



Assalamu Alaikum

Dear Students,

I hope this letter reaches you with the best of health and Iman. Just sending a reflection.

I want to speak about the respect we need to hold for “space,” but first we must explore some fundamentals. There are four foundational sacred spaces in our experience. In this note, we will speak of one of the four.

The first of the sacred spaces is the human heart itself. It is a space through which Divine Light, reaches us, and beams through us as Light upon Light.

In our Tradition, all of creation is precious. All creation has the capacity to receive this Divine Light. It is not that there are good and bad creations. Rather, all are in a hierarchy of goodness. At the bottom we would find the most wretched, including the accursed devil, being one who received, understood, and rejected connection with God.

The most precious of all creations is the human being, regardless of creed. The most precious of all human beings are the great recipients of Divine Light, the Prophets, may peace be upon them. The most precious of all the Prophets is the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him. We are taught, that when he was in a room, he was the most radiant of everyone.

The point to take from this outline is that each person you ever meet is a person of such value that all the universe cannot match up. In both Qur’anic and Biblical Traditions, it is such a catastrophe when a human life is taken, that it cannot be measured; it is as though all humanity is taken.


A problem of modernity, however, is that we often reduce people to their mechanical functions in our lives. One person might be your bus driver; that is the function this person holds in your life and nothing more. Another person might be the student who sits in front of you. Another person might be the cashier in the food shop. I mentioned in a previous letter that every person you ever meet is a person with a story, full of hopes, dreams, joys, and pains.

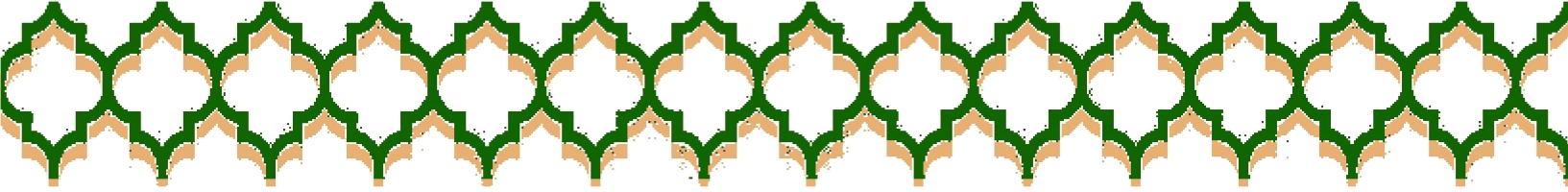
A problem of the appetite, however, is that we often reduce people to what they can do for us. If someone seems to have more ability, power, and wealth, we might grant them attention, hoping they will endow us with some benefits. In the meantime, we might ignore another person who has none of the above. Think about it. Who would you rather visit: someone home-blessed with a palace or someone homeless, with a single change of tattered clothing?

In devaluing others, it is not only an insult to them, but also to the Divine. If the Divine has endowed a person with such immeasurable value, and we ignore it, what are we then saying to the Divine?

Further, the deeper problem of modernity, when combined with the appetites, is that ours has become an era of bloodshed. Our society, the largest of consumers on the planet, draw the most blood. The deceased become not even a function, not even names, but brief statistics. That is their function in our lives: to fulfill soon-to-be-forgotten statistics, in our collective process of exploiting something they might possess.

Sometimes we hope to meet celebrities because we tend to believe that they have something





special about them that they can share with us. Because of some of the work I do or have done, I've been privileged to spend time with some of the most famous and/or most wealthy. I can't say that they have any special powers; scholars seem to have far more abilities. One thing they do seem to consistently have is diligence: they work really hard. I've definitely learned from the work ethics of such people. But frankly, I'd usually rather spend time with my daughters; it is far more enjoyable and valuable to me.

When you give someone a loan of cash, you put yourself in a position of vulnerability because you might later need it. You are entrusting them to return it. But, when you share something about yourself with someone, it's definitely a trust and you are definitely vulnerable if they share it with someone else. Yet, it cannot be returned. It's as though you have deposited a piece of your heart in someone else. A reason I do this work in serving people, is the profound treasure I feel I've been given when someone -- including an undergrad -- shares something precious with me about him or herself; that's worth more than a bag of gold. That's a bond. Through that bond, you are mutually sharing sacred space.

I hope to share such sacred space with each of you. This means that not only is the stranger in some distant corner of the globe a person of immense value, not only is the shopkeeper of a store you frequent of immense value, but you yourself most definitely are. Don't sell yourself short. Ever.

We will speak about the other three sacred spaces -- the mosque, the moment, and the supreme name of the Supreme Being -- subsequently, Insha Allah. For now, try to get to know someone.

And God knows best.

May Allah bless you.

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