

Our Relationship with the Quran

by Ustadh Nouman Ali Khan

Assalam o alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatu.

I want to start by saying that I am extremely happy and very excited to be here, Alhamdulillah. It's always good to meet new Muslims and see new faces, Alhamdulillah. We (myself and students traveling with me) make lots of dua that Allah blesses this Masjid with unity, more and more successful programs, and that you have something to offer to the women of this community, and youth of this community, and children of this community, the elders of this community, and that Allah brings the light of Islam to the greater area in this region through the House of Allah.

I wanted to use this opportunity to talk to you about a surah that I've been meaning to talk about for some time and share some blessings with you from the beginning of Surah Kahf. I'll also share some insights that some great scholars of the past have had with this remarkable surah. Obviously, this is a great occasion to talk about Surah Kahf. A lot of scholars have talked about this surah and it's particularly relevant on Friday – anyone know why? Why specifically Friday's a good day to talk about this surah? It's part of the Sunnah of the Prophet (pbuh) and part of it is tradition, where different ahadith have mentioned reading either part of Surah Kahf, or all of it, before the Friday prayer (Jum'a). Of those various instructions and teachings of the Prophet (pbuh), is the idea that this surah has to do with protecting us from the *fitna* of *Dajjal*. So it has something to do with protecting us from future troubles and difficulties. When you study those ahadith, on an overview you do learn of some great trial, great war, great trouble that is coming the way of humanity. You also learn of the great clash to come between the forces of good and forces of evil before the world itself comes to an end and the entire saga of humanity is finished. If those are the greatest wars to ever fall against humanity and the greatest troubles to ever come to humanity, this surah offers somehow protection and counsel and preparedness to deal with some of those greater struggles. The idea is that if you can prepare for those greater struggles, you can deal with the troubles you are facing now too, before that time.

In the very beginning of this surah, Allah offers a really interesting warning. After describing the greatness of the Quran, which we'll talk about in a second, Allah gives us one of the reasons for which this Book was sent:

وَيُنذِرُ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا

-to warn those that say Allah has taken a son. It's very interesting as a chronology in the Quran that Surah Israa, also called Surah Bani Israel, is the one right before this Surah. In the previous surah, Allah talks in some length about Jewish history and the history of the previous nation that was Muslim. From the ahadith of the Prophet (pbuh), we learn that this Surah has something to do with the future of these Muslims - in other words, the past of the former Muslims, and then the future of the current Muslims. It's like a timeline that's been created in these two surahs together.

Now, in this surah specifically, Allah warns those who say that He has taken a son. He says

وَيُنذِرُ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا

One of the functions of this Book is to warn those who say Allah has taken a son. These are the Christians.

مَا هُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ

They have no knowledge of what they say

وَلَا لِآبَائِهِمْ

And they don't possess knowledge, they have nothing of it, and nor did their ancestors who made such claims.

كَبُرَتْ كَلِمَةً تَخْرُجُ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ

How huge/enormous are the words coming out of their mouths

إِنْ يَقُولُونَ إِلَّا كَذِبًا

They are saying nothing but a lie.

Here are the words that I really want to highlight for you.

فَلَعَلَّكَ بَخِيعٌ نَفْسَكَ عَلَىٰ ءَاثَرِهِمْ إِن لَّمَّ يُؤْمِنُوا بِهَذَا الْحَدِيثِ أَسَفًا ﴿٦﴾

The central ayah I'm going to talk to you about today is this ayah.

فَلَعَلَّكَ بَخِيعٌ نَفْسَكَ عَلَىٰ ءَاثَرِهِمْ

Allah tells his Messenger (pbuh) that: Is it a possibility that you will worry so much that it will destroy yourself, thinking about their consequences. *Athar* literally means a footprint left in the sand. *Aathaar* (ءَاثَرٌ) are the consequences, the traces left behind. Another meaning of the word

Aathaar (ءَاثَرٌ) is “ruins”. Allah is highlighting that there is something about the Christian faith – something about it in the future of the world – it will have some very deep and scarring consequences. And the Prophet (pbuh) is so worried about these consequences that Allah is telling him that you're worrying so much that you'll almost kill yourself out of grief.

إِن لَّمَّ يُؤْمِنُوا بِهَذَا الْحَدِيثِ أَسَفًا ﴿٦﴾

If they don't come to belief in this perfect speech (the Quran) out of grief/stress/sadness, then you'll end up dying. That's how worried you (the Prophet (pbuh)) are.

What is the Prophet (pbuh) so worried about?

Some of our scholars in recent times, as late as the 1800s, tried to explore this idea – what about the effect of Christianity on the world made the Prophet (pbuh) so worried? And how is it related to the end of times?

I want to take you guys on a small journey. I see a lot of faces here, some young where you may be from high school, and a lot of you are from way beyond that ma-sha-Allah, but you've studied something of American history. You've also studied something of European history. You're familiar with the idea of the First Revolution, yes? The European Enlightenment? So , you're

familiar with those concepts... And you're familiar with the idea that essentially the Revolution was against one major institution. What was that institution? The church.

The Revolution was against the church. Among preaching other unscientific ideas, the church was also preaching to the people that the Earth was at the center of the universe and that the Earth was flat. When scientists in Europe started to disagree with these ideas, their books were being burnt, libraries were being torn down, and people were being put to death for having ideas that contradicted with the Bible. And the more and more people realized that this religion and what it has to force on us doesn't make any common sense, we have to fight against it. And so, there is this Revolution that happens against the church.

Even though Christianity survived – Christianity lives even beyond the effects of that Revolution – obviously, we're still living in a Western world that is predominantly Christian – but the original Revolution was against fundamental Christian creed. Essentially, that was replaced – the ideas that the earth is flat, that human beings are special, that the earth is at the center of the universe – these ideas were all replaced with something else. They were essentially replaced with the scientific worldview. And in the scientific worldview, everything that Christianity said about the world had to have been wrong. In other words, the earth is not flat and we're not at the center of the universe. And if Christianity argued that human beings are the most special creatures on the planet, then that must be wrong too – we are just like any other creation, any other animal – we've just evolved, really. That's all we are. This idea started taking over. The scientific mind started arguing and wrestling with the religious mind. So even when those that are religious reach higher levels of studies, they say that it when it comes to evolution or higher levels of philosophy or science, they leave their religion out of it and say they don't like to think about it since there's too much of a contradiction. Their mindset is as follows: **If I can, I'll stay religious;** but other than that, I have to move on with my life and think about problems in the real world through what is the “real” study of the world, i.e. science, technology, research, etc.

As a result, something else happened. This idea of science replacing Christianity slowly became an idea of science replacing religion altogether. In Europe, this was already an idea – that they are the supreme civilization. All the other civilizations are beneath them. You know how the Orientalists are people who study the Orient in the east. But the original inquiry into the east was very similar to what you may have seen in Discovery channel documentaries where they study animals – e.g. how animal predators wait for their prey. Well, they studied Chinese, Hindu, Muslim civilization in a similar way – “what a remarkable religion, they chant their Quran” – with this underlying assumption that somehow they are a superior religion and they're studying these inferior cultures that are ‘interesting’. “We find their artifacts and their art so interesting.”

So since Christianity was found false and had been disproven, people thought that must mean all religions have been disproven and may be thrown out of the window. And all the arguments for

faith that Christianity has to produce, how can any other faith produce any stronger arguments? Christianity was obviously the number one religion, so if this one lost, all other religions lost by default. They don't even have to be entered into the contest.

This mentality resulted in several consequences. We're talking about the consequences of the Christian civilization – Allah says when you kill yourself in grief over them, there are consequences. We're seeing more consequences of the Christian creed in the world today than ever before. As a result of a war against an irrational faith, a war against all faiths began. This didn't have to be a war of weapons; it was a war of ideas, a war of education systems.

How many of you have studied in Pakistan? I myself have, as well. And in the 90's, we were still studying Newtonian Physics where we had to write in our exams that “matter can neither be created nor destroyed” and if you didn't write that, you would lose marks. That statement in of itself is against what we believe as Muslims. God is not created and the only One who cannot be destroyed is Allah. Isn't it crazy that you have to agree with the statement above in a Muslim country and if you don't, you lose marks. It's like science is somewhere else and religion is somewhere else. I know we're studying Einsteinian physics now, and that we don't believe the statement above anymore, but that's how backwards some of our countries are, right? We're still teaching Newtonian Physics in this era, subhanAllah.

But this has spiritual consequences. In a religious world, you have two concerns. Your primary concern is saving your soul. Your concern is serving God. Even if you don't have Islam as a religion, whatever else your religion is, your focus is God, worship, and your soul. When god is removed from the picture, there is no soul remaining in the picture either since you can't scientifically prove a “soul”. “No hospital monitor can check for a soul, so let's stop worrying about things that we can't see” is the mindset many people started to adopt. The entire purpose of the scientific revolution is – “let's study and explore and focus on things that we can see; if we can't see it, don't worry about it. If god or soul is there or not, who cares? We should worry about what we can see – e.g. the human body, physical universe, science, technology, finance, etc.” So the focus has been shifted from serving God in the unseen and being amazed by Him, to being amazed by the universe.

I've recently seen two documentaries about the universe. And of course as Muslims, we appreciate the universe. We want to study it and explore it because when we appreciate how big the universe is, it makes us realize how great Allah's creation is. But I was listening to this documentary and this physicist is talking about creation and the constantly expanding universe and how the earth is so tiny compared to the universe, and it was almost like the physicist was praising the universe itself. He can't go one step further – the thing he'll appreciate the most is the universe itself. He won't take the step of appreciating Allah. They will study everything – the human body, health – and they'll appreciate the intricacies of it all but will not come to

appreciate the One who designed it and put it in place. So the focus of humanity, regardless of religion, became things that we **can** see. The focus became your job, your promotion, your money, your physical health – and if religion does have a place, then maybe once a week when the Hindu might show up at temple, the Christian might show up at church, the Jew might show up at synagogue, the Muslim might show up at the mosque – but that’s just once a week, **if** you have time that is. You come in as late as possible, park outside the parking lot so that you can leave as soon as possible because you don’t want to become ‘infected’. And then you go back to your main concerns – your job, your promotion, money, etc.

And then an even crazier thing happened: Christianity felt like it was an orphan. Originally, the war was against science and Christianity. But Christianity was left behind and so it tried to keep itself relevant. How did it manage that? They pointed out scientific facts in the bible, and said that since the bible consisted of scientific facts, their role was as good as science. Because science is the top dog now, so to be healthier, you have to be close to it. So if Christianity showed scientific phenomena in the bible, they hoped people would say the religion isn’t entirely irrational and since some of it makes sense, they could make it acceptable. In the mind of the person comparing science and religion, they are looking at scientific measures, but they’ve already accepted science as superior to revelation. Revelation has to come and compete with science, and if it agrees, we’ll take it, and if it doesn’t agree, then who needs revelation? And guess what happened later on in history? I’m not saying you shouldn’t study science, I’m saying that you should study science but the attitude should be right. If we’re exploring science for the purpose of “hey look guys, there’s scientific facts in the Quran, that must mean we’re a legitimate religion” – Islam has been a legitimate religion with clear proofs before any scientific development that we see today. They aren’t new proofs, they’ve always been there. They may further help us, fine, but they are not there to prove the legitimacy of the Quran’s truth. That’s not the correct way of thinking. But this mentality shows you something – that many Muslims have, at the back of their minds, accepted the superiority of science. The knowledge that humans seek to learn, they’ve put that above the knowledge of revelation, the knowledge that Allah Himself gave. It’s a strange situation.

But this is just one problem: the intellectual problem.

To help you understand the second problem, which is an even deeper problem, we will discuss this surah. Surah Kahf is all about this second problem – it’s about materialism. Let me tell you what this means in simple terms. I listen to a lot of Christian talk radio and I listen to a lot of preachers. I want to know what they have to say – the different denominations. There is one theme running across the Protestant faith and all of its variations. The Catholic faith said this world is evil. The most spiritual people according to the Christian faith were the monks. And the higher you are spiritually, the more it means that you’ve denied the world and its pleasures – you don’t eat delicious food, you don’t wear comfortable clothes. Allah says that they tried to deny

the *dunya* even though it was natural to them. They weren't able to give it consideration as it deserved. They tried to deny the world – they are not going to get married, they'll live in a monastery – because the “world itself and everything in it is evil.” The Protestant faith comes along and says no, that you've been focusing on the next world when this world is evil. But the scientific revolution tells us to focus on this world and not the next; this world is great and God wants us to do good in this world. So the preacher will tell you that “God wants you to get that promotion, that new job, He wants you to refinance your home, get that nice car, and praise be to the Lord, when you drive that fancy car, it means the Lord loves you.” In other words, the more *dunya* and worldly possessions you have, the more it proves that the Lord loves you. And if you don't have a lot of *dunya*, there must be something wrong with you, you need to pray. In other words, even if you pray, you pray for *dunya*. You see that? Even something that was supposed to be focused on God, they've made it focused on *dunya*.

Has this affected the Muslim mind? Have we ended up only asking for *dunya* as well? We may pray for both *dunya* and *aakhirah* when we read

رَبَّنَا ءَاتِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ حَسَنَةً وَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ

but for most of us, our focus is only on the *dunya*. We think that the *aakhirah* can wait for later, but for now at least pray that we get the job, the interview, to be able to marry that person, to get immigration, etc. Even though in the dua itself we are asking for both *dunya* and *aakhirah*, the focus in our head is on the *dunya* alone. So we got affected by the materialism problem discussed above as well.

Some years ago, I met a brother in a very difficult state. He was in one of the Gulf states where the sheikh took his passport and forced him to work for five years with no pay. He was only given food and boarding. Somehow, he stole his passport and ran off and moved to America. He took some mortgages out and got into some shady businesses. Eventually, he was riding an ice cream truck and was making good money through that, paying his mortgage out of his ice cream truck business. He used to sell ice cream at the Masjid's Sunday school where I met him. He was telling me that Allah has been really good to me; As soon as I applied for my mortgage, I got approved right away; And when I wanted to refinance, I got approved right away too; And most of my income is cash and I don't have to report most of it because it's cash; And I get government support on top of it; Allah has been very kind to me. So his proof for Allah being nice to him was that he gets away with a lot of cheating. He gets involved with questionable practices, financial transactions. He gets into that stuff and makes a lot of money. “If Allah was mad at me, I would've been bankrupt! Allah has made life good. This is proof that Allah loves me.”

This is the same surah that will trash that mentality and destroy that mindset. In this surah, we will learn the story of two gardeners. One of them is very wealthy and he says

مَا أَظُنُّ أَنْ تَبِيدَ هَذِهِ أَبَدًا ﴿٣٥﴾

...‘I don’t think this will go anywhere.’

وَلَيْن رُدِدْتُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّي

...‘And even if I was to go back to my master’

لَأَجِدَنَّ خَيْرًا مِنْهَا مُنْقَلَبًا ﴿٣٦﴾

...‘I will get even better’.

‘If Allah gave me so much in this *dunya*, it must mean He really likes me, He’s going to hook me up in the *aakhirah*. If I get a big screen TV here, I can’t even imagine the dimensions of my entertainment system in Paradise.’ That’s the mentality. This mentality is poisoned. What we enjoy in this world, when Allah allows you to pay off that house, when Allah allows you to get a nice car – you don’t have to have all of those things, by the way. One said: only worry about *dunya*. The other said, *dunya* is evil. What does the Muslim say?

Allah tells us what to say. Allah says “We settled you in the earth. We gave you means of living well. How will you thank?” In other words, you should have good things in this world. Allah gave them to you. The world is not a punishment, it’s not evil. And you should be grateful to Allah for it. We understand that the things Allah gave us in this world, the luxuries and the difficulties, all of them or a test. Some people, Allah tests with wealth, others Allah tests with poverty. Some people, Allah tests with luxury, others Allah tests with difficulty. Some people, Allah tests them with health and strength, while others Allah tests with sickness and weakness. They’re all a test at the end of the day.

This is becoming a philosophical conversation. Let me bring it down to the level of children, specifically children. I was in front of Sunday school kids, one time in my life. I brought some pictures with me. I brought a picture of a guy driving a convertible car to a mansion. Then I brought a picture of a homeless guy living in a cardboard box in New York City. Then I had a picture of somebody holding a lot of cash in his hand. And another picture of a person with some pennies in his hand, asking for money. So I asked this group – you need to tell me which one of

these groups of people is successful. There was no disagreement among the children. The wealthy is the successful is what they said. The poor are the losers.

You tell me – Pharoah had a nice house or no? Was he a loser or no? He was.

Ibrahim (alaihi salam) was kicked out of his house, he was homeless. But he was a winner.

The Prophet (pbuh) lived in a cave. He was literally deported when he lost his citizenship in Makkah. He was living in a cave. But he was successful.

Our judgment is different. The way we think about these things is different. The world is wrapped up in a certain mentality and it's constantly being reinforced. This materialism is constantly being reinforced. And it's not just being reinforced by some *kaafir* media. It's being reinforced by Muslim cultures too that have been affected by these ideas. Your parents will tell you, "Yes, studying Quran is nice, but your real goal is to become a doctor." I have no problem with *desi* kids becoming doctors and engineers. Let me qualify my statement. I have no problem with you guys pursuing law and medicine. Don't just be a doctor, own the hospital if you can. Be the best you can be. But you know when the parents are pushing their kids into these careers, they're not thinking, "My son is going to save lives. My son is going to become a force of goodness in this world. Allah is going to use him to serve his *deen* better and better." What's the thought in their mind? Money, money, money. This is not success. These are not the same things. But this is how we've started thinking. This is the mentality that has to be cut at its roots.

Allah says at the beginning of this surah,

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَىٰ عَبْدِهِ الْكِتَابَ وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ عِوَجًا ۗ

‘All praise and gratitude belongs to Allah that sent upon His slave the ultimate/final book. And He didn't leave any crookedness/deviation/room for criticism or attack in this book.’

The whole Revolution against religion happened because they found crookedness in a book. And Allah says that He sent a book that has no crookedness. Now try to fight it. So if the world has gone crooked, what's going to bring it back is the Book of Allah. We have to become people that internalize the Book of Allah and are able to effectively communicate its ideas. That when we're healed by them, we're able to heal others with them. That we're able to share with others the powerful ideas contained in this Book.

قِيَمًا

‘Stand up high’, this book is not going anywhere. Philosophy will rise and fall. Systems will rise and fall. Economies will rise and fall. Who could’ve said 15 years ago that the European Union is dying? You know how desperate Turkey was to join the EU, and now they’re like “no, thanks.” What are they going to do joining that sinking economy? The world changes, but Allah says this book, its teachings, its values, its principles, its solution for humanity, are upright (قِيَمًا). It will be in place, and won’t move from its place.

I just wanted to highlight the timeless value of the Quran in this ayah and conversation above. I will move on to a new topic now.

We talked about our attitudes toward the world. What are common Muslim attitudes toward the Quran? Many Muslims are knowledgeable, many are not. Many Muslims don’t know where the mosque is though they’ve been living here for ten years. They’ve never been to one. But all of them share at least one idea about the Quran – that the Quran is something special and should be treated with respect. Even if you go to a Muslim family household where they drink alcohol and don’t care much about Islam, you’ll still find a Quran on a top shelf in their homes. And it’s on the top shelf, why? Because of respect.

You have weddings. And even if you’re not religious, you have to have some exposure to religious people because you’re going to have the *imam* come and read the *nikkah*, so at least one bearded guy is going to have to show up. So he’s going to recite the Quran, so out of respect, people will put their scarves on their head, or they’ll find something, some paper bag, to cover their head. Even if they don’t know what it means, somehow we all know that the Quran has to be respected. That much attitude is there.

Now on top of that there is another attitude: That this Book has a lot of blessings in it. ‘So even though I’m really messed up, but when I die, make sure you invite a lot of people and make sure they recite the Quran, and through its blessings somehow all my messed up stuff will somehow disappear.’ So whether you’re religious or not, it doesn’t matter, just make sure you enjoy the blessings of this Book. Just play a recitation of it in Ramadan at home and you’ll be fine.

Or there’s a new trend. The whole family is messed up. Just take one kid and make him a *hafidh*. He is thought to be the guarantee for everybody else, the gatekeeper who’ll let everybody in (to Jannah).

That's our attitude toward the Quran. Through its blessings, we'll be saved. We don't have to change ourselves, we can be who we are, but we can recite the Quran and all our troubles will disappear.

Then there's another attitude that Quran is awesome for special occasions or special problems. When you're sick, time to bust out the Quran. When you have a serious problem, time to recite the Quran. When you're about to get your daughter married, read the Quran. Or when you're about to enter your new house, recite Surah Fatiha. 'This book is for special occasions. When you recite Quran every day, you're an extremist. You only need it for special occasions, nothing else.'

Then on top of that, there's another interesting attitude: The Quran will protect you. It will keep you from having a car accident, so take *ayat-ul-qursi* and hang it from your rear-view mirror. Buy a copy of a *mushaf*, you'll never read it, but will put it in your dashboard in hopes that it will somehow protect you. In many parts of the world, they have cups with Quran ayahs printed around the cup, and it is believed that if you drink from the cup, your sinus problems will be relieved. Or there are some people who will write Quran ayahs, make a patch out of them, put them around their arms and believe that they are then protected from problems.

That's what the Quran has become for us. For most Muslims, that's what the Quran is.

I've seen in New York a lot of Christian cab drivers who have put a symbol of a fish on their car which is a sign of Christianity, or they'll hang a crucifix in their car. These are trinkets. And when they get really scared, they'll hold their crucifix. What happens to a Muslim? He'll hold his *ayat-ul-kursi* chain. 'This is what the Quran is for – it's a book to be respected and kept for special occasions.'

No. In fact, the Quran came to solve our problems, to solve the trouble you're having with your wife, the trouble you're having with your husband. The Quran came to help you to teach how to deal with your parents better, with your children better. The Quran came to help you get a decent job, to do your business dealings the right way. The Quran came to make your mornings right and make your evenings right. The Quran is the best advice you'll ever get. But you and I never thought of the Quran as advice. When you and I needed advice, we go to specialists and counselors. Sometimes when we have serious issues, we go to a therapist. People go to psychologists and psychiatrists. The psychiatrist asks you to sit down and you talk to them for an hour: "Yeah, I hate my sister and my brother's evil and my parents don't love me.." and you just cry about it for an hour and at the end of the hour, the psychiatrist asks you, "So how does that make you feel?" And you say, "I just told you how I feel." "Oh well, time's up. We'll discuss next week. That'll be \$350." That's therapy.

You and I are not reciting the Quran when it's supposed to be therapy for us. We are supposed to take counsel from Allah directly and immediately. That's what the Quran is supposed to be. When you experience the counsel of Quran for yourself, you have to experience it for yourself personally. No lecture, no talk can do that. You have to get that experience by yourself, for yourself. And the best time to experience that is in Salah itself. The way Quran was meant to be experienced was in Salah, that's the best way. You come to understand some Ayaat, you memorize them, and you recite them in Salah, something happens inside of you. Something changes. Something beautiful happens. Even Salah for most of us has become cardiovascular exercise. It's become a speed contest.

My uncle used to take me for *Taraweeh*. We used to go to one masjid, but then he switched to another one. I asked him, "Why do we go here now?" He goes, "This one finishes 20 *rakah* in 38.5 minutes every day. The other one took 45 minutes. This guy is faster."

It's a speed contest now. 'I don't have time for Salah.' The quickest prayer is *Asr*, 'I'll pray that one.' You know, *wal asr* – the one that's supposed to make you respect your time for Allah. We don't give that prayer any time. The irony of it all...

The idea I'm trying to make for all of you is that an intellectual decline is high, a spiritual decline is high. And the solution to all of that is for all of us to go back and seriously develop a relationship with the Quran.

I want to share something personal with you. When I first read the Quranic translation, I was in high school. I read the Yusuf Ali translation. I tried to read it. I got through about 200 ayahs of Surah Baqarah and I quit, I couldn't do it anymore. The English was so hard, it was so Shakespearean. And even if you do get the English, there was so much going on – I thought I was reading about a battle, then all of a sudden, hajj and fasting came in. What's going on, I thought. Why isn't there just a chapter on Hajj? Why isn't there just a chapter on the battle and everything about it? Why is everything so jumbled up? I just gave up on it. That next Ramadan is the first time I heard the Quran being explained in simple language, just like I'm talking to you, like a conversation. That was the first time in my life that something hit me like never before – that Allah is actually talking to me. Allah's actually giving me personal advice. This is a conversation between master and slave. He spoke to His Messenger (pbuh), and through him, told all believers.

Most of you know, when we recite Surah at-Teen,

أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِأَحْكَمَ الْحَاكِمِينَ ﴿٨﴾

What are we supposed to say after we recite it? We should say *بلى* - “Why not? Of course.” Allah says something, we say something. It’s a conversation. Quran itself is a conversation between Allah and every person. Before that I thought the Quran was a book. Since then, I realized Allah is talking to me, He’s giving me advice. And when you come to the Quran with that attitude, you will discover advice, you will discover wisdom for your own life. And when I heard my teacher talk, though there were 200 people in class, I was thinking he’s just talking to me. “How does Allah know that?”

And then he goes to the ayah, “He doesn’t know who He created?” Doesn’t He know who He’s created? Subhan Allah. He knows. He knows who He’s talking to.

This becomes a direct, immediate conversation between Allah and us. And that’s the first step in us fixing ourselves as an Ummah – to once again engage Allah in a perfect conversation, to become more connected with Allah especially in our Salah. This needs to happen. Ramadan is around the corner, is it not? We have to start becoming ready for it from now. We don’t know if we’ll be around for it or not, but we have to make the intention that this Ramadan is the one where I will experience the Quran the way Allah wants me to. I will come closer to Allah’s book and by doing that, I will get close to Him. I will understand what He wants. The Quran is not just a book about *haram* and *halal*; it’s not just about *jahannam* and *jannah*. It’s not. Quran is a book of beautiful things. No scholar, no *imam* is going to talk about the Quran so as to give you the beauty when Allah himself says something. When Allah says it, it just has a different effect. So when I first personally discovered that the Quran is a conversation, my attitude toward it completely changed. That was about 12 years ago for me. And in the last 12 years, if there’s really been anything that I’ve really wanted to study, it’s the Quran for that reason. And I’m still very much a beginner, a student of the Quran. But the more I study it, the more I think, “Man, this is what I was looking for.” Sometimes I read an ayah and think, “this is the first time I came across it. The counsel I needed was just given to me.” It’s just immediate, relevant, perfect advice.

So this is the attitude that I want all of us to make an intention for, when we’re approaching the month of Ramadan.

I want to quickly give you some practical advice now. How do you get close to the Quran as much as humanly possible?

If there are *halaqaat* of the Quran happening at the mosque, of the *tafseer* of the Quran, if there are any studies happening of the Quran, attend them. It doesn’t matter whose presenting. Just come and attend. Make time and attend.

If you cannot attend, find whatever tafseer videos and resources online that you can find and start watching them. Note that I didn't say, read translation first. You know why? Because in my experience I tried that myself, that's the one that left me confused. So I can imagine when you're reading the translation as well, that you'll leave with more questions than answers. If you are going to read something, buy a *tafseer* and read it. I recommend one by Mufti Muhammad as-Shafee in English – it's good and simple reading.

If you really don't have any time at all and want to read a translation, I recommend the Abdul Hakim translation by Oxford University Press.

But a real relationship with the Quran doesn't happen until you and I are trying to memorize. Start memorizing the Quran. In Fajr, read for fifteen minutes, just one ayah. Don't be lazy about it. Don't overdo it, you will find it too difficult. Do short and what you can – 10, 15 minutes. Memorize a little portion every day. "A thousand miles begin with a step." So just take little steps and through that your *salaah* will become more beautiful. You will start experiencing more of a joy in your *salaah*.
