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HONOR IN PERSEVERANCE

By Shaykh Zulfikar Ahmad

Man's Purpose in Life

Man was not created a tree that he should stand still; neither was he created a rock that he should lay around doing nothing. Rather, man was created to be the best of creation. Hence, man should spend his time in what is the only purpose in life, in the remembrance of Allah ﷻ and in servitude to Him. The marvelous creation that man sees all around him was created for him, and he in turn, was created for the worship of Allah ﷻ.

Allah ﷻ is so magnanimous that He has assigned all of creation to man's service. The serene skies give life-giving rain to the earth for crops. The rolling earth and deep blue oceans abound with animals and fish for man's consumption. Lush vegetation provides yet more food and ever precious oxygen for the atmosphere. In return, Allah ﷻ merely asks for obedience from man, something in which unfortunately, humankind is seriously lacking.

Two Different Paths

Man has a choice of two different paths in this life; a life spent following and satisfying one's own desires, or that of a life spent following Allah's ﷻ wishes and commands.

When acting according to one's own whims and wishes, man uses his various senses such as sight, hearing and touch, in order to process different information. Thereafter, he makes decisions based on this analysis, in order to govern his life.

The other path is very simple, because Allah ﷻ has already supplied the valuable gift of His laws in the Holy Quran, indicating to people how they should live their lives. Moreover, He sent His Messenger ﷺ as a practical example.

Man's Faulty Senses

The senses through which man processes information and hence gains knowledge by which to act, prove to be faulty upon close examination. Sight is one of these faulty senses, because it is limited to certain distances and does not allow man to see everything at any given moment. The cat can see in pitch darkness, whereas man cannot. Likewise birds can see for miles, while man cannot. Furthermore, the air and ground is replete with an infinite number of microscopic organisms that man is unable to see. Yet, insects and other creatures of the air that are several time smaller than man, such as bats and bees, can see these. Moreover, man cannot see all the bacteria that he inhales when breathing. Yet, these bacteria can be seen under a microscope. Therefore, man's sight is imperfect and was created only to function within certain limits.

Man's ability to hear is equally bound by limitations, because it only functions within a certain bandwidth. Man can hear a great deal, but not everything. Scientists have invented a tremendous amount of sophisticated equipment to detect seismic and volcanic activity, yet they also keep animals in the same laboratories as an early warning system. Animals are sensitive to the minutest seismic activity that is beyond the capacity of human senses and which even escapes this sophisticated machinery. The animal's resulting heightened activity signals the scientists to an upcoming natural disaster.

Ultrasonic waves are further evidence of the limits to man's hearing ability, because these waves are beyond the frequency which man can hear. Devices such as dog whistles and rat repellants known as "Bye bye rat" emit a high frequency sound that could not be heard by man if he were standing in the same location as the animal. However, animal hearing is so sensitive that this sound would be absolutely unbearable for them.

The human faculties of sight and hearing function in a certain band width, just like a radio that tunes to a certain frequency and cannot pick up anything outside its band width. If the tools used to process information are faulty and limited, then the resulting information will also be limited. And so if man chooses to rely only on his sense and experiences, he will fail in life. On the other hand, the person who makes obedience to Allah ﷻ the foundation of his life will be successful both in this life and the Hereafter.

The inventor knows his machinery together with its strengths and weaknesses. Whenever new machinery or

software is introduced in a foreign market, it is always accompanied by engineers and trainers who educate and train the others on its use. Trainers offer practical examples and workshops on the use of the new product and leave a manual behind if future assistance is needed.

Likewise Allah ﷻ also created the “machinery” of mankind and sent numerous prophets over time to educate people on how to live fruitful lives in obedience to Allah ﷻ. Last of all came the Messenger ﷺ of Allah, the best “engineer” of all who showed people his own practical example so they could earn Allah’s ﷻ pleasure and succeed. The manual that the Messenger ﷺ of Allah brought and left behind is the Holy Quran, a treasure trove of guidelines detailing every aspect of life, detailing how man is to live in accordance with Allah’s ﷻ wishes. Together with the Sunnah, this is a shining beacon through which man can ultimately succeed, if only he were to understand and adhere.

The Value of Knowledge

No other book places as much emphasis on the importance and value of knowledge as the Holy Quran. Before the advent of Islam, the Arabs were known for such savagery and ignorance that even the two leading empires of the time, Rome and Persia, shied away from the possibility of conquest. A historian writes concerning these times that “[a]t that time Arabia was the most degraded nation of the world.”

The Messenger ﷺ of Allah came into this savage society and elevated it by, among other things, teaching them the

value of knowledge. Regarding knowledge, the Messenger ﷺ of Allah said:

Seeking knowledge is obligatory on every male and female Muslim

Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave

Furthermore, regarding knowledge, Hadrat Imam Ghazali (May the mercy of Allah ﷻ be upon him) held the opinion that the ink of the scholar's pen is more valuable than the blood of the martyr. Indeed, no existing literature elaborates on knowledge, as does the Holy Quran.

A book entitled *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History* became immensely popular in Pakistan. In this book, a Christian biographer by the name of Michael Hart researched and ranked who he considered to be the most important people in history. In this ranking, he places the Messenger ﷺ of Allah first, and writes a fascinating statement explaining his reasoning. He states:

My choice of Muhammad to lead the ranking of the most influential personalities in history will surprise some of the readers.

Michael Hart continues to say that on researching the lives of countless important individuals he noticed that all had studied at the hands of a gifted teacher sometime in their youth. He noticed the same trend from Alexander the Great to Newton, that all had acquired education and

training from the best teachers at the finest institutions of learning.

However, he says that one personality stood out against the crowd as not having sat as anybody's student or apprentice. Being illiterate, the Messenger ﷺ of Allah brought a silent revolution to Arabia and in merely twenty-three years, turned it from a violent society to a civilized one. He *himself* taught mankind the value and greatness of knowledge. Hart concludes by saying that these facts compelled him to place the Messenger ﷺ of Allah at the top of the rankings.

Upon further examination, this truth shines even brighter and becomes more evident. The Prophet ﷺ never ventured outside of Arabia except on small trade caravans in his youth. Likewise, the noble Companions remained constantly at his side and also did not leave the Arabian Peninsula. No party from amongst these early Muslims traveled to the great empires of Rome or Persia to study economics and management as young people do today. In fact, remaining only in the company of the Messenger ﷺ of Allah molded them into such grandiose personalities of knowledge and character, that they humbled those very empires and stood as practical examples for the world.

This knowledge and character did not come from any university, but was the knowledge and character that Allah ﷻ taught the Prophet ﷺ and in turn the Companions ﷺ acquired from him.

A Fascinating Event

No one has highlighted the value and importance of knowledge more than the Messenger ﷺ of Allah. Mr. Brody was a traveling English professor who visited many universities. He once taught a management course at my university. Everyone was very impressed that such a capable professor, who had taught in American and European universities, was teaching them as well.

At one point in his lecture, he stated that research had shown that people needed study, not only as students but also beyond that, well into their professional lives. This was in order for them to be able to keep up their skills. Mr. Brody said this with great pride as if he had opened a door to another plane of understanding. At that point, I stood up and expressed my wish to quote a hadith of the Prophet ﷺ. Mr. Brody obliged and so I quoted the hadith where the Messenger ﷺ of Allah said that knowledge should be pursued from the cradle to the grave. The professor paused and took out his diary from his briefcase. He opened it for me and requested the hadith in writing, saying that he would include it in his lecture circuit in the future and thereby educate his listeners to the fact that the Prophet of Islam ﷺ highlighted the importance of knowledge fourteen hundred years ago.

Attaining Knowledge

An Arabic proverb states that one will attain what one strives for, and consequently, knowledge is something that has to be sought and struggled for. Man either solidifies and improves his life with his own hands, or he destroys it with

his own hands. However, it is a proven fact that the more one struggles to attain life's bounties, the more one sees and enjoys them.

Accounts of our Righteous Predecessors

The incredible feats and righteousness of the righteous predecessors are a shining example of courage and perseverance that continue to fascinate the common people.

Imam Shafi

At the tender age of thirteen, Imam Shafi (May the mercy of Allah ﷺ be upon him) had acquired all the treasures of the Holy Quran and the sunnah and was engaged in teaching them, thereby fully earning his title. It was because of his intense desire and diligence that Allah ﷻ made it easy for him to cross these vast oceans of knowledge and thereby enabled him to acquire their secrets. At his young age, he set a precedent through his diligence that stands as an everlasting testament.

Muhammad bin Qasim

In today's society, a seventeen-year-old boy would not be able to take the responsibility of a household if he was suddenly charged with it. However, at the age of seventeen Muhammad bin Qasim (May the mercy of Allah ﷺ be upon him) not only became Commander-in-Chief, but set out to the heart of Raja Dahir's kingdom in Sind¹ with a small, untrained force.

¹ A province in modern day Pakistan

Hajjaj bin Yusuf was another famous Muslim commander at the time who informed Muhammad bin Qasim that Raja Dahir's men had attacked Muslims who had been passing near Sind and that they had captured some Muslim women. Hajjaj bin Yusuf also explained that his armies were engaged elsewhere and could not be spared. Since these Muslim women were pleading for help, Muhammad bin Qasim convened a war council of young men who pledged to join in a campaign to free their mothers and sisters. These young men were not professionally trained, but they put their trust in Allah ﷻ and responded to the call to defend their women's honor. Muhammad bin Qasim himself was so dedicated to this cause that in the midst of the gathering, he would often exclaim, "I am at your service my sister!"

Raja Dahir's army was no ordinary force. Rather, it was composed of professionally trained soldiers in full armor who were fully equipped with weaponry. Trusting in Allah ﷻ, the poorly equipped and poorly trained young Muslim men with Muhammad bin Qasim pounced on Dahir's army and decimated it. Afterwards, Muhammad bin Qasim showed the utmost confidence in his men by leaving the prisoners of war and spoils in the charge of his second-in-command. Meanwhile, he himself took a contingent all the way north to Multan², bringing with him both Islam and liberation.

² Another city in modern Pakistan, about 300 miles north of Sind.

A successful life is not one of luxury and ease, but one of hardship and struggle as defined by these examples. If the youth today applied these examples to their own lives, Muslims would not be in the position they are nowadays and nor would anybody be able to look at us reprehensibly.

Hadrat Abdullah bin Mubarak

In Hadrat Abdullah bin Mubarak's time, there were no loudspeakers at speeches as there are now. So whenever someone would speak to large gatherings, announcers would echo the speech forward for those sitting further away. Thousands would gather to listen to Hadrat Abdullah bin Mubarak's (May the mercy of Allah ﷺ be upon him) lectures and speeches on the Holy Quran and the Hadith. At one count, only the announcers numbered in excess of forty thousand.

An Anonymous Muhaddith

It is recorded that a muhaddith of his time wrote a great number of books on hadith analysis and knowledge. His writings were so numerous that when the number of pages he had written was divided by the days he was alive, the result averaged out to ten pages a day.

This number increases dramatically when we take into account his infancy and the fact that initially, acquiring knowledge took approximately ten to twelve years. Nowadays, even studying a few pages weigh heavily upon us and in-depth research and writing weighs even heavier. The feats and achievements of these remarkable people astound the imagination.

Other Special Accounts of Perseverance

Ibn Mughal (May the mercy of Allah ﷺ be upon him) is a renowned writer in Islamic history who kept writing well into his eighties. Today he is remembered by the grand title of *Saheb ul-Masalikul Mumalikul Maghadir wal Mahalik*.

Hafiz Abul Qasim Sulaiman bin Ahmed Tabrani (May the mercy of Allah ﷺ be upon him) spent thirty-three years of his life in the pursuit of collecting and verifying Ahadith. In that period of time, he met and acquired knowledge from one thousand mashaikh.

Abu Hatim Razi (May the mercy of Allah ﷺ be upon him) admitted that he had walked over nine thousand miles in his pursuit of collecting and verifying hadith.

Ibn Maqri (May the mercy of Allah ﷺ be upon him) once undertook a journey of eight hundred and forty miles for a portion of a valuable book that he was missing.

Hafiz Abu Abdullah Asfahani (May the mercy of Allah ﷺ be upon him) traveled through one hundred and twenty countries compelled by his intense desire for hadith.

Imam Adab Sebuia started out as a student of Imam Hammad bin Salma (May the mercy of Allah ﷺ be upon them). At one point of a class, Imam Hammad had to admit to a grammatical mistake when corrected by his student, and from that point onwards, Imam Adab Sebuia persevered so relentlessly in the field of *Nahw* that every modern student of Nahw now knows his name.

Allama Ibn Juiz (May the mercy of Allah ﷺ be upon him) once admitted while delivering a sermon at the pulpit, that he had written two hundred volumes with his hands.

According to his last will, the same pens he had used were burned to warm the water for his funeral bath.

For fifty years, Imam Ibrahim Harbi (May the mercy of Allah ﷺ be upon him) did not miss any of his shaykh's gatherings. Distance, health and family were no obstacles to these lovers as they are today.

Imam Razi (May the mercy of Allah ﷺ be upon him) once said that since time is so valuable, he grieved at the time taken to eat and sleep since that took him away from his constant pursuit of knowledge.

On one occasion, the texts that Imam Ghazali had studied from Hadrat Abu Nasr Ismail (May the mercy of Allah ﷺ be upon them) were stolen. He beseeched the thieves to return them, but their ringleader laughed and said, "You have wasted your time if you are ruined at the loss of just one book." The texts were returned, but this point struck home to Imam Ghazali who started memorizing everything from that point so that he had committed all his lessons to memory in three years.

Hadrat Qurtubi said that when Imam Shadwi (May the mercy of Allah ﷺ be upon him) wrote *Qasida Shadia*, he performed twelve thousand *tawaf* of seven rounds each around the Holy Kaa'ba holding the book. At the end he offered two rakat prayer of *tawaf* and supplicated to Allah ﷻ as follows:

O Allah ﷻ! Creator of the Heavens and Earth; Knower of the Unseen and the Seen; Lord of this Great House, Benefit with it whosoever reads it.

Scientists' Perseverance

Anybody who has excelled in this life, attaining fame and fortune, has worked extremely hard for his success. Hard work and diligence is a prerequisite for anyone seeking success either in this life or the next.

Isaac Newton

Newton was once working on a lengthy groundbreaking thesis that he left on his desk as he went to answer the call of nature. Since these were the days before electricity, he left his oil lamp burning on his desk. His dog Tony happened to come into the room and tipped over the lamp as he jumped onto the desk, and Newton's entire thesis burned to ashes.

Upon noticing this catastrophe, Newton did not become angry but merely said, "Tony, you have increased my work." After this, Newton started anew and with diligence and forbearance, completed his magnum opus work in a few months.

Albert Einstein

A well known fact from Einstein's early life is that he was not learned in accounting or mathematics and would often argue with the bus conductor saying that the latter had shortchanged him. However, upon recounting, the bus conductor would be proved right, and so after a few repetitions of this argument, the bus conductor said, "What will become of you in life if you do not even know simple arithmetic?"

The conductor's words struck a cord and Einstein decided to study mathematics. He persevered so hard in his goal that a time came when he revolutionized the world of science with his Theory of Relativity. Surely, hard work earns its true reward.

Individual Accounts of Perseverance

The Boy who Placed Second in his Exams

A young man scored well in his High School Examinations and so, asked his father to help him seek admission to college. Both parents were old and the father was so weak that he could not work. Hence the father said, "We don't even have enough to eat. You need to start a business and work so that you may bring the family some income."

Hence, this poor young man who had been scoring so high on exams started tending a grocery store. However, he could not ignore the intense desire for learning within him, and so he bought college textbooks that he would secretly study. Since the shop was operating well, the parents were unaware of their son's private studying. In this manner, the young man successfully completed the study of difficult texts in Mathematics, Chemistry, and Physics.

Whenever he encountered difficulty in the texts, the young man would refer to the local college professor. Since he also wanted to complete the practical laboratory section of the curriculum, he also asked the professor to teach him further. The professor was only too glad to oblige such an enthusiastic student, and so the young man cleverly scheduled his laboratory practicum dates to coincide with

when he would pick up grocery supplies from town. To further avoid any suspicion, he would inform his father four days in advance of the date he would be going to town.

Hence, this young man would go to town on the date of his practicum with money for groceries. However, he would give the money to someone else who would buy and hold the necessary goods for him. He himself would go to college to take the practicum and then return home with the grocery to stock the store, and in this manner, his father would be unaware of his son's educational activities.

In this secretive manner, this young man gave all consecutive examinations and finally placed second overall in the city-wide Lahore Board of Examinations for Science. As his name appeared in the newspapers, joyful neighbors thronged his house to congratulate the parents, but the father kept insisting that his son only took care of the store and was not studious. Realizing the family situation, a few neighbors approached some wealthy businessmen in the neighborhood asking them to collectively grant a scholarship by which the boy could pursue his further studies and so that his parents would be taken care of financially. These businessmen agreed to the proposal and donated funds so that the parents were taken care of and so that their son was able to successfully complete a Civil Engineering degree at Lahore University.

Today, this young man is a wealthy civil engineer, living in a large home together with his parents and driving a fancy car. People can accomplish anything that they have a sincere desire and will for, and truly Allah ﷻ helps those who help themselves.

The Lady Doctor

The daughter of an Islamic Studies professor at the local college in Jhang³ had a strong desire to pursue medicine after scoring high in her high school examinations. However, her father was opposed to this idea since he did not want his daughter exposed to evolutionist thought at the university. At that time Jhang only had a college for arts and humanities for girls, but no college where girls could study science. Yet, the poor girl continued to plead with her father that she really wanted to study medicine.

Opposed to sending his daughter to the city, the father suggested that she could pursue self-study at home. Thus, he bought her all the necessary medical textbooks and so the girl enthusiastically started studying. Understandably these were difficult texts with some problems beyond her understanding and so she would ask her father if she could consult a professor at the local college. Her father was opposed to her going to a stranger, but he was accommodating enough that he would listen to the problem from his daughter and would convey the information to another professor at the college. Whether or not he agreed with or understood the problems and solutions, he would relay the answers back to his daughter.

Thus persevering, the girl successfully completed her initial studies so that she was admitted into Fatima Jinnah Medical College, a very prestigious medical school in Pakistan. This girl eventually earned the fruits of her labor

³ A city in Punjab, a northern province of Pakistan.

and was successful in achieving her goal of becoming a doctor.

Nobel Prize Winner Dr. Abdus Salam

I once received a letter from a college principal inviting me to an event honoring a renowned scientist and Nobel Prize winner Dr. Abdus Salam Khurshid from Canada, a non-Muslim who was originally from Pakistan. Hence, I took leave from the university and proceeded to the event at the college.

After formal greetings, over tea, my professor asked Dr. Abdus Salam the background to his winning the Nobel Prize. The Nobel Prize winner simply answered that he was very hard working. To this, my professor replied, “Every science student is a bookworm and hard working, but he doesn’t go on to win the Nobel Prize.” Dr. Abdus Salam again gave a similar reply saying, “I am not as intelligent as I am hardworking.” He continued with an example and said that the first time he read his Chemistry book, he did not understand it, and so he reread it. Yet again, he failed to understand the subject and so he read the book a third and fourth time. He kept on reading it until he finally grasped it after reading it a total of sixty-three times, so that he had almost memorized the book. Dr. Abdus Salam’s listeners were amazed at the incredible work ethic of this man who would read a book so many times just because he failed to understand the subject matter the first time.

People engineer their own successes or failures through hard work or lack thereof, and consequently, must take advantage of all talents and opportunities presented to them

in their youth. One truly attains what one strives for, but can also lay it to waste through laziness.

Something to Ponder

Farmers use human and animal waste and other debris as fertilizer to cultivate fields. It is very strange that something as despicable as fecal matter can prove so beneficial to crops and vegetation. If people do not work hard to improve their lives and relationships so that they can benefit each other, then they are worse than the fertilizer in the fields.

We need to live our lives constantly keeping the welfare of other people and the entire Muslim nation ahead of our own welfare, so that we leave something behind for the rest of humankind to cherish.

*Lives of great men remind us,
How sublime we can make our lives.
And departing leave behind us,
Footprints on the sands of time.*

- Longfellow

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