

## Being positive in challenging times

What is your dream for your child? How many of you are surprised by this question? How many of you have thought about this and have it written down? How many of you have shared your dream with your child about whom you dreamt? What did your child say? Believe me, my brothers, and sisters, raising children is a lot more than paying bills. It is not an unconscious process that will somehow happen if you keep earning money. It takes thought, time, effort, energy, patience, and tears before Allahﷻ in the dead of the night, when everyone is fast asleep. How many of you want your children to make dua for you in Tahajjud, when you are gone? How many of you made dua for your children in Tahajjud, today? One is the product of the other. Make no mistake.

We spoke about the importance of changing the way we educate our children. It is a great tragedy that we, who led the world in the field of education for centuries, blindly copied the system that the Industrial Revolution bequeathed us. Interestingly there is no difference between how children are taught in our secular and religious schools. The only difference is in the books. Everything else is the same. Which makes it even more ridiculous. Firstly, let us see what Allahﷻ said about education and what it should achieve and how to do it. Allahﷻ said:

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لَآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ  
الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَمًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ  
وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَطْلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ

*A'al Imraan 3: 190-91 Verily! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for people of understanding. Those who remember Allah (constantly) standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and think deeply about the creation of the heavens and the earth, (saying): Our Rabb! You have not created (all) this without purpose, glory to You! (Exalted be You above all that they associate with You as partners). Give us salvation from the torment of the Fire.*

Allahﷻ told us to look at His signs in His creation and through them, reflect on His Glory and Magnificence. The Qur'an is a book of Signs (Ayaat), not science. I am not among those who try to 'prove' the veracity and truth of the Qur'an by quoting Ayaat that relate to scientific matters. That is a bit of a dangerous slope, because what we call 'science' is human knowledge until today. There is nothing to say that this will not or cannot change tomorrow. The difference between Revealed Knowledge and science is that the Revelation is good for all time, whereas Allahﷻ opens new vistas of appreciation to scientists, all the time. So, theories change. For example, one of the most quoted theories, 'The Big Bang Theory', is being questioned and refuted, as we speak. From a scientific perspective this is entirely possible and welcome. That is what development is all about. But if you had been building your argument about the truth of the Qur'an based on this theory, your foundation will soon be demolished. That is why we look at what Allahﷻ mentioned in the Qur'an about His creation as signs pointing to His Glory and Majesty. So, what must change? In short, everything. We must wipe clean and rewrite our destiny

As I mentioned last week, we are not talking about tweaking a train factory. We are talking about building a plane factory. So, everything we do today, what, and how, must change and become focused towards creating leaders who can change the world. That is why I began by asking you what your dream is, for your child.

Allahﷻ showed us a model which I call, Integrated Education. Integrating Islamic Theology with so-called Secular subjects. I say, 'so-called', because all knowledge is from Allahﷻ and so the term 'secular knowledge', from an Islamic perspective, is an oxymoron. Allahﷻ showed us how everything is integrated. It is we who created the false divisions between science and religion. That is the root cause of all our corruption. When we separated Tazkiyya from Ta'aleem, Noor left Ilm and only the words remained. When we separated purification of the heart/soul from the acquisition of knowledge, the light of guidance stopped shining and only dry words, remained. That was how we lost our position of leadership in the world.

لَمَّا فَصَلْنَا التَّزْكِيَةَ عَنِ التَّعْلِيمِ انْطَفَأَ نُورُ الْعِلْمِ، وَبَقِيَتِ الْكَلِمَاتُ  
الْجَائِفَةُ فَقَطُّ. كَانَتْ تِلْكَ مَأْسَاةً كَبِيرَةً، وَهَذَا هُوَ السَّبَبُ فِي أَنْنَا  
فَقَدْنَا مَكَانَتَنَا فِي قِيَادَةِ الْعَالَمِ

Islam is a practice. To benefit from it, we must practice it. We cannot do that wholeheartedly and meaningfully if it doesn't make sense in the context our modern education. The reason for that is not so much in what we teach but in how we do it. The Qur'an shows us the way, i.e., Integrate.

I have devised a teaching methodology that I call 'Integrated Teaching'. The most important element in this is the quality of the teachers. Teachers must be people who have the best manners, dominated by kindness. Their education must include child psychology and they must demonstrate kindness in everything they do. We must teach by demonstration because children listen with their eyes. If they are Muslim, they must be practicing Muslims, in their appearance, speech, and behavior. Integrate knowledge. Don't teach discrete subjects as if they have no relationship with each other. Ask, why we don't teach the chemistry of water, with Archimedes Principle, which is the reason a ship weighing thousands of tons floats on water? And lead from there into the story of the British Empire which was based on their ability to sail the oceans, using navigating equipment, astrolabes, using star maps, which Europe got from the Muslims. It is not an accident that 60% of the names of stars are Arabic in origin.

Ask why the Arabs and before them, the Polynesians and even before them, the Greeks, and Romans, all had ships, but it was not them, but the British, Portuguese, and Spanish, who were able to sail across the major oceans and reach the Americas (accidentally) and China, India, and Japan? The reason lies in botany more than in anything else. It was because they had access to coniferous trees in the Northern Hemisphere which the Arabs, Polynesians and others didn't, that they were able to build ships that could cross the great oceans. It was Tall Ships that took them across the oceans to colonize, plunder, decimate and enslave populations and enrich their own countries.

Pope Nicholas V in the 15<sup>th</sup> century issued a papal edict called the *Doctrine of Discovery* which authorized European Christian nations to “invade, capture, vanquish, and subdue all...pagans and other enemies of Christ...to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery...and...to take away all their possessions and property.” The ships were the vehicles for the spread of their ideology of military domination of the world. Thanks to botany, history was written. In the Eastern White Pine tree, the English found exactly what they needed to build their Clippers and Galleons. Straight, strong, and light masts, that thanks to the slow growth of the trees, were very dense and resistant to decay.

*The majestic Eastern White Pine is the tallest of the pine species in North America, basically the Sequoia of the Northeast. Trees 150 to 240 feet tall and trunks free of branches to heights of 80 feet or more were plentiful when the “New World” was being colonized by the English and other Europeans. To maintain its world dominance of the seas, Great Britain needed the strongest and fastest ships and Eastern White Pine would make these ships the greyhounds of their day and a force to reckon with in any battle. Acting as dominion over the forests of “New England”, the King assumed ownership of the best of the Eastern White Pine trees and appointed a legion of Surveyors of Pines and Timber to survey and mark all suitable trees with “The King’s Broad Arrow”, a series of three hatchet slashes. Violation by the colonists of this rule would be assessed a fine of £100. The tax on tea was not the only issue that raised anger among American colonists in the 1700’s. Eastern White Pine played an equally key role in events that led to the Revolutionary War and American Independence from English rule.*

<https://easternwhitepine.org/the-kings-broad-arrow-and-eastern-white-pine/>

Do you see how we can teach botany, history, chemistry, physics, and the principles of leadership, all while telling a very interesting true story. This must be taught with constant reference to the One who created, the trees, the oceans, and those who used one to sail on the other. That is how you see the Signs of Allahﷻ in His creation.

Now add to this, trips to the sea, sailing, praying on board ship, learning principles of Tahara, Wudhu and Ghusl with respect to salt water. Finding the direction of the Qibla using a Marine Chronometer. Deep sea fishing, visit shipyards that build sailing ships, and shipyards that build modern ships and submarines – there is one right here in New London which allows tours. Right through all this, children create and present their projects on topics they choose, based on what they are learning. The focus is always on practical application of knowledge with the intention to open doors to further enquiry, support questioning, and critical analysis and dissent. Daily prizes given for best question i.e., one for which nobody had an answer that day. With the responsibility to try to find an answer in due course.

Talking of sailing ships, in 2014 I visited Gordonstoun School in Moray, Scotland. It was founded by Kurt Hahn in 1934, after he escaped from Hitler's Germany after an appeal by British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald. To my amazement and great delight, Gordonstoun has an 80-foot Ketch which is used to train students in sailing but even more in leadership. They spend a week on-board, sailing around the British Isles

with just one adult sailor on board. The boat is captained and crewed entirely by teenagers. Not only do they participate in the annual Tall Ships Races, but they are also registered as a station of the Royal Coast Guard of Britain. They also have a Fire Station in the school, registered with the Fire Service of the town, with two fire engines, also crewed by students, with only the two drivers who are adults. My guide, another 16-year-old told me that when they were on duty, they carried pagers and dropped whatever they were doing and raced to the station to head out to the fire. He said that they did this even when they were in the chapel for morning worship assembly or even more seriously if they were playing a cricket match. After all this is in Britain. I asked him what they did if they were in the middle of their final exams? He said, "We run out of the hall, even without saying anything to the teacher and write the exam after we return." Imagine the kind of leadership this teaches the children. Far more than any classroom teaching can achieve.

Education must focus on problem solving, creativity, questioning and use imagination and creativity as the means of achieving it. It must be rooted in action, interacting with neighbors, scientists, technologists, philosophers, nurses, doctors, police, government, anyone in society. Learning, impacting, leading. That is why our education must change. That is our challenge and on it depends our success in both worlds.