

The Ramadan Address of Habib Ali al-Jifri



Translated by: Hasan Sidky and Christopher 'Khalil' Moore

Edited by: Christopher 'Khalil' Moore

The following is a newly updated edition of the address given by Habib Ali al-Jifri to students of the West in the blessed city of Tarim (located in the Hadramawt Valley of Yemen). The original address was given during the last ten days of the sacred month of Ramadan 2004.

All praise belongs to God, for the blessing of gathering us upon the service of His Deen and the seeking of His pleasure. I bear witness that there is nothing worthy of worship except God—a witnessing through which God makes firm the light of certainty in our hearts. I also bear witness that our Master Muhammad is His slave and Messenger—a witnessing through which we are tied to his presence, in a way that will prepare us for his service and victory. May God’s peace and blessings be upon him, his family, companions, and all those who follow them in righteousness until the last day.

To proceed (*wa ba’d*):

I sincerely thank God, for both you and myself, that He has blessed us to reach this sacred month and that He has allowed us to partake in the last ten days of it, while we are upon the belief of “*La ilaha illa-God, Muhammadun Rasul-God*”.

Perhaps you are among those who taste this blessing the most, because there are from among you those who were blessed with Islam after having experienced what it means to be without this faith. And there are among you those who grew up in the company of those who don’t know Islam. Therefore, since God has allowed you to taste Islam (after not knowing it) it is necessary that when you come to the lands of the Muslims, and find that those who are around you are

living without this taste of Islam, then you should not let your faith become “habitual”, as it has become for many of them.

This is why it is incumbent upon you to be a means towards reminding them of the blessings of Islam—for they have been afflicted with the disease of becoming familiar with, and complacent towards, these blessings. As the Arabs say, “Familiarity is blessing’s disease.” Thus it is obligatory that you remind yourself of this each and every day, saying, “All praise is due to God for the blessing of Islam, and sufficient is it as a blessing.”

The second issue pertains to the approach of the last ten days of this blessed month of Ramadan; the days in which your Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, used to roll up his sleeves, worship by night, and wake up his family for prayer. It is absolutely necessary that you increase your aspiration to draw nearer to God in these last ten days, because God, the Mighty, the Sublime, has hidden in these days some of His special divine gifts, which necessitates your desire for God to bless you with a great portion of these gifts. If you are sincere in drawing closer to your Lord, you will be able to reap the benefits of these final days of Ramadan until the next year, as well as the rest of your life.

Increase your daily recitation of the Qur’an, pondering its meanings. However, if you are not able to ponder its meanings—due to a linguistic deficiency—ponder the essential meaning: the magnificence of being able to recite the words of your Lord. For indeed, if you approach the Qur’an in this manner and from this doorway, subtle meanings will become apparent to you; meanings that even scholars of the Arabic language, even those who profess excellence in it, have been deprived of due to the fact that they have not approached the Qur’an from this blessed doorway. In your recitation of the Qur’an, you should seek out what it means to be in the company of your great Lord. And if your hearts get acquainted with and taste this meaning, then the world that encompasses you will no longer have an impact on your hearts, rather, you will be of those who impact the world.

It is human nature to esteem and honor those who sit in the company of kings and rulers. It is also the nature of this world, nay, the whole of existence, whether it perceives it or not, to be naturally disposed and compelled to esteem and honor those deeply attached to being in the company of their Creator. The meaning of “esteem” here is to benefit from and through them. This is the type of relationship that we must now establish between this world and ourselves, in preparation for the affair that is dawning upon the *Ummah* (the Muslim community).

We are people with a mission in this existence. We weren’t created in vain. Nor were we blessed with Islam in vain. Nor have we been put in touch with the great scholars in vain. Nor were you brought to this illustrious land (Tarim, Yemen) that has in it a great secret from amongst the secrets of inheritance from the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, in vain. Nor were you tied to the connected chain leading back to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, in serving the *Ummah*, in vain. Rather, God has given all this to you and has prepared all this for you so that you may be prepared to take on the mission that is approaching you in this world.

When people hear talk about “a mission that is approaching” the minds become distracted by thinking only about the outward affairs that are taking place around us now. This is not what is intended. It is necessary that the affairs that now transpire in the world (those that bring happiness, those that bring sadness, the painful and difficult matters) should have no place of magnitude in your hearts. It is inappropriate for those who have been chosen by God for the rectification of the world, to praise and magnify the world (*‘alam*), rather, their magnification and esteem should be directed to the Omniscient (Al-‘Aleem) Knower (Al-‘Alim), the Mighty and Sublime.

We feel pain for what has befallen the *Ummah*, we beg God, we weep to God, we turn to God, we repent to God, and we seek His forgiveness, in order that we aren't held accountable for being a cause of what has befallen them. We beg God in our supplications that He rectifies the *Ummah*, at the same time we struggle in using the means that assist in this rectification by using what God has given us. With this in mind, we must never be distracted from the essence of our mission.

You must constantly remember that there is a purpose behind your creation: “*And We have not created the Jinn and Mankind except that they should worship Me.*” God created us solely for His worship. In the Arabic language, if a negation (“*And We have not created...*”) is followed by an exception (“*...except that they should worship Me*”), it is one of the strongest ways of affirming and restricting (*hasr*) something. So God, the Mighty and Sublime, affirms that the sole purpose of our creation is to worship Him. This is why there should be no greater mission in our existence than this mission. This is the foundation...

This foundation branches off into our interaction with the creation surrounding us. “Our Lord! You created us to worship You alone... But You haven't created each one of us in a separate place to worship you, rather, You have surrounded us with Your creation. What is the reason behind this, our Lord?” God, the Almighty, said, “*I am placing on the earth a vicegerent (khalifah).*” So our goal on this earth is to establish what God wanted to be established on this earth. And from among this is seeking knowledge, calling to God, and *jihad* for the sake of God.

Please note that *jihad* is not to be understood as “fighting,” for fighting is only one manifestation of the physical form of *jihad*. This word comes from the Arabic root word “*al-jahd*,” which simply means exertion or struggle. This entails that one fully exert themselves and struggle to serve God, as well as to perfect one's interaction with others. This is the general and comprehensive meaning of *jihad*, which we must understand. We must also recognize that fighting is only one of its manifestations and only one of its many meanings.

All of our interactions with the creation, from seeking knowledge, to calling to God, to *jihad* in the way of God, are but branches originating from the foundation, which is establishing the worship of God. Hence, this is why it is of the utmost importance that as we do these things they don't preoccupy us and cause us to forget the purpose for which they were established. The scholars of the heart say that it is from the greatest obstacles that befall a person traveling to God that his means become his goals.

Seeking Sacred Knowledge

From amongst the means to the goal is seeking sacred knowledge. You are now in this state. The purpose behind seeking knowledge should be to establish the worship of God. Therefore, your esteem (*ta'zeem*) for the seeking of knowledge is commensurate with establishing the worship of God.

This esteem (*ta'zeem*) brings forth many benefits:

- Having high *adab* (courtesy and moral character) in seeking knowledge.
- Honoring your time, so that not one moment is spent except in what you came here for.
- That you fully understand what you are being taught, while having full confidence in those teaching you. (I say this because a student of knowledge may become confused as to what he is really seeking during his initial quest for knowledge).

- That you preserve, through your knowledge, those elements that will protect the “light” of knowledge for you. This is done primarily by guarding your heart and limbs from falling into the disobedience of God.
- Quickly acting upon that which you are taught.
- That you esteem all that is associated with knowledge; your books, the authors of those books, your teachers who are teaching with a connected chain of transmission back to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), the place that you study in, and even the clothes that you wear during study.

Having esteem and respect for what was mentioned will have a great impact on your actual benefit from the realities of knowledge. Don't be preoccupied with the outward manifestations of knowledge, in exclusion to the inner-reality of knowledge. At the same time, you should do your utmost to perfect the outward seeking of knowledge and its sciences.

Calling to God (*Da'wah*)

The best way to obtain the real rank of “calling to God” is by not specifying a time for *da'wah*, by saying, “Now I will begin making *da'wah*,” or “Now I will stop doing *da'wah*.” Your calling to God began the moment you said, “I bear witness that there is nothing worthy of worship except God, and I bear witness that our master Muhammad is His slave and Messenger.” The end of your outward calling to God is when your soul leaves your body. Therefore, the time for *da'wah* is from the first time you say the *Shahadah* (the testimony of faith), to the last moment you can say it. The only difference is that you will utilize different means and methods in every phase that you move through.

The phase that you are in right now (the actual seeking of knowledge, acting upon this knowledge, and rectifying your character and inner state) is *da'wah*. Not one week should pass by except that you weep to God, either by night or by day, hoping that He alleviates the *Ummah* of what has befallen them, and that He guides them back to the best of paths. You must establish amongst yourselves the prophetic way of consultation and advice. You must train yourselves so that it is not heavy on your hearts to advise your brother with gentleness and love, if he needs advise and guidance. You should also train yourselves how to readily accept advice from others without the slightest agitation in your hearts, if you are mistaken. Indeed, finding it difficult to give advice and to accept advice from others is a sign that there is a deficiency in your sincerity in seeking knowledge and drawing closer to God.

You must establish with every type of person around you a relationship based on *da'wah*, regardless whether he is the salesman in the market, the taxi driver on the street, the janitor of the building, or the one who sits next to you in the mosque. Your concern for calling them to God must be greater than your desire to receive any benefit from them. Then, if the time comes for you go back to your respective countries, or if you go out for *da'wah* in the local villages (here in Yemen), the meanings and methods of *da'wah* will open ever wider for you. However, the one who is not calling to God in this phase will never be a true caller to God in the next phase. If the heart is able to delay the concern for *da'wah* now, then the heart is empty from the reality of *da'wah* in the first place. The reality of *da'wah* is deep heartfelt concern, and this concern is a matter of the heart, and actions of the heart can never be delayed.

It is possible to delay buying a piece of clothing, or reading a book, or to delay having lunch until dinner time, or to delay the Dhuhr payer until 'Asr time (for the traveler). The outward affairs of the world (like buying and selling) and the afterlife (such as prayer) can be delayed under certain

circumstances. However, the acts of the heart, whether they are worldly or of the afterlife, can never be delayed. It is not possible for a person who loves someone, to say, "I will delay my love for you." Likewise, *da'wah* is a deep concern, and is an act of the heart. So if you are able to delay the *da'wah*, then you were capable of delaying this deep concern, and if you are able to delay this, then you are not a true person of *da'wah*, at best, you only have the outward form of a *da'i* (a person calls to God).

From amongst the innovations of the Arabs (mainly in pre-Islamic times) was that if a person died, the women of the household would be heard wailing, lamenting, and mourning. If the women of the household were few in number, other women would be hired to assist them in the wailing and lamenting (*nawwahah*, in Arabic). One time, three of these women were hired and brought to the house of the deceased. When they arrived they began their wailing and crying, and the people of the house told them to delay their wailing until the funeral procession passed in front of their house. So when the funeral procession passed by they were told to begin. They were able to do this because they were merely hired, but the mother of the one who passed away could never be told to delay her lamenting and crying, because her state of sorry began the moment her son passed away. This is why the Arabs say, "The one hired to wail and lament is not like the one whose only son perished in her lap." Hence, it is necessary that the one calling to God should have the utmost concern, and should cry about the Deen more intensely than the mother whose only child perished in her lap. Without this state, you will never be a true *da'i* (caller to God).

Our societies (in the East), and the communities of the Muslims in the West, are not lacking people who can give speeches and admonitions. In every mosque you will find those who can give the Friday sermon and public speeches, yet, we do not find the desired results. The societies in question are not transformed through these admonitions and speeches because most of these speeches are like the *nawwahah* (lamentation of the hired women), and very, very few in the *Ummah* can speak like the mother whose only son perished in her lap. So, do not accept delaying the *da'wah*. This does not mean that you should neglect your pursuit of sacred knowledge; rather, make your pursuit a part of your *da'wah*.

Jihad and the Middle Way

Anyone who claims that they want to serve the Deen yet is not conscious of the concept of 'jihad in the way of God', either has no understanding, or they are not a truthful and sincere person. As for the issue of jihad itself, you should be aware that people have gone to two extremes, both of which are mistaken. One group thinks that jihad means it is necessary to view all non-Muslims as those against whom we must raise the sword or the rifle to kill. The other group thinks that the concept of jihad entails being gentle and affectionate to all (regardless of circumstances and context), and by doing so we would be "struggling" (i.e. making "jihad") with them to bring them back to God and this way of life (Deen). Obviously, both groups have fallen into error. Most assuredly, we are not a people whose mission it is to eliminate the non-Muslims, but at the same time we are also not a people who love the non-Muslims unrestrictedly. When it is time for fighting (just as any nation must do so), we only fight those whom, by doing so, we would be serving God alone (and not our passions or personal agendas).

One day, Sayyiduna Ali (may God honor his face) was fighting an opponent in a fierce battle. During the battle Sayyiduna Ali overcame him and raised his sword to kill him. As soon as his enemy knew that he was going to be killed he spat in Sayyiduna Ali's face. At that instance, Sayyiduna Ali immediately left him and went on his way. He was later asked, "Why did you leave him when God clearly gave you power over him?!" Sayyiduna Ali replied, "I was fighting him for the sake of God, but when he spat in my face I feared that if I killed him it would have been out of spite and revenge."

From this we understand that it is obligatory that we differentiate between fighting people who are our own personal enemies and others whom we fight because they are the enemies of God. If a believer is forced to fight someone, he fights him not because this person hates him, because this person is conspiring against him, because this person wants to overcome him, rather, he fights him only because: 1.) he is an enemy to God, 2.) it is a sanctioned time for fighting, and 3.) the permission from God has been given (in the sacred law).

On the other hand, we have those who say, “We must love the non-Muslims, be kind to them, and have esteem for them. They are nice people and they have a lot of good qualities.” People who say this have mixed truth with falsehood and gone astray, just as those who say they want to kill all non-Muslims, without distinction and proper understanding.

It is impossible for a true believer to unrestrictedly love a disbeliever: “*You will not find people who believe in God and the Last Day having love for anyone who opposes God and His Messenger*” (Qur’an 58-21). You must realize though that we do love goodness for them. There is a clear difference between loving them and loving goodness for them. If you say you love them then you are claiming that you love their actual essence (*thaat*), that entity which you interact with, yet, the true believer doesn’t truly love any essence except the essence of God (*Thaatullah*), the Mighty and Majestic. If you love the good qualities that they possess, desire that they are saved from the fire, wish that they use these qualities in the service of God—all the while looking at them with the eye of mercy—then in this case you have understood how to properly interact with them. You do this because you know that this is what pleases God.

So we view all the disbelievers as being, firstly, the creation of God. And as Muslims, we love God’s creation. Therefore, we do not love the actual disbeliever; rather, we love God’s creation, which he/she is. We view them as being a means for our spiritual transaction with God, a means for our drawing nearer to the Divine. The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “For God to guide one person through you is greater than the whole world and all that is in it.”

We interact with them according to this balanced perspective, upon the foundation of having mercy for them, compassion for them, and a desire to try to save them from the fire. This is the only way we should view our interaction with them. We do not esteem the influential one amongst them because he can benefit us in our *da’wah* (while remaining a disbeliever), nor are we generous with the needy amongst them because we love them in themselves, rather, we deal with the influential, the poor, the sick, and the young amongst them with mercy, and through mercy, because that is the way that God loves.

We should talk with them in ways that they can understand, using means that they are familiar with (as long as it is not prohibited in the sacred law). This is not because those means are the only means, but rather, because they are the means that God loves. Furthermore, if there comes a time in which it is more pleasing to God for us to use another type of means, then we will not hesitate for even a second to abandon the old methods and to use new ones. The principle here is that we are open and inclusive to everyone, merciful with everyone, loving and wanting goodness for everyone, from societies to leaders, from Muslims to non-Muslims. And if a situation arises that calls upon us to deal with firmness, even if it reached the level of physical confrontation, then we will not allow our previous ways of mercy and gentleness to delay that which God has commanded.

One of the sons of Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, may God be pleased with him, did not become a Muslim during the Meccan period, and, as you know, the affection of a father for his son is much greater than the affection of a son for his father. In Mecca, Sayyiduna Abu Bakr tried to convince his son as to the veracity of Islam with love and gentleness. He used the best and loftiest means to try to bring him into the faith, yet God had not decreed for him to become a Muslim just yet. Sayyiduna

Abu Bakr made Hijrah and later went to fight in the battle of Badr. This son of his also went out on the day of Badr, yet he was with the army of the enemies. This son was trying his best to avoid his father during the battle. Later, when his son accepted Islam, he said to his father, “Oh my father, on the day of Badr I was avoiding you so we wouldn’t have to fight.” Sayyiduna Abu Bakr replied to him, “As for me, if I met you on that day I would have fought you till the end.”

What is the reason behind this? This delicate point is necessary for us to understand. The action of the son wasn’t based on servitude to God, but rather, was based on compassion (for his father) and his participation in the battle was only for glory, honor, and tribal goals, thus, this was how he acted. His actions were enslaved to his emotions. On the other hand, the actions of Sayyiduna Abu Bakr (in Mecca) and his love and compassion were not for himself, but for the sake of his Lord. So when the time came that he had to serve God by fighting against his son, he didn’t waiver, even if it meant his own son’s death. We are in need of this criterion in establishing the correct concept of jihad.

Therefore, jihad is to establish the means of guidance and salvation, not just physical confrontation. While physical confrontation does occur in a few cases, the goal behind it is to save others from the oppression of those who are preventing the light of guidance from spreading. We do not fight out of revenge and spite. The Muslim does not fight because someone is his or her personal enemy, because they are conspiring against one, or because they have slaughtered one’s fellow Muslims. The Muslim only fights because a barrier has been erected between guidance and those whom it should reach. Again, the Muslim does not fight out of revenge and only because the enemy has killed other Muslims. Carefully consider what is being said here!

The Prophet, may the peace and blessings of God be upon him—when he entered Mecca on the great day of conquest—didn’t avenge for the killings of the Muslims on the day of Uhud, even though God had clearly given him power over them on that day. These disbelievers in Mecca were the very ones who killed his dearest companions, even members of his own family! These were the same people who barred the guidance from reaching others. These were the same people who ripped open the chest and stomach of Sayyiduna Hamza (who was the uncle of the Blessed Prophet, peace be upon him). These were the same people who ate from the liver of Sayyiduna Hamza, may God be blessed with him. Even more amazing than that is the fact that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, welcomed those who actually conspired to kill Hamza (Hind and Wahshi) into the faith when they declared their acceptance of it.

If the purpose of fighting against the disbelievers was merely to avenge for spilt blood then it would have been befitting for the Prophet, peace be upon him, to command the killing of Wahshi and Hind right when he entered Mecca. But the issue with the Muslims is not one of revenge; it is the issue of guidance and the spreading of its light. The true Muslim is the “letter of divine guidance” sent to humanity (*al-Muslim bareed hidayat-illah ila al-khalq*). When the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, saw that there was hope in them being guided he said, “Go, for verily you are free.” And this is how our interaction must be. The day I meet with an enemy soldier who actually killed Muslims—and I sense that he may want guidance—I will treat him with great mercy. We must understand things in this way. Our ultimate and primary mission in jihad is guidance, even though we might be physically fighting!

All this is clearly understood in the beautiful story where our Blessed Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him, got upset with our master Usamah ibn Zaid—the beloved, and the son of the beloved (he was named this because the Prophet, peace be upon him, loved him greatly). One day, Usamah was out on the battlefield engaged with the enemy. During the heat of the battle one of the enemies slipped and fell, so Usamah lifted his sword to strike him. At that moment, the enemy shouted out “*La ilaha illa God, Muhammad Rasul-lullah*,” [There is no deity but God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God] yet, Usamah struck and killed the man anyways. When the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, got word of this he censured Usamah, with anger

visible on his face, saying, “Did you kill him after he said that!?” Usamah replied, “Oh Messenger of God, he only said it out of fear of the sword.” But the Prophet quickly replied, “Did you look into his heart, oh Usamah!?”

This very man that Usamah killed may have killed many Muslims on that day, and this incident even occurred in the midst of a battle in which this man was still actively fighting. Yet, when he said the testimony of faith, even if it was in hypocrisy, Usamah didn't refrain himself and he killed him. This is why the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, became very upset. The Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, continued to blame Usamah about what he did for the rest of the day, so much so Usamah said, “I wish that I became a Muslim after this day” (meaning that he wished that the event never even happened and that he could have a fresh start in Islam).

This incident is not mentioned to put blame on Sayyiduna Usamah, may God be pleased with him; rather, there is an important principle that we must understand here. The mishaps of the individual companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, are looked at as a further perfection in the society of the companions. This is so because the goal behind the community of the companions is that we may emulate them, so if no mishaps occurred by individual companions, then we would not know how to deal with a person who falls into error in our time and the times to come. Therefore, the mishap of one of the companions is, in reality, perfection on the societal level. This shows us the realities of what it truly means to learn.

In the aforementioned incident, the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, made firm in our hearts the understanding that even while fighting, our goal is their guidance. So if the enemy shows the signs of being guided, then the fighting between them and us ceases, even if it was an outward form without any true reality. That is why the meaning of the statement, “Did you kill him after he said it, oh Usamah!?” is that we should not let our drive to fight blind us from the real cause of fighting: their guidance.

This is why they mention about our master Al-Hussein, the son of Ali (may God be pleased with them both), when his army met the army of the mistaken and fugitive Muslims who wanted to kill him, he looked at them and began to weep. The number of Al-Hussein's men, including the women (non-combatants), did not exceed 80, while the number of the opposition was greater than 3,000. Remember, Al-Hussein is the son of the daughter of the Messenger of God, peace and blessing be upon him, the beautiful scent of the Messenger (*rayhanat Rasulillah*, a title given to him by the Messenger himself, peace be upon him), the master of the youth of paradise, the one for whom the Messenger made supplication, saying, “Oh God, love the one who loves him (Al-Hussein).”

The army had risen against Al-Hussein after pledging allegiance to him. They gathered 17,000 signatures from the people of their land and called Al-Hussein out to them saying “come and lead us to goodness.” When he went to them they met him with an army of 3,000 men ready to kill him, most of them being from amongst those who actually signed the allegiance. These were people who wanted to commit one of the greatest crimes on the face of the earth: killing a member of the family of the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him!

As Al-Hussein stood looking at his deceptive opponents he began to weep. His sister, Zaynab, saw him weeping, and she asked, “What makes you weep, Oh Hussein? Are you afraid of death? Indeed, you will join your martyred brother Al-Hasan, your martyred father Ali, your mother Fatima, and your grandfather the Messenger of God!” Al-Hussein turned to her and said “Woe to you, Oh Zaynab! Al-Hussein is not one to be afraid of death!” “Then what is this that I see upon your face?” she asked. He replied, “Oh Zaynab, I looked at these men who were treacherous to the covenant that we made with God, and I see that they will kill me and enter the fire, as they have no right to do so, and I wish that they will go to paradise instead.”

This is the meaning that is incumbent upon you to understand concerning jihad. If you understand this while removing from your hearts the delusional power of “physical means,” and “people of means” (*ahlul-asbab*), while adding to this the realities of *da'wah* and seeking sacred knowledge, and you take these as means to bring to reality the foundational purpose of your creation—your worship of God—you will be from amongst those chosen and elevated by God in this age that we live in. This is the mission that you came for, if you but understood. This is what you must ask God for in these days that end Ramadan, and for the rest of your lives.