Today’s Khutba is about responding to what Allah is telling us. For at every stage of our lives, Allah is telling each and every one of us what we need to know with regards to how we are faring concerning what we were created for. And what were we created for? Allah says:

**"I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me"**

Ibn `Abbas (May God be pleased with him) is reported to have said that here li ya'budun (that they may serve Me) means li ya`rifun (that they may know Me).

So we’ve been created to worship Allah and know Him. This is a very different narration to the dominant narration we see around us. A glance at the modern world would lend many to conclude that we have been created to consume, to entertain ourselves, to make more and more money and to get more and more fame. That guy has the big house, big car, big title and that person is called a CEO – a Chief, he may be 30 years old but he’s a chief. I recently parked my car in a slot which I was told was reserved for a VIP – it doesn’t take much imagine to think what the ‘I’ or importance stood for – I don’t think his being a VIP was because of his Ibadaat or Taqwa, rather his importance was determined by his salary, his car, by his titles….the takathur of things we pile up of the dhaahir (the externality) from the life of this world.

And yet Allah tells us something different:

] **أَلْهَاكُمُ التَّكَاثُرُ\* حَتَّى زُرْتُمُ المَقَابِرَ\***

**The Piling up of worldly things diverts you,   
until you visit the graves (i.e.until you die).**

The word [alha – yulhee - lahwan (past tense) - il-haa] literally means entertainment, so the verse literally means we entertain ourselves by the piling up of things. The root word Lahw is that which distracts you, ilha – is to be distracted and pulled away from something…in this case from the dhikr of Allah, to be pulled away from Allah, as He says:

]**يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لا تُلْهِكُمْ أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلا أَوْلادُكُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ**

**O you who believe, do not let [tulhikum] your wealth and children distract you from the remembrance of Allah...and whosoever does that shall find that they are from the Losers.**

So success and failure is determined by a life lived for Allah. The more we live for Allah and have a heart filled with love for Allah the more we succeed in this life and the next. In fact such success is perceptively felt…

**أَلاَ بِذِكْرِ اللّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ**

**Is it not with the remembrance of Allah that hearts find contentment?**

The more one lives a life for Allah, the more one finds contentment – so you can see a person with not much outwardly, but with a lot inwardly – a heart filled with love of Allah. And you can also see the reverse, one with a lot of things outwardly, but inwardly impoverished.

A story by the late translator of the Qu’ran, Muhammad Asad, in his book ‘Road to Mecca’ illustrates the latter in a most vivid way. Muhammad Asad was a former Austrian Jew named Leopold Weiss who led a fascinating life which is partly documented in his famous book ‘Road to Mecca’. It is a seldom known piece of information that he was given Pakistani citizenship by the newly established Muslim state of [Pakistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan) and appointed the Director of the Department of Islamic Reconstruction and made recommendations towards the drafting of the new Nation State’s constitution. . He later on represented them as its Foreign Minister for the UN. Prior to his conversion to Islam, he worked as a journalist for Frankfurter Zeitung, a German Newspaper and travelled around the Muslim world, such as the Gulf and parts of South East Asia. He had come to see the pristine beauty of Islam – this was pre-oil and all the ‘progress’ we have since come to make, and in this world. Asad had come to fall in love with the "Bedouin," who as someone once wrote, "can sit for hours in the desert, feeling the ripples of time, without being bored." He had fallen love with the simple purity of faith and contentment that a life lived for Allah bequeaths its practitioners, and though he had not formally taken the faith himself at the time of his initial travels, it had given him enough insight to see something that eventually did herald his embracing the faith.

Upon his arrival back in Germany, he writes in his book about a trip on the German subway wherein he sees various people decked out in their finery, only to be in internal pain, coming home he looks upon the Qu’ran, the book says:

*“When we returned home, I happened to glance at my desk on which lay open a copy of the Koran I had been reading earlier. Mechanically, I picked the book up to put it away, but just as I was about to close it, my eye fell on the open page before me, and I read:*

**أَلْهَاكُمُ التَّكَاثُرُ\***

**حَتَّى زُرْتُمُ المَقَابِرَ**

**كَلاَّ سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ\***

**ثُمَّ كَلاَّ سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ\*كَلاَّ لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ اليَقِينِ\***

**لَتَرَوُنَّ الجَحِيمَ\***

**ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ اليَقِينِ\* ثُمَّ لَتُسْأَلُنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَنِ النَّعِيم**

***You are obsessed by greed for more and more  
Until you come to your graves.  
Nay, but you will come to know!   
Nay, but you will come to know!   
Nay, if you but knew it with the knowledge of certainty,   
You would indeed see the hell you are in.   
In time, indeed, you shall see it with the eye of certainty:   
And on that day you will be asked what you have did with the blessings you were given****.*

Leopold Weiss read Sûrah al-Takathur and embraced Islam; he become one of the first to translate the Qu’ran (albeit with some unorthodox opinions) into English. He had the foresight to see what was happening in his time. The reality though is that if he had lived till today – he would have seen the pattern in Germany being replicated in the Muslim world and who is to say that he wouldn’t have seen the same emptiness, the same pain - in our eyes this time- that comes from a life lived for other than Allah – seeking to pile up things in its place.

Renowned psychologist Oliver James, in his bestselling book ‘Affluenza’, alludes to what he says is a modern psychological virus primarily sweeping through the English speaking world since the 1970’s. The symptoms of those suffering from this ‘virus’, he lists as being obsessive, with envious, greed driven tendencies having twice as a much of a likelihood to be suffering from anxiety, depression and other addictions than those of other nations.

You might have had the feeling, “I wasn’t put here on earth to do this.” And it’s not just the office boys and workers and cleaners who feel that feeling. How many of us have met and know people with 6- and 7-figure incomes that have that feeling, “I wasn’t put here on earth to maximize a number.” That’s what a lot of jobs are. Wall Street jobs are like that – trying to make a number go up in a computer. Or marketing executives try to make market share go up, or in business you try to make profit go up. “Was I really put on earth to do that?”

Physical pain in the physical sense is a messenger that tells us, "Don't do that," and we are wise to heed it. But when we feel the spiritual pain of a life lived for other than Allah, what do we do? We seek to ignore it and to distract ourselves from it - here watch a movie, have more entertainment.

Entertainment. Have you ever thought about that word? To entertain a guest means to bring him into your house; to entertain a thought means to bring it into your mind. To be entertained means to be brought into the television, the game, the movie. It means to be removed from your self and the real world. When a television show does this successfully, we applaud it as entertaining. Thus, entertainment is escapism – our constant craving for entertainment only points to the impoverishment of our reality.   
  
But the second-hand pseudo-experiences that today's entertainment media provide assuage our hunger only temporarily, in the end they only intensify that hunger. Like any object of addiction, they are a counterfeit that leaves the real need unmet - a shortcoming that is temporarily disguisable by increasing the dose.   
  
Movies and music for example have become progressively more intense, louder, and faster-paced over recent decades. Computer 3-D animation, the Internet, youtube, iPhone, iPads, has brought to fruition things we could previously never think possible - and yet we feel more and more empty in the relentless anxiety that has come to dominates modern life. As a commentator on the ills of modern society recently said:

"Everyone can feel the nothingness, the void, just beneath the surface of everyday routines and securities." We live in a world of images, of representations, that separate us from real experience; we then try to meet the hunger for reality with yet more images. The further intensification of dosage is therefore an inevitability—we can never get enough. **It is like trying to assuage hunger by chewing gum.”**

The pain stays, the wound stays, it finds a way to keep coming out, it is an interior wound manifests in a million ways: an omnipresent loneliness, an unreasonable sadness, an undirected rage, a gnawing discontent, a seething resentment. When there is nothing to do, nothing to entertain ourselves, nothing to busy ourlselves with - it surfaces again…boredom is an increasingly common experience for today’s youth.

Apparently in a general sense, boredom was not even a concept before the word was invented around 1760, along with the word "interesting".

And yet today Boredom is so endemic to our culture, particularly among youth, that we imagine it to be a near-universal default state of human existence. The fact that it rapid mass emergence coincides with the progress of the Industrial Revolution, hints illustratively at a reason why some feel that it has , until relatively, been an exclusively Western invention. Its mass export has coincided with what the factory system created a mass-produced reality, standardized products, standardized roles, standardized tasks, and standardized lives. A realm of atrificial lives where we are increasingly defined by what we consume more than anything else.

Things – Mine! As that word mine indicates, ownership implies an attachment of things to self. The more we own, the more we think we are. The more we think the constellation of me and mine grows. Why do we feel the need to do this, because wheen you remove Allah – when we are no longer Abd of Allah, the insignifiance of our lives comes infront of us and we seek to maximize ourselves by things….mistakingly thinking we are who we are by what we own.

"Be like Mike," the Nike ads used to say—and through our cars, our houses, our watches, our clothing, our sports teams – we feel we are more than the tiny little blob we see in our physical reality whenever the scale of our proportions become apparent, such as on a plane, when we look below.

This is what the Prophet feared for us, for he said:

**وَاللَّهِ مَا الْفَقْرَ أَخْشَى عَلَيْكُمْ، وَلَكِنْ أَخْشَى عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْ تُبْسَطَ عَلَيْكُمُ الدُّنْيَا، كَمَا بُسِطَتْ عَلَى مَنْ كَانَ قَبْلَكُمْ، فَتَنَافَسُوهَا كَمَا تَنَافَسُوهَا وَتُلْهِيَكُمْ كَمَا أَلْهَتْهُمْ**

**“By Allah, it is not poverty that I fear for you. Rather I fear that the World would be outspread for you, just as it was spread for those before you and you will compete with each other over it as they did and you will be ruined as they were ruined."**

Today we compete to build the world’s largest, tallest, biggest, etc. We have masaajid made from the finest carpets with beautiful pillars – but where are the people ? Where are the rijaal (men) who make up the masaajid – where are the Umar al Khattabs, the Abu Bakrs, the Ali’s of this Ummah (may Allah be pleased with them all)?

To fill up the incompleteness our lives we have been deluded into thinking that adding more and more to ourselves, more property, more material baggage, ultimately more ego, more self-importance, Takathur…can actually benefit us?

The interior wound—the loss of our inner connection to worshipping Allah—is never healed by the accretion of more and more self on the outside. It is the inside where we have to look. The sense of entitlement that drives selfishness and greed thus arises from an authentic source: that we have been robbed of our birthright- to know and worship Allah.

So something is missing, it's just that we are looking in the wrong place for it. An ancient folkloric tale describes the sage, Mullah Nasruddin, groping around under the streetlight. A passer-by asks, "Mullah, what are you looking for?"   
"Alas," replies the hapless Nasruddin, "I have lost my house key."  
"Well, when was the last time you saw it?"  
"I think I lost it over there in the shadow of those trees."  
"Well, why are you looking for it here then?"  
"Sir, can you not see how dark it is there? I am looking here under the streetlight where I can see better."

What we are missing is nothing less than the key to our homecoming, a look inward – that makes us aware of that we were created and that we have a Lord and that we have to worship Him.

Unfortunately, for most of us, we dare not look in the frightening shadows where the key actually lies, preferring instead to find that missing something in a safe zone. So conditioned are we to anxiety that we dare not leave its domain. Notice how all the things we pursue in lieu of our life purpose—money, beauty, career, power, prestige, possessions—are all linked to survival borne out of fear: the desire to amass as if somehow these things will help us once we die.

**So what is the cure?**

A popular bumper sticker in the west once said: “He with the most toys when he dies – Wins.”

Perhaps deliberately, the sticker illustrates the irony of the modern age, the items we amass are not of much use to us where we’re all eventually going. Our graves have only so much space and our various items are of not much use there. Some people mistakenly believe that glory and titles likewise add to them – but what good are they – if they’re not around to be appreciated.

This is the why the Qu’ran says:

**كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ لَهُ الْحُكْمُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ**

**Everything is perishing except His Countenance (and that done for Him). His is the judgement, and to Him you will be returned.**

Death is a reality we cannot deny, every second that passes – brings you closer to it. Every second while living you are in active destruction, coming ever closer to the reality that you will die and meet your Creator. The Qu’ranic reference to ‘perishing’ is in the form of an active participle, implying and agreeing very much with the constant state of flux that we all exist in, at every moment you are perishing. Where is the young boy that was one you ? Perished. You can point to him in old family picture and say that’s ‘me’, but he’s not you, you’re you, that young boy shared your identity for sometime – but he’s gone, he’s perished. The illusion of the photo and family video allows you to re-live memories but cannot bring him back, he’s gone and at every moment you are in an active process of perishing. So if everything we have is going, what do we have that stays?

As the verse says, that done for His countenance, i.e. Him. If you want to make the most of your life, make Allah its goal, make every moment you have a means to draw closer to Him, then those moments acquire a shade of eternity, they are not subject to the perishable nature of the world, they will live on – in a hereafter of eternity by His Will.

Thus, death, as a point of reflection, is also a means by which we can awake ourselves from the slumber of living a life based on piling things up – a life in which things and entertainment are all we have to shout about. Things that in themselves are ultimately of no value. To reflect on death is a means of waking up from the slumber of the dead hearts that incline to the materialism of this world. This is why Ali (may Allah enoble him) is said to have said: "People are asleep and when they die - they wake up." Hence it makes sense to die a death before death, dying a death of the empty aspirations of piling things up of this world – a death that brings in its wake – life. The life of the soul, the life of one who lives for Allah.

It is because of this that the Qu’ran may be said to allude to the next verse of visiting the graves, it says:

**حَتَّى زُرْتُمُ المَقَابِر**

**Until you visit the Graves.**

The Qu’ran uses the word ‘Maqaabir’, it could have said Quboor which would literally have been ‘graves’ but chose to refer to the place of the graves – in other words, allowing for the idea of either physically dying or the idea of reflection upon death itself. The Qu’ran alludes to how reflection upon death, upon the temporality of this world – is a cure for the wanton materialism of the modern age. How many people do we know that suddenly became religious after the death of a close one in their family, it is as if death itself provided a wake up call – that life is a not a series of moments we are meant to maximise our pleasure and consumption is – but is a pointer to a greater reality.

The consequences of not heeding this warning are great, as the Qu’ran says:

**كَلاَّ سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ\* ثُمَّ كَلاَّ سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ**

**Nay, you will come to know. Again, nay, you will come to know.**

The Qu’ran uses the word Thumma [Again!] which adds takhfeem (heaviness) to the first ayah. In any warning such a rhetorical device conveys the sense of urgency and the gravity of the impending danger . By repeating the warning - the warning is more stronger and emphasises urgency in the situation. (i.e. "Stop! Stop!)

**كَلاَّ لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ اليَقِينِ**

**Nay, if you were to come to know with certainty of knowledge.**

According to the great linguist, Raghib Isfahani, yaqeen is a kind of knowledge that implies certainty more than just 'knowing'. It is a form of knowledge that as conviction should bequeath action.

This is why Allah says:

**وَاعْبُدْ رَبَّكَ حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِيَكَ الْيَقِينُ**

**And worship your Lord until there comes to you the certainty [yaqeen] (death).**

The one thing we all know is we’re going to die. But do we really know or are we really convinced, i.e. have Yaqeen that we are going to die. If we did, would we be living our lives the way, an onlooker upon us would probably be forgiven for us thinking we’re invincible, that we can keep putting off our priorities of getting our religion straight with Allah for another day, while we choose the temporalities of this world.

Do we really ‘know’ we’re going to die – if we did, why aren’t we living our lives as such ? If I told you, the world would come to an end in 100 years – it would likely bring about a sense of panic, yet, that is exactly what is going to happen, for you, your world, comes to an end in a 100 years and all you’ll have is what you did for Allah. So what are you doing about it ?

Or are you in doubt ?

**وَإِذَا قِيلَ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَالسَّاعَةُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهَا قُلْتُم مَّا نَدْرِي مَا السَّاعَةُ إِن نَّظُنُّ إِلَّا ظَنًّا وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُسْتَيْقِنِينَ**

**"And when it was said that the promise of Allah was true, and that the Hour- there was no doubt about its (coming), you used to say, 'We know not what is the hour: we only think it is an idea, and we have no firm assurance.'"  
  
[al Jathiyah 45:32]**

If you are from those who have no firm assurance, no yaqeen, its time you started acquiring some. There are different levels of yaqeen, commensurate to the levels of faith that one has in the eternal certainties that Allah has promised us, they can be summarized as follows:

- 'Ilm al yaqeen - certainty based on knowledge, i.e. hearing second hand about a fire from others or deducing it from secondary observance such as seeing smoke which normally signifies a fire.  
  
- 'Ayn al yaqeen - certainty based on seeing, i.e. Seeing the fire.   
  
- Haq al yaqeen – certainty of experience. Feeling the fire as it warms you or burns you.

This is why Allah refers to Ilm al Yaqeen in the following verse,

**كَلاَّ لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ اليَقِينِ\* لَتَرَوُنَّ الجَحِيمَ**

**Nay, if you but knew it with the knowledge of certainty,   
You would indeed see the hellfire*.***

Muhammad Assad, chose to translate this verse as the ‘Hell you are in’, although most translators took this to mean the hellfire of the afterlife, hellfire is a place of torment primarily because of what it represents - a place of distance from God, manifesting His displeasure. For those who choose to live their lives away from God, the ‘hell’ of distance from Him is something they come to acquaint themselves within in this life. We have been created to know and worship Allah, that is what our Soul wants – to live a life otherwise is to torture oneself.

**ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ**

**Then you shall most certainly see it with certainty of sight**

So if you will only believe it through seeing it - then you will see it physically, but at the stage the chance to reform ourselves is no longer there, reality is manifest and every one shall have what he deserves.

**ثُمَّ لَتُسْأَلُنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَنِالنَّعِيمِ**

**Then certainly you will be thoroughly asked about the blessings you had.**

The emphatic form of la tus'alun-na (with a shadda), is to say, you will certainly, certainly be asked. Thus emphasizing the nature of the questioning, how it will certainly come about and how it will take into account every precise moment of our lives. For a moment’s reflection will make us conclude that we did nothing to deserve creation and that alongside being brought into existence (Ijaad) we are constantly being existentiated (imdaad) – both of these two blessings pre-suppose all other countless blessings we partake in, every moment of our life is a blessing that we will be asked about. We are born out of nothingness, we arrive as helpless infants, yet we find we are fed, protected, clothed, held and soothed. What did we do to deserve that? Our lives and by definition all of the multitude of experiences and blessings that we experience are given to us is a gift. As long as we live, all of us partake in the wonderment of riches that life constantly offers us, undeserved and freely available, they come to us at no cost: the joy of breathing, the delights of color and sound, the pleasure of drinking water, the sweetness of affectionate touch, seeing a beloved’s face – all of this is something we will be asked about.

May Allah give us the ability to take ourselves to account before we are taken to account, to adopt the way of Shukr, the way of gratitude that necessitates a life lived for Allah – to see the world for what it is – and what it is not. To take the dunya as means to serve Him by placing it in our hands and not in our hearts, for when it is in our hands, it is a slave to us and when it is in our hearts, we are a slave to it – and a slave of the dunya can never be a slave of Allah.

And to rectify our hearts making us sincerely for Him - is not a thing difficult for Him, so to Him we turn and to Him do we look for help.

Wasalaam.