

Speech of
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Winner of the 1995 King Faisal International Prize
For Service to Islam

Your Royal Highness Prince Sultan Ibn Abd Al-Aziz,
Your Royal Highnesses,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,

Praise be to Allah, and may peace and blessing be upon the Prophet Muhammad.

Allah has created man and granted him inheritance of the land in order to populate it for the purpose of worshipping, learning, and performing righteous deeds. He has sent messengers to all mankind, a messenger for each nation, to save the people and disassociate them from evil. With the emergence of Islam, the Seal of the Messages, an unmistakable code for the reform of all mankind has been instituted. This code has been revealed in the first chapter of the Holy Qur'an, and even in the first word of the revelation Read! a world which represents the natural means of acquiring knowledge. This divine order has been revealed in other opening revelations of the Holy Qur'an which Allah, Glory be to Him, has sent down. It has been revealed that "He, who taught the pen, taught man that which he knew not."

The revelation continued to urge mankind to seek knowledge and to respect and praise scholars, until it became a Muslim slogan: "O my Lord! Increase me in knowledge."

The introduction of the revelation by the word Read! and the urging of people to seek knowledge has been tied from the outset to one condition only: that this should be done in the name of the Lord. In this context, search for knowledge knows no boundaries, barriers, or restrictions in Islam, for, as long as this knowledge is sought in the name of the Lord, it must be virtuous, beneficial, and redeeming for mankind. That is because the word Read! Expresses knowledge and the search for knowledge in the name of the Lord expresses faith.

From this, we can see that Islam regards the dissemination of knowledge and the renewal and reinforcement of the faith as the way for the salvation and reform of mankind. Allah, the praiseworthy, has therefore said in the opening chapters of the revelation, "Read! In the name of thy Lord and cherisher, who created. Created man from a leech-like clot, Read! And thy Lord is most bountiful; He who taught the pen, taught man that which he knew not."

This principle of the revelation is stressed in various forms of brevity or verbosity.

The wisdom behind sending the Prophet Muhammad, peace and prayers be upon him, to the people, and one of his duties towards them, were to "Instruct them in scripture and wisdom, and purify them." It has been his duty to spread knowledge and faith. Praise be to Allah who has said of Himself and his Apostle: "It is He who has sent amongst the unlettered a messenger from among themselves, to recount to them His signs, to purify them, and to instruct them in the Book"

The messages of knowledge and faith must therefore continue, because these two elements are so closely tied that they are virtually inseparable. The message of knowledge is carried by the scholars and, indeed, a quality of faithful scholars is their fear of God. Allah, the most gracious, has said that those who truly fear Him among His servants are those who have knowledge.

It is the duty of those who have knowledge to disseminate it. By so doing, not only do they serve Islamic reformative teachings but also complement their own righteousness and qualifications as messengers of knowledge.

The basic Islamic concepts for the reform of society can, therefore, be outlined as follows:

Firstly, the dissemination of knowledge in all aspects of learning such that the Islamic Nation is able to stand on solid ground and even become truly competitive with other nations

Secondly, the renewal of belief and the clarification of all ambiguities that jeopardize effective and positive applications of the faith.

A third concept, which springs from the two previous ones, is the great Islamic teaching which is stated in the Holy Qur'an as follows:

"The believers are but a single brotherhood."

Explanation, simplification, and realization of these three important concepts are the responsibility of scholars who strive to convey knowledge. It is actually a responsibility that must be shouldered by every Muslim, but particularly by their scholars, each in his own field of specialization.

Grace be to Allah Who has said in the Noble Book "It is not for the believers to go forth together; if a contingent from every expedition goes forth to devote themselves to studies in religion and admonishes the people-when they return to them-that thus the)' may learn to guard themselves against evil."

I conclude by expressing thanks to those who nominated me for The King Faisal International Prize for Service to Islam for their confidence in me and their appreciation of my efforts which Allah, the praiseworthy, has guided and enabled me to undertake. May Allah help and provide you all with support and guidance.

God bless you.