

You are the best of people

In my Leadership Development practice, when I do my Core Ideology Workshop for any organization, I ask them a question. And the question is, "Why do you exist? What will be lost to your constituents if you no longer existed?" That is what we call Core Purpose. It is essential to be clear about your Core Purpose because it is and must be the criterion of all decision making. It is the basis on which we decide whether a particular course of action is the right one. It is that clarity which enables us to take hard decisions; decisions which others around us may not agree with but which we know that we must take, because anything else would compromise the achievement of our Core Purpose. Core Purpose is and must be the focus of all our energy, influence, time and resources. It is that lens through which in the twilight of our lives, we will look back with satisfaction or regret. That depends on how clearly, we understood what our Core Purpose was and how committed we were to its fulfillment. This commitment to Core Purpose is clearly visible in the lives of all great visionaries, social activists, missionaries of every faith and ideology. It is most clearly visible in the life of Rasoolullah ﷺ and his Sahaba and in the lives of the great Islamic leaders.

Allah ﷻ defined the Core Purpose for us Muslims and said:

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ
الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ

A'al Imraan 3: 110. You [Muslims] are the best of peoples ever raised up for mankind; you enjoin Al-Ma'ruf (Islam and all that is good) and forbid Al-Munkar (all that Islam has forbidden), and you believe in Allah.

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The point to note here is that Allah ﷻ called us the 'Best of People', not based on ethnicity, nationality, race, color, tribe or geography but based on our Core Purpose. We are the 'Best' because we exist FOR ALL MANKIND. We are the 'Best' UNTIL we exist for all mankind. We came to give, not to take.

Abdullah bin 'Amr bin Al-'as (RA) reported: A man asked Rasoolullah ﷺ, "Which act in Islam is the best?" He (ﷺ) replied, "To feed people, and to greet everyone, whether you know them or not." [Bukhari and Muslim].

Ibn Umar (RA) reported: Rasoolullah ﷺ said, "The most beloved people to Allah ﷻ are those who are most beneficial to people. The most beloved deed to Allah ﷻ is to make a Muslim happy, or to remove one of his troubles, or to forgive his debt, or to feed his hunger. That I walk with a brother regarding a need is more beloved to me than that I seclude myself in this mosque in Madina for a month. Whoever swallows his anger, then Allah ﷻ will conceal his faults. Whoever suppresses his rage, even though he could fulfill his anger if he wished, then Allah ﷻ will secure his heart on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever walks with his brother regarding a need until he secures it for him, then Allah ﷻ will make his footing firm across the bridge on the day when the footing is shaken." [al-Mu'jam al-Awsat 6192]

Now let us see the reality. 60% of the names of stars and other celestial bodies are Arabic in origin. But if you look at the number of Muslims who won the Nobel Prize in Science, from 1900-2018, it is 3. Abdus Salam (1979), Physics (Ahmediyya), Ahmed Zewali (1999), Chemistry; Aziz Sancar (2015), Chemistry. I know contribution is not only in science. So, tell me where is

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our contribution to the world today? Where have we contributed to the world in past century? Why not?

My brothers and sisters, in the life of every man and woman, a window opens when they have a chance to make an impact. Those who succeed are those who anticipate and prepare for it and are ready when it opens. Once that window shuts, your life is over, even if you remain alive. For to live, is not merely to draw breath.

For too long we have fractured knowledge, even life itself into false compartments of Deen and Dunya. Deen is not the antonym of Dunya but the way to live in the Dunya. There is no Deen in the grave. Rasoolullah ﷺ said, 'The Dunya is the tillage (fields) of the Aakhira.' But we have relegated religion to the masjid and kept it out of our daily lives. That is why we don't see the terrible contradiction of accepting a declaration of war from Allah ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ by dealing in interest and then we come to the masjid to ask Allah ﷻ for His protection and help. Who do you think protects and helps the one he is at war with? But the paradox of it doesn't strike us as we have become so used to thinking of Islam as a bunch of rituals, mostly to be left to someone else to do on our behalf.

Islam is the name of a practice. Like any practice, we can only benefit from it when we practice it. Knowing about Islam is necessary to live by Islam. But results come only from living by Islam, not from knowing about Islam. Allah ﷻ defined our Core Purpose as living FOR all people and told us that it means to promote, support, enjoin, initiate and stand for everything good, noble, pure and beneficial and to stand against everything which is the

opposite of that. Allah ﷻ defined our Core Purpose in terms of action, not simply knowing or talking about acting.

The most powerful Da'awa is that of action. The question I want to ask myself and leave with you is, 'What actions of ours define us as Muslims according to our Core Purpose?' Remember these will not be the way we dress or our personal actions of worship. Our actions that define us as Muslims in terms of Allah ﷻ's definition of our Core Purpose are those that contribute to society i.e. Amr bil Ma'arouf wa Nahi anil Munkar.

Let me ask you, 'If your mobile phones stopped working, would you notice and feel a sense of loss?' The same question for all that you enjoy and appreciate in your life; be it gadgets, games, countries, people. Now another question, 'If the rest of the world wakes up tomorrow and discovers that there are no Muslims in the world; no Muslims or signs of Islam; would they feel a loss? Would they miss us? I don't mean individually. I am sure we all have non-Muslim friends who will feel sorry that we disappeared from their lives. But what about us as a people? Would the non-Muslims of the world, miss us Muslims?' I don't know. I didn't have the courage to do a survey. I suggest that you do. What does this tell us about fulfilling our Core Purpose? I ask myself this, because the day will come when we will be asked this.

In 1632 the foundation of a building was laid. In 1636 the foundation of another building was laid. Both buildings exist today. The first building has two occupants, both dead. The second building has moulded the thinking and contribution of thousands who passed its portals down through the centuries. The first building is the Taj Mahal in Agra, the second is New

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College (named Harvard College in memory of John Harvard, who left his library and half his estate to the college) in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

We must focus on contribution. We must learn to add value first. Entitlement will follow. Entitlement goes with territory. Contribution defines the territory. We may be remembered for our consumption, but we are honored only for our contribution. Let us ask what our contribution is, individually and collectively. We like to talk about Islam, but we have forgotten that people listen with their eyes. They don't care what you say until they see what you do.

Just a few days ago, there was the great tragedy of the deaths of Kobe Bryant and his daughter Gianna. Of course, the deaths of those who died with them are equally tragic, but celebrities get written about. My point is that people feel sad about his death because of what he contributed, not only to basketball and the Lakers, but to people in general. His life was a great source of motivation for countless people. His drive to excel in every game that led him to go to the court after every match, when his fellow players had all gone home, and practice endlessly to score the one or two shots that he would have missed in that game. He was not doing that because he had lost. He did that after every game that he and his team won. He did it because he was Kobe. What is it that drives a man to excel? What if we make that the goal of our lives? Kobe did it for basketball and himself. What if we do it for Allahﷻ? See his farewell video, Dear Basketball, which won an Oscar. Every time he says, 'I did it for you', meaning basketball, I thought to myself, 'What do I have to say to Allahﷻ, 'I did it for You?'

Let me end with a story. I had a very dear friend, my first boss and mentor, Mr. James Nicholas Adams, in Guyana, where I started my work career. When Nick was a young man, he lived in Linden, Demarara. One day he received a summons from a court in Corentyne which is at the northern border of Guyana, with Suriname; a distance of about 400 kilometers. To go there in those days (1960's) must have been an expedition. Nick had no idea why he had been summoned. But he went. When he arrived at the court, his name was called, and the judge asked him to come forward. As Nick was walking down the aisle, he heard a woman's voice, 'He is not the man.' Nick turned to see a young woman with a baby. The judge told the lady, 'Look carefully at him. This is Nick Adams. Is he the man?' The lady said, 'He is not the man. This is someone else.'

When Nick asked, the judge said to him, 'A man by your name, got this lady pregnant and now that she has a baby, he has disappeared. Anyway, this is not your problem, so you can go home.'

Nick said to the judge, 'Your Honor, I would like to request you to please arrange for this child's maintenance to be deducted from my salary.' The judge was astonished. 'Do you know this lady?' Nick said, 'No, Your Honor, I don't. I am seeing her for the first time today.' 'Then why are you offering to pay for the maintenance of the child?' asked the judge. 'It is not your responsibility. This matter doesn't concern you.' Nick replied, 'But the child needs to eat, Your Honor. Someone must pay for that. I am willing to do that.' For the next 18 years, Nick Adams paid maintenance for a child that was not his own. He saw the mother, that one time in court and never saw

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the mother or child again. But month after month, year after year for 18 years, Nick Adams paid for a child because he had compassion in his heart.

His Rabb was no less compassionate. So many decades later, in 2011, Nick Adams who was by then suffering from cancer, one week before his death, accepted Islam along with his wife and sister in law. The Seerah of Rasoolullah ﷺ and the lives of the Sahaba have many instances of people going out of their way to help others, but I told you this story of our times and our part of the world so that you would know that the laws of Allah ﷻ and His Mercy and reward are still there in the world. Waiting for people to claim their reward. Allah ﷻ helps those who help His creatures, no matter who they are. That is why we were created, that is our Core Purpose. Let's do it.