**THE SEARCH FOR THE SOUND OF THE SOUL**

**A discussion by Nouman ‘Ali Khan**

As-salamu ‘alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh. (Arabic).

So I realize that it’s Friday and it’s 4:30 or so, which means you are extremely sleepy. We have already, you know, ‘survived’ a khutbah this afternoon and, you know, now there are 3 speakers that are going to come before you, so I understand the challenge that I have and, actually more so, that you have because I can stay awake because I am talking but you have to stay awake by listening, which is a lot harder. But what I want to share is not very complicated, inshaAllah wa Ta’ala, and I don’t think it will take even the whole 20 minutes. It’s really a heart-to-heart that I want to have with all of you and something that I’ve been thinking about for the past few weeks personally in my life and the life of my family and my children, and that is that the very fundamental premise on which all of our faith is based, the fitrah, which is the subject matter of this session, is under attack, and that we are building an artificial picture of Islam, personally for ourselves and our communities oftentimes, that is really very hollow at its core, and this is a very dangerous trend. An ayah that really makes me shiver when I think about the way Allah expresses this problem, “A’udhu Billahi min ash-shaytaan-ir-rajeem (etc., in Arabic).” The Prophet (saw) is warned about a dangerous group of people within the ranks of those who call themselves Muslim and the big crime that Allah describes they have is that they say they believe with their mouths, but their hearts haven’t come to believe; their hearts have not yet experienced something called faith. This problem is a very serious one, and I want to start in this conversation with something very, very basic: The fitrah is not something that is sound after you become Muslim. All human beings enjoy this predisposed sense of decency that Allah (A’zza Wa Jal) put and preprogrammed in all of us, a sense of commitment to truth, to fairness, to mercy, to courtesy, to respect for others, you know, of gratitude, of appreciation, of having regard. These are things that aren’t just some things Muslims are concerned with; these are things that humanity was gifted with. And these are things that the Prophet (saw) excelled in even before the revelation starting coming to him. He was already at the height of his fitrah. And actually we would consider, at least in my limited understanding of the seerah of the Prophet (saw), in the life of our Messenger (‘alayhi’l-salat wa’l-salam) that that predisposed decency that the Prophet lived up to (‘alayhi’l-salat wa’l-salam) even before revelation came, gave him his credibility to carry the message of Islam. Not anybody can just carry any message and it will have weight. People can give good speeches and people can talk, but when their character is not there to back up what they’re saying and people know them personally and say, “Well, you may be impressed with his or her speech because you know him only from YouTube or you know her only from that public forum, but I know them personally and I don’t want to hear anything they have to say, because I know what they’re like in their personal life.” Which means there is something hollow. That wasn’t the case with our Prophet (saw). There is a very deep introspection that all of us need and, actually, people that are up on this podium and the people that are sitting in the audience, none of us are the exception to this introspection; we all really carefully have to look deep inside and see what kind of people we have become. I want to get a little more specific. I want to leave generalities, inshaAllah wa Ta’ala. I’m really worried, personally, about preserving my own fitrah and the fitrah of my children. They are growing up. My oldest daughter is 10 now, and I literally, I said this in khutbah today, I talked to her just a couple of days ago and I said I miss you. And she says, baba, I’m sitting right here, why do you miss me? I was like, yeah, but you’re not what you were when you were 2 years old. And, you know, you were so innocent. You were something else. But baba, I’m still me, and I was like no, that’s not you. And I’m going to miss this one in 3 years when you’re a teenager, that crazy monster, that strange creature that, you know, all of the sky and the earth, they fear, that thing? I fear when a teenage girl is inside my house. And I really, honestly, I do worry. Because the fitrah of all human beings, not just Muslims, the fitrah of all human beings is under attack by a conglomerate of multiple, multi-billion-dollar interests that are destroying our fitrah. If you even read some basic statistics, like the filthy pornography industry in its revenues outdoes all of the tech sector combined. Google, Microsoft, you name it. You put all of those companies on one end and the filth industry on the other end, it outshines them in revenues. There are sociologists that are doing statistics now on at what age the average child on this planet is exposed to this stuff. This is a crisis situation. I have to be ready to talk to my 10-year-old, who, even if she goes to Islamic school or she’s home-schooled or she is even in public school, it doesn’t matter. I have to have the heart, the strength of heart, to sit her down and talk to her about the time when one of her friends is going to show her something on the phone, or somebody is going to show her something on a mobile device. Even if we don’t allow that in our home, she will be exposed to it. It’s a fact. It’s a reality now. Her fitrah is in crisis. Her innocence is in crisis. She is going to be exposed to it. You know, we have a children’s halaqa in our neighborhood, and a relative conducts the halaqa and is really great with the children, and he asked the kids a question, “What’s the thing that you find so different about everybody else than yourselves at school?” Most of these kids are in public school settings, and these are 6-year-old, 7-year-old, 8-year-old, 9-year-old, 10-year-old children, so 6-10, right? “What do your friends talk about that you never talk about when you’re home? What do you talk about that you never talk about when you’re among Muslims?” Well, all of them have boyfriends and all of them have girlfriends, and all of them talk about these songs and all of them have an iPhone or an iPod and they have these songs on them. And a child of one of my relatives came up to me even and said, he asked one of those filthy 4-letter words. He said, “What does it mean? My friend was using it the other day.” I almost cried because it’s a 7-year-old kid. He has a right not to be exposed to this stuff, you know? It’s like, we worry about pollution and environmentalists worry about the earth’s water supply being corrupted and the air we breathe being corrupted and the landfills contaminating the earth. We’re worried about spiritual contamination, seriously. The fitrah is being contaminated by the social environment in which the entire world is wrapped up now. And so, there is the story of not just the youth, the children that I worry about and I’ll talk to you about. At least I came up with my little scheme, a plan, for how to try to preserve the children, the children in my family, at least some level of fitrah in them, I want to preserve it and strengthen. How do I do that? I’ll talk to you about that in a little bit. But, before I do, I want to talk to you about the youth that turn to Islam.

Young people, they find a spiritual calling, something happens in their life and they make a change in their life. And may Allah protect you because you are the exception to the rule, right? And you have made some major changes in your life so that you are sitting in this audience now, that couldn’t have imagined themselves coming to anything that began with the letter I. Something (indiscernible) on an Apple product (laughter). But it’s like, it doesn’t matter. If it’s Islam or Muslim, why would I go there? And yet you find yourself sitting here today, because there are some of you like that. But even those who have made their way back, it doesn’t mean their safe. It really doesn’t. Actually, it means that the bombardment from shaytaan is even heavier on you. You’re even in more trouble, and the big danger on you is self-righteousness. That’s the real big danger on you. And on me! You start seeing others as people that haven’t evolved yet, they haven’t taken the leap of faith that you, Alhamdulillah, have already started to grow your beard, or already started to wear hijab. Therefore, you must be in the clear. You’re not. I’m not. We’re not. These are the outwardly aspects of our religion. The fitrah is constantly under attack in the air we breathe today. It’s constantly under attack. And so, one of the things that I …if …and this is a litmus test for you. I don’t want to give you an academic discussion. Again, it’s a heart-to-heart. It’s something I have been talking to my wife about. It’s something I have been talking to my cousins about. Because I’m worried about our family. And you guys, as Muslims, you are the extension of our family. We are all a family. We are bonded by this la ilaha illAllah. So I worry about this for myself and all of you. Look, there is a personal litmus test. If, for example, you watch a movie. It’s okay. You don’t have to raise your hand. I know (laughter). You watch a movie, and you see something disgusting, and you know what I mean. And it doesn’t bother you. You didn’t flinch. You didn’t bother to turn it off. You forwarded it because somebody else is sitting there, not because you felt bad, then your fitrah is dying. That thing Allah gave you is dying, if not already dead. Because you didn’t even feel anything. That feeling is all you have as a litmus test. If you’re in the company of friends and they’re bad-mouthing one of your friends, and you just jump on the bandwagon without even a shred of mercy for the person being trashed, then your fitrah is dying and there’s a problem. Your sense of decency is gone. You’re watching the news and you see some disturbing images of, you know, disaster or children in need of help, and you just change the channel and watch the comedy instead. Your fitrah is dead. It’s gone. That gift Allah gave you, that gift of humanity that Allah gave you, is gone. And if that human decency is gone, you can pray 5 times a day, that’s fine, you can memorize the Qur’an, too, but it doesn’t matter now. It doesn’t matter, because it’s an empty shell on the outside. The heart is dead. That’s a tragic state for you and me to be in.

Somebody came to me this Ramadan, and they asked me about the curriculum they should have for their Sunday school. Some people from the Midwest flew all the way to Dallas to randomly run into me in taraweeh and pull me over after salat, outside the masjid, so I could give them a counseling session on how to execute their Sunday school curriculum. How much Arabic should they teach? How much tafsir should they teach? Which du’a books should the kids memorize? Etcetera, etc., etc. You know how delusional we’ve become? How many Sunday schools across the country (and I think they’re critical) where all we worry about is the outwardly of Islam? These kids are memorizing du’as. They’re learning about the seerah of the Prophet (saw), and they’re taking multiple-choice-question tests on it. And at the end of it all, nobody even dared or cared to ask, hey, so how are things going at school? Do you really know why you’re Muslim, even? How do you feel about your parents? Do you know how many Muslim kids, if they had an honest conversation with you, would tell you, “I hate my parents?” Do you know how big of a spiritual problem that is, how deep a spiritual problem that is? When you see kids sitting there, they’re intelligent, they can pass a test. You give them any test and they’ll pass it, and that’s the same for Islam. You can learn fiqh. You can learn hadith. You can learn tafsir. That’s fine. That’s just like, you know, that’s an intellectual ability, but it doesn’t mean that you’ve become a better person at all. At all. People come for ….I have a full-time program, and I tell them at the beginning of the year that if you’re a bad human being, you will be a bad human being at the end of 9 months that can speak a little Arabic (laughter). This is not going to make you a better person if that predisposed decency is dead, if it’s gone. How many hifz kids do I know, hifz programs across our country here and it’s a tragedy. We are supposed to be thinking. Kids that have memorized the Qur’an, and they’re playing outside while salat is going on at maghrib, not taraweeh, salat is going on and they’re playing outside waiting (you know, playing basketball, watching a movie on YouTube or whatever) because the hifz graduation ceremony is after maghrib, and these are kids that have memorized the Qur’an. And I don’t blame the kids. I don’t blame them. We didn’t concern ourselves with their fitrah.

So, what plan of action do I have for my own children? I basically want to share some things with you, some things that drive my thought, my discussions with my own children. Number one, I want to instill in them a sense of purpose. I constantly tell my girls especially, because they’re older now, Allah put you on this earth for a reason. Allah wants you to do something for Him. You have to figure out what you’re really, really good at and then you’re going to give it to Allah. You’re going to find some way of doing that for Allah. Like I tell my older daughter, you’re the older one, you know; everybody wants to be like you. Your younger sister, who always steals your clothes and takes your toys, etc.? Do you know why? Because she wants to be like you. Well, you have to act like a leader. She says no, she always takes my stuff. No, no, no. That’s why she wants to be like you. You have to act big. You have to act strong. I mean, sibling rivalries are natural, but when I start seeing an evolution in that instead of fighting, she is taking care of her little brother or little sister, like she’s saying, “Did you finish your dinner? Did you go to the bathroom? Mama said you better go to the bathroom. You know what happened last time.” (Laughter). You know? When she does that, this is part of fitrah. This is really a part of fitrah. And then, so, a sense of purpose, good company. We have to make sure we and the people around us are in company that makes us better people. They are not company that reinforce our bad habits. It doesn’t matter if you’re……let me talk about religious people. You can have long beards and backbite. That’s not what I’m talking about. I’m talking about people that you hang out with that make you better fathers, that make you better sons, that make you better neighbors, that you actually do good things with other than talk. You do stuff with them. Good company is absolutely critical for ourselves and we have to hunt it out for our children. Even if you have to move to a neighborhood where you know other people are raising their kids in a good way, and your kids can be friends with their kids; it’s a good idea. It’s worth it. It’s worth the sacrifice.

Then, of course, there are hands-on lessons. You can talk about the Prophet (saw) being charitable, but what does that mean to a child if you’re not asking them to give up their favorite toy? What does that mean to a child when you take them shopping for Eid and they didn’t go for themselves, they went for their cousins and got them gifts? They learn not to even ask for themselves, because you’re instilling something in them. Giving lessons about charity and a lecture and a talk is different. Hands-on experience is something entirely different, you know? We are overindulging ourselves and our families, and it’s creating a culture of ingratitude. We’re just taking everything for granted, and it’s destroying our fitrah.

Then, of course, the big one, the big 2 or 3…..I’ll just mention 2 and I’ll end, inshaAllah, and that is respect. One of the things that destroyed the predisposed human decency in our culture is a lack of regard for all things. There is *nothing* that isn’t open to criticism. Nothing. Everything can be made fun of. Everything can be criticized, you know? Everything should have a star rating, you know? Whether it’s the Book of Allah, whether it’s your parents, whether it’s your teachers, whether it’s the school you go to. And you know what that does as a culture, when you’re constantly thinking about criticizing and you’re the customer and you’re supposed to be pleased and you’re in the position of judging everything else? Oh, this is good, but, you know. That’s good, but, you know. Ask people….religious community, right? The religious community, ask them what do you think about your masjid? “Yeah, it’s got a lot of problems. It’s got da da da da da da da da.” Nobody ever starts with, “Alhamdulillah, we have a masjid. We actually have the ability, Allah gave us, that is, to buy a house next door to the masjid. We get to hear the adhan and go make salat at the masjid. There are some issues, but who doesn’t have issues? We are all human beings. May Allah help us to do that.” Nobody talks like that. Everybody begins with all the problems in their masjid, how much they hate their imam, and how much the board members don’t understand anything, and how the youth are so messed up, and how the parking at the front, oh, my god. We are just a complaining people. That kills your fitrah. Do you know that? That you’re preprogrammed to criticize and not to be grateful. And I’m the same way. We’re in that consumer mentality. And we have to snap out of that. Respect for things is the first step towards appreciating things. Respect for teachers. Your kids have non-Muslim teachers. Does that mean they don’t deserve respect? The utmost respect. They’re giving knowledge. My children’s math teachers, science teachers, English teachers, doesn’t matter if they’re Muslim or not. They deserve the utmost respect. Elders deserve the utmost respect. Something I really appreciated about moving to Texas…I moved to Texas about 3-4 years ago. At least in the neighborhood that I live, Alhamdulillah, you go and when children see you in the line and they are going to cut through, they say excuse me, sir. Just because you’re older. Or excuse me, ma’am. Just the fact that they can show that respect is admirable. A couple of these Mormon kids came to my door maybe a month and a half ago, teenaged boys, red like a tomato because it’s 106 degrees outside and they ride their bikes, shirt, tie on, dressed up nicely. “Sir, we’d like to talk to you about God for a little bit, if we could.” So respectful. And I am not at all amazed with the message of Joseph Smith. I’m not. But I’m amazed at the fact that these teenagers are so darned respectful. What do your parents do, man? That’s amazing. You see the Muslim teenager do that lately? (Laughter) You know? Not to mention the level of commitment to not having iPods or, you know, PS3 and to be out in the heat to go deliver God’s word or what you think is God’s word. That’s admirable. We have to learn from some other communities about how they’re raising their children. We have lost some of these basics. We have those teachings in our books, but that’s all they are now; they’re just in our books. They’re not making their way into reality. We are giving lectures about being charitable and not being wasteful, and we are the people that throw the most food away after every Islamic event, every masjid in America. We’re the ones who talk about Allah having given us this earth as an amanah, and we probably produce more plastic waste as a people than anybody else. Isn’t that something? There’s something off. There’s something missing. *Fitrah* is missing. Respect and regard for others is missing. This has to be re-instilled. And then, on top of that, we teach our children the salat and the du’at and the tajweed and the Qur’an and the seerah and the fiqh. Yes, all of those things are absolutely critical; but when that basic decency isn’t built, all of that is shallow, and they will learn it and they will throw it up when the time comes. They won’t hold onto any of it.

Finally, the last thing I hope to instill into my children, when they get to the age…..reflection. I’d like them to be people of reflection. And reflection is not that you read somebody else’s reflection. You have to become a thinker, a person of deep thought yourself, you know? And you don’t do that unless you become a person of reading, a person of writing your thoughts, a person that appreciates literature, because that builds thought. That builds understanding. And to me, actually, the greatest manual for developing your reflection is the Qur’an. Really. And I’m not talking about studying an academic tafsir of the Qur’an, even a discussion, a baseline discussion about the Qur’an with our families, ayah by ayah by ayah, little by little, based on scholarly sources but in easy language. You know what that does? It prepares them for a life of reflection. It really does. They really, they start seeing the world through the ayat of Allah. That’s what we want. We don’t want this book to be sitting in a shelf. We don’t want it to be something that is recited beautifully alone. We want it to be something we think through. We see the world and we’re reminded of an ayah. We see a friend and we’re reminded about the ayat about friends, you know? We see nature outside and we’re reminded about the gift of nature. We see night coming quickly and we’re reminded about how time is a fleeting commodity. That’s what we’re supposed to be, a people of reflection.

May Allah A’zza Wa Jal help preserve our fitrah and nurture it, and may Allah A’zza Wa Jal give us the tools and the ability and the commitment to combat the attack against this great gift that Allah has given to all of humanity and that he has charged this ummah with, not only of protecting but in refreshing it in the rest of mankind. BarakAllahu feekum wa’s-salamu ‘alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh.