

1. (Introduction)

a. رَبِّ اشْرَحْ لِي صَدْرِي وَيَسِّرْ لِي أَمْرِي وَاخْلُ عُنْدَ مَنْ لِسَانِي يَفْقَهُوا قَوْلِي

b. *My Lord! relieve my mind. And ease my task for me. And remove the impediment from my speech so that they may comprehend what I am saying:*

إِنَّ الْحَمْدَ لِلَّهِ نَحْمَدُهُ وَنَسْتَعِينُهُ وَنَسْتَغْفِرُهُ وَنَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ شُرُورِ أَنْفُسِنَا وَمِنْ سَيِّئَاتِ أَعْمَالِنَا، مَنْ يَهْدِهِ اللَّهُ فَلَا مُضِلَّ لَهُ وَمَنْ يُضِلَّهُ فَلَا هَادِيَ لَهُ. وَأَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ.

Indeed, all praise is for Allah. We praise Him, we ask for His help, we beg for His forgiveness, and we seek refuge and protection with Allah from the evils of ourselves and from the evil consequences of our sins. Whoever Allah [SWT] guides to the straight path, no force in the universe can misguide him. And whoever Allah [SWT] misguides, no one can guide them to the Truth. I bear witness that there is no deity, no object worthy of any act of worship except Allah [SWT], the One without any partners, associates or equals. And I bear witness that Muhammad [SAWS] is His slave and messenger.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تَقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ  
(3:102)

O you who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared, and die not except as Muslims.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا  
(4:1)

O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person, and from him He created his wife, and from them both He created many men and women; and fear Allah through Whom you demand your mutual rights, and do not cut the relations of kinship. Surely, Allah is an All-Watcher over you.

2.

Assalamsmualaikum sisters and brothers. It is truly a pleasure to see you all gathered here on this beautiful day. Over the past couple of weeks we covered a number of realities during

Jummuah, touching on topics of race, sexuality, and gender formation. And while we will move forward in critically examining our communities and traditions i want to take this week as a juncture to reflect on a reality too many of us, including our parents and elders, are dismissive of.

I want to talk to you all about darkness, the darkness cast by doubt. And while I understand that it is an ominous start to a khutbah, it needs to said.

The lights switch off. Pitch black. After image floaters are the only thing visible, except perhaps for the ghost outline of a hand. You feel it deep inside as your heart thumps, thumps, thumps. Quicker and quicker. Primordial fear. We like to think of faith as a light. How then do we deal with the gaps in our vision- how do we deal with uncertainty?

That class on evolution, that little boy on the beach with justice washed ashore, the lights of our communities snatched away, the resurrection of slavery which never really died in the first place. The whole edifice shakes.

Islamweb.net claims that “Doubting the principles of faith and the principles of Islam takes the person out of the fold of Islam.” The companions supposedly acted with iron-clad certainty. Every word the prophet said, law, every question answered or unasked in the first place. That one muslim you know talks like they get the faith. We see something in their eyes and wonder why we don’t have it.

I’m here to tell you that that’s absolutely a load of nonsense.

Let’s go back to the beginning. The year was 610. Muhammad of the Banu Hashim of the Quraysh goes on retreats to the cave of hira atop a mountain outside his city, Mekkah. He meditates. One day a being comes to him, seizing him, commanding him to recite. He responds that he cannot read, cannot recite. And he is squeezed. Again and again he says he cannot read, recite, yet he is commanded. And then he hears the first words of revelation. “Read in the name of your lord who created. Who created humankind out of a clot of blood. Read in the name of your lord most generous. Gave him the pen to write. And taught him that which he knew not.”

We may read these words often, but do we read of the prophet’s reaction? He ran, stumbled down the mountain. A numinous vision filled the horizon and overwhelmed him. Some early sources claim that he thought of jumping. That it was too much, that he may be under a spell which only death can undo. He ran to the lap of his wife, Khadijah. “Zamelooni, zamelooni” - “Cover me, Cover me.”

Were those the words of certainty? Where those the words of a man without doubt? He thought of *jumping*. He thought he was possessed, beyond hope. Our religion, quite literally, is based in a moment of overwhelming doubt. A man doubts the foundations of his society, doubts his reality while meditating- is overcome with a presence, and then doubts his very own sanity. "Cover me, cover me."

Let's go back further. Surah Baqrah, verse 260.

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ أَرِنِي كَيْفَ تُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ قَالَ أُولَٰئِكَ تُؤْمِنُ  
قَالَ بَلَىٰ وَلَٰكِن لِّيَطْمَئِنَّ قَلْبِي قَالَ فَخُذْ أَرْبَعَةً مِّنَ الطَّيْرِ فَصُرْهُنَّ  
إِلَيْكَ ثُمَّ اجْعَلْ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ جَبَلٍ مِّنْهُنَّ جُزْءًا ثُمَّ ادْعُهُنَّ يَأْتِينَكَ  
سَعْيًا وَاعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٦٠﴾

"And [mention] when Abraham, (the father of monotheism), said, "My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead." [ Allah ] said, "Have you not believed?" He said, "Yes, but [I ask] only that *my heart may be satisfied*." [ Allah ] said, "Take four birds and commit them to yourself. Then [after slaughtering them] put on each hill a portion of them; then call them - they will come [flying] to you in haste. And know that Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise."

Abraham did this. He called them. They came. It's right there in the Qur'an so "that my heart may be satisfied." He knew, but also did not know.

Eid al-Adha commemorates the story of Abraham, Hajar, and Ismail. We've heard that most disturbing, awe-inspiring tale where Abraham is to slaughter his own son. He guides the boy out to a rock. Can't you hear his heart beat? Isn't it fast? Isn't he shouting inside? His son tells him "peace." Why did the boy need to say that? What did he see? Was Abraham's hand firm when he held the knife? Or was it shaking?

Moses, Musa, kept questioning Khidr even when he was told not to.

If the prophets themselves were unsure- those who were in contact with God had hearts which felt unease- why do we demand such an absolute or near absolute certainty of ourselves? It may sound strange, but a room filled with light is as blinding as one with only dark. In either case nothing can be distinguished. The difference is that too much light burns the eyes. It is in that interplay between light and dark that we are able to see and move. It is when faith is coupled with doubt, certainty with uncertainty, that we can grow as individuals. We can ask questions and move, develop. Otherwise we can become stagnant, and like water muck accumulates. Without doubt, we may lose our drive to improve and end up following conclusions into madness. Fundamentalists are those who have complete certainty, or those who want certainty so badly they force themselves to believe that they have it while bathing in blood.

Perhaps it is because he was uncertain that the prophet Muhammed (s) didn't become swallowed in ego and worked to actually fix his society. As Sayed Nursi wrote, "On the condition that they do not lead to excess or overwhelm a person, essentially uncertainty is a cause of vigilance, leading to seeking the best way and giving rise to seriousness. . It banishes indifference and repulses carelessness."

The most important way to deal with doubt in general is to not hate ourselves for it. This is hard because we are trained to doubt ourselves for doubting. Beyond this, it really depends on the doubt itself. Sometimes we need to simply trust in God as Abraham did when he held the knife. That God was not like a pagan idol demanding simple blood sacrifice, but something far greater who can transform an attempt at violence into an act of charity which transcends generations. Sometimes we need to know that it will be alright.

But not always. Some questions have roots so deep that simply ripping them out will tear out our hearts along with them. Trust in God, and tie your camel. That's a hadith. Believe in the divine, but keep searching for answers yourself. You may not get a divinely-inspired fuzzy warm feeling. But instead you keep searching. And while you may not find the answer, you are not lying to yourself by hiding it. You are not lying to others by feeding them hogwash. If we as believers as supposed to be truthful to others, then we must also be truthful to ourselves. Maybe we will come up with working solutions that help us and others, that aid society. Or maybe we will keep questing.

One final point. In these journeys of faith, we need to realize that we are not alone. Abraham's son comforted him. When the prophet ran down the mountain, Khadijah did just the same. She covered him, reminded him that he was truthful and that he would not be mislead. Be there for your brothers and sisters in islam. Shine as a reassuring light. It's sunnah.

## **1. Intermission**

- a. *Aqulu Qawli hadha wastaghfirullah li wa lakum*
- b. *Wa lisaairil muslimina fastaghfiruhu*
- c. *Innahu huwal Ghafurur Rahim.*
- d. *“AlHamdulillah was Salatu Wassalamu ‘ala Rasulullah”*

## Second Part

“It is really quite impossible to be affirmative about anything which one refuses to question” - James Baldwin

Uncertainty extends beyond questions of religion. I still remember during my underclassman years spending so many hours walking in circles, trying to figure out what I wanted to do. I just finished applying to graduate. Y'all, I'm a senior. But believe me when i say i still spend hours doing wondering what's going to happen next. Uncertain in regards to the future, my conviction, constantly asking myself the bigger questions.

Some of what applies to the deen applies here to. Trust in ourselves a little bit more, trust in God. Do all the work, tie our respective camels, zebras, horses, and pray. Discuss it with people. Form community and rant to someone. Please.

Something Dr. Omid Safi said still sticks with me till this day. “Remember, Jesus didn’t become Christ till he was 30. Muhammad did not become the Prophet till he was 40. And you all are not any cooler than them. It took Jesus and Muhammad a while to figure out who they were, and what they were going to “do.” If you haven’t figured it out by the time you’re 22, it’s alright.”

Darkness need not be scary when coupled with light. Inshallah. I should add that I am uncertain when it comes to dealing with uncertainty. I don’t know. But I do know Allah knows best.

I’d like to thank the many people who have discussed this topic with me over the past couple weeks. We are here for each other. Would also like to credit Leslie Hazleton for her Ted Talk discussing the doubts of the prophet where I got ideas for this khutbah today.

### 1. Du'ua

- a. *May Allah protect us all from being hurt and from hurting one another. May Allah guide us toward what is best for us. May we come up with ways to manage*

*our realities today. May we stop judging one another and remember that allah swt is the best of judges. May we show one another kindness and generosity.*

- b. Oh all gives those unjustly taken from us the highest places in jannah. Aid us in carrying on their legacies and honoring their names.
- c. Allah swt protect us. Shield us when we lose the ability to do so ourselves. Grant us success in our ways and justice in the spaces we inhabit. Line our perceptions with an iron honesty and guard our conclusions from the inebriation of laziness the rashness of our egos. Give us patience. Patience and the wisdom to know when we no longer owe it.

*Wa aqimissalah*