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Conscientiousness: Its Significance and Merit

Khutbah Topic

His eminence, venerated Sheikh Saud Al-Shureem—may Allah protect him—delivered this Friday's Khutbah titled “Conscientiousness: its Significance and Merit.” He talked about the importance of conscientiousness and the sense of scruples in society. Then, he defined their significance and stressed their intrinsic worth. He equally outlined the three subtypes of conscientiousness and described the consequences of their absence from people’s lives.

Part One

﴿All the praises and thanks be to Allâh, the (only) Originator [or the (Only) Creator] of the heavens and the earth, Who made the angels messengers with wings, two or three or four... ﴾ [Fater: 1]; *﴿The Forgiver of sin, the Acceptor of repentance, the Severe in punishment, the Bestower (of favours). Lâ ilâha illâ Huwa (none has the right to be worshipped but He), to Him is the final return.﴾* [Ghafer: 3]; *﴿all praises and thanks be to Him (both) in the first (i.e. in this world) and in the last (i.e. in the Hereafter). And for Him is the Decision, and to Him shall you (all) be returned.﴾* [Al-Qâšaš: 70].

I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah with no associate, and I also bear witness that Muhammad (ﷺ) is Allah’s Servant and Messenger, portrayed in the Holy Quran as *﴿...the Prophet who can neither read nor write (i.e. Muhammad ﷺ), who believes in Allâh and His Words [(this Qur’ân), the Taurât (Torah) and the Injeel (Gospel) and also Allâh’s Word: "Be!" - and he was, i.e. ‘Îsâ (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary), ﴿عليهما السلام﴾...﴾* [Al-Arâf: 158]. May Allah send His bounteous *Salat* (i.e. Graces, Honours, and Mercy) and *Peace* on him, his chaste and virtuous family, wives (mothers of the believers), Companions, and the *tab’în* (the contemporaries of the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ)

after his death), and on all those who have virtuously embraced their tradition till the Day of Judgement.

O Servants of Allah!

Observe *taqwa* (i.e. fear of violating Allah's commands) and bear in mind that the Herein is but an ephemeral form of life rather than a locus of eternal residence. Allah has made you trustees of its resources to test your conduct: **﴿As for him who gives (in charity) and keeps his duty to Allâh and fears Him﴾ ﴿And believes in Al-Husnâ﴾ ﴿We will make smooth for him the path of ease (goodness)﴾** [Al-Layl: 5-7]

O Muslims!

The world nowadays is experiencing a most sophisticated era of technical advancement and ultra-modern information technology. It is witnessing a state of euphoria stimulated by successive innovations and inventions in all walks of life. No sooner do people get familiar with an original novelty through scrutinising its structure and function than another equally ingenious innovation bewilders them to the extent that they forget about the previous one.

Thanks to its strong motivation and high sense of curiosity, the world has reached outer space and manufactured the atomic bomb. Yet, it has been unable to stimulate the conscience and resuscitate the scruples of societies and peoples. It has failed to fill the spiritual void reigning over society and affirm the concept that life is simply a means rather than an end in itself. Paradoxically enough, they do have the capacity to observe stars in the sky but remain quite sightless when it comes to detecting a particle of dust in the eye.

In fact, much ink has been spilled on the topic of individual conscientiousness and scruples which has been constantly advocated by many earnest reformers and advisers who are dutiful to their nation and people. Unfortunately, such advocacy had little echo in real life as it failed to move the Islamic nation from confinement to liberty, from humiliation to glory, from egotism to self-effacement, and from dearth to worth. Quite often, awareness is only available when it is too late—if ever it is the case. It is reactive rather than proactive. More often than not, rescue coincides with the disaster itself instead of resulting from the vociferous warnings of counsellors. This confirms the poet's verse:

The Sheikh cites a line of poetry:

(I offered them advice while we were going round the tortuous turning of the district by night, but they only understood its essence the following morning).

O servants of Allah!

Conscientiousness is that inner human feeling which makes individuals monitor their own behaviour. It is a sense of scrupulous self-monitoring that fosters in the individual a psychological predisposition to distinguish between good and evil in speech, action, and thought. It enables one to appreciate what is good and repel what is evil. In essence, Islam is a divinely revealed religion

founded on freedom. This is why it emancipated people from worshipping humans and orientated them to the worship of Allah alone and unrivalled. Islam affirmed that glory is the fruit of faith whereas humiliation and inferiority are strongly associated with unbelief, wickedness, and sinful disobedience.

All such meanings manifest themselves through individual conscientiousness and a sense of ethical awareness to be subsequently extended to the entire Islamic society. Whenever this dynamic sense of ethical awareness is absent from a given society, its members will systematically turn into spiritless bodies. Certain societies might paradoxically promote their members to the status of satanic entities in human disguise.

Each manifestation in social reality of such common issues such as strength vs. weakness, wealth vs. poverty, faith vs. immorality, and justice vs. injustice is inevitably closely connected to the state of people's conscience and their sense of ethical awareness: whether vigilant, lost, or dormant. Nowadays, Muslim societies are suffering from the absence of fully committed conscientiousness and sense of ethical awareness. In the past, when such principle was prevalent in their daily lives, people in the Levant used to say "bless you" to someone who sneezed in the western side of the territory, and when someone sought succour in the north those in the south would answer his cry for help.

In fact, one can but look aghast at what is going on in the life of this nation. Quite surprisingly, even the screams of pain from someone just next to you would remain unheard; his helpless hand gestures to seek urgent assistance would fail to attract the attention of passers-by: *﴿...Verily, it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts which are in the breasts that grow blind﴾* [Al-Ĥajj: 46] .

The nation's conscience will never awaken before its individuals' conscience regains life, for how can the shadow of a body be straight if the body itself is crooked and how can someone with crippled fingers wear a ring? As a rule, the weaker conscience is, the later this sense of conscientiousness and ethical revival will be. It seems as if certain people's conscience had been resistant to change to the extent of sterility and absolute inefficacy.

People can be categorised into different groups depending on the nature of their inner conscience. The first category is endowed with an unmistakably energetic conscience allowing them to recognise and enjoin what is good and reject what is evil. They share their nation's worries, sufferings, and hopes. They relieve people's grief, alleviate their sufferings, and echo their sighs. They are modest with true believers but relentless opponents to criminal tyrants. They implacably ignore human reproaches: *﴿...That is the Grace of Allāh which He bestows on whom He wills. And Allāh is All-Sufficient for His creatures' needs, All-Knower﴾* [Al-Ma'ida: 54]

The second category of people has a dormant conscience bordering on vacuity. A man with a dormant conscience is like a dumb and powerless slave¹ who is a burden on his master; whichever way he directs him, he brings no good. He is only a statistic devoid of action. He is in a death-in-life state lurking in anticipation for some material benefits or deriving personal privileges. He may also

¹ The Sheikh's statement is indirectly quoted from the Holy Quran *﴿And Allāh puts forward (another) example of two men, one of them dumb, who has no power over anything (disbeliever), and he is a burden on his master; whichever way he directs him, he brings no good.﴾* [Al-Nahl: 76]

be tainted with the fear of leaving unsupported and weak offspring behind.² His inner voice echoes the following expression: “I am all for number ONE.” Consequently, this category of people hardly offers help or advice. They behave as though they were created just to eat and drink. These people are required to resuscitate their conscience before it irreversibly joins the dead ones.

As to the third category, these are people characterised by inert conscience. They are dominated by evil and contain little, if any good. They are neither at the forefront nor at the rear. They only share all that is evil and are only noticed enjoining evildoing and proscribing good conduct and noble values. These people are typically tight-fisted. They have forgotten Allah; as a result, Allah has totally ignored their existence and doomed them to oblivion. They are typically liars, cheaters, egotists, slanderers, fault-finders, and going about with calumnies.³

An internal voice betrays their inner thoughts: “I must just rescue myself; after me the deluge! Attack is the best defence strategy.” They are like houseflies targeting bleeding injuries. Their society abhors their existence and constantly seeks protection from their imminent threat. It seems as if they were created just to commit evil acts and have their action scales burdened with sins until their final encounter with Allah, suffering total disfigurement.

So, observe *taqwa* (i.e. fear of violating Allah’s commands)—may Allah bestow His grace on you—and never forget that living conscience is the stimulator of real faith. Its fruit is mutual love, compassion, and empathy. It acts as a catalyst for unity in the entire complementary organism of the nation—as confirmed in the Prophet's (ﷺ) Hadith, “***The case of the believers in their mutual love, compassion, and empathy is similar to that of the (human)body: whenever a single organ suffers from pain, the rest of the body will respond by showing symptoms of sleeplessness and fever.***” (Narrated by Imam Muslim in his *Sahîh* Book).

If each one of us tried himself before his own conscience one would realize that the tree of negligent conscience never bears fruit. Should any of us completely surrender to the dictates of his conscience, whether good or evil, he would feel so intolerably uptight and disturbed about it and his eye will never be able to see the truth the way it should be seen. Right then everyone calling to account will realize that turning a blind eye to accountability to one’s conscience and patronizing it have much more serious consequences than the causes of such failure.

It follows then that every faithful must take the initiative to interrogate his conscience; for a silent conscience is a ‘silent devil’. Likewise, a conscience that speaks only evil is a ‘speaking devil’.

The Islamic *sharia* has come down to us in order to uphold conscience and to prevent it from perishing or withering away, inducing members of the Muslim community to realize the importance of such an undertaking, to guard themselves against the evil of dead or negligent conscience, and to bear in mind that a living and vigilant conscience is their only resort for strength and integration.

² Once again, the Sheikh’s statement is indirectly quoted from the Holy Quran: ﴿And let those (executors and guardians) have the same fear in their minds as they would have for their own, if they had left weak offspring behind. So let them fear Allâh and speak right words.﴾ [Al-Nissâ: 9]

³ The Sheikh’s statement is indirectly quoted from the Holy Quran: ﴿A slanderer, going about with calumnies.﴾ [Al-Qalam: 11]

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: ***“Don't nurse envy against one another! Don't practice Najsh⁴! Don't nurse aversion against one another! Don't be inquisitive about one another and don't outbid one another (with a view to raising the price)! Be fellow-brothers and servants of Allah! A Muslim is the brother of a Muslim: he does not oppress him, nor does he fail him, lie to him, or scorn him. Taqwa (piety) is right here” [and he pointed to his chest three times].*** O Servants of Allah! That is indeed what is meant by ‘living conscience’.

“Taqwa is right here”. Then he says: ***“It is a serious evil for a Muslim that he should look down upon his brother Muslim. All things of a Muslim are inviolable for his brother in faith: his blood, his wealth and his honour.”***

May Allah bestow His blessings, for you and for me, in the *Qur'ān* and *sunnah* and benefit us with the verses, *Dhikr*^o and wisdom therein. I have said what I have said; if it is true it is thanks to Allah, but if it is wrong it is because of me and the accursed Satan. I seek forgiveness from Allah. He is All-Forgiving!

Part Two

Praise be to Allah Alone! May His Peace and *Salat* (Graces, Honours, Blessings, Mercy) be upon the seal of all messengers!

O People!

No true believer would doubt it for a moment that the *ummah*, while being scorched by the flames of conflicts, disasters, aggression and wars that have ravaged everything in their way, is now more than ever in need for true conscience that is clear from all forms of hatred and envy. What the *ummah* really needs are Muslims with compassionate and admonishing conscience willing to overlook their personal and relatively negligible interests and focus on the yet more important and more pressing issues that concern their brothers in faith and community in general. Having said that, we must all realize that once there is no more conscience, egoism and selfishness will take over and the prevalent logic among individuals and communities will be something like: ‘mind your own business’; ‘what for? You won’t be able to make a difference’; ‘what else can you do?’ ‘You’re not entrusted to sponsor, represent or protect so and so.’”

When conscience is no more, one starts hearing statements like ‘leave what’s for Allah to Allah and what’s for Caesar to Caesar’. When conscience is no more, the treacherous are trusted and the truthful are accused of treason; liars are believed and the honest are called liars.

In the absence of conscience lambs change to roaring lions, he-camels to she-camels and turkey vultures to eagles. Seas will derive their waters from wells, the frivolous will speak out and people will entrust their leadership to the ignorant who will then walk and lead others astray.

⁴ Deceiving a purchaser through a third party offering a higher price

^o Remembrance of Allah

When conscience is gone, reproach becomes admonition, backbiting freedom of speech, and slandering exhortation.

When conscience is gone, the oppressor will not refrain from destroying an entire population. He will then proceed to slaughter, blow up, imprison and displace people; they cry out and call out for help, but in vain.

When conscience is no more, tyranny gets the upper hand, justice wanes, stinginess prevails, exhortation goes scarce, pests and punishments are poured down, buildings are destroyed block by block, with no chance for restoration.

Finally, when conscience goes feelings go with it and it matters, no more, who is up and who is down. People would then prefer to be buried under the ground rather than remain on it.

On the authority of Abu Huraira, may Allah be pleased with him, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: ***“The Last Hour would not come until a person would pass by a grave of another person and he would roll over it saying: I wish it had been my abode; not out of religious belief but because of this calamity.*** [Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim]

*There is no good in this life and this living
When the key to conscience is lost and gone
Don't you see that the solid grains are turning
Into flour under the effect of the grinding stone*

Ask Allah –may He have mercy on you– to send His *Salat* (Graces, Honours and Mercy) and Peace on the best creature of Allah and the purest of mankind, Muhammad ibn `AbdAllāh, who is given *al-Hawdh* (the sacred basin) and is vested with intercession; for Allah sent His *Salat* (Graces, Honours and Mercy) and Peace on him and then ordered His angels, that are praising His sanctity, to do likewise and called out to you, O believers, to ask Him to send His *Salat* (Graces, Honours and Mercy) and Peace on him. Allah the Almighty (ﷻ) says: ***“Allâh sends His Salât (Graces, Honours, Blessings, Mercy) on the Prophet (Muhammadﷺ), and also His angels (ask Allâh to bless and forgive him). O you who believe! Send your Salât[1] on (ask Allâh to bless) him (Muhammad ﷺ), and (you should) greet (salute) him with the Islâmîc way of greeting (salutation i.e. As-Salâmu ‘Alaikum).”*** [AlAhzab: 56]. The Prophet (p) said: ***“He who offers me a Salat, Allah will offer him ten such Salats as a reward”***.

O Allah! Send Your *Salat* (Graces, Honours and Mercy), Peace and Blessing upon Your Servant and Messenger, Muhammad! O Allah! Be pleased with the four Caliphs, Abu Bakr, Omar, Othman and Ali, all of his Companions, on the *tab'in* and those who righteously followed them till the Day of Judgment. O Allah! Be also pleased with us all, along with them, by Your Pardon and Generosity, O You, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate!

O Allah! Grant glory to Islam and Muslims, and fail polytheism and polytheists (who associate O Allah! Grant glory to Your religion, Your Book and the *Sunnah* of Your !partners with You) Prophet, and Your believing servants!

O Allah! Relieve the distressed among Muslims, alleviate their anguish, pay off the debts of those indebted, and cure our patients and theirs, with Your Mercy, O You, Most Merciful!

O Allah! Grant our souls piety, and purify them, You are the best Who Purifies them, You are their Guardian and Master! With Your Mercy, You, the Most merciful!

O Allah! Grant us safety in our homelands, and set right our *Imams* and Guardians. O Allah! Make our leadership from among those who fear You, guard *taqwa* and seek Your satisfaction, O Lord of the Worlds!

O Allah! Guide our leader to say and do whatever You love and please, O You, the Living, the Everlasting! O Allah! Set right his retinue, O You, the Lord of Majesty and Honour!

O Allah! Be on the side of our brothers who are oppressed and defenseless in their religion, wherever they may be! O Allah! Grant them victory against Your enemy and theirs; O Allah! Grant them victory sooner rather than later, You, The Lord of Majesty and Honour! O Allah! Grant them victory in Palestine, Syria, Burma, and everywhere, You, The Lord of Majesty and Honour; the Lord of the Worlds!

O Allah! Make it a speedy victory and relief for them! O Allah! Make it a crowning victory, O You, the Living, the Everlasting!

O Lord! You are Allah, and there is no deity worthy of worship but You! You are the Self-sufficient while we (humans) are destitute! Do send down rain on us and save us from despair! O Allah! Send down rain on us and save us from despair! O Allah! Send down rain on us and save us from despair! O Allah! We beseech You not to make the worst of our deeds a reason for depriving us of the best of Your Grace! You, the Lord of Majesty and Honour!

O Allah! We are but creatures of Yours. We implore You not to make our sins stand between us and Your grace, O You, the Living, the Everlasting, the Lord of the Worlds!

﴿... Our Lord! Give us in this world that which is good and in the Hereafter that which is good, and save us from the torment of the Fire!﴾ [Al-Baqarah: 201]

Glorified be our Lord, the Lord of Honor and Power! You are free from what they wrongly attribute unto You! May peace be upon all the Messengers! And the last of our supplications is “praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds!”