Introducing SAKEENAH

By Shaykh Abdallah Adhami

SAKEENAH is a not-for-profit, independent educational foundation based in New York City. It aims to devote the sacred Islamic sciences, along with the various disciplines of human knowledge, to the enrichment of people's lived reality, and toward a communal definition of Islam in the Western experience. Our name is inspired by the Arabic word for "tranquility," a gift we hope we will be blessed to exude, and inspire in others through our journey.

Despite global challenges to freedom, and an unprecedented manipulation of fear, there is still much goodness and opportunity to do good everywhere. As we cherish the freedoms we still enjoy in America, it behooves us to emphasize the importance of the freedom of thought—before that of speech. This is so that what we say is ennobling to ourselves, enriching to our neighbors, intelligible to our age—and hence, a vehicle toward more *sakeenah*. Our narrative tradition warns that there are times when "seeking knowledge is better than action," [lit., just "doing"]—particularly at a time "when jurists are few, and orators are many; when many have questions, and very few have answers. At that time, learning is better than action."[1] In a prescient critique, René Guénon (1945) highlighted the "exaltation of action over knowledge," as one of the major crises of our modern world.[2]

What is intelligible for an era is not by scholars alone determined. Religious scholars can not provide the answers to everything all by themselves. Unfortunately, all too often, people expect the "*sheikh*" (or "*imam*") to have far more authority than he can possibly have the credential for. He may well be eloquent and entertaining as an orator, but the "*sheikh*" can rarely also be an authority on politics, 'and' biomedical ethics, 'and' music—and 'all' at the same time—without proper qualifications. It is indeed an onerous burden to advise the "community" on political strategy, or to tell them how they should educate their children. We need to exert ourselves to raise the barometer of what it means to be "servants of knowledge"—sacred and worldly—to be closer to the ideal and serious trust that our titles imply. To acknowledge the gift inherent in the rich diversity of people and the need for their contribution is a Quranic challenge.[3] The Prophet Muhammad, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, stressed the sanctity of [worldly] specialty,[4] and made professional competence an act of devotion to God.[5]

The service of sacred knowledge needs to be informed by the critical input of every domain of human endeavor. "The aim of all intellectual pursuits, including science, philosophy and art is to seek unity in the midst of diversity; order in the midst of complexity. Their ultimate task is to fit the multifarious elements into some kind of compact, cohesive, apprehensible scheme."[6] Sadly, many of our best minds, who have a wellspring of insight for our collective betterment, have been effectively alienated from our institutions and mosques. This is an egregious travesty of trust that we must candidly exert our better selves to rectify.

What will ultimately testify to the level of our commitment and service to others is the conviction of our constituents—not what is claimed from the pulpits, or ornamented in mosque brochures. People are all witnesses upon one another in our small global village. Our beloved Messenger, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, said: "You are all witnesses for God on earth."[7] So, "If your neighbors say that you have done well, then you have. If your neighbors say

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[1] Imam Malik (93-179 h), *Muwatta`*, (417) 1:173. Cf. *Musnad*, 5:155, and [34th] of *Shu'ab al-Iman*, 4:258.

[2] René Guénon (1886-1951), *The Crisis of the Modern World* (New York: Sophia Perinnis, 2004).

[3] God willing, we will devote an entire article to this important concept.

[4] "If affairs are relegated to the inept, trust is squandered." Imam Bukhari (194-256 h), *Sahih*, (59) 1:21.

[5] "God loves that when you endeavor upon a task that you perfect it," [*yutiqinahu* f. *itqan*] "perfection." *Musnad Abi Ya'la*, 7:349, and *Shu'ab al-Iman*, 4:334. A variant narrative has: [*yuhkimahu* f. *ihkam*] "precision."

[6] D. E. Berlyne, *Aesthetics and Psychobiology* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1971), 296.

[7] Imam Bukhari, *Sahih*, (1367) 2:97, and *Sahih Muslim*, (949), in *Ikmal al-Mu'lim*, 3:409–both in *kitab al-jana`iz*.

that you have transgressed, then you have."[8] For, "there is no good in the one who is neither affable, [or devoted to others] nor inspires the same [toward himself] from others."[9] Affinity in the hearts of people can not be bought—'not for all the gold in the world.'[10]

The abundant repertoire of talent within our "community" needs the creative space and freedom to experiment, to learn and grow. People must be granted true ownership of their own curricular development—across every specialty—so that we are closer to the ideal of "mutual counsel" that the Quran exhorts us to be for one another. So that the *collective* professional, educational and artistic endeavor, across the entire "community," can set an admirable standard of excellence that will enhance Islamic professional and aesthetic sensibility across all human endeavors. For Muslims, even the ordinary and ephemeral become daily acts of devotion to God—when infused with a sense of sanctity and responsibility.

Our goal is to devote knowledge to enrich this ephemeral reality, through [specialty-focused] educational seminars, annotated articles, online forums, and cooperative ventures with other organizations. This is to show how divine revelation can be used to enable humanity to live in harmony within the apparent limitations of their world. Moreover, we have spent the last two decades building a community, professional, and personal-development mentoring base. This is to provide people with the tools they need to realize that even the individual, concerned Muslims, (eloquent, poised and well-prepared), can begin to see themselves as a new kind of ambassador for justice, peace and growth in their own neighborhoods.

Our effort is to an already ongoing process. We must recognize and highlight the contributions of those who have assiduously exerted themselves on this long road before us. Without them, without the earth that they had prepared, without the seeds they had planted, none of us would be able to stand and to do what we are able to do today.

God willing, SAKEENAH will be but one instrument to navigate this exciting terrain. Being an independent vehicle means that we are communal property—a resource for individuals and organizations alike—that can mediate between scholar and activist; home and street; youth and elder; woman and man. We have difficult choices and demanding trusts ahead of us. Yet, all about us, are also infinite creative possibilities and wondrous potential for collective transcendence. May we all be blessed to remain steadfast, truthful and disciplined enough to realize them.

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[8] Imam Ahmad, *Musnad*, 1:402.
[9] Ibid., 2:400 and 5:334, and [53rd] of *Shu'ab al-Iman*, 6:117.
[10] Cf. *The Noble Quran*, (§- *anfal*) 8:63.

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