musa pulls out his hand and it is glowing – what can Fir’‘aun say now? He has been rendered incapable. Fir’‘aun cannot speak at this point.

The Qur’an is a mu’jizah because no one can truly respond as to where it came from. Why can’t we produce a Qur’an? We are educated and intelligent. We do not have the power to do what Allah تَعَالَىوََسُبْحَانَهَُ has done with the Qur’an – this is why it is a mu’jizah.

Once again, Allah تَعَالَىوََسُبْحَانَهَُ’s first word is Iqra’ – become people of knowledge, research as much as you can. Then, you yourself will adopt this quality, this power of ‘ijaaz. When we study and do our research very well and present an argument, no one can respond!

Allah says, “Read in the Name of your Lord Who Created” – created what? This is left open-ended. Allah سُبْحَانَهَُوََتَعَالَى created us and He knows what is good for us, and He is telling us to READ.

Allah mentions the word Rabb. In every introduction, Allah سُبْحَانَهَُوََتَعَالَى introduces Himself as Rabb. What is the opposite of Rabb? ‘Abd – the opposite of Master is Servant, or Slave. We need to have this constantly reinforced in our minds.

THE QUR’ANIC FORMULA FOR SUCCESSFUL PREACHING

Iqra’, Qum, Qum – from Surah ‘Alaq, Surah Muzzammil, and Surah Muddathir.

“Iqra’. Surah Al-‘Alaq, 96:1

“Qum, Qum. Surah Al-Muzzammil, 73:2

“Qum. Surah Al-Muddathir, 74:2
Qum – stand up! You are nervous and want to wrap yourself up in blankets and ignore the world and hide. Many of us are still doing this. We are still in Muddathir and Muzzammil. We are Muslims living in a non-Muslim environment – when we have a responsibility, we want to wrap ourselves up and hide. Allah is telling us that enough is enough. Get up and warn the people. Get up in the night and pray and connect with Allah. This is the formula for success.

1.) Iqra’
   - Read and research – increase knowledge

2.) Qum
   - Have a spiritual connection with Allah and refuel it

3.) Qum
   - Get up and convey the message

You are the most powerful daa’i if you are able to do these things.

THE BEGINNING OF CREATION

When Allah created Adam, He emphasized education – even then! If we look at ayahs 31-32 of Surah Al-Baqarah where this story is told, we see words such as taught, inform, knowledge, All-Knowing, and All-Wise.

“And He taught Adam the names - all of them. Then He showed them to the angels and said, ‘Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful.’ They said, ‘Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who is the Knowing, the Wise.’” Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:31-32

‘Ilm is emphasized as an obvious theme. When Adam was created, Allah did not say that he was special because he was beautiful – he was made from dirt. We are not more beautiful or powerful than the angels as we are from the Earth. What puts us above and beyond is ‘ilm.

Allah has shown us a very clear theme of what makes human beings special, and that is EDUCATION! Iqra’ is repeated over and over again in the Surah. Allah knows our nature, so He repeats it. What does it mean to say that Allah is the Most Noble? Allah knows nobility and is teaching it to us.
Learning + Reading + Writing + Teaching + Pen = EDUCATION

KNOWLEDGE ELEVATES OUR STATUS

Knowledge gives us our rank in life. The concept of a university even has Islamic roots. Islam used to be at the forefront but not so much anymore. It is sad to think about this – why do we have to point out what people did several years ago? It is embarrassing! We should have things to show today – we are not focused on education.

"O you who have believed, when you are told, ‘Space yourselves’ in assemblies, then make space; Allah will make space for you. And when you are told, ‘Arise,’ then arise; Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees. And Allah is Acquainted with what you do." [Surah Mujaadilah, 58:11]

Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim – this is important to remember. How can we oppress people by preventing them from obtaining an education?

The Prophet ﷺ said:

"The best of you are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it." [Sahih Bukhari]

"Allah indeed hates every rude and harsh person who argues, any person who is a corpse by night and a donkey during the daytime (purposeless, mindlessly going through the motions), and any person who is knowledgeable of this world but ignorant of the Hereafter." [Sahih Al-Jaami’]

Allah ﻪﻠﻠﻪ hates the type of person who is slaving away in the dunya with no greater purpose or legacy in the aakhirah – this is a scary and powerful reminder.

We should write down which books we want to read this year so that we can be people of education. It is not that difficult to take two, three, four or five books, add up the page numbers, and divide them by the days of the year to come up with something reasonable for each day. We will be able to look back at the year and feel accomplished. Do we have libraries in our homes? Children who have parents who read regularly and have a
library in the house do very well in school. The research is clear on this! If parents constantly have the TV on or are always looking at their tablets, their children are in another situation. If we are proud of the books we have read and the subjects we study, our children will have a better future inshaAllah.

We know that human beings were created from a clot. One interpretation explains that such a reminder instills humility in us as we realize our simple beginning. Another interpretation explains that the same way we cling to our mother’s womb, we should cling to knowledge.

One of Dr. Nasser’s professors once said the following about the revelation of Qur’an: “Muhammad went up a mountain and heard some noises and came down.” Technically he was not lying, but he greatly belittled this beautiful moment. He made it sound very ugly and unappealing. Many times, “Intro to Islam” classes only focus on obscure figures from history instead of the Qur’an and Sunnah. They may not be lying, but they try to detract attention from da’wah.

The purpose of studying Islam from the Western perspective is not to gaindeen from people – it is to obtain the diversity of perspective and experience. Get the full picture, but do not try to get Islam from them.

If we listen to information, it can go in one ear and out the other; but if we actually listen and try and formulate our own thoughts, we will truly retain the information.
CHAPTER 2: PHYSICAL

OUR BODY IS NOBLE

Allah ﷺ says in Surah Al-Dhariyat:

“And on the earth are signs for the certain [in faith]. And in yourselves. Then will you not see?”
Surah Al-Dhariyat, 51:20-21

A typical interpretation of “on the earth there are signs,” is that it refers to the creation in general. However, a literal interpretation would translate into “in the earth there are signs or proofs.” This means that Allah ﷺ is telling us that in the earth or digging in the earth there is proof! It is referring to paleontology and archeology, sciences that Muslims need to study.

In ayah 21, Allah ﷺ says that we ourselves are an ayah. Ayaat are miraculous signs that show God’s existence. They are looked at with respect and nobility. Similarly, our bodies are a living proof of God’s existence. Therefore, we should treat our body well, with respect and nobility.

Allah ﷺ says in the Qur’an:

“And We have certainly honored the children of Adam…” Surah Isra, 17:70

This means we should treat our body like something that deserves honor. Dr. Nasser elaborates by citing a quote: “Treat yourself as if you are worth being well treated.” Unfortunately, often times we neglect taking care of ourselves. We don’t eat healthy, exercise regularly, or sleep enough. This is not the way of The Prophet ﷺ.
For instance, The Prophet ﷺ says:

فَإِنََّلِجَسَدِكََعَلَيْكََحَقًَّا

“Your body has a right over you…” [Sahih Bukhari]

As Muslims, we need to clean our bodies, eat healthy, exercise regularly, and get enough sleep.

EXERCISE
The Prophet ﷺ says:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنَ الْهَمِّ وَالْحَزَنِ، وَالْعَجْزِ وَالْكَسَلِ، وَالْجُبْنِ وَالْبُخْلِ،

وَضَلَعِ الدَّيْنِ، وَغَلَبَةِ الرُّجَالِ

“O Allah! I seek refuge with You from worry and grief, from incapacity and laziness, from cowardice and miserliness, from being heavily in debt and from being overpowered by (other) men.” [Sahih Bukhari]

The Prophet ﷺ is asking Allah ﷺ to keep him away from laziness. He wants to be someone that is active. Oftentimes, Muslims complain about lack of energy, pain, and depression. A simple way to overcome these problems is through exercise.

The Prophet ﷺ was described as having a wide chest and broad shoulders, implying he had a straight back. Therefore, we should fix our posture because it positively affects the way we feel and communicate. It also illustrates self-respect, confidence, and dignity.

Also, when the Prophet ﷺ made tawaf and the disbelievers were surrounding the Ka'bah, he told the Muslims to run quickly and remove the ihram from their right arm. This was to show the disbelievers their strength, toughness, and speed. Today, however, many Muslims
don’t take care about their bodies, although there was a time when people were strong, worked hard, and exercised. The Prophet ﷺ and the Companions are a great example of that.

It is important to note that we need balance with exercise. Usually there are two extremes. The first one being obsessed with ourselves and going to the gym excessively. While the other extreme is constantly sitting, whether we are at school, work, or home. The Muslim needs to find a middle ground.

Dr. Nasser explains how taking care of our physical health positively impacts all the other aspects being discussed, whether mental, spiritual, financial, or social. Therefore, taking care of our physical body is essentially the root of it all.

**DIET**

Allah ﷺ says:

> "O you who have believed, eat from the good things..." **Surah Al-Baqarah, 2: 172**

The word *tayyib* means good, wholesome, and pure. However, in Arabic this word follows the *ism fa’eel* pattern. The pattern implies the meaning of internal and long lasting. Therefore, the full definition of the word *tayyib* is something that is good, wholesome, and pure, internally and long-term.

Allah ﷺ is advising us to eat from that which is good for us in the long-term. Usually we eat foods that give us short-term satisfaction such as junk food. They remove the hunger feeling, make us feel good temporarily, but negatively affect us in the long-term. The best thing for us in the long-term is that which comes purely from the earth. This is because we are made from the earth.

Furthermore, the Prophet ﷺ says:

> مَا أَطْعَمْتَ نَفْسَكََفَهُوََصَدَقَة َ[What you feed yourself is sadaqa...” [Sahih Al-Bani]

This means that Allah ﷺ rewards us for eating healthy.
PHYSICAL STRENGTH

In the Qur'an, Allah describes the prophets as strong. For example, in the story of Musa, Allah records the girl telling her father about Musa. She says:

"...Indeed, the best one you can hire is the strong and the trustworthy."

Surah al-Qasas, 28:26

Allah highlights the importance of strength in this ayah that describes Musa.

The Prophet says:

“A strong believer is better and is more lovable to Allah than a weak believer, and there is good in everyone…” [Sahih Muslim]

The hadith may be interpreted as referring to strength in iman or physical strength. Dr. Nasser explains that Muslims would have a huge impact if they became educated healthy Muslims who upheld good relationships with others. People would begin to wonder how we have it all together. This would be da’wah without needing to speak.

THE UMMAH AND EXERCISE

Dr. Nasser explains how exercise is not just physical training but also a mental discipline. It brings willpower. This is something the Ummah needs to adopt. When Dr. Nasser was in Malaysia, he started to exercise in the park with fit Yemeni brothers. There was another group of young men that would hang out and smoke. They saw Dr. Nasser and the Yemeni men workout and wanted to join. This was because being strong and tough was cool to them. Therefore, incorporating physical activity within Islamic gatherings is important. It will appeal to youth, which then will get them more engaged in the masjid.
PHYSICAL BENEFITS OF EXERCISE
Exercise brings us a myriad of benefits. Some of the physical benefits include:

- More energy
- Increased positivity
- Healthier bodies and therefore further protection from sickness and injury
- Reduced stress and less prone to depression
- Strength to work harder which you can use to achieve your goals or make more money
- Promotes cooperation
- A reward from Allah with the right intention
- Even more reward if you encourage others towards health and exercise

HELPFUL TIPS FOR HEALTH
1. **Write down your goals.**
   This will help clarify your objectives and what you are working towards.

2. **Eat healthy food.**
   Don’t keep filling your stomach. We know this from our religion, and science tells us the same thing. If you are given more food that you can eat, take it home. Don’t be shy to do that.

3. **Try new foods.**
   A lot of times, someone doesn’t like a certain fruit or vegetable, but they may have never even tried it before. Some people say they don’t even like the taste of water!

4. **Don’t become a slave of your desires.**
   Don’t sacrifice your health for a moment of flavor that last for a few seconds in your mouth and much longer in your body.

5. **Change happens gradually.**
   If you want your changes to be long-lasting, they will take time. Take one step at a time in dietary changes that are realistic.
CHAPTER 3: SPIRITUAL

STRENGTHENING YOUR FAITH

In a marathon, there’s a large group of people at the beginning and at the ending, what are they called? The spectators. When Ramadan comes around, the masaajid are packed at the beginning and ending. We don’t just want to be spectators, we want to be a marathon runner when it comes to our spirituality. We need to exercise our iman. We should focus on the fundamentals when it comes to increasing iman. Let’s start with the tahleel (saying laa ilaha illAllah).

The ﻻmeans “no.” It is termed laa al-naafiyatu lil jins which is the absolute negation. So, it is much stronger than a regular no. The fatha in ilaha makes that clear (otherwise it would have been a dhamma tanween at the end of that word). The word ﻻإلاً means “except”. الله is the proper name of our Master, Provider, Sustainer, our Rabb.

The word الله which is often translated as “God” requires us to take a closer look at the word in Arabic to truly understand its depths.

The word ilah can be termed a masdar (infinitive). That can be used in Arabic to describe the epitome of something or to exaggerate or hyperbolize an attribute. So, the root letters of ilah can stem from the meaning of “to worship.” So ilah is the ultimate object of worship and there is nothing else worthy of worship except Allah. Another potentional root can mean "to have fervor/passion/enthusiasm" which means that there is nothing that can cause as much excitement as Allah. So much so that everything that causes excitement in our life comes from Allah

Allah tells us in the Qur’an:

“Race toward forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden whose width is like the width of the heavens and earth, prepared for those who believed in Allah and His messengers. That is the bounty of Allah which He gives to whom He wills, and Allah is the possessor of great bounty.”

Surah Al-Hadid, 57:21
And a similar ayah:

“And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a garden as wide as the heavens and earth, prepared for the righteous.” Surah Al-Imran, 3:133

A psychological insight from these two verses is that Allah associates racing and competing with the width of Jannah. It is because winning this race is not to the exclusion of anyone else. So, it is a positive competition where we encourage each other. This is no negative competition. Let us grow together. The seed of negative competition can grow inside the heart. Allah cures this by saying that everyone can win. No one has to be left out! Reflection is key.

Another definition of ilah means to be an object of obsession or desperation. Something you can’t get enough of that you are almost addicted to. So, there is absolutely no ultimate object of obsession or desperation other than Allah. He tells us that our love of Him should be more intense than our love of anything else.

“And [yet], among the people are those who take other than Allah as equals [to Him]. They love them as they [should] love Allah. But those who believe are stronger in love for Allah. And if only they who have wronged would consider [that] when they see the punishment, [they will be certain] that all power belongs to Allah and that Allah is severe in punishment.” Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:165
Allah does not associate this word *katheer* with any other act of worship besides remembrance. We should be obsessed with making *dhikr* of Him.

This is what we are saying when we say *la ilaha illa Allah*. We should mean what we say and say what we mean. That makes us a person of substance.

The word *ilah* can also stem from the meaning of being a guardian from internal problems and external threats that we take refuge in and escape to for rescue.

Finally, the word *ilah* can stem from a root letter that means to be high or lofty. This implies that *ilah* is the ultimate object of reverence, astonishment, awe, and wonder.

“For those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured.”

Surah Ar-Ra’d, 13:28

“So flee to Allah. Indeed, I am to you from Him a clear warner.”

Surah Adh-Dhariyat, 51:50

“And among people and moving creatures and grazing livestock are various colors similarly. Only those fear Allah, from among His servants, who have knowledge. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Forgiving.”

Surah Fatir, 35:28
You will have that reverence when you have more knowledge. Not just matters of the religion but even when you study science, physics, and biology. When you study the harmony of the celestial bodies, the immense systems in our body working together. This is explained in the book “The God Hypothesis” where we live in this goldilocks universe where all these forces in nature are in perfect harmony for our existence and any alteration in that, even by a little, would lead to destruction of this universe.

Another interpretation of these root letters explains that *ilah* is our highest intent and goal. We all have goals, but at the end of the day, the number one thing on the list has to be Allah.

"Say, 'Indeed, my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the worlds.'" *Surah Al-An'am, 6:162*

The final interpretation of the root letters underpinning *ilah* is the meaning that He is the object of authority. So, there is no other ultimate authority except for Him. Many people will agree to the other 7 meanings of *ilah*, but will take pause at this one.

*The Messenger has believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord, and [so have] the believers. All of them have believed in Allah and His angels and His books and His messengers, [saying], 'We make no distinction between any of His messengers.' And they say, 'We hear and we obey. [We seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the [final] destination.'"*  
*Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:285*
In Malaysia, Dr. Nasser was teaching someone about Islam and gave them an assignment: pray to be shown the truth and that they will accept whatever truth The Creator shows them. A few weeks later that person stated they did not do that assignment because they were afraid of the answer. If they are convinced of a sign from God, they would have to follow it and change their life and submit to this new authority. This is what holds people (even Muslims) back sometimes from truly submitting. People aren’t willing to change their lifestyle.

**STRENGTHENING OUR BOND WITH THE BOOK**

Once we have this foundational understanding of *laa ilaha illAllah*, the next most important thing is to connect with the book of Allah. Are we people of the Qur’an?

We all know the phrase “You are what you eat.” What do we consume for our soul? Our body needs fuel from the Earth (food) as it is from the Earth. Our soul is from the Heaven and needs divine provisions.

The Qur’an has beautiful qualities that we can develop in ourselves if we read, contemplate, and practice the Quran.

**1.) Become Wiser**

> “Ya, Seen. By the wise Qur’an.”
> **Surah Ya-Sin, 36:1-2**

You can develop *hikmah* when you immerse yourself in the Qur’an. Wisdom is to put the right thing in the right place at the right time in the right amount.
2.) Become Noble

“Then I swear by the setting of the stars, And indeed, it is an oath - if you could know - [most] great. Indeed, it is a noble Qur’an.”

Surah Al-Waq’iah, 56:75-77

We find that people are always trying to develop a status. They want to be cool or they want to have nobility. They spend time, money, and effort in an attempt to have that status. We can have nobility through the Qur’an.

3.) Become Memorable

“Sad. By the Qur’an containing reminder.”

Surah Sad, 38:1

Certain people always have something worthy of mentioning and full of interesting reminders. We can develop those beautiful comments in ourselves through the Qur’an.

4.) Become Healthier

“O mankind, there has to come to you instruction from your Lord and healing for what is in the breasts and guidance and mercy for the believers.”

Surah Yunus, 10:57
There are so many diseases of the heart, and the Qur’an heals people from these!

Stinginess, jealousy, heedlessness, arrogance, showing off, negative assumption, depression, hypocrisy, evil suspicion, narcissism, hardness of the heart, etc. There is one cure for all these diseases of the heart. The Qur’an is our vaccine and we need a daily dose of it.

“All praise is [due] to Allah, who has sent down upon His Servant the Book and has not made therein any deviance. [He has made it] straight, to warn of severe punishment from Him and to give good tidings to the believers who do righteous deeds that they will have a good reward.” Surah Al-Kahf, 18:1-2

Not only is there no crookedness within the Qur’an, but it is used as the measuring stick to straighten others. We can be just that effective in society; people will see Muslims as the moral compass that highlight the errors of morality and ethics in our society. There will be something consistent and measurable for people to see.

It was narrated from Asma’ bint Yazid that she heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) say: “Shall I not tell you of the best of you?” They said: “Yes, O Messenger of Allah.” He said: “The best of you are those who, when they are seen, Allah the Mighty, the Majestic, is remembered.” [Ibn Majah]
5.) Become Correct

“Blessed is He who sent down the Criterion upon His Servant that he may be to the worlds a warner.” Surah Al-Furqan, 25:1

We always find ourselves at a crossroad where we are looking for clarity. We can have that through the Qur’an as it serves as the Furqan (criterion) which informs us right from wrong.

6.) Become Blessed

“[This is] a blessed Book which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded.” Surah Sad, 38:29

“[This is] a blessed Book...” Surah Sad, 38:29

What it Means to be “Mubarak”

“Birka” (from root letters ba, ra, kah) means a pond where water stays stagnant. Water in a pond is something that stays. To have “barakah” means it’s something that doesn’t leave, it remains. A good example of this is when everyone has eaten to their full, but a lot of food remains. We say here that barakah exists in the food.

Become a Person Who is “Mubarak”

We want to be the people whose words of advice are long-lasting and remembered for years to come; they should have barakah in them. Bring this blessed Book in your life and you will be mubarak. You are what you consume, so have the Qur’an in your life.
7.) Become Elevated in Your Thought Process

“By the honored Qur’an...” Surah Qaf, 50:1

“Majeed” is something that is honored, but it’s also something that is majestic, something higher up. Bring this Qur’an al-Majeed into your life and you’ll start thinking higher thoughts and ideas as well, instead of gossiping, etc.

These Qualities in Your Life

What happens when you bring all these qualities into your life and you become hakeem, majeed, kareem, mubarak, etc.?

“...وَإِنَّكُ لَعَلَى خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ...”

“It was narrated that a man from Banu Suwa’ah said: ‘I said to ‘Aishah: Tell me about the character of the Messenger of Allah.’ She said: ‘Have you not read the Qur’an? ‘And verily, you (O Muhammed {ﷺ}) are on an exalted (standard of) character.’” [Ibn Majah]

The character of the Prophet ﷺ was the Qur’an. All the qualities we’ve discussed above are embodied in one man. He was the walking Qur’an because he had all these qualities. The best way to spiritually nourish yourself is to bring the Qur’an into your life, develop all these qualities, and inshaAllah you will also be a walking Qur’an.
**DAILY SPIRITUAL ROUTINE**

Develop a daily amount of Qur’an that you would like to read or memorize, whether that be one *ayah* or one page or more. This will become your spiritual sustenance. Dr. Nasser highly recommends that you try to get a small group of friends who are serious about the Qur’an and make a small group chat where everyone just posts that they’ve hit their daily goal (regardless of length). If you’re not able to keep up, then shorten the length of your goal, but be consistent and have a daily relationship with the Qur’an!

**GOAL VERSUS JOURNEY**

Never be concerned about the goal. **Be concerned about the journey; enjoy the process and the current moment you live in.** If someone is trying to lose weight and they’re constantly focusing on the number, they’ll be miserable; but if they focus on trying to enjoy a lifestyle change, they’ll succeed and be happy along the way.

With the Qur’an, Dr. Nasser doesn’t focus on finishing, he enjoys the process of each and every page. Focus on the now so that you enjoy the moment and you’ll be happy.
CHAPTER 4: SOCIAL

When it comes to character, this is a topic that is large and we could talk about it forever. In this class, we break it down into four simple and short *ahadith* that are powerful and succinct. The Prophet ﷺ had a quality called *jawami’ul kalim*, concise speech with comprehensive meaning.

**SAY WHAT IS GOOD OR ZIP IT**

منْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنَُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمَِ الآخِرَِ فَلْيَقُلْ خَيْرًا أوَْ لِيَصْمُتَ

“Allah’s Messenger ﷺ said, ‘Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should talk what is good or keep quiet.’” [Bukhari]

Why mention Allah تَعَالَى and the Last Day? Because you are driven for the sake of Allah, but you also fear accountability. So if you don’t have anything good to say, be quiet.

This *hadith* can be summarized with the expression, **“If you don’t have anything good to say, don’t say anything at all.”** If we implement this quality, it will teach us how to give information. We must train ourselves to speak when we have something meaningful to say. Think of your words as currency. Don’t flood the market because it can depreciate the currency; hold your words back and make them valuable.

The Prophet ﷺ said, “May Allah have mercy on the person who when he speaks, he benefits and when he is quiet, he keeps himself safe.”

**DON’T PUT YOUR NOSE WHERE IT DOESN’T BELONG**

منْ حُسْنِ إِسْلاَمِ الْمَرْءِ تَرْكُهُ مَا لاَ يَعْنِيهِ

“Indeed among the excellence of a person’s Islam is that he leaves what does not concern him.” [Tirmidhi]

This *hadith* can be summarized with the expression, **“Mind your business.”** If we implement this quality, it will teach us how to receive information. Ask yourself what benefit you’re getting out of this information. Is it fitting into your goals in life? Ask yourself if this information is going to make you better in any way, whether it be mentally, physically, spiritually, socially, or financially. If it doesn’t help you in these categories, then it doesn’t concern you.
COOL IT

On the authority of Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him): A man said to the Prophetﷺ, “Counsel me,” so he (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “Do not become angry.” The man repeated [his request for counsel] several times, and [each time] he (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “Do not become angry.” [Bukhari]

This hadith can be summarized with the expression, “Control your temper.” If we implement this quality, it will teach us how to react to information. If someone blows up and makes us angry, there are two possibilities. They either did it to make you angry or they had no intention to make you angry whatsoever. If they did it to get under your skin, just don’t give them that satisfaction. If they had no intention to make you angry in the first place, then it doesn’t make sense to get angry at a person who had no intention to offend you. Either there is malicious intent or there isn’t. In either case, it makes no sense to blow up.
TREAT OTHERS AS YOU WANT TO BE TREATED

لا يؤمن أحدكم حتى يحب لأخيه ما يحب لنفسهه

“None of you believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.” [Tirmidhi]

This hadith can be summarized with the expression, “Treat others as you wish to be treated.” If we implement this quality, it will teach us how to have empathy in general.

A scholar was once asked how he developed character and he said he paid attention to people with bad character and avoided that. Pay attention to the things that bothered, hurt or offended you and make sure to avoid doing those things to others. Use those instances as an opportunity to learn rather than getting flustered or angry. When something terrible happens to you, you can be mad about it or you can learn from it. This is how you’ll have empathy and you’ll treat others the way you would like to be treated.

If we can implement the above four qualities, our character will transform.

جاء رجل إلى النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم فقال: يا رسول الله، دلني على عمل إذا عملته أحبني الله، وأحبني الناس.

فقال: ازهد في الدنيا يحبك الله، وازهد فيما عند الناس يحبك الناس.

A man came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, “O Messenger of Allah, direct me to an act which, if I do it, [will cause] Allah to love me and the people to love me.” So he (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “Renounce the world and Allah will love you, and renounce what the people possess and the people will love you.” [A hasan hadith related by Ibn Majah]

Do not obsess so much over what other people have! Mufti Kamani gave his students advice, how it’s dangerous when students who are studying Islam become overly interested in wealthy people’s things. When students who study Islam begin to fawn over a car, it sends the wrong message, “Yes, I’m studying the deen, but what’s really important to me is this wealth.” Mufti Kamani himself has been offered so many things by people, but he always says, “May Allah bless you and what you have, I don’t need it.” He has a good habit of never being too impressed by worldly things.

المؤمن مراة المؤمن ولزمأ المؤمن أخوه المؤمن يكف عليه صيبعته ويحوطه من

“Worshiper is the Worshiper’s mirror. The believer is a mirror to his faithful brother. He protects him against loss and defends him behind his back” [Abu Dawud]
Why is the believer like a mirror to the believer?

- The more time you spend around another believer, you learn more about yourself.
- A mirror tells you the good and the bad. It’s not healthy to be around people who never correct you or only correct you.
- A mirror is fair. It’s not like a funhouse mirror that makes things too big or too small, it shows you the good and the bad
- If you look into the mirror, consult it, and leave, does the image stay? In that same way, when you ask someone for advice, after you leave, the believer doesn’t go around telling people about your problems.

الدِّينُ النَّصِيحَةُ

*The Prophet ﷺ said, “The deen (religion) is naseehah (advice, sincerity).”* [Muslim]

This deen is for people who are real and sincere. When you’re real and sincere with someone, you tell them what they need to hear, and advice is built into it.

قد سَمَعَ اللَّهُ قُولَ الَّذِي تَجَدَّدَكَ فِي زُوجِهَا وَتَشْتَكِي إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ يَسْمَعُ

“Certainly has Allah heard the speech of the one who argues with you, [O Muhammad], concerning her husband and directs her complaint to Allah. And Allah hears your dialogue; indeed, Allah is Hearing and Seeing.” Surah Al-Mujadila, 58:1

We find that some people want to give an opinion before they have even listened to the problem. Who are we to pass judgment when we haven’t even listened? Even Allah listens.

Our job is not only to convey the message of Islam, we also have to actively listen and pay attention to what others say. When you hear someone speak, repeat what they said and rephrase it to ensure you understood correctly. Sometimes we are speaking the same language as others, but we mean different things.
CHAPTER 5: FINANCIAL INVESTING IN THE COMMUNITY

May Allah reward the people who came to this country and built masajid. We need to invest in our community and current Islamic Centers while focusing on social services. We have an Imam, but we should also have an Imam’s assistant, resident scholar, youth director, and marriage counselor. There are so many positions necessary for a thriving community! Invest in people who can have a positive impact on the community. Some youth who were raised here feel disconnected from their masjid and deen. Social services should address such needs.

We all know who Muhammad Ali was. He could have simply been a very talented boxer who had money, a fancy house, and a comfortable life. But he chose to be a force of good, religiously, politically, and racially. He took on three different causes and served as a huge force for positive change. Would we be the voice in his head that tells him not to worry about those causes, or would we say to be an amazing force for change? Which voice would we be?

LEAVING A LEGACY

We all have a choice to make. We can be the type of people who only focuses on themselves, or we can be the type of people who goes beyond and helps others in the community. Our money should be more than just a number we accumulate in the bank; we should strive to leave a legacy after our own needs are taken care of.

It’s not all or nothing. We can be the force of change in our own local communities or masajid. Start with a pure intention, and ask yourself what cause you believe in. Let us strive to be people with a purpose as opposed to those who merely go through the motions of life without true substance.

“IT IS HE WHO MADE THE EARTH TAME FOR YOU - SO WALK AMONG ITS SLOPES AND EAT OF HIS PROVISION - AND TO HIM IS THE RESURRECTION.” Surah Al-Mulk, 67:15
"And We did not send before you, [O Muhammad], any of the messengers except that they ate food and walked in the markets. And We have made some of you [people] as trial for others - will you have patience? And ever is your Lord, Seeing." Surah Al-Furqan, 25:20

"And spend [in the way of Allah] from what We have provided you before death approaches one of you and he says, 'My Lord, if only You would delay me for a brief term so I would give charity and be among the righteous.' But never will Allah delay a soul when its time has come. And Allah is Acquainted with what you do." Surah Al-Munafiqun, 63:10-11

The Prophet ﷺ said:

"Every day two angels come down from Heaven and one of them says, 'O Allah! Compensate every person who spends in Your Cause,' and the other (angel) says, 'O Allah! Destroy every miser.'" [Bukhari]
The Prophet ﷺ said:

"The shade of the believer on the Day of Judgement is his charity."

"The upper hand is better than the lower hand. The upper hand is that of the giver and the lower (hand) is that of the beggar." [Sunan an-Nasa’i]

GOAL SETTING

TRYING TO HIT THE TARGET
Grade yourself in each of the five categories discussed and assess where you need to improve. In terms of goals, how do we stay motivated? Firstly, make your goals small and manageable. Winning is a habit, and losing is a habit. If you make your goals manageable, you will be successful every day because they are easy to accomplish. When you become accustomed to winning, you can slowly increase your goal.

Remember to appreciate yourself at your highest. The best example of this is Ramadan! We look back to ourselves in that month, and we feel proud; we push ourselves during Ramadan in a way we don’t push ourselves during other months. Use that success to fuel you.

SALAAM CAN BRING BALANCE
What is the definition of salaam? It means peace – from the root “s l m.” The word saalim or saleem refers to being whole and complete. When something is whole and complete, it is in a state of balance. When we say salaam to others, we are asking Allah for peace that is achieved through that balance. And the entirety of our 24-hour day should manifest such balance.