

## ***Knowledge Retreat Session Descriptions***

This year's Knowledge Retreat will focus on the balanced approach to purification. In doing so, recommended qualities that pertain to our relationship with Allah, Exalted is He, (Rohaniyyaat/روحانيات) and those that pertain to fellow humankind (Akhlaaqiyyaat/أخلاقيات) will be studied. The following characteristics will be emphasized:

### **1. Introduction to the Fiqh of Tazkiyah**

The need for purification of the soul and the heart is vital and ever constant. Allah, Exalted is He, reminds us with two, short, yet powerful verses on how imperative this process is:

“To a happy state shall indeed attain he who causes his self to grow in purity, and truly lost is he who buries it in darkness.” *Surah Al-Shams, 91:9-10*

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا (٩) وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا (١٠)

Tazkiyah or purification of the self is concerned with the “spirit or feeling” of the heart as the believer worships and connects with Allah. Students will not only learn how to get closer to Allah, but also what steps are necessary along the way.

### **2. Al-Rajaa - Hope الرجاء**

In this stressful world full of global turmoil as well as personal strife, it becomes increasingly difficult to remain hopeful. Only when we realize that Allah is the best of planners and that we must never despair, can we comprehend what it means to hope in Allah's Mercy. To be balanced in our approach, it is imperative that we do not go into extremes. One extreme is to take Allah's Mercy for granted and assume He will forgive all of our shortcomings. In turn, the believer becomes lax in his or her worship and lowers his or her guard against sinning. On the other end of the spectrum is to become so fearful that Allah will not forgive our sins, that we despair in Allah's Mercy. Yet Allah, Exalted is He, reminds of his vast Mercy in the Qur'an:

“Say, ‘O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful.’” *Surah Al-Zumar, 39:53*

قُلْ يٰٓعِبَادِىَ الَّذِيْنَ اَسْرَفُوْا عَلٰى اَنْفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوْا مِنْ رَّحْمَةِ اللّٰهِ  
اِنَّ اللّٰهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوْبَ جَمِيْعًا اِنَّهٗ هُوَ الْعَفُوْرُ الرَّحِيْمُ (٥٣)

Ibn Al-Qayyim illustrates a beautiful balance when he said, “The heart on its journey towards Allah, the Exalted, is like that of a bird. Love is its head, and fear and hope are its two wings. When the head is healthy, then the two wings will fly well. When the head is cut off, the bird will die. When either of two wings is damaged, the bird becomes vulnerable to every hunter and predator.”

### 3. Al-Tawakkul - Reliance on Allah التوكل

When we rely on Allah, subhanahu wa ta'ala, we plan and execute to the best of our ability and leave the whole situation up to Allah.

“Rely upon Allah. Indeed, Allah loves those who rely [upon Him].” *Surah Ale-Imran 3:159*

فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

This mode of operation for the believer ensures constant action and progress while minimizing feelings of despair or anxiety about the results. This is described beautifully by the words of Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, when he said:

“If you had all relied on Allah as you should rely on Him, then He would have provided for you as He provides for the birds, who wake up hungry in the morning and return with full stomachs at dusk.” (Al-Tirmidhi)

عن عمر بن الخطاب رضي الله عنه عن النبي - صلى الله عليه وسلم - قال : لو أنكم توكلون على الله حق توكله ، لرزقكم كما يرزق الطير ، تغدو خماسا ، وتروح بطانا رواه الإمام أحمد والترمذي

When we fail to have true reliance on Allah we fall prey to two extremes: laziness and over-reliance on ourselves and on others. When tawakkul is misunderstood, believers will fail to plan and even worse, chose not to take steps towards success, with the false hope that Allah will take care of everything. The other extreme is planning and taking action with the belief that the outcome must turn out in direct relation to the efforts put forth. So when a young man cannot marry the woman he proposed to, or a young woman didn't get the job she applied for, they are not able to process the failure. They delve into the "what-if's" until they fall into a vicious cycle of depression, or even worse, weakened faith.

### 4. Al-Himmah - High Aspirations or Vigor الهمة

The conscious Muslim should have high vigor, which naturally pushes him or her to set his or her sights on accomplishing big goals which include personal, communal, and societal ones. Having himmah makes one value every second of one's time, work towards high-level goals in

all aspects of life, and remain conscientious of one's progress and growth. The believer takes to heart the words of Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, when he said:

“Take advantage of five matters before five other matters: your youth before you become old; your health, before you fall sick; your wealth, before you become poor; your free time before you become preoccupied, and your life, before your death.” (Al-Albani)

عن ابن عباس رضي الله عنهما قال قال رسول الله (صلى الله عليه وسلم) لرجل وهو يعظه : " اغتنم خمسا قبل خمس شبابك قبل هرمك وصحتك قبل سقمك وغناك قبل فقرك وفراغك قبل شغلك وحياتك قبل موتك " أخرجه الحاكم

We should set our priorities high and not only work towards them, but run towards them, as Allah reminds us in the Qur'an:

“So race to [all that is] good.” *Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:148*

فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ

When one gets consumed by mundane details of life; then living with purpose, taking action, and taking oneself to account fall to the wayside. Instead of planning for the future and working towards important goals, a person could just do the minimum in all aspects of life, so that his or her efforts are just "good enough." Status quo becomes the measuring stick for accomplishment as opposed to constant effort and growth.

## 5. Al-Sabr - Patience الصبر

Patience is vital to our mental and spiritual health. Not only does the believer need to remain patient in times of trials and tribulations, but also when it comes to avoiding what Allah has forbidden and performing what Allah has commanded. Having patience in these three categories is vital to attaining other praiseworthy traits, such as being grateful and content. Allah reminds us of the importance of patience when He says in the Qur'an, that He is with those who are patient. We are also reminded of the importance and value of patience in *Surah Al-Ma'arij, 70:5*:

"So be patient with gracious patience."

فَاصْبِرْ صَبْرًا جَمِيلًا

Patience is required during small tests such as waiting in heavy traffic, or in larger tests such as a loss of income, health, or life. We are reminded of this in *Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:155*:

"Surely We will test you with a bit of fear and hunger, and loss in wealth and lives and fruits, and give glad tidings to the patient."

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ

Practicing patience prevents the Muslim from complaining, becoming ungrateful, falling short in their adherence to Allah's law, and falling into sin.

## 6. Al-Dhikr - Remembrance of Allah الذكر

Remembering Allah is so simple, yet so vital. It keeps us from sinning, reminds us of what is important, and leads to contentment.

"Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured."

*Surah Al-Ra'd, 13:28*

أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

There are so many distractions that can take the believer away from what matters most in life: Allah. Social media, for example, not only distracts the believer from important tasks such as prayer and productivity, but also encourages followers to chase after superficial success. People become consumed by what others are doing and what they possess; which leads to envy, dissatisfaction, and competition against one another in worldly affairs. Other distractions are just as time consuming - shopping, watching sports, arguing over religious, political, or hypothetical issues for the sake of argument, and on and on. Tests in life, if not handled well, can also cause us to forget Allah. We become so wrapped up in the details of our trials and in our intense emotions, that we forget our Creator. We forget to take advantage of the opportunity to get closer to Allah during these difficult times. When we forget about Allah and His blessings, we fall into the trap described in the Qur'an:

"And be not like those who forgot Allah, so He made them forget themselves. Those are the defiantly disobedient." *Surah Al-Hashr, 59:19*

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنْسَاهُمْ أَنْفُسَهُمْ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

In addition to becoming preoccupied with difficulties, people can become so entrenched in the allurements of this world that they completely disregard their duty to Allah as described in the Qur'an:

“And whoever is blinded from remembrance of the Most Merciful - We appoint for him a devil, and he is to him a companion.” *Surah Al-Zukhruf, 43:36*

وَمَنْ يَعْشُ عَنْ ذِكْرِ الرَّحْمَنِ نُقَيِّضْ لَهُ شَيْطَانًا فَهُوَ لَهُ وَقْرِينٌ

Aside from forgetting to remember Allah or being in a state of *ghafila* غفلة, one can fall into the other extreme that involves performing dhikr in a way which is displeasing to Allah, whether by being an innovation or artificial, merely done to show off.

## 7. Al-Shukr - Gratitude الشكر

There is so much to be grateful for and yet we find ourselves forgetting how blessed we are, regardless of the difficulties we may face. Allah reminds us of these countless blessings in the Qur'an:

“And if you should count the favor of Allah, you could not enumerate them. Indeed, mankind is [generally] most unjust and ungrateful.” *Surah Ibrahim, 14:34*

وَإِنْ تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ لَا تَحْصُوهَا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَظَلُومٌ كَفَّارٌ

Being in a state of shukr, not only leads to success in this life, but leads to success in the Hereafter, as well. Gratitude is pleasing to Allah and, in addition, leads to the added benefits of satisfaction and happiness. Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, also taught us a valuable lesson in the following hadith:

“He has not thanked Allah who has not thanked the people.” (Bukhari)

روى الإمام أحمد والبخاري في الأدب المفرد عن أبي هريرة مرفوعاً: لا يشكر الله من لا يشكر الناس.

Allah reminds us in the Qur'an:

"And [remember] when your Lord proclaimed, 'If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favor]; but if you deny, indeed, My punishment is severe.' " *Surah Ibrahim, 14:7*

وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِن شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِن كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ

In the very same verse, Allah also reminds us of the what happens when we deny His favors upon us.

## 8. Al-Zuhd - Asceticism الزهد

The Muslim remembers where he or she is headed always, so that the glitters of this world do not take him or her off of the straight path. To practice Zuhd means that we can have worldly possessions, but we do not become consumed by them. We realize that what we have is from Allah. We may enjoy these comforts today, but we may not have them tomorrow. The believer also does not make attaining worldly goods his life mission, just so that he or she can show off or compete with others. The following verses highlight these valuable lessons:

“Say: Brief is the enjoyment of this world whereas the life to come is best for all who are conscious of Allah.” *Surah Al-Nisaa’, 4:77*

قُلْ مَتَّعُ الدُّنْيَا قَلِيلٌ وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ لِّمَنِ اتَّقَى

“And they rejoice in the life of the world, whereas the life of this world as compared with the Hereafter is but a brief passing enjoyment.” *Surah Al-Ra’d, 13:26*

وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا فِي الْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا مَتَّعٌ

“But you prefer the life of this world, although the life to come is better and more enduring.” *Surah Al-A’la, 87:16-17*

بَلْ تُؤْثِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا (١٦) وَالْآخِرَةَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى (١٧)

When one loses sight of these important principles, one becomes a slave to this world and a slave to the people. Slaves of this world are only happy when people are happy with them or when they are praised by others. Their heart is attached to this world. As a result, people lose sight of what is important and forget to be grateful, due to their obsession for hoarding worldly goods and attaining status. They take for granted Allah's blessings of health, wealth, and family. So, on one hand, people can fall into the extreme of greed, where they constantly want more. And on the other hand, one can take to passivity. This extreme can lead to neglecting oneself and neglecting others.

## 9. Al-Rahma - Compassion الرحمة

Allah is Al Rahman. He mentions His Mercy or Rahma much more in the Qur'an than He does His Wrath. This emphasis on Allah's Mercy should encourage us to embody this characteristic. The believer should be merciful to the old and young, to his or her spouse and children, and to his or her parents. Allah asks us in the Qur'an to be merciful to our parents in this profound verse:

"And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy and say, 'My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up [when I was] small.'" *Surah Al-Israa', 17:24*

وَأَخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذُّلِّ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا

Being compassionate will encourage us to be kind to others as Allah commands us in the Qur'an:

"Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the neighbor farther away, the companion at your side, the traveler, and those whom your right hands possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are self-deluding and boastful."

*Surah Al-Nisaa', 4:36*

وَأَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَلَا تُشْرِكُوا بِهِ شَيْئًا وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَبِذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْجَارِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْجَارِ الْجُنُبِ وَالصَّاحِبِ بِالْجَنبِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ وَمَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ مَن كَانَ مُخْتَالًا فَخُورًا

Practicing compassion with others allows us to become more forgiving. Finding excuses for people makes us think positively and encourages us to give others the benefit of the doubt. This not only creates a sense of good will, but also makes us less arrogant. When we fail to put ourselves in other people's shoes, we see everything through a selfish lens. Thoughts such as "How dare she not invite me?" or "Who does he think he is?" creep into the mind of the hard-hearted.

## 10. Al-Tawaadu - Humility التواضع

When we are humble, we realize that all of our blessings come from Allah. No matter how successful we are, we realize it is entirely due to Allah's generosity and not due to our own efforts. If we remember that all our gifts and talents are God-given we would never boast, nor look down on others. In this way, we would be humble towards Allah, and humble towards humanity. In the absence of humility, arrogance reigns over our hearts. Instead of humility, we would practice vanity and arrogance. Allah warns us against this:

"And do not turn your face away from men with pride, nor walk in insolence through the earth. Verily, Allah does not like any arrogant boaster." *Surah Luqman, 31:18*

وَلَا تُصَعِّرْ خَدَّكَ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَمْشِ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَحًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُورٍ

We are also reminded in the Qur'an that what Allah cares for most, above social status, power, beauty, or wealth, is taqwa (God-consciousness):

"Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you."

*Surah Al-Hujraat, 49:13*

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقَىٰكُمْ

The opposite extreme of arrogance is lowliness. If the believer does not understand humility correctly, he or she exhibits low self-esteem and deems himself or herself as unworthy. This leads to becoming subservient to people and looking to please others instead of Allah.

### 11. Al-Ihsaan - Excellence الإحسان

Doing everything with excellence (matters of faith, housework, school work, or work in one's career) leads to excellence. When the Angel Jibreel, peace be upon him, asked Prophet Muhammad about Ihsaan, he replied, "It is that you should serve Allah as though you could see Him, for though you cannot see Him, He sees you." It is this level of mindfulness that grants the believer success in this life and in the Hereafter. Allah reminds us in the Qur'an of the importance of excellence:

"...and do good deeds. And Allah loves those who are good in their deeds."

*Surah Al-Ma'ida, 5:93*

وَأَحْسِنُوا وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Not only is excellence mentioned in general, but also in particular, for example, when it comes to interacting with parents:

"And We have enjoined on man to be good and dutiful to his parents"

*Surah Al-Ankaboot, 29:8*

وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حُسْنًا

It is this quality that pushes believers towards other positive characteristics, such as having high motivation (himmah), being compassionate towards others, and being organized in their affairs.

The opposite extremes of Ihsaan, is on the one hand, perfectionism, and on the other, carelessness. A perfectionist harms himself or herself in many ways. One can repeat actions or duties over and over again unnecessarily wasting time and which leads to a constant state of

dissatisfaction. Having unrealistic, high expectations also negatively affects relationships with others. Others' actions are never good enough as seen through the eyes of the perfectionist. Distrust and distance are born from these high expectations which weaken existing relationships and prevent new ones from forming. The other extreme opposite of Ihsaan, is doing everything sub par or in a careless manner. Becoming lazy, taking shortcuts, and rushing to perform tasks without quality in mind, lead to poor results and poor relationships. Complacency in our affairs is a slippery slope that we must avoid at all costs.

#### **12. Question and Answer & Action Plan Session**

Members of the audience will be able to submit their written questions via text or note cards that will be passed around. Students will have the opportunity to gain further clarity on previously discussed topics or pose new questions to the panel of Knowledge Retreat teachers. An action plan for taking it into daily-life practice will be proposed.