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Khutbah

Title: [That Which Allows Ma'ruf to Triumph Over Munkar](#)

DVD title: At the Root of Islam is Compassion/Rahman
At the Root of Rahman is Ma'ruf and Munkar

Opening *Du'ās*

Bismillah ar Rahman ir Raheem. It is an important time in our lives, and we should always remember Allah in every moment of our lives. We want to say, “Bismillah ir Rahman ir Raheem (congregation repeats),” because this is a time when we are to remember, in the month of Muharram, the compassion of Allah. Sunni or Shia, it makes no difference. This is a time for remembering the reality of Islam against, unfortunately, the reality of Islam in the world we live in today, where there is forgetfulness and there is not the awareness of the compassion and mercy of Allah.

I want to speak on the subject of *ma'ruf* and *munkar*, because I feel that at the root of any compassion, or at the root of any understanding of this Islam, we have to understand what enjoins us to do good and what forbids us to do evil. It is not some God on high on a throne, but what resides, who resides in our heart, in our choices, in our sense of right and wrong, justice, equity, peace and understanding. And let us remember what is happening now, as we speak, in Gaza. But not just remembering what is happening in Gaza because there are Muslims there. There are also Christians there. There are also Jews who will probably be dying in this conflict—all of the Ahl al Kitab. But we have to remember all the people who are suffering in this world by oppression. We have to remember that this oppression comes from ignorance and the lack of the understanding of the *rahmat* of Allah (SwT). We have to remember that we live in the ocean of the *rahmat* of Allah. Just

as we breathe the air that He provides for us.

You know, those of you who live here and study with me and keep me on the straight path know that when I say “He”, I mean a whole reality, a whole system, not some anthropomorphized view of God or Allah. He is the Provider. What it is that we, in English, risk, when we do not follow the way of Allah (Swt) is the *rizq*/provision of Allah (Swt). That is what we are risking, that is what we are betting against. That is what we are saying, that we don’t accept what Allah (Swt) has provided for us. We do not understand what Allah (Swt) has provided for us.

Allah (Swt) says: **“Hold fast on the rope of Allah! Don’t be divided and remember the favor of Allah upon you. For those of you who are enemies so that He brought your hearts together so that through His blessings, you became brothers. And you were on the brink of an abyss of fire and He saved you from it. So does Allah make clear His signs that you may be guided.”**

And He tells us later in Qur’an: **“You have eyes but you don’t see. You have ears but you don’t hear.”** So what is clear? Clear to who? Why, because He says:

And there may grow out of you a community who invite all to goodness and enjoy doing the right and forbid doing what is wrong. And it is those who are successful.

A community, not just an individual—and a community grows out of the womb of the mother. We are of really one blood, of one mother, children of Adam and Hawa. I appreciate when people say that we are the children of Ibrahim (as), but the reality is that we are all the children of Adam and Hawa. We Muslims have to remember this. We

have to remember that all the people are our brothers and sisters, potentially. They are all our cousins. They are all our aunts and uncles. Their parents made them something else, but we are all born in submission to Allah (Swt). We have to remember that Muslim is not a title. It is a reality. We are all born in submission. Not one of us was born out of the womb, stood up and asked for breakfast, walked over to the table and ate it. We needed someone else. We needed our mother. We needed our father. We needed our community to grow.

So my dear brothers and sisters, endless are the reminders in Qur'an. Are we really or can we be: **“And you are the best community that has been brought forth for the good of humanity. You enjoin good and forbid evil, and you believe in Allah.”**

And He goes on: **“If the people of the book had believed it would have been better for them. Some of them are believers, but most of them are corrupt.”**

Well, look around. We should, of course, begin with ourselves. There is a common theme in these verses that are captured with these words, to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, in this terminology of Qur'an, the two words that capture the essence of this important phrase, *ma'ruf* and *munkar*, to establish *ma'ruf* and eradicate *munkar*. So let us explore that for a moment or two, and try to gain some better understanding of this duty that is enjoined on us (it is not a suggestion), which Qur'an places on the shoulders of the members of the Ummah, the community of the believers. It is not a community of people who call themselves by a name; but rather, people who strive to act and when they fail, remember Allah.

When they succeed, they remember Allah (Swt). They remember the teachings and the Hikam of Ibn At'ala Askandari (ra): our sins, *our sins* are blessings of Allah (Swt). It

takes away the excuses we have. You sin and then you continue to sin because you are lost? Forget it. I take it away from you. You do not have that excuse anymore.

Forgetfulness—this is a blessing of Allah (Swt), because, “Oh, my God. I forgot.” As Muslims, we can say: “Ya Allah, I forgot.” The Christians do not say, “Jesus.” They say that it using the name in vain. We use it in meaning, “Ya Allah! I forgot.” I told you last night that I forgot my cell phone, but I remembered that I forgot it. *Alhamdulillah*.

It is not by mere chance that we reflect on the Qur’anic understanding of *ma’ruf* is when recently, our brothers and sisters came from the plains of Arafat (same root), came back with more wisdom, *irfan* (same root), knowledge, and hopefully uplifted to a state of consciousness, *ma’rifat*. But this is not just available to those who travel geographically to the plains of Arafat. But it is to turn to the Ka’ba in us and make the journey, moment to moment, day by day, year by year to the center of our being, wherein we taste, we get the *dhawq*, of the *rahmat* of Allah (Swt). We get the taste of justice. We get the taste of equity; we get the taste of love within us. A migration we should make daily. We should make it, not just five times a day. If we could make it five times a day really well, *alhamdulillah*, that is all we need. (And that was negotiated, as you know, down from 25.)

But we have to make it in the inter-spaces between the prayers, where the reminders are, where the ‘*āyāt* are. It is obvious that this is a symbol (points to the prayer carpet). It is obvious that this is a symbol (gestures to the *mehrab*). But what about our thoughts? What about our interactions with one another? What about the enjoinders that we can make by the tone of our voice, by our friendship, by our, “*Asalaam alaikum*.” Do not forget where some of this comes from. [The *hadith* says] *that when some of the Banu Isra’il would greet the Prophet (sal), ‘Aisha would get upset and want to return the curses. And the Prophet said, “Did you not hear what I said? I said, “Aleikum. And to*

you.” Return to the enemy good words and good greetings.

Generally speaking, what is *ma'ruf* is good, acceptable, well known, honorable and befitting. As with *'arifa*, *ma'ruf* implies knowledge and knowledge of that which is good, [a knowledge] when an individual gets to know his/her Creator as well as to get to know their self. So it denotes what is good, well known and what is a standard. What constitutes *ma'ruf* also has, by its nature and its reality, a divine sanction to us. This has very important implications, because each society has a tradition of belief about what is right and what is wrong and what is good and what is bad. This gives birth to ethics and morality. It gives us a sense of position and responsibility and duty. And morality, as we know, is a social institution often culturally defined, culturally bounded with a history and a code of learned rules. One society believes that such and such a thing is moral and good and another society believes that it is not. But the ethics are universal. The principles are universal.

We do not create our own morality by creating our own rules, however. It cannot just be a personal policy or code. It is a social code that is arrived at and derived by people. But another term often used with these ethics is a kind of intellectual discipline, an intellectual honesty, a sense of critical inquiry, which we find missing in our society today and missing in our Islamic society today. [Instead, there] is a fear of critical inquiry, a fear of knowledge. [There is] not [the attitude to], “*Seek out knowledge from the cradle to the grave,*” as Prophet Mohamed (sal) enjoins us to do, but actually a fear of knowledge. That means we develop a very patronizing, paternalistic mentality. We bring up our children and think, “I am going to indoctrinate them; but I am going to keep a heavy hand on them, because I don’t really trust what I am teaching them.”

There is no way of understanding the *qadr*. There is no way of understanding how Allah

brings us to Him, to the Truth. So we do our best and we hope that we planted seeds. Some seeds take ninety days to germinate. Some seeds take 120 days to germinate. Some seeds can germinate overnight. Some seeds bear fruit after three months. Some things will grow in a certain environment but die in another environment. I can't plant dates here. They may germinate in the summer, but the date trees are going to die. So we don't know these kinds of mysterious *taqdir*. We can assume that if we walk on the good path and if we enjoin to the good, the environment is there for the fruit to grow, *insh'allah*. The environment is there to grow sweet fruit. So where do we find this lack of confidence in the teachings that we teach? Do we believe it? Are we honest and say, "I don't know how good a teacher I am of this. The fault lies with me." So I seek out better ways, better environment, articulate things in a more constructive and understandable way. Allah tells us He rewards all that effort, if we are remembering Allah (Swt) in this.

Allah tells us: "**Remember Me and I will remember you.**" I will add to what you give. "**You come walking towards Me; I will come running towards you.**" These are all symbolic statements, as well as real statements. How can Allah come running to us? Is Allah not here? Is He somewhere else? Do you have a picture of someone in a jogging suit running to us? What does it mean? It means, coming swiftly to our consciousness, available to us, providing for us His *nai'ma*/grace, His *fadl*/ bounty. What are they? Are they only material things? No. They are inspirations. They are ideas. They are reflections. They are the whole system that we call Allah (Swt). They are the interrelated system that responds to us, and is created for us. We are put at the nexus. Why? How do we know? Because we know intuitively. We know the attributes of Allah (Swt), which the angels did not know. We know the names. Why do we know? Because it is a reflection out of which we were created. Therefore, just like the Greeks showed, if I pluck a C string, all the Cs will resonate. The frequencies will resonate. Compassion

resonates throughout the universe. Mercy resonates. As- Salaam. Ar-Rahman. Ar-Raheem.

So to enjoin to do good is to be present, to be aware and to affirm and to articulate that presence and to display it; therefore, it helps us to make our decisions, what we ought to do and what we should not do. It is to be fundamentally concerned about what human good is or what harm is. It can also be concerned with the impact of human actions on other forms of creation, for example, the environment, the physical environment, the political mentality of the day we live in today, the decisions that people are making, the value they place or don't place on human life, on human effort. And do those sixty-seven wounds on the body of Imam Hussein not represent the destruction today in Gaza, multiplied, at this point, three times in lives, if not, hundreds of times? Is the beheading not symbolic of taking the core, the place of knowledge, and the place of belief, and the place of intellect and knowing away from the body? But they missed the heart. Because of this, they strengthened Islam. They did not weaken Islam. They could not kill Islam by killing Hussein (as). They killed only the lack of faith. They lifted faith.

We have to remember, of course, that this Ashura is not just for Shi'a. It is also for Sunni Muslims, many lessons to learn from it. Today we are seeing, again, the replay of that—*munkar, nakara*. It means to be ignorant or to disavow or to feel repugnance towards something. It is the opposite of *ma'ruf*. But it also has the meaning of things that are disallowed and unlawful and objectionable. So armed with the basic understanding of these two terms, we can see these verses that I quoted from Al-Qur'an address groups of people, not just individuals, which I sort of touched on when I quoted them. But Qur'an uses the word *ummah* in each of these verses and addresses community as faith community. This community is consolidated on the basis of a very high degree of moral consciousness, of moral agreement, founded on universal principles, universal ethics that

anyone, if we can articulate them in their language, can agree with—anyone except maybe the worst criminal mind, the diseased mind.

This is, then, a major defining characteristic of our *ummah Islama*, the community constituted on the basis of ethical and moral consciousness, of specific commands from the *'ālam al-amr* sent to the *'ālam al-khalq*. These commands are constantly flowing down to this creation. The commands [are] not like, “don’t do this” “don’t do that.” [They are] commands like “Be careful; don’t trip.” “Cover your head. It’s cold outside. Zip up your jacket.” Those kinds of commands [are] compassionate commands, loving commands. “Watch out! Be careful! Look where you are going.” And sometimes: “Didn’t I tell you? Didn’t I warn you? If you had listened you would not have that sore throat right now, that cold.” Those kind of loving commands.

Why do we have to think of these commands as being thunderbolts from the sky that are so much related in Torah? These are gentle commands, loving commands: “Watch out!” “Be careful!” This is the understanding that we Muslims should carry to the world. This is the service that we should provide to the world. They should not think of us in anyway but the people who address the needs of humanity, food security, poverty, genocide, unemployment, infrastructural problems. We have a history of solving those problems, because anyone who has any belief in this universe, in this Creator of this Universe sees how ordered and measured it is, how beautiful it is.

I was sitting with our friend who is passing on her death bed. She is looking out at the barrenness of winter and telling me how beautiful it is, *alhamdulillah*. In a way, we are on our death bed every day, because today is dying, and tomorrow is coming. We don’t know. We should live for today and do everything we can do for today and also be grateful if tomorrow comes. The root of, at least our understanding of Islam through

Tariqah and Tasawwuf, is that the root is the *rahmat* and the *shukr* of Allah (Swt). Without that gratitude, who are we? We are breathing the air, and up until now, there is no charge for it. We have managed to charge for water, but then we get poisoned by the plastic that it is in. But the air is still free. I wish we could say it was pure, but, of course....that is a whole other khutbah.

So we have traveled from Arafat to *ma'ruf*. We have to contemplate to Allah on the plains of Arafat and we have to contemplate and communicate in *tafakkur* with Allah in the plains of our heart. I hope this is a beginning to explore the meaning of this and especially in this month of Muharram. If we allow *munkar* to triumph, it will lead to our loss, but if we let *ma'ruf* to triumph in our lives, then the whole world gains, the whole world gains. All religious communities, through their various scriptures, texts, teachings, prohibitions, prescriptions have spoken of this. Even non-religious people ascribe to notions of good and evil, bad and good. We can play a very important role as a vanguard in today's society. It is not the point of whether we succeed. I had a phone call from one of my brother's, a *shaykh*. He was saying, "I don't know what all of this is going to lead to (meaning the new administration in Washington)." I was telling him about my contacts with them and our secular work. He said, "I don't know. I don't have much hope in anything." I said, "Yes. But let us not forget that that is not the point. The point is that we have to do our best—as if... as if change will come." That is what we are enjoined to do.

That is why we are given the *amanat*. We cannot give up. That is why Allah tells us to forgive, to live to give, for giving. We also say to forget. Forgetting is very difficult. But not live to get, but to give. That is what we are enjoined to do as Muslims, hopefully, hopefully as *mu'min*. Anyone can take the name Muslim by saying a few words. But *mu'min* is not anything anybody calls themselves. It is only something someone displays

and that is recognized by Allah (Swt). Anyone can say, “I am a *murīd*.” But who can say “I am *murad*.”? So this is, I hope, *insh’Allah*, the beginning of something again to remind us of something greater than, *insh’Allah*, our own self, but certainly focused on our own self. *Insh’Allah t’ Allah*.

Closing *dua*’s.

I want to remember, please, those who are ill and those who are dying and those who are making sacrifices among our friends and people we know and we don’t know in the Muslim community and among those people in the world who are suffering and ask that Allah’s hand be spread over them and over our families and those who are with us and those who are not with us. To be our companion and our guardian, *Insh’Allah t’ Allah*.