

We used to say, “Seeing is believing.” That is no longer true about videos. Use of AI to create Deep Fakes is so powerful that most people can’t tell the difference. As time passes, the technology will develop to the extent that we will simply not be able to tell the difference between real footage and doctored or simply created footage about a person or incident that never happened and so could never have been filmed. Remember the video of the smoking fish eating a snake? That is an excellent example of a fake video. Most are not so benign as that. People make fake videos to influence minds and hearts to serve their own reasons and we are their unsuspecting victims. The fake video industry is worth billions of dollars and has massive official support in some countries. Its purpose is to promote hatred, racism, prejudice and violence to distract the attention of the general population (i.e. you and I) from their real purpose, looting our resources and the legacy of our children. With these people, compassion, justice, suffering, deprivation, poverty, nothing has any value or meaning, except the predatory, single-minded pursuit of profit and power at any cost. That is because we pay the price, not they. They merely gross the profits, thanks to our cooperation in being and remaining distracted and not getting organized and not asking critical questions. Our biggest weakness is that we think we are intelligent enough to recognize a fake and can’t be fooled. And when we do get fooled, which is all the time, our ego won’t let us admit it. We are the fake video maker’s dream come true. What is the solution? Never look at a video that is not from a source you trust. Guarding our sight has a whole new meaning.

Never has it been more necessary to sincerely ask Allahﷻ :

اللهم أرنا الحق حقا ورزقنا إتياعه و أرنا الباطل باطلا و وارزقنا إجتنابه

Allahumma arina al-haqqa haqqan warzuqna ittibaa'h

wa arina al-batila batilan warzuqna ijtinabah"

"O Allahﷻ show me the truth as truth and give me the ability to follow it, and show me falsehood for what it is and give me the ability to abstain from it."

Never has it been more critical to remind ourselves about the categorical statement that Allahﷻ made about what defines us as Muslims: Justice.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَى
أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ إِنْ يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَقِيرًا فَاللَّهُ أَوْلَىٰ بِهِمَا
فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا الْهَوَىٰ أَنْ تَعْدِلُوا وَإِنْ تَلَوُّوا أَوْ تَعْرِضُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا
تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا

Nisa 4: 135. O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even though it be against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, be (they) rich or poor, Allah is a Better Protector for both (than you). So follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest you may avoid justice, and if you distort your witness or refuse to give it, verily, Allah is Ever Well-Acquainted with what you do.

Justice is the bedrock of our faith. Lying is the worst and biggest of sins in Islam. Our duty and signature is to stand for justice as witnesses to Allahﷻ.

After the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on Friday, November 22, 1963 there was a small but very powerful picture in the papers. It was the picture of an automatic rifle with the caption, “This is made for one reason only.” That is the real story of **Social media**. A story that most of us, like all addicts, refuse to believe. We try to convince ourselves that social media is value neutral, only a tool, benign, and something which is in our control. Believe me, that is the root of the problem and the reason for our addiction and enslavement. Social media is NOT about communication. It is about the use of technology to achieve the purpose of power brokers and the wielders of power, mind steering and mass control. They do it by creating anxiety and fear which makes us willing, even eager, to accept surveillance and invasion of our privacy, which is the tool for mass control. How many of you saw the video of how China controlled Covid? It was by literally tracking every single individual’s every movement and directing it, to control the disease. I am not offering a prize to guess what will happen to all the cameras, and the social media app that tracks the movement of every person, when Covid is finally a memory. The reality about surveillance and control is that once it is in, it never goes away.

Another thing about social media is that it is like masturbation. It takes away the drive without achieving any result. How many times have you seen a WhatsApp video about some great injustice and cruelty, the sunken cheeks of a starving child, war torn Yemen or the Uighur and Rohingya genocide?

How many times did this bring tears to your eyes, turmoil in your heart and a great passion to put a stop to this oppression? How many times did you then forward that message or video to all your friends, doing that multiple times because WhatsApp doesn't allow you to forward it to more than five people at a time? And then how many times did you sleep well that night? Did you sleep knowing that the injustice had been stopped, the starving children fed, the murder of innocents stopped, and the perpetrators brought to justice? Or did you sleep because your passion cooled down after forwarding the messages so many times? Results come from acting on the passion in meaningful ways. Not in forwarding messages. But do we learn? Social media creators are experts in psychology and masters at manipulation so that the individual becomes mentally dependent and a blind and willing follower. His every click, his attention, his involvement generates revenue for them. They become billionaires thanks to us. What do we get in the process? We must ask that question. Remember, that at one end of this string is an expert in psychology unburdened by any ethics or values earning millions because he can manipulate you. And at the other end is your child; innocent, malleable, totally incapable of resisting, let alone combating the sweet poison that is being fed to him. And worse, a parent who thinks s/he knows and is in control. In the words of Daniel Boorstin, *"The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance; it is the illusion of knowledge"*. We think we know. We think we are in control. We think it won't harm us. We are wrong.

I am not trying to be dramatic. It is as bad as that. Please remember that the biggest problem of the addict is to accept that he is addicted. That is our reality. We are living in a world of denial. But remember also that denial is simply that – denial. It is not real.

The truth is not dependent on belief or acceptance. It is true, whether anyone accepts it or not. Gravity will not go away if we refuse to accept it. Cigarettes will not become beneficial because we deny their harm. Drugs will not stop intoxicating because we legalize them or make them tax deductible. Social media is about fake news, mental enslavement, dopamine addiction leading to ADHD and other more toxic conditions. Algorithms determine what we watch and believe, how we vote, who we trust, who we suspect, who we love and who we hate and in the end who rules us. Deep fakes appear real thanks to technology. We know this but we do not bother to verify because they appear to be so real. Most of us do not even know how to verify. By the time someone verifies it and publicizes that information, the damage is done. Hearts have changed, stereotypes are reinforced, people are demonized, violence is legitimized, and prejudice becomes ever more ingrained.

We are social beings and need company, affirmation, and friendship. Traditionally we sought that in face-to-face interactions, the most remote form of it was the penfriend. Someone we had never met but who we wrote letters to. We protected our identity and personal information and guarded it jealously and would go ballistic if even our parents, closest relatives or

friends opened any letter of ours or read our diary without our permission. Then came social media in 2004 and opened the doors for us to seek affiliation and affirmation without any boundaries or rules and without the tools to even assess its reality or effect. The first social media site to reach a million monthly active users was MySpace and was the beginning of social media as we know it. Yes, it is, as recent as that. Facebook which owns Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp has over a billion active users who volunteer their information for it to harvest and use for anything at all, is even more recent. Only in February 2012 did Facebook become a public company. Its first IPO in May raised \$16 billion, giving it a market value of \$102.4 billion. Today it is worth over \$300 billion. Ask how your wealth increased from 2012 to 2021. Do yourself a favor and read these two articles.

<https://ourworldindata.org/rise-of-social-media>

<https://www.thestreet.com/technology/history-of-facebook-14740346>

With social media, suddenly from a few real friends who we knew, we ended up with tens and hundreds of virtual ‘friends’ and ‘followers’. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and everything else in between encouraged us to share the most mundane information about ourselves and suddenly made it the means to become ‘popular’. They gave us ‘role models’ like the Kardashians and others who post what they post to induce us to do the same. Like faithful sheep, we followed.

I am putting words like ‘friends’, ‘followers’, ‘popular’ in quotes to underline the fact that none of that is real. However, human nature is such that it does not analyze or deny pleasant experiences. And so, if we have 2000 virtual friends on FB or 3000 followers on Twitter, we do not question the reality or check it against real evidence. We are happy to stay with the fantasy and give in to the drive to increase our ‘following’. This also means that we will do whatever we need to, to ensure that we don’t lose any friends or followers. Remember that all this happens very unobtrusively and quietly and our behavior changes without our being aware of it. Rapidly we get our own sense of identity hooked to this and start to look forward to seeing what our ‘friends’ and ‘followers’ think of us. We want them to like us and so we do what they like. We think we are independent. We are not. We are enslaved.

Where we used to be upset if someone pried into our private lives, now we voluntarily put it out there and get upset if nobody comments on it immediately. We keep checking after every post to see if it is getting attention. How often do we check? How about every three seconds? If you don’t believe me or the statistics which I am quoting here, just time yourself to see how long it is before you look at your phone, even if it is just lying there on your desk, without the notification tone sounding. We post a picture of our dinner in a restaurant on Instagram, Kheema Dosa, which should be

sacrilege as it combines that which is vegetarian with that which was; and we immediately check to see who liked that picture.

It doesn't matter whether we even know those people. All we are looking for is the 'like' symbol. We conveniently ignore the fact that those who post 'likes', are exactly as interested in our post as we would be in their similar post i.e. totally uninterested; but would still hit the 'like' button because we want them to hit the 'like' button for our posts. That is what Dopamine addiction is all about. Instant pleasant reactions which create a need for more and more of the same and create withdrawal symptoms (which can be severe) when we don't get that 'positive' stroke. Even without this, the need for strokes creates huge distraction of focus and a fall in productivity and quality of life. Needless to say, while we are engaged with these apps, whether that is on the phone or other device, we can't do anything worthwhile, which impedes life goal achievement.

Dopamine is a drug which is created in the body, like cancer. And just because it is created in your body, it does not mean it won't kill you. It will. Also, like cancer. Imagine the effect of Dopamine addiction on children. Yes, children. Your children, thanks to you. Yes, you. Parents who are too lazy to parent and leave parenting to the tablet or the phone. You are the cause of your child's addiction and the effect of the make-believe world that you opened up for your child which will have long-term negative consequences on their attention span, perseverance, social skills, resilience in the face of

hardship, ability to reflect and conceptualize life's lessons and simply ability to grow into a confident, ethical, compassionate, and courageous adult. Dopamine addiction can lead to maladjusted individuals who have major problems forming real relationships, dealing with disagreement, marriage and in increasingly frequent cases, suicide. It is as serious as that.

This is where those who found a way to exploit Dopamine addiction to their advantage came in. By writing algorithms to identify what we prefer and are attracted towards and then using that to create the dream of the advertiser – the supremely targeted advertisement that can almost guarantee purchase. This metamorphosed into mind-steering and instigating action; buying behavior to begin with and then more dangerous possibilities like manipulating public opinion and elections. The tragedy is that there is nothing that WhatsApp or FB or Instagram or anyone is taking from us without our consent. We give consent because we are addicted. Taking our consent is like the drug dealer taking money from a heroin addict. The addict will hunt the drug dealer down to pay him because he needs his fix.

My principle in this is very simple. I say, "I may not be able to stop it, but I am not going to help it to happen." FB and its owner may want to control the world and may even succeed (remember Cambridge Analytica <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/04/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-scandal-fallout.html>) but that is not going to happen with my help. Please see the excellent Netflix documentary: The Social Dilemma

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11464826/> and don't say, "This won't happen to me or my kids." If you said that, it means that you are already addicted. Every addict denies his addiction. Everyone it happens to, says the same thing and that is exactly the reason it happens. Those who accept that it can happen, take precautions, and get out while they can and save themselves. This documentary was made by the very people who created this monster. Listen to them because there's nobody who knows it better. It is your call.

I have heard the following statements (excuses) from people when I speak to them about social media addiction.

1. 'They' already know everything. What's the point of changing now?
 - a. My question is who is 'they'? By 'they' if you mean WhatsApp or FB or any social media app, that statement is simply not true. They know only as much as you told them. Keep telling them and they will know more and more. Stop telling them and they can't know anything more. Your call.
2. I have nothing to hide, so what do I care who knows anything?
 - a. That's like saying, 'I have nothing to hide, so I am going to walk around naked.' Yes, it IS as stupid as that. Privacy is a human right. It is the basis of dignity. We have nothing negative to hide but that doesn't mean that strangers must have access to our personal data. Once again, your call.
3. If **FBI** (Police) wants to know about me, they can always find out.

- a. Hello!! Wake up. We are not talking about the FBI; we are talking about FB. Maybe there is a difference? We're not talking about a criminal investigation. We know you did nothing. We are talking about volunteering information about yourself to help FB et al to do all that I mentioned earlier, better, and more powerfully.

There is a natural reluctance to change in all of us. We all like the familiar. I say to you, recognize it for what it is; comfort with status quo (like a woman with an abusive husband who will complain but won't leave him because she fears the unknown). We are the victims of FOMO (millennials don't need this explained - Fear of Missing Out). FOMO is real and is the hook for Dopamine addiction. I remind myself and you that there was a time when we had BBM (Bahut Badi Museebat) on Blackberry. We thought that life was not possible without it. Where is it today? So also, WhatsApp or whatever else. Treat a tool like a tool and treat your spouse like a spouse. Not vice versa.

-What do we need to do? 5 – Critical things:

- 1. Reclaim your dignity:** Respect your own privacy. Get out of all social media. Use email knowing that it is not encrypted and so it means that almost anyone can read it, not the FB programmer alone. I know that free international calling is very attractive. Keep your chat app for that only. Don't use it to send and receive images, videos, or in the place of education. WhatsApp University is the site for ignorance, not knowledge.

Keep one app. Delete all others. FB first, then Instagram, then Snapchat, then WhatsApp. Remember that your children follow you and when they meet Allahﷻ they will remember you.

2. **Relearn to read:** Since Wahi has stopped, reading is the only way. No, listening to lectures is not enough. It is not even close. A book is a book. Read. Start a book club to encourage yourself and others to read together. Believe me, once you get into the habit, you will wish you had done it earlier.
3. **Make real friends:** This is a skill we lose over time and the reason why people are lonely in their old age. Loneliness kills and the solution is never to lose the skill to make new friends. Making friends is the best way to give Da’awa because you can only sell to friends.
4. **Relearn to communicate:** Smileys, icons, GIFS don’t substitute for conversation. Communication is the key to success in every aspect of life. You learn to communicate by communicating. Not by having your face in your phone all the time. Talk to people face to face even if it now means mask to mask, until we can resume our normal interactions.
5. **Think for yourself and make your own decisions:** It’s your life. Reclaim it. Let me reiterate; this is not about them. It is about us. What do we want to do with our lives? Allow others to use us as commodities for their personal benefit? Or take charge of our lives and live in a way that is positive, dignified, and powerful. Have real friends, make real contributions knowing that this takes time and persistence and leave

behind a legacy. For those who want to say at the end of all this, “What difference does my leaving this space make? After all I am only one person.” If you think you are too small to make a difference, think of the Corona virus. It changed the world.

I say to you, “Even if you can’t stop them, don’t join them. For in the end, it is not about them. It is about you. It is about us.”