

come back. It is tough enough being Muslim in the world today, with all the constant attacks on our faith in the media and popular culture. It is tough being Muslim, when many look at Muslims with the utmost suspicion, if not outright hostility. It is tough being a Muslim, when many times, the dictates of the faith clash with the cultural norms of society.

The mosque on Friday should be a refuge, an hour when one can come to the House of God and feel relieved, refreshed, and reinvigorated. Not fall asleep. A father asks his children, “Why must you keep quiet during the khutbah,” to which they reply, “So we don’t wake up the people who are sleeping.” The Friday prayers should energize the worshipper, a reminder how wonderful it truly is to be a Muslim. After leaving Friday prayers, the worshipper should be encouraged and inspired to live a better life during the coming week than they did in the preceding week. After leaving prayers, the congregant should be looking forward to next week’s services, where they will be inspired again. If they come to Friday prayers and get demoralized even further, they will conclude that it is simply not worth their time.

So, what should be done about this crisis? Here are some suggestions: The “official language” of our mosques must be **correct English**. If the mosque believes that the khutbah simply has to be in Arabic, because the Prophet (p) spoke Arabic, then make the “pre-khutbah speech” in English and then translate the Arabic “khutbah” later. Khateeb must have a good command of the English language & should be the best speakers.

Each of our communities has its respected elders/leaders. We owe them a tremendous amount of gratitude & respect, as our faith tells us we should. But, that does not mean they have to give the sermon on Friday. Not everyone is eloquent. We expect an “I Have a Dream” speech **each & every Friday**. We want someone who can articulate a point well and proficiently. The Friday khutbah is supposed to teach & inspire the congregation. **Not to make us squirm as if our teeth are being drilled down to our nerves (without anaesthesia).**

The only thing the khateeb has to do, is throw an incomprehensible statement at us, which will act as a wrench in the works of our brains, rendering it useless for further discrimination. Human conceit, being what it is, will not admit to its own stupidity, but will sit there listening to endless drivel with a contrived & holy look on its bland face, for fear of appearing not to have comprehended the deep & secret gas works being wafted at it. Beware of noxious souls who pretend to teach the divine mysteries.

Topics should be timely, pertinent & most important of all, HOPEFUL. No more sermons about the breath of the fasting person; or about what things make our clothes unclean; or about how Allah is “severe in punishment.” In fact, why not have the congregation request specific topics they want to have discussed? After all, isn’t the Friday sermon for the people? Talk about God’s love. Our people are hungry for positive, hopeful messages. We need to deliver these messages, especially in this difficult and trying time in the history of Islam.

Create a well-paid position of Imam/Khateeb in our mosques. In traditional Islamic societies, the Imam of the mosque was simply the person who led the five daily prayers, and the Khateeb was a distinct person, who was more equipped to speak to the people. We should revive this tradition. We should have well paid Imams/Khateeb. This way, we can attract the best brightest to be shepherds of the Muslim flock. This must work for all mosques.

If young people continue to be bombarded, week after week, with khutbahs that tell them they are not good enough, or rehash the same old topics, or cannot even be properly understood, then we are at risk of losing them. They are the future of Islam & we cannot afford to drive them away with asinine sermons. Saturday beckons. Our future, our survival, and our very salvation is at stake.

**Hollow words:** The khutbah crowd always seems muted and their response to the lacklustre speech are as lacklustre as the words they are hearing. Most khutbahs are hollow words that echo from a distance uttered by those whose primary interest is self-preservation. We are looking for inspiration, leadership and vision. We instead get a list of complaints, tunnel vision, begging for money and the kind of leadership more associated with childhood groupings in the school playground than what we would expect from someone representative of the Prophet (p). Was it mentioned that you hear ad nauseam, **begging for money?**

Here’s one how-to: Write emails to the masjid committee letting them know how inspiring/deflating & (ir)relevant the khutbah was. This will cause many khutbah-wannabe’s to avoid the mimbar. We must demand quality speeches that’s well researched. We don’t come to Jumuaah for the ‘privilege’ of having our intelligence insulted. We come to attain to the unrestrained contemplation of the Highest Reality. The Friday sermon is a reminder, a call, a guidance and a means of education. We learn that whenever God’s Messenger (p) delivered the sermon, his eyes would become red, his voice rose, with intense emotion as one giving a warning against the enemy. Such a spellbinding way of delivering sermon related to the fact that the overwhelming motive was to **remind the Muslims**.

# Thank God ~~It's Friday~~ Saturday

## Our Khutbahs

are in  
Crisis

Like a global financial crisis which threatens to drag the world economy into depression. The khutbah crisis is similar because it is also liable to take the spirits of Muslims into a depression out of which it may be very difficult to climb.

Many Khateeb are superficial manipulators of rhetoric & dialectic. They say more than they think. Lacking vivacity of thought. Without clearness the children of the mind, thoughts & judgments, cannot be brought into the world. Stillborn discourses kill/bury the audience. They are offensive to intelligence & to the God-concept. Most khutbahs are no rousing call-to-arms, no grand vision, merely a recycling of a well-worn set of phrases & platitudes & the complaints that tend to characterise all sermons. Millions of Muslims suffer from a debilitating illness: **Sermon Syndrome**. **Why can't we have imams of razor-sharp wit & conversational perspicacity?** Ones that don't make us supplicate asking God why He didn't make us oversleep. Then again the “Sleepy Sermons” are a sure-fire cure for insomnia.

## “SHORTENING THE SERMON & PROLONGING THE PRAYER

### IS A SIGN OF THE MAN’S KNOWLEDGE.”

**R**emember that forgettable 1978 disco movie “Thank God It’s Friday.” Musical fluff & not very listenable. Got tiresome very quickly. Couldn’t wait to see **The End**. Most of today’s khutbahs are the equivalent of that era’s musical fluff. Can’t wait to hear the “Salaam” to the left before there’s a mad rush for the exit door. Back to work. At least there’s a prophetic saying that “Work is Worship.” Maybe we will find some spiritual fulfillment there.

Khutbahs are supposed to make sense. An infusion of intellectualism into the teaching of the Faith. Human intelligence has come to be left out of religion. It no longer participates in the things of the spirit. There is need to express spiritual truths in such a way as to win back the intelligences of smart men & women for the only object that could truly satisfy them, namely Divine Reality, is the Object for which intelligence exists.

In a world increasingly rife with heresy & pseudo-religion sermons lack bite & passion. Sermons leave you in a state of near-death experience. The centre for spiritual nourishment for the congregation is the mimbar. If the mimbar lacks authenticity either in content, clarity or unction, then the result is dangerous malnourishment.

The Friday service consists of a 25-minute rambling speech with no logic, followed by a 3-minute “khutbah,” which is nothing more than one verse of the Quran, one hadith, and a long-winded, rhyming supplication in Arabic. Then, we all pray & go our separate ways. Why must Muslims endure this type of service? For years? Some persons pop into the mosque right before the speech ends. That way, they are not bored to sleep by a rambling *talk*. They can focus on the “khutbah,” during which they are **supposed to pay their undivided attention**.

You can fulfill your Friday prayer obligation in ten minutes flat (a “Drive-thru Jumuah,” if you will). Yet, the purpose of the Friday prayer is **not** to pray and leave, but to re-charge our spirits on a weekly basis. For far too long, too many Friday prayers have left us totally

disappointed. Spiritually drained. In place of an enthusiastic acceptance of life’s duties the khateeb is led to preach the joyless abandonment of them, and to grumble generally at political conditions, the opinions of the orthodox multitude, and the scientific assertions of the learned, without being able himself to advance anything positive. He is almost entirely wanting in the gift of combination. He might analyse, but he does not hit upon any synthesis, and his learning/teaching bears no fruit. The tree of his knowledge has its roots in the air. His talks weigh down the spirit instead of allowing it to reach a dizzying height of contemplation.

Reflect upon the state of our Friday Khutbahs and you will see a number of problem paradigms:

Many mosques have this Speech/Arabic “Khutbah” hybrid for Friday prayers: Presumably, this is in belief that it is “sunnah” to give the sermon only in Arabic. But, the khutbah should be for every worshipper, and if one worshipper does not get the message, then the concept of the Friday sermon is completely lost. Yet, what about the worshipper that does understand Arabic? What becomes of him or her? What lesson has he or she learned on this particular Friday that will help him or her live a better Muslim life? What if a non-Muslim visitor, who is interested in Islam, happens to show up during the English/Arabic hybrid service? What benefit will he or she gain? Every sermon, like in E.V.E.R.Y...is Crucial.

**The Khateeb cannot speak proper English and/or is an un-engaging speaker:** Their speeches are invariably spiced like a **cheap dinner**, with spices hot enough to mask the bland taste of the re-hashed, refried beans. It is truly a matter of wonder what a tablespoon of Quran, half a cup of hadith, a few duas, some slices of Islamic history & a couple drops of fiqh can do to poor ingredients. This whole concoction will be stewed & brewed over their feeble alchemical fires until all goodness & original flavour has evaporated. What a cauldron! What poor cooks! Spiritual junk food like this will **not** fatten our lean spirits.

**The topics of our Friday sermons are the same or can be read in a book:** How many times have we heard the verse: “Fasting has been prescribed upon you as it was prescribed upon the people before you that you may learn God-consciousness” right before Ramadan each & every year? How many times have we been told that “the fasting person has two happinesses...”? How many times have we been informed that the bad breath of the fasting person is

like Musk? Once, on the 26th Ramadan, the khateeb read the detailed fiqh of fasting, including the fact that we can kiss our wives without breaking our fast. Good God...

Our uninspiring sermons are nothing more than fiqh lessons that we can read in “Fiqh-us-Sunnah”: how many times have we been told about the things that break wudu? How many times have we been told that we have to bathe after spousal relations or nocturnal emissions? How many times have we been told that blood that is bigger than a quarter will make prayers invalid? How many times have we been told that, if we don’t hear a sound or smell an odour, we don’t have to repeat our wudu if there is doubt. **Good God**...ok...one more, *please*. How many more times do we have to endure the wagging finger & you must pray 5 times?

In many mosques across the country, there is very little effort to give us khateeb that (1) can talk about a familiar topic in a different way; (2) or talk about a completely new topic altogether.

The Khateeb does not inspire or give hope to the congregation: Another problem is that, so many khateeb continually remind us of how bad we are as Muslims. They constantly tell us how far we have deviated from the standard of the Sahabah (*how do they know*). We leave the prayer feeling sad and dejected. Almost no khateeb tells us that God loves us; on the contrary, he constantly reminds us that God will punish us severely for our sins. One khateeb devoted an entire sermon on the punishment of the grave. He looked so “grave” with eyes no livelier than tombstones that he must have been resurrected.

Another problem is that many khateeb tell us what we should do, but do not tell us how. The last thing people want to hear is being told “You have to...” “You have to get close to Allah...” [and then not be followed up with]...HOW. How are we supposed to get close to Allah? How are we supposed to increase our love in prayer? How do we increase our “dhikr” of Allah? How do we implement the Quran in our lives, as the Sahabah did? How?

**Declare a state of emergency:** Some Muslims never go to a Friday sermon because of the bumbling, the incoherency, the lack of inspiration, producing lots of perspiration that acts as lubrication for khutbah elimination. Some of us go because it is part of our routine; we cannot fathom not going. Others who may not be as obsessed as we are with Friday prayers may not

**O YOU WHO BELIEVE!**

**WHEN THE CALL IS PROCLAIMED FOR THE PRAYER ON THE DAY OF CONGREGATION (JUMUAH PRAYER),  
COME TO THE REMEMBRANCE OF GOD**

QURAN (62:9)

Zamals Software Co.; 6 Dowding St. Kitty

shamal2007@yahoo.com; Brochures on [zamalsgy.com](http://zamalsgy.com)

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