When Muslims Work Together 7

Question and Answer Session

Transcript of Lecture by Nouman Ali Khan

Date of Transcript: 21/12/2012, Rawalpindi Pakistan

by Parvez Akhter (ksaparvez@hotmail.com)

Some parts of the speech especially the repetitions have been edited out for the sake of clarity.

Bismillah

***(Q: What is your opinion about working with the Tablighi Jamaat?)***

Ans: My opinion on the matter is first of all I respect all movements and jamaats and for the Tablighi Jamaat I have tremendous respect. I also believe that going in the path of Allah takes different shapes and forms and that’s one of them.

The whole point of today’s endeavour (series of lectures) was to encourage the Muslim youth to be involved in at least something. The deen requires us to be concerned with more than just ourselves. I t requires us to be concerned with others, so inshalah in whatever way that manifests itself I would highly encourage you to get involved.

***Q. Does your advice apply to the teacher-student role or just t the leadership-follower role?***

***Q. How do I balance keeping my followers/students disciplined while applying all the nice leadership you gave?***

Some of the advice is universal and can apply to the teacher student but some of it doesn’t.

But the leadership advice for you as a teacher does apply. For example the ability to be patient with students and working with them and finding the balance between courtesy and authority. This is because a leader at the end of the day is an authority, but he has to exercise it such a way that it doesn’t feel authoritative.

The use of the word ameer in Arabic is very instructive in this regard. There are three words for this; amir, ammar and ameer. Amir is someone who commands you. Ammar is someone who keeps telling you what to do and ameer is someone who doesn’t tell you what to do, but you obey him anyway. It is an adjective which means they are in a position of authority but they don’t have to open their mouth for people to obey them; that’s what a real ameer is. So by the linguistic definition ameer means someone who doesn’t give a lot of instructions, they are followed anyway. That is the quality of a good leader. He doesn’t have to tell what people should do because out of respect for that leadership they do it anyway. But developing that relationship of respect takes time. We should try to strike a balance between becoming too chummy and friendly with students and the same time not becoming too harsh with them either. There is a very thin line between those two.

***Q. What is the best way to talk to or advise someone who may take your words as an attack on his beliefs and ways? Is dua the best option then to help them out?***

Look telling somebody about what wrong they are doing especially in family, you have to be direct; you can’t beat around the bush. But you have to be subtle at the same time, you have to find tact but at the end of the day the truth hurts and people are going to be offended, I mean there’s no way around that one.

There isn’t going to be a nicer human being on earth than the Prophet (s) and even his family was extremely offended by Islam. So sorry that just comes with telling the truth, people’s feelings are hurt and they are offended by things you say but you have to maintain a respectful posture and you shouldn’t say those things over and over again. Find a good time to say it. If it works out, it works out, if it doesn’t just let it go. You don’t know when you say something to somebody maybe they don’t respond to you right away or respond negatively right away but the words stick in their mind and it takes them a year, six months or whatever and then those same words that you said to them may click. Everybody works on their own clock. So you do whatever best you can do and don’t worry about changing people because that comes from Allah’s azwajal.

***Q. What advice would you give MSA leaders who are facing bad najwa in their shura or facing differing opinions?***

***Q. How would you deal with a shura person who does nothing you ask him to do?***

Ans: Listen to this series that should help a little. Other than that you cannot do much but be patient because these kinds of problems exist. You just have to work through them. If you say to them, ‘This is najwa-I heard a lecture that this is najwa and according to Sura Maida people of Najwa burn in hell,’ if you do that your days as MSA president are numbered. If people (within organisations talk to each other in this way) then this becomes personal but I’m not in any shura, I’m on the outside, so hopefully it’s impersonal. And if this one guy says to the other ‘Hey, you need to listen to this, that’s also a personal attack. Instead it needs to be, ‘Everybody needs to listen to this’, or ‘We are all going to listen to this.’ So you have to depersonalise it because criticisms in organisational situations can become personal very quickly and turn ugly.

***Q. How do you establish a leadership-volunteer relationship with a friend who may not take you seriously?***

You don’t. That just doesn’t work. The Prophet (s) was best friends with Abu-Bakr ® and then all of a sudden it became a leader-follower relationship. You know how it happened? Because he was the Rasul Allah (s). Other than that its very difficult to take a friend for an authority figure; it just doesn’t work. If you want to work with them or beside them just give them very little or nothing. Don’t give them work because it’ll ruin the organisation or your friendship. Nothing good will come from it because those things just don’t mix very well. Just like you can’t be the MSA President and your younger brother the secretary . It doesn’t work. You get slapped around by him and then you tell him to order the food. It’s just not going to happen.

***Q. How can we balance mix-gender MSA and not compromise our modesty and not be shameless?***

The mixed gender thing I’m going to do a whole programme on it called ‘shame’. It ‘s about how the Quran talks about shame and where is it compromised for Muslim youth that are very religious and for those that are not so religious. More often than not these are moral stances rather than fatwas. If you understand the moral guidelines and you can stick to them you’ll be fine but if you don’t understand them you’ll have problems.

Here is one moral guideline that I’m going to give you now. If you are standing somewhere talking to some guy lets say on campus or any other place and somebody watching from a distance can get the wrong idea; like if your father was watching or your brother or your husband and he gets the wrong idea or thinks, ‘what’s going on there,’ then you should probably be not in that situation. If it can be misinterpreted then you shouldn’t be in that situation. So that is a kind of a litmus test.

As far as conversations are concerned, if you are completely comfortable with having a conversation with a non-mahram in the exact same way as if your father was standing there and your tone wouldn’t be any different and your body language or posture wouldn’t be any different, the words you use wouldn’t be any different, then go ahead. But if you think that your dad, your brother or your husband or grandpa or even me was standing there and your tone, the way you carry yourself would be impacted a little bit then you probably shouldn’t be in that conversation. These are good litmus tests.

It’s not a fatwa, it’s just a litmus test. If you think I’m not doing anything wrong-then why are you changing your behaviour when your dad is there. If it’s not wrong why are you so ashamed of it? Why are you shocked by it? You see your inner conscious is telling you there’s something wrong.

***Q. Can I just serve my parents and spend a life in solitary affairs with just my immediate family and relatives?***

Ans: Sure why not? If you just want to work on your family and it keeps your hands full, then don’t volunteer at the masjid, just do it (i.e. serve your parents and family).

***Q. How can I learn Quran easily?***

I talked about this yesterday at Toledo and it’ll be up on Youtube. It’s called, ‘The importance of learning the Quran’, but I actually talked about how to study the Quran and I tried to give a roadmap as to how Muslims can study the Quran effectively. (I mentioned) milestones and roadmaps and how we can all be educated in the Quran in a good way inshallah.

***Q. As a leader how do you overcome the stress of your responsibilities in order to lead an organisation (effectively)?***

Ans: Video games. When I get overstressed I play video games, or I play with my children or I sleep. When I wake up I can deal with it again. We are all humans. We need a release. It may be basketball or a punching bag at home and so on. For other people it’s dua or qiyam ul lail. Those are great, but if you are not into that sort of thing and chances are you’re not , then find some healthy release.

But don’t over do it. We should be concerned about our role but we shouldn’t be paralysed by it. Life is about moving on. Everybody’s got problems, we all have a to do list. If you took a piece of paper now and made a list of things to do, it’ll probably be a very long list. And if you started thinking about getting all those things done, you may feel there’s so much I haven’t got done. Or if you made a list of things you wanted to learn that you haven’t learnt, you’d be depressed. You just have to take one day a time and one problem at a time and not look at the whole thing.

What advice do they give to kids doing hifz (memorization) of the whole Quran? They start with Juz Amma (30th chapter), they do two pages and they (the teachers) hold the two pages up, then they hold the rest of the Mushaf (Quran) and they say, don’t worry about what you haven’t done, worry about what you have done. I worry about the next page, that’s it. Worry about the task at hand, otherwise you’ll get overwhelmed and you won’t be able to carry on.

***Q. When we serve a community at large for the sake of Allah; how to have a lot of sabr to graduate to the next level? Individually how can we have focus and develop our deen especially seeing that we are struggling with our work-life balance?***

I personally believe balance in the life of a Muslim comes from a familiarity and a regular study of the Quran and that Quranic studies shouldn’t be just an academic exercise. It’s the exercise of balance. This book balances all of our priorities, it doesn’t let you forget your obligations to Allah and to your community and it keeps you spiritually in check.

I feel that the biggest crises of the Muslim Ummah is that we as a people are distant from the Quran. We don’t have a personal relationship with the Quran.

That’s why I feel the talk I gave yesterday is very important. I usually don’t feel any of my talks are important but I feel that one was. This was because I gave it with my own kids in mind. That is, how can I educate my kids with the Quran?, How can I get them to have a deep, personal connection with the Quran? How are they going to do that? That’s what inspired that lecture.

***Q. If you know your family is doing something wrong, how important is it to say the truth or should you keep your silence for the sake of family?***

There is no such thing as keeping the family together by compromising on the truth. There is no such thing. It’s a myth. Actually speaking the truth is not going to destroy your family unless it’s a traumatic secret the family’s holding. In that case see a counsellor. Don’t seek my advice.

But if it’s like you’re dad’s into a haraam business and you haven’t said anything and then you say, ‘Dad isn’t that a little haraam?’, just slip it in, you may get yelled at but say it, at least it’ll be off your chest. Say, ‘Dad, you’ve got a lotto machine in the gas station, isn’t that a little problematic? I mean I feel bad about it.’ Or, ‘You know we’re eating halaal chicken from haraam money.’ Slip it in get yelled at, slip it in again. Don’t argue about it with your parents but you should speak the truth and take a beating, and speak the truth again, that’s the formulae.

***Q. What is your opinion about sisters sharing their knowledge in the masjid vicinity, giving a talk like today’s? Can women take a lead in doing work for the sake of Allah and not be prevented from that?***

Ans: I don’t know. If you have got something to do, do it. Nobody is stopping you. What’s that thing over there? It’s a flyer for a sister’s programme. My mother in law is speaking at that one. But yeah sisters should do their own programmes. I don’t see anything wrong with that. I actually encourage it. I feel we should have public sister role models for our girls because there’s more than enough Disney role models for them.

Honestly I was at a programme where Irshaad Banji was speaking. She claims to be a Muslim, Allah knows what’s in her heart but from her actions and speech that’s not Islam. But you know after she spoke a couple of little girls in Hijab went over to her to get her autograph. You know why? Because she is apparently a Muslim and she’s a public figure, so she must be a role model. That was disturbing. We need to have role models for our girls and we need to develop strong tarbiyah for our daughters at home. So that when they come out of home and go to college or to wherever they are going to go in their lives, they guard their haya and they know how to be strong and confident women at the same time.

Our deen does not want our women to be not in the workplace or whatever. That is ridiculous. Musa (a.s) saw a couple of girls that were herding sheep- but they knew how to handle themselves. That’s in the Quran guys. They knew how to handle themselves. They waited for the men to finish as they didn’t want to mix with them inappropriately and get pushed and shoved, so they waited for them to finish. Then when Musa (a.s) went up to them to ask them, ‘What’s your problem? Why are you wrestling with these sheep?’ They didn’t go like, ‘Hee, hee, astaghfirullah,’ they didn’t do that. They talked to him straight and they were tough. Remember Musa (a.s) was a big guy and they both said, ‘We can’t feed our sheep until those men are done and by the way our dad’s a big sheikh.’ So they were tough and they were out in the workplace, literally women in the workforce as mentioned in Sura Qasas.

(Along these lines) I met sheikh Akram Nadvi from Oxford. He recently finished typing a fifty volume book on the female collectors of hadith. It’s called Al-Muhadithat. About three thousand women in the history of Islam that were muhadithat including some of the teachers of Bukhari (rahimullah) and Muslim (rahimullah) and so on. He’s compiled an entire composite list of these three thousand women that are the mothers of hadith study just to prove one point; that Islamic scholarship is not something that was owned by men. Women were equally if not even more involved in Islamic scholarship. And it’s always been the case. That’s our tradition but it’s so easy for us to have amnesia of our own history, subhanallah.

***Q. How should one deal with sincerity in public speaking?***

Ans: You have to know yourself. I mean you have to know why you are speaking , why you are opening your mouth. I admit speaking can turn into a performance, it can turn into theatrics if you ‘re not clear about who you are. My personal remedy is several things. These are my own fixes for my own sincerity.

One I have close friends who have me known me before I was on Youtube. They are not impressed with me and never will be. They know me for who I am. Those are your real friends. They aren’t your friends because you are a public figure. They are you’re your friends because you played basket ball with them back in the days and they scold you. Those are your real friends and they keep you in check. They keep you human. They don’t sit next to you and say brother Nouman I have a question, they don’t do that. (They say things like), ‘Yo pass the chips.’

The second thing is to have around you elders who are not impressed with you to keep you in check. For me that’s alhamdulilah my parents.

That’s why our relationship with our parents is so important. It keeps us from being arrogant. They test our patience more than anybody else. As you get older you will get older with what your mother and father have to say and you’ll have to be patient, that’s what keeps you humble.

You don’t need a sheikh you need your parents. Go to your parents sit with them let your mum yell at you let her tell yow how silly your beard looks or how your hijab is ugly or something. Sit there and be quiet, that’s humble check. I’m not saying my mum does that, she’s really nice but it’s really good to have sound relationship with your parents. So after you give a speech go hang out with your mum or dad. The final fix for me personally is itekalf (seclusion). You have to go to and find a place where nobody knows you, don’t give a talk when doing itekalf, don’t give a halaqah, just go and be quiet.

My itekalf this year was hajj. No talks, no pictures, no meetings, nothing. I’m just there to make hajj, that’s it. Not there to give speech. All I want is to disappear. I want to blend and that’s all I want. And for da'ees especially my advice is to do itekalf and if you can afford it go to umrah and don’t go to umrah with a group and don’t take pictures and post them on face book. Go by yourself and come back and it’s your little secret between you and Allah.

***Q. What about Muslim women speaking in terms of lowering he gaze? Isn’t s sort of putting herself in front of men to look at?***

Ans: I don’t know, that’s a fiqh question and lowering the gaze is the man’s responsibility so I don’t know how that works but I would ask Shiekh Omar about that. But I know historically we have had female public speakers. That’s been historically the case. Not necessarily sitting in front of a gathering of men but with proper safeguards we have had that.

All right jazakallahkahir for coming today, nastaghfirullah, nastaghfiruhu wa natoobu elaik.