Synopsis of Friday Sermon
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“Learning and Teaching the Qur’an”

In a profound hadith, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) informed, “The best among you is one who learns and teaches the Qur’an.” Why the Qur’an, one wonders? Simply because the Qur’an is the last and final uncorrupted scripture that contains the final guidance that guides people to true happiness and salvation. It contains the answers to our everyday struggles. It is the speech of our Creator, Allah Almighty.

In the early days of Islam a group called the Mu’tazilites held the belief that the Qur’an was the created divine word. In fact, The Abbasid Caliph Abdullah al-Ma’mun (827 CE) adopted this doctrine publically. Imam Ahmad (RA), who did not comply with the position of the State, refuted their claim and consequently he was imprisoned and tortured.

Surat al-Rahman clearly refutes the claim of the Mu’tazilite, “The most Gracious, taught the Qur’an, created man, taught him (how) to express himself” (al-Rahman, 55:1-4). Man is a creation of Allah; and the Qur’an, which is the speech of Allah, was conveyed and taught to Muhammad (SAW) through archangel Jibril (AS), teaching him the most eloquent speech.

The Qur’an itself asserts that it is the speech of Allah (SWT), “If any one of the idolaters seek your protection (O Prophet), grant it to him so that he may hear the word (kalam, speech) of God, then escort him to his place of safety, for they are people with no knowledge (of it)” (al-Tawbah, 9:6). A speech of a person is an attribute of that person and the speech of Allah is an attribute of Allah (SWT). It cannot be a creation. The second to last ayah in surat Ya Seen clearly demonstrates this fact, “Indeed, whenever He decrees a matter, He says to it Be (kun) and it is!” (Ya Seen, 36:82). How can then Allah’s speech (Be, kun) be created when He uses the command Be to create whatever He wills?

The Qur’an is indeed the speech of Allah (SWT) and according to Prophet Muhammad (SAW), “The superiority of the speech of Allah compared to all other speech is like the superiority of Allah over His creation.” Why then learn and teach the Qur’an? Because, “The most accurate and truthful speech is the Book of Allah.” A reminder the Prophet (SAW) would articulate at the pulpit while addressing a Friday congregation.

Reflecting on the word “Best” from the hadith, the best of humans are the prophets and messengers of Allah (SWT). He chooses the best because they are the link between Him and the people He created. With Muhammad (SAW) being the last and final prophet and messenger of God, who would play the vital role linking the rest of humanity to their Creator God Almighty after him? Only the followers of Muhammad can fill the gap and occupy that position. Therefore, the ummah (the messenger of the last Messenger of Allah) is the final link between God and humanity. In praising the ummah, Allah (SWT) declares, “You (Muslims) are the best of peoples raised for all mankind” (Aal Imran, 3:110), It is in this light we may understand that the best of Muslims are those who
learn and teach the Qur’an.

In a similar fashion, the Prophet (SAW) said, “The most superior among you are those who learn the Qur’an and teach it.” Therefore, the best and most superior of all people are those who continue the tradition of the Prophet (SAW) and his noble companions by understanding and teaching the Qur’an to others.

Learning and teaching the Qur’an is a basic function of propagation (dawah). Allah (SWT) apprised, “And who could be better in speech than one who calls (people) to God, acts righteously and says, ‘I am one of (those who surrendered to God) the Muslims’” (Fussilat, 41:33). Dawah to Allah begins with the Qur’an. Indeed it was the Qur’an; its eloquence, message and wisdom that captured and softened the hearts of the early converts to Islam.

The statement, “Best among you are those who learn and teach the Quran” is so profound, it informs the believer of his obligations toward the Qur’an. Those who fulfill such duties are indeed among the best of people. Such responsibilities include, first and foremost, real faith and belief in the Qur’an. Our belief in the Qur’an should not be limited to only saying we believe in it. One who truly believes in it and appreciates the speech of Allah is eager to learn about His creator and what He has to say.

Secondly, people who have genuine faith in the Qur’an recite it profusely and more frequently. After all, why was the Qur’an sent to mankind? It was not meant to be treated as a decorative ornament in our homes, offices and cars. It was meant to be read. The word “al-Qur’an” literally means “the Recital” or the Book to be read, “Recite then of the Qur’an as much as may be easy for you” (al-Muzzamil, 73:20). The importance of learning the Qur’an is emphasized in surat al-Qamar. In four places Allah (SWT) challenges the Muslims, “And We have indeed made the Qur’an easy to learn (and understand). Is there then anyone who wish to learn?” (al-Qamar, 54:17,22,32,40).

The third obligation toward the Qur’an is to reflect on and understand the ayat that are recited. Each ayah of the Qur’an is a sign and symbol of divine wisdom and knowledge. And each ayah deserves the proper attention and understanding. After all it was revealed for that purpose, “(This is) a blessed Book which We sent down to you (O Prophet) so that they may ponder over its ayat (signs) and that the men of understanding may take heed” (Sod, 28:29). The method by which we gain deep insight into the Qur’an is through the use of our intellect; “Undoubtedly, we have explained the signs in detail; for those who understand” (al-An’am, 6:98). The knowledge of the Arabic language is, however, vital for this purpose.

The fourth duty is to act upon its teachings and injunctions. The aim behind learning the Qur’an is to influence and shape the personal life of the individual and the collective life of the community. The Qur’an, also known as al-Huda, or the Guidance, contains genuine guidance that leads to true happiness and salvation, “Verily, this Qur’an guides to that which is most upright, and gives the believers who do good deeds the glad tiding that they will have a great reward” (al-Isra’, 17:9).

The fifth and final obligation is to propagate the Qur’an to the masses. We can appreciate this duty when we ponder on the following ayah, “This is a clear message for mankind in order that they may be warned thereby, and that they may know that He is only One God, and that men of understanding may take heed” (Ibrahim, 14:52). In a similar fashion, He (SWT) informed, “This (Qur’an) is a clear statement to (all) the people and a guidance and admonition for those who are mindful of (and fear) God” (Aal Imran, 3:138).

The ummah is the only link between Allah (SWT) and the entire humanity for all time to come entrusted with the prophetic mission of disseminating the final message of Allah (SWT). To be effective in this endeavor one has to embody, think and act according to the Qur’an.

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was an exemplary teacher who taught the Qur’an in an unequivocal manner. And we as students of the Qur’an must be role models just as the Prophet (SAW) was. The teacher must fear Allah,
be good-natured and possess an exceptional character. He/she is cheerful, patient and forbearing. Among other traits he/she is tranquil, respectful and humble. Additionally, he/she is clean, well groomed and smells good. He/she avoids idle talk, mockery and excessive laughing.

A word of caution: intention, intention, intention. Our intention for this task (or any Islamic work for that matter) must be purely and solely for the sake of Allah (SAW). Any other motive may result in utter ruin in the hereafter. We may recall the hadith in which the Prophet (SAW) informs of the philanthropist, martyr and scholar who are brought to the grand court of Allah for reckoning. All supposedly acted with the intention of pleasing Allah (SWT).

The man who acquired and imparted knowledge gained from the Qur’an will be brought before Allah (SAW). Upon recalling the favors He (SWT) bestowed upon him, i.e., giving him the ability to learn the Qur’an, He (SWT) asks him, “What did you do to express gratitude for it?” the man replies, “I acquired the knowledge of Qur’an and taught it for your sake.” Allah (SWT) will say to him and He knows best, “You have lied. You have gained knowledge of the Qur’an so that people may call you a scholar and a reciter (i.e. to be praised) and they have done so.” Allah (SWT) then orders the angels to drag him on his face and thrown in Hell.

Intention. Intention. Intention. It cannot be stressed more. The student who has sincerely taken this responsibility of learning and teaching the Qur’an may start off with good intentions, but unless the motive is clear, verified and confirmed regularly, we may slip and begin serving our own ego rather than the cause of Allah (SWT).

Another point worthy of mentioning is, unless this endeavor is primarily for personal guidance and development, the very Qur’an one is learning may become a means of misguidance. The Qur’an confirms this point, “Through it (the Qur’an) He makes many go astray and leads many to the right path. But it is only the rebels He makes go astray” (al-Baqarah, 2:26). In other words, a person whose motive is to study the Qur’an for mere intellectual exercise may find him/herself completely misguided.

Learning the Qur’an without having genuine faith in it, its guidance, rules, laws, injunctions, instructions, etc. will be of no benefit other than perhaps worldly benefits.

For new students of knowledge who may decide on embarking on this task of learning and teaching the Qur’an, it is recommended to start where the Prophet (SAW) started. Often times we start where the prophet (SAW) ended. His mission started in Makkah and ended in Madinah. The revelations that were revealed in Makkah are distinctively different in nature than those that were revealed in Madinah.

The Medinan Qur’an dealt with rulings (ahkam), do’s and don’ts, lawful and unlawful etc. As Muslims we must abide by all of God’s rules and commands. However, a Muslim, particularly a new Muslim, who is far from the deen will find it heavy and burdensome to comply with the Islamic law. This is because the personal development has not yet been attained to prepare the person to accept such commands and struggle against his own will to obey God.

The remedy for this is to start where the Prophet (SAW) started. For thirteen years in Makkah, two-thirds of the Qur’an were revealed, and the Prophet (SAW) taught the three main doctrinal beliefs. They are belief in God (Iman Billah), belief in the institution of prophethood (Iman bil-Risalah) and belief in the hereafter (Iman bil-Akhirah).

Extensive surahs and sections of the Qur’an talk about Allah, the Creator, His oneness, His names and attributes, role of messengers, historical accounts of past nations, resurrection, Judgment Day, punishment and reward. These subjects are repeated in different forms and styles to draw the reader to the Qur’anic power of eloquence and wisdom. Such teachings are crucial to a non-Muslim audience.
It was through such teachings that the noble companions of the Prophet (SAW) were transformed completely. This phase was known as the phase of “purification of the soul.” It is necessary to sow the seeds of Iman and nurture it to grow before one may reap the benefits of Iman. The inevitable result of deep-rooted faith is good action which includes complying with all of the injunctions of God Almighty.

Finally, the Qur’an is the pinnacle of Wisdom, “Alif Lam Ra [This is] a Scripture whose verses are perfected, then set out clearly, from One who is all wise, all aware.” (Hud, 11:1,2). “And He gives wisdom to whoever He wills. Whoever is given wisdom has truly been given much good, but only those with insight bear this in mind” (al-Baqarah, 2:269).

Indeed the Qur’an transforms lives and shapes and reforms societies. It is the light that guides the way, and it is the straight path that leads to an everlasting, perpetual bliss of paradise. Indeed, “Best among you is one who learns and teaches the Qur’an.” Time is precious and short. We can truly be among the best. Let us begin this journey of learning and teaching the Qur’an and be among the best in the sight of Allah (SWT).