



Realise Your Potential

MAWLĀNĀ SAYYID ABUL ḤASAN ‘ALĪ NADWĪ رحمة الله

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سُبْحَانَكَ يَا رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

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In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

This booklet, “*Realise Your Potential*” is an English translation of a speech delivered by Mawlānā Sayyid Abul Ḥasan Alī Nadwī رحمته الله to students of Dār Al-Ta’leem wa Al-Sihat, Kanpur, India on 25th June 1979 / 30th Rajab 1399 AH. It was first published in Urdu entitled “*Hilāl Say Badray Kāmil*” in Ta’meer-e-Ḥayāt, an official magazine of Dārul ‘Uloom Nadwatul ‘Ulamā’, Lucknow, India.

I am grateful to my brother Sulaiman Kazi, lawyer, for editing the lecture for the benefit of English-speaking readers. I would also like to thank Mawlānā Sufyan Boodi for his help in proof-reading the text and providing valuable suggestions. May Allāh reward both of them.

I pray to Almighty Allāh that He accepts this publication and makes it a means of inspiring the seekers of prophetic knowledge. Āmeen.

Mawlānā Khalil Ahmed Kazi

Madina Academy
Dewsbury, England

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Realise Your Potential

In the Name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful

*All Praise be to Allāh and peace and blessings be upon His
chosen servants*

Modest Beginning

My respected teachers, students and friends,

In one couplet Dr Muḥammad Iqbal, Poet of the East, draws inspiration from the Eid crescent. He says:

“O crescent, don’t feel insignificant because of your size.

*Although you appear like a strand of hair, you will soon
grow into a full moon.”*

It is common knowledge that the new moon is very small and barely visible. It is like a thread of light on the horizon. On the twenty-ninth night, it is even smaller. Special efforts are made

for sighting the new moon. Only some people, experienced in the art of observing the new moon, are able to witness it. The new moon is like, so to speak, a thread of light in the sky. Later, on the fourteenth night, it transforms itself into a full moon. For millions of years, without any alteration, this cycle of how the moon begins and blossoms has been part of divine law. Never has it been reported that a full moon was sighted on the first of the month and then reduced gradually. The natural course of events is that a crescent grows gradually into a full moon. There is much divine wisdom behind this phenomenon.

First, it underscores the law of nature that everything has a modest beginning. Gradually, it grows into something substantial. Of course, it is entirely within Almighty Allāh's power for anything to happen at any time. Generally speaking, the law of gradual evolution is applicable to every natural phenomenon. For example, a baby grows after developing in different stages and becomes an adult over a period of time. This is also true for plants and animals. However, it is not outside the power of Almighty Allāh for an adult-size person to be born. Secondly, the law of gradual growth teaches us that one should not feel disappointed with a humble beginning, when development is in its infancy and barely noticeable. After development reaches its peak, decline naturally sets in. All this happens, so that man may not suffer from arrogance or megalomania. The Qur'ān says: "One then loses all knowledge after having had it." (16: 70).

Thus, a crescent grows into a full moon and then recedes into a thin hair. Everyone is fixated by the moon. Many important

Islamic events, such as Ramadan, ʿĪd al-Fiṭr, Īd al-ʿAḏḩā and the most important ritual of Ḥajj is linked to the sighting of the new moon. The Qurʾān states: ”(O Prophet), they ask you about the new moons. Tell them that these are the signs to determine time for the affairs of people and for Ḥajj season“ (AL-BAQARAH 2: 189). In this verse, Almighty Allāh encourages us, no matter how small or insignificant something may be, that human beings should not feel despondent. The second lesson is, after attaining peak, everything is subject to decline and decay. There is, therefore, no reason to be arrogant. The verse is a stark reminder to avoid despair and haughtiness. Almighty Allāh is imparting upon us two important lessons: to shun despair and haughtiness.

At the beginning of this talk, I recited a couplet of Dr Muḩammad Iqbal:

“O crescent, don’t feel insignificant because of your size.

*Although you appear like a strand of hair, you will soon
grow into a full moon.”*

Drawing inspiration from this, I remind you that like the new crescent you should also reflect upon your potential and never feel despair, insignificant or overwhelmed. Do not lack courage, thinking you are weak like a strand of hair. Remember, you are capable of great things. Allāh has hidden inside you the potential of a full moon. Some final year students have assembled for this talk in this small hall. Even if your numbers were less, it does not matter. It is your quality that matters. Have trust in Allāh so that you can be employed in the service of Islam. Bear in mind that

quantity alone is not enough. As the Qur'ān points out: “Those who believed that they will meet God said: ‘How often, by God’s will, a small group prevails over a big one!’” (AL-BAQARAH 2: 249).

My dear students,

At present, you are small like a new moon. However, please do not be despondent or consider yourself worthless or insignificant. Inside each one of you lies the power of a full moon. On this basis, I am reminding you, those students who have gathered in this small hall, even if your numbers were less, that each one of you is a precious jewel and each one of you can be chosen by Almighty Allāh for the service of His religion. This is Allāh’s way. The new moon ultimately turns into a full moon. So, each one of you should also be mentally prepared for this transformation. As the Qur'ān says: “Do not lose heart or despair. You will have the upper hand, if you are believers” (ĀLE ‘IMRĀN 3: 139).

You must therefore have the conviction that you will shine like the full moon, not only individually but also collectively, as a Madrasa. Insha Allāh, this Madrasa will grow in stature, resulting in limited space. Indeed, this was the case with the renowned Dārul ‘Uloom of today, which were once very small Madāris when they were first established. As I was preparing for Ṣalah, I recalled how similar this Madrasa is to how Dārul ‘Uloom Nadwatul ‘Ulamā’ used to be in its formative years. In my student days, there was a large empty ground and only one main campus and a small hostel. There was not even a Mosque. A half-built structure served as the main dining hall. Compare that with the Nadwa of today. I am hopeful this Madrasa will similarly grow in

leaps and bounds and someday turn into a major Dārul ‘Uloom.

For this reason, you should not think much about the size of your Madrasa. Do not wish that you should have been in a large Dārul ‘Uloom, like Nadwa or Deoband. When Nadwa was small, it was better in some respects. The standard of education was better and its students were more talented. The spirit of learning permeated every student. In a sense, the size of a Madrasa does not matter so much. Never look down upon your Madrasa. If you do so, it will betray ingratitude which Allāh dislikes. Do not suffer from inferiority complex. We should never pass any judgment about teachers or think ill of anything associated with your Madrasa. One who has a strong link with Allāh is truly great. Allāh is supreme. As we are associated with His religion, we should not think low about ourselves. It is Allāh who bestows greatness. You should serve the cause of Islam and scale new heights.

As time is limited, let me press home a few important matters for the benefit of students.

Command of Arabic Grammar

My dear students,

Quite often, I have had the opportunity to speak in several Madāris that I have visited. I make this point everywhere that our standards are declining. Shaykh Al-Hind Mawlānā Maḥmūd Ḥasan رحمته الله once mentioned: “Since the buildings of Dārul ‘Uloom Deoband became strong, its standards began to decline.” I heard this personally from Mawlānā Ilyas Kāndhlawī رحمته الله. Hence, we

must strive to raise the academic standard in our Madāris.

It is common knowledge that only a few bricks are used for building a foundation, and then a huge structure is raised over it. By the same token, grammar is the cornerstone of Arabic. All Arabic works are based on the rules of grammar. If you have a good command over grammar, you will enjoy reading any book in Arabic. By Allāh's grace, if you study diligently, you can become a jurist, Hadith scholar or a writer. If you are familiar with Arabic grammar, Şarf and Naḥw, you can read and enjoy any Arabic text. I strongly encourage you to become proficient in the Arabic language. This is quite possible at a small Madrasa where students have more time for practice. In larger Madāris, with larger classes, it is not always possible for teachers to devote sufficient time to students. The opportunity for one to one teaching proves increasingly difficult. In this sense, you have an excellent opportunity here to learn and improve your skills. There are sufficient teachers available to teach and train you. May Allāh guide you to achieve great heights. After finishing here, you can always join Deoband or Nadwa to pursue advanced studies, 'Inshā' Allāh.

The important advice I want to share with you is that you should strive to improve your Arabic. At this stage, if you work hard to improve your understanding of Arabic grammar it will help you greatly throughout your life. If you waste time now, it will hinder your progress. It is up to you to choose either of the two paths. If you do not work diligently now, you will lack confidence in reading or explaining a text, or leading prayer or delivering the

Friday sermon. I have seen students making excuses on such occasions. You should, therefore, have the ability to perform any task well. Otherwise, you will avoid people in order to cover up your incompetence. Of course, no one can be a master of every discipline. If you do not know something, be candid. This is not a flaw. Even great scholars are on record for acknowledging their ignorance of certain issues. This attitude befits a good scholar. I have even seen experts expressing their lack of knowledge of certain matters. Hence, you should not have any guilty feelings in admitting your lack of knowledge about something. You may refer the query to another scholar.

Ambition and Aspiration

My next advice to you is that you should carefully consider your career and invoke Almighty Allāh's mercy for success. There are special moments where supplications are accepted.

When I was a child, it was my ambition to be a writer. There was an academic atmosphere at my home, even the ladies were engaged in reading, writing and composing poetry. I aspired to be an author and have my books published. Had I wished to gain the gnosis of Allāh, He could have graciously granted it to me and I may have served the cause of Islam. Now, it is your turn in life and I ask you to be careful in what you desire. If you pray for a lucrative job and that prayer is granted, what will be your ultimate fate? Therefore, pray to become a servant of Islam and a scholar devoted to the cause of Allāh. If you are destined for this, Allāh will provide you with sustenance as well. He does not

humiliate those devoted to His cause. If so and so can provide food and care for your worldly needs, do you think your Creator will overlook the needs of those who serve His religion? Undoubtedly, He will sustain you. He will certainly bless those who work for Him. It is unlikely that Allāh will not pay attention to your needs or leave you unattended. If you devote yourselves to religious knowledge, He will not allow you to be disgraced.

Have trust in Allāh and remain devoted to seeking knowledge and He will enrich you so much that you will feed others. You will sustain many. Aspire to work for Him alone. Do not entertain the idea of becoming a messenger, as there cannot be any messengers after Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. Anyone claiming to be a messenger is totally false. Similarly, no one can lay claim to divinity. There is, however, nothing wrong in your wish to become a spiritual master. In every era, there have been such mentors. Perhaps you may also be elevated to this status. However, there are some important prerequisites: be particular about prayers, reach mosque in time, engage in supplications, value books, remember Allāh, respect your teachers - show them regard, be humble before them and hold them in high esteem. You should be grateful to the writers and teachers who have benefitted you. Religious education is different from secular education. If you are bright and hardworking, you will attain success. Notwithstanding degeneration in the West, people still have regard and respect for books and teachers, benefactors and the elderly. It is only ill-informed people who think that these values do not exist in the West. It is not so; they still hold in esteem books and teachers.

Accordingly, I would urge you to be very particular about the following matters:

- Respect for your teachers and books
- Gratitude to your benefactors and seniors
- Hardwork
- Fervent supplications to Allāh and performance of religious duties

Those who inculcate these traits will outshine others. If you read the biography of Imam Ghazali رحمته الله and other luminaries you will note, from childhood, they displayed the qualities of working hard, service to others, respect for seniors, modesty and humility, devotion to supplications, and praying earnestly. These traits enabled them to gain such name and fame.

Sincerity of Purpose

My dear students,

The aforementioned guidance will indeed benefit you. Another important factor to consider is sound and pious intention. I exhort you to develop sincerity of purpose. As you are like my own students at Nadwa I wish to share the following advice.

Lack of Sincere Intention

Please bear in mind these two points: lack of faith and consciousness. The former is uncommon. A student of Islamic education is not expected to cheat. This is something unthinkable. When

I was a teacher at Nadwa, I used to ask students about their purpose in studying. Some frankly told me that they had not given any thought to it. Some promised to think about it. Some simply said that they were following their ancestral tradition or were abiding by the wishes of their parents. Some expressed their real ambition was to become a doctor or a lawyer. Some of the more mature students stated their resolve to be an Islamic scholar. I advised them all to have sound intentions, namely, to have a firm grasp of the articles of faith and commit themselves to preaching Islam. They should promote Islamic education and follow *Şirāṭ al Mustaqīm*.

Lack of Faith and Reasoning

Nowadays, the condition of Muslims is abysmal. In their long history they have not faced such adverse circumstances as they do today. Decline has set in amongst Muslims everywhere. They are targeted across the world. The enemies of Islam are emboldened, having conquered their bastions.

Two major menaces presently afflict Muslims: lack of faith and lack of reason. The former is worse. Muslims get easily provoked and act irrationally. They do not draw upon their faculties. They meddle in affairs which do not concern or, worse, harm them. They do not seem at peace with themselves. When these two calamities – lack of faith and reason strike a community, they stand doomed. They are bound to face disgrace and severe hardships. Only Allāh alone can save them.

Faith Contingent upon Reasoning

Our purpose should be to profess and practice sound faith with reason. One's mental faculty is a precious gift from Allāh. Faith is complemented and supplemented by reason. This explains why the Prophet ﷺ made this supplication for 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās رضى الله عنه:

“O Allāh, grant him the understanding of faith (BUKHĀRĪ). The Qur'ān declares: “He grants wisdom to whom He wills. He who is granted wisdom is granted much good. Only the people of understanding take a lesson” (AL-BAQARAH 2: 269).

Wisdom, as a divine bounty, is an invaluable blessing. The Qur'ān asks us to reflect on the signs around us (AL-NISĀ' 4:82). We are also directed to observe the creation in the heavens and on earth (ĀLE 'IMRĀN 3: 191).

While the Qur'ān repeatedly asks us to think and ponder, we do not do so. Let us reflect on the purpose behind our creation.

It is common knowledge that mental sharpness is a great blessing. We should draw upon reason. Many people think that reason has no role in religious matters. But the truth is that faith is completed by reason. Lack of reason causes defect in one's faith. We should perfect our faith and reason. Your mission should be to infuse religiosity among Muslims and sharpen their mental abilities. We should analyse events critically and act where there is a need to do so. We should shun pointless discussion and debates. Understand that the media creates sensationalism. You should eschew

trivial issues. It is downright foolish and irrational on our part to waste our energy on pointless things. Let us stop this hysterical attitude and mental retardness. It is hazardous for the entire community. We should resolve to root it out. We should oppose what is wrong, even though it may offend someone.

Faith and Sound Reasoning

As you are young and lack experience you may not grasp my next point. However, since it is very close to my heart, I would share it with you. I feel agony over the loss of faith and reason among Muslims, though they claim to be Muslims. Sound faith must be reinforced with reason. The companions of the Prophet ﷺ had excellent mental prowess. The same holds true for the mental sharpness of classical Islamic scholars, elect servants of Allāh and preachers of Islam.

On the other hand, our plight is miserable. There is nothing right or good about us. We easily get provoked and lose our temper. A community which is easily provoked and behaves like some explosive, cannot thrive. We should be polite and courteous in our interaction with others, whilst actively pursuing our goals. However, we seem to easily lose self-control in speech. Without thinking, we utter whatever comes to our mind. We are unable to grasp any issue calmly and rationally. Instead, we tend to criticise and reproach. We are given to speaking ill of others. We do not even spare the ‘Ulamā’. In fact, it is second nature of Muslims to discredit ‘Ulamā’. People are unsparing in their attack of them. This kind of attitude is not befitting of Muslims.

May Allāh accept my talk and enable us to do what pleases Him. May He grant success to this Madrasa. I am hopeful that this Madrasa will go from strength to strength, Insha Allāh. It is the duty of the people of Kanpur to help and support this recently established institute. It is in their interest and also of the entire Muslim community to see it flourish.

Praise be to Allāh, Lord of the worlds.



Glossary and Biographical Notes

Dārul ‘Uloom Islāmic educational institute

Īd al-Fiṭr is known as the “Festival of Breaking Fast”. It marks the end of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of fasting.

Īd al-’Aḏḥā means “Feast of the sacrifice”. It coincides with the end of Ḥajj.

Madrasa (pl. Madāris) Islamic seminary

Naḥw syntax

Ṣarf morphology

Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm is the Arabic term for “The Straight Path” or “The Right Path”.

‘Ulamā’ Muslim scholars who are recognised as having specialist knowledge of Islamic sacred law and theology.

Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al Ghazzālī (1058-1111/449-504), also known as Ḥujjat al’Islām (Proof of Islām). Imām al Ghazzālī was an influential Muslim scholar, philosopher and Ṣūfī who wrote many works, including ‘Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm alDīn.

Mawlānā Maḥmūd Ḥasan (1851-1920/1268-1339), popularly known as Shaikhul Hind (The Leader of India), was the first student of Dārul ‘Uloom Deoband and later became its principal. He was an eminent theologian, activist and freedom fighter.

Dr Muḥammad Iqbāl (1877–1938/1294–1357), widely known as ‘Allāmah Iqbāl, was a Muslim poet and philosopher. He wrote poetry in Urdu and Persian. His poetry is considered to be revolutionary.

Mawlānā Ilyās Kāndhalwī (1884–1944/1302-1363) was an Indian Islāmic scholar who founded the Tablighī Jamat, Islāmic revivalist movement, in 1925, in Mewāt, India.

Dārul ‘Uloom Deoband in Deoband, Uttar Pradesh, India was founded in 1866/1282 to train religious leaders who would promote moral and religious regeneration of Muslims, whilst imparting the original tenets of Islām

Dārul ‘Uloom Nadwatul ‘Ulamā’ in Lucknow, India was founded in 1894/1311 with the objective of combining ancient and modern forms of knowledge, promoting unity and presenting Islām effectively in the modern world.

Realise Your Potential: Drawing on a couplet of the celebrated poet, Dr Muhammad Iqbal, Mawlānā Sayyid Abul Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī ﷺ in his characteristic manner encourages students of Islamic knowledge to realise their full potential, avoiding despair and despondency. He advises them to be worthy representatives of Islam, fully cognisant of Allah’s promise to those who serve His religion. He exhorts students to gain command of the Arabic language, study diligently, purify their intentions, and inculcate the necessary qualities to succeed. Although brief in nature, this talk will benefit and inspire students of Islamic knowledge.

Mawlānā Sayyid Abul Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī (1914-1999/1332-1420) was one of the most widely read and influential Muslim scholars of his time. He hailed from a family which produced scholars and spiritual masters such as Shah ‘Alamullāh Naqshbandī (1624-1685) and Sayyid Ahmad Shaheed (1786–1831). He was Rector of Nadwatul ‘Ulamā in Lucknow, India and was associated with a number of Islāmīc organisations and educational institutions worldwide. For his services to Islām, he was awarded the King Faisal Award and other numerous accolades. He was a powerful orator and writer, both in Urdu and Arabic. Some of his books which have been translated into English include: Islām and the World, Stories of the Prophets, Muhammad: The Apostle of Mercy and Saviours of Islāmīc Spirit. The unifying theme of Mawlānā Sayyid Abul Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī’s tireless commitments, as a scholar and Dā‘ee, was the spiritual well-being of Muslims, emphasising to them their relationship with Allāh and each other,