

Values drive Behavior. Behavior drives Results. This was the mantra in GE as long as Jack Welch was CEO. This is what touched me the most when I joined their leadership development team in 1994. I was struck by how closely it syncs with our Islamic principles. And so, that is what I want to talk to you about today and for the next couple of weeks. It is critical enough for us to spend time to fully understand and internalize, so that we can check ourselves against this principle.

If you want to address behavior you must first address the values that drive that behavior. Without that, any behavior you see can be playacting and pretension. Playacting cannot be sustained. Playacting is always seen through by everyone except the actor, and it destroys credibility. So, let me talk about the values that we Muslims must have.

There are three **Core Values** that I believe we must focus on, and they are:

Identity, Integrity, and Courage.

1. Identity

Strictly speaking 'Identity' is not a Core Value but rather the platform on which everything runs. A strong sense of identity is rooted in your history; personal, family, and community. Storytelling is a very important part of building a sense of identity in the child. We are the product of the stories we were told as we grew up from our earliest age. We are literally the stuff of legends. Our own legends in which the heroes and players are

people we know or knew personally and some in which we play the main role. These legends shape our personality. They tell us what is important and what is not. They tell us why that is so. They teach lessons about what happens to those who live by these principles and those who ignore them.

For example, I was born in our ancestral home in Hyderabad, which my great-grandfather, Shamsul Ulama Nawab Aziz Jung Bahadur built. When I was born, he had passed away and his son, Nawab Deen Yar Jung was the head of the family. The house had a garden of about 5 acres with a formal rose garden, 2 tennis courts, lawns, and large ponds with fountains. The rose garden was my grandmother, Begum Deen Yar Jung's favorite place and it was out of bounds for us. Picking the flowers was strictly forbidden. My mother told me this story more than 55 years ago. One day, when I must have been about 5 years old or less, I plucked a rose and then went to my grandmother and presented it to her. Normally this was like adding insult to injury. Not only had I committed a forbidden act, but I had taken my ill-gotten gains to the one who made the rule. It should have earned me at least a frown, if not a clip on the ear. My mother says that my grandmother smiled, took the flower that I was holding out to her and spontaneously said:

Phool ley kar phool aya,
Phool kar main nay kaha
Phool kyon laye ho Sahab
Tum khud hi tho phool ho

For those who understand Urdu, it is word play on the different meanings of the word Phool, which means flower, happiness, pride, beauty, and grace. In the Rubayi which Begum Deen Yar Jung created on the spot, she reprimanded me for breaking her rule but did it in such a beautiful way that I recall it decades later. The story underlines the scholarly and graceful culture of our family and the teaching that you can correct someone without insulting them.

My paternal grandfather was a Guard in the railway. My father was a physician. Two stories I recall about my paternal grandfather are where he caught a gang of robbers looting a railway warehouse, pretending that his swagger stick was a rifle. They discovered that he was unarmed after he had tied them up. A story of courage and dedication to duty that exceeded whatever his job demanded and the very small pay he earned. That leads to the second story which is that he put my father through medical school while being the single supporter of a family of his wife and nine children. The result was that my father said that my grandfather did not buy himself even a shirt through the five years that my father spent in medical school. Mercifully, medicine was taught faster in India those days than it is taught in America today.

Apart from these personal stories, my parents, mainly my mother, raised me on stories from the Qur'an of the Anbiya (Prophets). I had heard all of them long before I read them in the Qur'an, which also my mother taught me to

read. After telling me each story, my mother would ask me what I had learnt from it and would add to whatever I had to say. She did this all in the course of the day. Not in some special Deeniyaat class. That way Allahﷻ, Rasoolullahﷺ and the Anbiya of Allahﷻ were part of my earliest childhood. Raising children is a contact sport that parents must practice. You cannot outsource parenting to Sunday School or Maktab or to the Maulana or Imam. It is your child, and you must raise him or her. That is what entitles you to the rank that Allahﷻ bestowed on you as parents. You did not get the rank for donating genes but for raising a human being who can be an asset to the world. Parenting takes time and effort and is your investment in your own Aakhira. Your children are your signature; your legacy to the world and your Sadaqa Jaariya for yourself.

There are many examples of how identity was shaped in the times of Rasoolullahﷺ and how that led to certain Sahaba performing amazing roles. Take Mus'ab bin Umair (R) and how as a 16-year-old, he successfully presented Islam and convinced tribal leaders in Madina. Take Mua'ad bin Jabal (R) who was in his early 20's when he was deputed by Rasoolullahﷺ, to Yemen as the Qadhi and Governor. Take the best of all examples, Rasoolullahﷺ himself, who never allowed all the persecution he suffered, to dampen his enthusiasm and dedication to his mission. To a great extent this was the result of his own lineage and upbringing as the protégé of two great tribal elders, his grandfather Abdul Muttalib and his uncle Abu Talib.

Imagine Muhammad ﷺ as a little boy, sitting by the fireside or riding behind his grandfather, who was the head of the tribe, listening in rapt attention as his grandfather told him these stories. Reflect on how these stories shaped his character with the generosity, courage, and sense of destiny that he displayed throughout his life. It was not only the stories but who was telling them. The Seerah must be studied, not just as a part of our collective history but as the life of someone who Allah ﷻ referred to us as the best example for us to follow. Someone real who is an example for all mankind for all time.

Imagine the power of listening to the story of Abraha from the man who met him face to face and got him to return his camels. Remember, when we hear the story, we are told, “Abdul Muttalib did or said this.” But when Muhammad ﷺ would have heard the story from his grandfather he would probably have heard something like this. “We had heard that Abraha was coming to Makka with an army. We did not know why he was coming. Then one day my camel keepers came running to me in a panic and said, “Ya Sayyidi, they have taken away your camels.”

“Who took away my camels?” I asked them.

“The soldiers of Abraha, Ya Sayyidi. They were armed and we could not fight them. Please forgive us Ya Sayyidi.”

“I knew that it was now up to me to do whatever I could to get my camels back.”

“How many camels were there, Ya Jaddi?”

“Two hundred.” Imagine the rapt attention of a six-year-old boy, eyes round with wonder at how his grandfather was going to rescue two hundred camels on his own. “Then what did you do?”

“I went to meet Abraha and get my camels back. But it is not easy to meet a king. Especially one who is in the middle of his army. So, I met the driver of their biggest elephant. The elephant was called Mahmoud. The driver arranged for me to meet the king.”

“Elephant? What is an elephant Ya Jaddi?”

“Ah! How do I describe to you what I also saw for the first time in my life and never again?” And the story continues.....

“Then what did you do when you returned with your camels? What about the Ka’aba?” He knew the story but was asking his grandfather for the joy of listening to an eyewitness and main character.

“What could I do? I knew that we could not fight that army. We would have been annihilated. So, I took the key to the Ka’aba and hung it on the door and said to Allahﷻ, “Ya Rabb, you know we have no power to fight this army. This is Your House; You protect it.”

“Then what happened?”

“And then came the Ababeel – probably Swifts – with ‘stones’ in their claws and beaks and the great army of Abraha was destroyed.”

Think about this when Sura Feel was revealed. It only confirmed for Rasoolullah ﷺ what he had already heard from his grandfather. Imagine listening to this story from someone who had not only seen it himself but was a major player in it.

What values do you learn from this story? I learn the reality of leadership, that in the end you must be prepared to stand alone. Abdul Muttalib could not delegate anyone else to go to rescue his camels. He had to do it himself. I learn the power of courage. Abdul Muttalib could have simply accepted what had happened, that his camels had been stolen by someone he could not possibly fight. He could have given in to his own fear that he may end up losing his liberty or life if he went to challenge a king in the middle of his army. Be that as it may, he went. That is what you must do as a leader. No matter what you feel, you must act. You must do what needs to be done.

Imagine the power of listening to the story of the uncovering of the well of Zamzam from the man who dug it out. Imagine listening to the story of how his father was to be slaughtered as a sacrifice to Allah ﷻ and how not only did Allah ﷻ save his life but did it with accepting the sacrifice of one hundred camels which was an indication of how important his life was. Imagine Rasoolullah ﷺ as a young man in the meeting that led to the pact of Hilf-ul-

Fudhool that was made to come to the aid of a man who had been wronged but had no supporters. What must he have been thinking? We know that the incident impacted him tremendously because he said later that though that was a pact made in the days before Islam, if anyone called to him in its name, he would respond. It shows how Rasoolullah ﷺ's sense of justice and the willingness to stand against injustice was shaped. Now when you read the hadith, *"On the authority of Abu Sa`eed al-Khudree (R) who said: I heard Rasoolullah ﷺ say, "Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then [let him change it] with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart — and that is the weakest of faith." [Muslim]'* – Think about how the meeting of Hilf-ul-Fudhool would have served to develop this quality.

That is the power of identity. It is shaped primarily in the home. By you.

I am speaking to the parents here; what are the legends that your children are being raised on? What stories do they hear? What is the effect of those stories? Remember that you need not be the storyteller always. But for them to listen to stories from others, you need to keep the company of people with learning and wisdom. People who can tell stories which have the power to shape character. What kind of stories do you watch, tell, and listen to on Netflix, Sports channels and whatever else you watch? They have power. All stories have power. All stories shape character. You choose which ones you want to tell and listen to.

So, my question to you is “Who are you as a Muslim and how does that set you apart from everyone else?” If you are a physician, an engineer, a businessman or woman, an administrator, a policeman, a mother, or father; how does Islam make you special? I do not mean your appearance alone. Islam is not in the length of your beard or the hijab on your head. It is the reason you have a beard and wear a hijab. It is your identity. What is that?

In what way does Islam make you different and special? Not superior for you to feel arrogant about. But special in terms of the responsibility that it bestows on you and which it is your honor to uphold until your last breath. You are a doctor like any other doctor but does your Islam benefit your patient in a special way? Same question to you, no matter what you do.

Identity is something that must be felt and will be visible in your actions. It is not a bunch of words that some wordsmith concocts for you to mouth in speeches. It is the CORE of your being. It is what you live by and are willing to die for. You may not even be able to say this eloquently. That does not matter. What matters is how much you feel it and what it will enable and strengthen you to do. Your identity is your BRAND. It is your SIGNATURE. It is your FACE. It is WHO you are and far more importantly, it is the WHY. It is what people see when they see you or experience you in any way. It is like the color of your skin. You do not have to tell people what it is. They can see it, the minute they see you. Your identity defines, directs, and distinguishes you. Pay attention to it because everything starts with identity.