



An Introduction to the Academy of Self Knowledge

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Salaam alaykum & welcome to everyone.

ASK is the brainchild of Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri and as such a major milestone in the development of his work. However, as SFH has repeatedly said throughout his years of teaching, he is not bringing anything new. But while the wisdom teachings he has been privileged to share with thousands of students all over the world over the past 26 years come from the wellspring of Islam, the ability, approach and style of imparting this knowledge is distinctly shaped by the gifts that Allah has bestowed upon him and the drive to discover the interconnecting thread that weaves existence, seen and unseen together.

Context:

I'd like, therefore, to share with you a little of SFH's background, so that we give a context to this afternoon's proceedings. By no means do I wish to engage in a eulogy – for he would have to move on to the next life for that accolade! I simply wish to enable people here today to move rapidly from the unfamiliar to the familiar and beyond any preconceived notions about the purpose of ASK and the people behind it. We live in a world where so many so-called teachers of truth seem to have a hidden agenda for personal gain of whatever variety. I would like to leave it to you to make your own assessments.

SFH is an acknowledged master of self knowledge whose role as teacher, mentor and guide was the natural by product of his own quest for self fulfillment.

As you may already know, SFH was born and brought up in Iraq in a community that, according to his recollection, reflected an ideal Muslim society, imbued with the values of neighbourly care and concern, worship and remembrance of the One, personal concern with one's own accountability to God and the wider social community; a place where religious and spiritual knowledge was respected and regarded as the highest achievements of man, where enlightened men in that society were effectively followed.

But his world was also changing and as he grew into a young man he naturally became aware of the *realpolitik* of the wider world around him. This awareness became more focused when he went abroad for further study, to the UK, US and France. Like many Eastern scholarship students before him, he discovered a more materially advanced society, with many similar ethical values to his own, though actually very different. Questions began to arise.

Returning to serve his country in the petroleum industry, SFH was soon born aloft a swelling tide of the oil boom development of the 70's and his worldly career took him from Iraq to all over the Middle East. All the while he was aware that the Muslims in the East were losing their traditional religious reference point. The point from which all new things were once measured and assessed was no longer the main point of reference. In fact, in those giddy days people were indiscriminately drunk with the elixir of modernization and material gains of development. With everything in the outer all shiny and new, it was not possible to see what was being compromised or lost in social values.

But from SFH's then position in the thick of things – the eye of the storm – he had a privileged vantage point and was able to observe and reflect on the new directions.

Sincerity in a quest for enlightenment is always met with gratification: Seek and you shall find. Ask and you shall be given. Allah's provision is such that all is already provided, it just has to be found and uncovered.

SFH was guided to discovering his spiritual provision through his reading and meeting self-realised masters whose egos had been sublimated by a higher knowledge that freed them from the confusions and role play fantasies of the human condition. This process was greatly aided by the fact that he had access to all the seminal and classic texts of knowledge from within the Islamic tradition through the original languages of Arabic and Persian. SFH found he was able to decode the conceptual language appropriately for the modern mind, which he realized was characterized by high rationality with little attention given to the intuitive and almost no referencing to the heart.

Arising out of his own awakening SFH put all his material and energetic resources towards sharing the revitalizing teachings of Original Islam with those seekers who sought meaning and transformation in their lives. He established charitable trusts with branches in the US, UK, Pakistan and India, a publishing house, an Institute for Qur`anic Studies, and businesses that support Muslims and enable them to interact with others fruitfully. He has written many books, mostly in English, some in Arabic, several of which have been translated into French, Greek, Spanish, Swedish, Russian & Indonesian; and many of his lectures have been transformed into books as well.

Just as every human experiences continuous growth and development throughout their lives, so too do the spiritually enlightened among us. SFH is no exception. He has reached a point in his own evolution where he feels it is time to talk less and concentrate on repackaging the life science of what the path of Islam truly offers in a way that is appropriate to contemporary man.

The knowledge SFH expounds and shares is as old as Adam. Indeed the Truth is self-evident but man is veiled by his own illusions and therefore cannot perceive.

The Academy of Self Knowledge (ASK) is therefore a bringing together of the primordial teaching of self knowledge: how to understand the self, how to transcend the self without denying it, how to liberate the self from the chains of its own making, from its presumptions and assumptions, so that life is lived to the full in every moment, whether in expansion or contraction.

SFH does not see himself as a revivalist or reformer. Through ASK he simply intends to make accessible, in a language which we can understand, the map of the self, the vehicle and license for the journey, and the accurate reading of the overall situation, the weather forecast.

The ASK course is, if you will, an unbundling of the spiritual sciences of Islam, freed from the tyranny and baggage of Muslims' sloganeering and religious homilies, not to mention sectarian competitiveness and other divisive doctrinal debates.

Indeed, in Module One there is no mention of Islam let alone Islamic terminology. True Knowledge – *Haqq* – must stand the test of time and place regardless of culture and language. Once the student has got the bearings of the self, and the self in relation to others, to creation and to its Source, then the course moves on to the elements necessary for the journey.

Module Two then, is the path of transformation on the level of meaning – how to perfect one's *'ibadah* or worship. Without meaning ritual is worthless. We live in a time where mere ritual is simply not enough for people such as ourselves. Once meaning is attained it is counterbalanced by the wisdom that everything has a form and the best of forms are the divinely revealed prescriptions– the legacy of the Prophets.

Having imbibed the Prophetic prescriptions we need one more vital, essential element of preparation: Module Three. The Prophet knew himself, his Lord and his *'ibadah'*. But everything he did had a context and a timing. Module Three is about equipping the student with enough insight and understanding into the world as it is so as to gauge the appropriateness of correct action. What use is a correct action – a good deed – if the timing is wrong or the circumstances cause it to be rejected?

SFH's discoveries and insights can be summarized in realizing the foundation of the human paradox of being both worldly and other-worldly. The world of rationality and reasoning has its clear laws and codes and within the heart of the human being it meets the heavenly world which is subject to neither time nor space. Once we realize that these

two domains are not the same but complement each other, then the inherent personal and societal source of conflict will begin to resolve without resolutions.

For those who yearn to know, for whom the mundane and mediocre in life is not enough, who strive for excellence in their beingness, ASK is a huge stepping stone that will bring them to the shore of the vast seas of lights, enable them sail the sea of lights and be continually refreshed and delighted by its perfection and beauty, in humility, gratitude and overflowing love.

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