

January 9, 2009

Khutbah

Title: **The Challenges We Face Today**

DVD title: The Challenges We Face Today
Ask: What is the Benefit of This Crisis?

(Opening *du'ās*) Well, my brothers and sisters, *Asalaamu aleikum*. It's a very joyous day today, because it is the birthday of my youngest daughter Samah, and it brings great joy to our hearts that she is with us. And it is a very serious day as we contemplate the future of the world for our children. There are many crises in the world that we have to be concerned with, and many reasons for us to be proactive instead of reactive, or at least responding properly to what has already occurred. We live at a time of crisis. Of course we can have said that many, many times over the years, but somehow the crises we are facing these days seem somewhat more immediate and far-reaching.

Allah Swt says in the Qur'an,

And surely We shall try you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of worldly wealth, and lives and the fruit of labor. And give good news to the steadfast who when they are visited with misfortune say, "Truly we belong to Allah, and truly to Him is our return." Upon them rests the blessings of their Sustainer and mercy; and it is they who are guided. (2:155)

We need to be of the steadfast and understand that the trials that are coming to us and to our brothers and sisters throughout the world, especially our brothers and sisters in Palestine today, are tests of Allah Swt. On the other side there are also tests of Allah for

the Israelis. They may say they are being tested by their patience or their survival, but moreover they are really being tested by their trust in God, too; and in their ability to find ways to really solve or at least a means of beginning to solve an issue that far transcends the limited boundaries of their country or even the region they co-inhabit with the Palestinians and other Arabs, Muslims, Jews, and Christians.

So today I want to try to deal with the crisis in the lives of these people, and therefore in our lives—the challenges of our times. One of the attributes of reciting Sūratu Kahf, especially on Fridays, is to give us strength and to learn how to resist, to learn how to live our lives amidst the trials and tribulations. Part of the systemic reality is to help us remember Allah Swt, to understand the limitations of *dunya*, the physical world, and to prepare us to understand the freedom of our *ruh*. The descriptions in Sūratu Kahf are very beautiful. Allah Swt in the Qur'an makes many back and forth statements about trials He gives us. He says, also in Suratu-l-'Arāf,

And We dispersed them all over the earth as separate communities.

And among them, some were righteous and some were other than that.

And later We tested them with good times and bad, that perhaps they would return to the straight path. (7:168)

Then He goes on to tell us what happens after that in this dispersion, this diasporic intention of Allah Swt to test whether people stay on the straight path, and with the teachings of their belief, the revealed teachings—in the case of the Jews, the Torah, and in the case of the Palestinians, the Muslims (who are also in diaspora), and for the Christians who are among the Arabs. He says,

And there followed them successors who inherited the Book while they

grasped at the goods of the lower life. saying, “It will be forgiven to us.” And all the while they were ready, if a similar chance of fleeting good comes to them, to take it. Was it not a covenant taken *from* them on the Book that they would not say anything about Allah save the truth, and they studied what was in it? The home of the final life is better for those who guard themselves for Allah. Will you not use your intelligence? (7:169)

Then He reveals the truth again.

And for those who hold fast to the Book and establish their salat, surely We shall not allow the reward of those who set things right to be lost. (7:170)

Then in a sort of prognostication of what is to come, He says:

And remember when We shook the mountain above them as though it were shadow, and they thought it would fall upon them. Hold to what We have given to you with all your strength, and remember what is in it in order that you may guard yourselves for Allah. (7:171)

Allah speaks to us of crisis among people and nations, with tests and trials for many, in many different circumstances. We are to understand that of course there are many, many problems, challenges, tests and trials. It can be an earthquake or bombs shaking the mountains. There can be flood and fires that come through nature, or floods of water mains bursting, and fires as the result of bombs. There can be death that comes from plague or war. A terrible crisis can be a disease like AIDS or disease that comes from the destruction of war and genocide. The outcome of any crisis is a large degree of pain

and suffering.

But the reward of how we deal with the crises in *dunya* is multiplied if people are patient, if they submit themselves to Allah Swt, and persevere within the context of the essence of their faith, if of course the essence of their faith is extant, reachable, understandable, offered to them even in the midst of crisis. The Qur'an teaches people to be patient and to persevere when there are calamities. In Suratu-l-Baqarah, Allah says,

We will test you with something of fear and hunger and loss of goods and lives and the fruit of your toil. But give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere, who say when afflicted with calamity, "To Allah we belong and to Him is our return." (2:155)

We also say this when someone dies. Just like we have different degrees of pain thresholds, many of us find ourselves defining things in our lives as crises when other people would laugh and say, "You call this a crisis? You call this pain? You call this loss?" It's one thing to have a flood or a water main break as it did in Washington, or an earthquake. It's another thing to have them break under the impact of 500 pound bombs, which take along with them people and property. Those things are clearly crises. But the trials and vicissitudes of day to day life that we all experience, and that I may consider a crisis, may not be a crisis to someone else. But everyone agrees that no matter what you define as a crisis, you feel some damage from it, some strain from it.

Very few people talk about the benefit of strain and crisis. It almost seems to be *haram* to talk about the benefit—cold, insensitive. Dare we talk about the benefit of this crisis, a rain of bombs upon the Palestinians? What is the benefit? But Allah does not give us anything without a potential benefit to it. People who fight wars in the name of religion

or some kind of cultural-religious or pseudo-religious mentality, forget this part of the equation. They talk about responding with like, an “eye for an eye”, tooth for a tooth, the *jihad*, the sacred right to own the land, while all the other sacredness is thrown out the window in a secular society. Or if one has only power based on the “*jihad*,” what would happen if there was no need for the *jihad*? What would happen to those people? Would they go quietly to their homes, melt their weapons down, and turn them into plowshares and pruning hooks? Or is their identity so locked up in their *jihad* or their historical ideology of destiny that they dare not contemplate peace and understanding? [They] dare not see what this trial and tribulation is pointing them to, an affirmation of the deepest spiritual values, the most profound trust in Allah Swt, the challenge to be a believer in the midst of all this chaos and murder and genocidal activities.

The crisis in the Middle East today, like all the crises there over the last 60 some years, has been exacerbated and caused by the selfish and greedy politicization of the region and of the faith of the people. Whether it was years ago when Ariel Sharon turned a blind eye to Sabra and Shatilla, or whether it was in ‘48 or ’73, or pick a year. Pick a circumstance. Then these people come out and make themselves over to look like they are peacemakers. Maybe if you spelled it “piece” makers, fragment-ers, turning things into pieces. Because we are Muslims—and we try not to be overly political and still have our right to criticize and critique what is happening from a spiritual point of view—we have to look to the benefit. What is it Allah is placing before us? What is it the system is responding to, to set us back on the *siratal mustaqim*? [It is] to make peace something that has value; that’s not just the absence of war. [It is] to make love, brotherhood and sisterhood a value.

Had I wanted, I would have made you all one community. But I made you different so that you could come to know one another.

Come to love one another, and respect one another, so that the enemy turns into a friend, as Allah tells us. We can't turn a blind eye to those *'āyāt*. It's not, if everything goes all right, then that will happen. It has to be made to happen, by faith and belief. All of our faith and beliefs are tested. If you feel the tests from here, imagine what you would feel when the doctor ran into the hospital in Gaza carrying his one child who is alive, saying, "I could not bring the body of my wife. She has been cut in half, and my one year old son is dead." She was Ukrainian. She and the children could have gone out, but she refused to leave her husband's side. He has to live with that. That's just one little story. What's the benefit? How easy is it to look for benefit in that situation? Perhaps you can say that during a crisis, people often turn to God, Allah. Maybe they come back toward Allah. On the other hand, there are people who think Allah has abandoned them. In the times of material security and peace, people get lazy and don't necessarily feel or see or look for the presence of Allah Swt in their lives.

When times are difficult, maybe they tend to pray and remember Him and seek His favor, or at least call out to Him in the misery they see around them. Maybe that will happen. Certainly it will happen for some people, to some extent. People may pray, "O Allah, relieve us of this crisis, and we will try not to make the same mistake again." Maybe that happens in some cases. But Allah says in Suratu-l-'Arāf,

We have tried them with both prosperity and adversity in order that they may turn to Us. (7:168)

That's the point. Allah tells us the point. This is why the crisis comes. This is what the trials and tribulations are for, because we forget. What about the people who are remembering every day among those people? Are they part of the collateral spiritual damage? There are people who really believe this living in Gaza and in Israel. What about

them? Why are they being punished along with everyone else? We *all* need to be tried and tested. You don't just get faith and belief, and there's an absolute guaranteed investment that will both stay and grow. I don't think so. It's a reminder for each of us. When people wander astray, one way of bringing them back is to be tried with adversity, but also with prosperity. In a strange way, this battle today is between adversity and prosperity, fear of loss of what one has, hopelessness in gaining anything other than what one has. Of course we would say, "I would rather be tried with prosperity than adversity," but who would see that as a trial?

Then patience and perseverance, Allah tells us. Patience and perseverance are necessary when one faces difficulties. Those of us who face hardships, crises, difficulties—if we are patient with Allah, Allah tells us He will reward us in paradise. *Alhamdulillah*. If life in this world is hell, [though] people may feel paradise is a great reward, on the other hand, people may feel, "How can I think of paradise when I see what is happening in front of my eyes?" Then we look around and see an awful lot of impatience, especially in the Middle East—more death, more misery, more destruction, more insecurity, no shelter, no food, no water, no hope. What is "*la illah ha*" without the "*il'Allah*?"

Then Allah Swt tells us in Qur'an:

And We shall try you until we know those of you who strive hard, and those of you who are the steadfastly patient. And We shall test the truth of your statements. (47:31)

Think of all the people who are being tested today, who think of themselves as believers, but who are lying about the situation they are in, out and out lying to the people about the necessity of war (whether about the Middle East, Iraq, or what some people wanted to accomplish in Iran before a change of power took place in this country). Just think about

the amount of faith that is put in lies. **“We will test you *until* you know the truth of what you are saying.”** Think about the lies that are told to the people. Most of us are failing the tests. Maybe some people don’t believe they will be rewarded in the hereafter; okay. Maybe some people don’t believe they can have a painful life in hell. These are the disbeliefs of the believer. It’s very hard for a group of secularized religious people, whether Jews or Muslims or whatever, to believe those statements. When you look at the Middle East, where is the common ground? If it doesn’t exist in faith and belief, there is no common ground.

If it doesn’t exist where Allah has given birth to three major religions in the world – and I don’t mean geographically, but in the common belief – there is no commonality, and there is no hope. What they find common ground in is property, land, objects, competing for ownership, possession, which has become so hyperbolized and magnified it becomes to look like principles. But the foundation of the principles lie in the *dīn*. You heard me tell the story many, many times about the negotiator at the time of the Balfour agreement who said, “Can’t you two gentleman sit down like good Christians and work this thing out?” speaking to the Muslim and the Jewish representative. In a strange, ironic way, he was right. If they could have sat down like good Christians, or good Jews and Muslims, maybe they could have worked things out. Maybe that was his intention, although he comes off like a fool. As I re-think that statement, he may have been right. He was right; I’ll go that far.

The common ground has to be spiritual faith and human dignity. Faith gives dignity. And it has to be a vision of the future that Allah Swt has promised us. There has to be a sense of the *amanat*. And we have to look at the world we live in today and say, “Look!” My humble suggestion is what I am now calling de-regionalization of thinking. Stop looking at the local situation or regional situation only. You have to globalize your

thinking, and raise, generation after generation, people who feel they have a global responsibility. They have talents and capabilities that are needed everywhere. Their poverty and their hunger, if solved on a global level, will be solved on a local level. It's a strange turnaround from the 60's. Now, acting globally is acting locally.

Allah Swt tells us that if you persevere and if you are patient, and if you are strong, then you will do all right in crisis, and you will be rewarded. But if you don't believe in the reward, what's the point? The reward is also just the security that comes from that patience and perseverance, and to purge our hearts from what needs to be removed from our hearts—penury and hate and greed. Allah Swt reveals to us that the crisis is a test to clarify through examination and contemplation, *fiqh*, what is in our hearts. Allah knows exactly what we think and feel, so Allah can pick the test pretty easily. [It is] not like a god sitting on a throne knowing; but we make an impression where we are and what we do, and the response comes to that. [It is] very personal. If I know you are afraid of losing your money, well, just turn the economy over to the bankers and investment brokers. They'll take care of that fear. Allah says in Suratu-l-Imrān,

Even if you have been in your houses, those appointed to be slain would have gone forth to the places where they were destined to lie down. All of this in order that Allah may try what is in your breast and render pure all that is in your hearts. And Allah knows what is hidden in your breasts. (3:154)

So our fears, worries, doubts come out in this outward way. It doesn't have to be announced in public; but somehow, it is seen. When it is announced in public, and we see the fears in public, it should stimulate us to understand that we have to move toward compassion, mercy, forgiveness, justice, peace, love, understanding, tolerance and perseverance, move toward sustenance and sustaining, and good guidance, and revealing.

This is the way. The road is blocked over here. There are all these trucks, tanks and barbed wire. Here is the road out of this. We can discuss the causes, and look at the symptoms and make prescriptions, and that's a good intention. But these specific tests and trials in the Islamic community, in the spiritual and faith community, one would hope would result in some kind of understanding, some kind of purification, *atazkiyat*, some kind of lasting *tarbiyya*. Some knowledge might be gained. Some purification could be gained. The community should benefit.

The Muslims have to keep their piety and their *taqwa*. The Jews have to re-find, refine their deepest teachings of spirituality, not this sort of crazy humanistic, secular humanism. They have to have sincerity and justice and love and love, and love, and understanding. That is what Allah created these types of tests for; otherwise it is just fodder for the political people who want to take advantage of it, gain power, and stay in power. The only way they can do that is by maintaining the war, the constant war. Again I heard it in the deniers on the news yesterday, the revisionists of history going on now as the administration changes. Richard Pearl said that the war was never a neo-conservative ideological war. People say, "See? He said it. It must be the truth." It is like going to a cesspool and saying, "Really. Believe me. This is fresh water. Drink from the well." It must be true.

It is very hard for us to see benefits coming from difficulties, especially when some of our friends, some of our colleagues, some of our brothers and sisters are working very hard just to get people medical supplies or get them out of Gaza. We are praying. We should probably be making *janaza* three times a day here. We should start that here this weekend, make *janaza* for those people who have died. People are calling out for reconciliation. I got a letter from someone who is a peacenik from Israel, who visited here and spoke about holding hands all around, and all the accomplishments they had

made, and how all those are lost now, and holding hands around the old city, and kissing each other, and holding each other and loving each other. Forget it! There is no solution to this problem. There is no solution to this conflict. There is only a way to affirm your relationship with Allah (Swt). Allah is the solution to this conflict.

Yes, dialogue is important. Sitting with one another is important. Affirming peace is important. Understanding that these tests and trials are for something much greater than just peace in the Middle East. Peace is a result of something much greater.

Allah (Swt) says in Sūratu-n-Nahl:

Invite all to the way your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious. (16:125)

And in Suratu-l-Fussilat

Who is better in speech than one who calls people to Allah, one who works righteousness and says, “I am of those who balance submission to Allah in Islam.”(41:33)

It does not just say people who call people to Allah, *dawa*, but one who works righteousness. No one is working righteousness when they are dropping a bomb, or controlling a drone, or shooting a missile, and then running into a house to find protection. Did he really not know that the technology exists to know exactly where that rocket came from? It should have been proved time and time again already this week. They can pinpoint exactly where it comes from. Then Allah tells us this real kicker. Every once in a while there is a zinger when you think about what is happening. He says:

Thus, We have made you of an *ummah* justly balanced that you may be witness over the nations and the messenger a witness over yourselves. (2:143)

Well. Do I really need to comment on that ‘*āyah*? There are an awful lot of believers who are disbelievers. The evidence is clear. Allah says:

This is my way. I invite you unto Allah with evidence clear as the seeing of one’s eye. Whoever follows me, Glory be to Allah. Never will I join others with Allah. (12:108) ...except those people who are telling us to fight a war that is unjust or to kill people who are innocent.

It is hard to control our upset and our anger at the loss of life. It is hard to find the depth of our faith and our belief. At times of these trials, if it is hard for us from here, my God, what is it like for those there? Do we love them just because they are Muslims? No. We love them because they are people. Do we weep for them because they are Muslims? No. We weep for them because they are human beings, creations of Allah (Swt).

Lastly, I want to say in this long khutbah (I’m sorry), this concept of due proportional response is, of course, on the one hand ridiculous, and on the other hand an affirmation of how Allah (Swt) tries to make everything in measure and balance. But look who is making the decision and defining what proportion is? If you do not fear death because you do not think that anything happens after death, [look at the reasoning]. “You live. You die. You live a good life. You do good. You raise your children. They do good. They live. They die. They raise their children. They live. They die.” So what difference does it make? If you follow that logic, what is the divine right of ownership in this whole process? Let’s pull God off the shelf and use God. If you believe in the

hereafter, why not fear the actions? This is so unreasonable and illogical that it sounds strangely human, strangely post-modern.

Although it may give us some peace or it may not, we must pray for these people, if for no other reason because I want my daughters to live 120 years, healthily, and your children also in a good environment, and we are still able to work for that. All of our energy, all of our money, all of our effort and all of our time should be put into that. Though we may not live on a high hill, maybe we might be part of the “Christian” concept of the shining city on the hill, the community of real believers. When I see my daughter wake up in the morning, it is birthday time and I say, “Happy birthday.” She comes out and we sing, “Tabaloud, Mubarak” and we hug and we kiss. What greatness. She got a few gifts today, a few more coming tonight, I am sure. Another one that we have ordered that has not arrived yet. And I saw what joy she got in her face when her sister gave her some soap that bubbles and foams—just a bottle of soapy, hand soap that foams. Can you ask for anything more from your children than that transference of love from something so simple? Just I have to pray that it lasts. Allah, for those of us who may not have so much time left in this world, we really do want to leave a legacy. Allah gave us the name. So let us live up to it.

Closing *du'ās*.

I ask for your *du'ās* for my daughter on her birthday today, and for all the poor people and the suffering people and those who are oppressed today. There are people today, in Gaza, and I am sure in Israel, whose birthday it is today. Some of whom wish they were never born, probably. So let us remember them. *Insh'Allah*.

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