

March 13, 2009

Khutbah



Title: [The Purpose of Adversity and Blessings](#)

DVD title: The Rahmāt and Rahīm of Allah Precede Everything
Awareness of Allah’s Presence in All That Comes to Us

(Opening Du’ās). Allah reveals in the Holy Qur’an:

We never sent a prophet to any town without trying its people with misfortune and with hardship, that they might be humbled. Then We replaced the bad with the good so that the communities said to themselves, “Our forefathers were touched by both hardship and affluent ease. So why should we worry?” Then We seized them all of a sudden, when they were least aware. If the people of the townships had believed and guarded themselves for Allah, surely We would have opened blessings from the heavens and the earth for them, but they denied every messenger and prophet. So We seized them because of what they earned. (7:95-96)

This could of course describe the world we live in today, also. The fear that comes along with that kind of description or analogy is we know the Prophet Mohammed was the final prophet. As we say in colloquial English, “There just ain’t no one else comin’.” We have to remember, re-case and re-grasp the reality of the Prophet Mohammed (sal). At this time of year, the time of his birth, was very auspicious in many ways. There are many

descriptions of what happened prior to his birth, to his mother, and to the people around them. These are all wonderful stories. Hopefully, when you read them, you build affection for this person.

But today, we want to understand the themes in these kinds of verses. Allah sends also suffering and adversity to societies, then changes them to prosperity. But the people don't grasp that [nor] have understanding and humility. So again, we find the cycle of suffering and pain until the believers believe, to the point where they turn only to Allah Swt at the time when there is difficulty or need or when there is plenty, to be grateful. The themes are clear. A prophet comes with adversity and difficulty. It hopefully teaches humility. People see the eventual change from adversity to blessings as part of the normal course of day to day life. But some people, if not most people, don't draw the lessons from it.

That type of ignorance is caused by turning away from humility, and over time results in precipitous change for the future. Turning away can also be in the form of being very rigid ideologically, not accepting the need for change, for new thinking, for a new way of understanding the blessings that Allah Swt has given us. Perhaps that reflects us more in this world today. It's obvious that people who are prosperous and powerful feel secure against being taken to account and facing the consequences of their own actions. The example of that is on the news today, the man who made off with a lot of money. He moved from a 7 million dollar apartment to a 56 square foot prison cell.

People, as pious as they may be in the sense of the prayers they pray and the actions they take, have no real piety. Because of that, they don't make *muhasabat*. They don't take

stock of themselves and account for themselves. They lose the ability to turn away from the difficult and harmful course they are on. Their arrogance deadens their faith and diminishes their ability to see/*basīra*. It is a forewarner of decline, recession, depression: mental, psychological, or economic. Humility and awareness of Allah is totally missing, so things fall apart. The key to the real blessings of Allah Swt is the awareness and consciousness of Allah, remembering Allah, and the humility that comes along from seeing what Allah has presented.

Allah Swt says, “Whatever I’m going to tell you from X point on, I want to prepare you to hear it. Here is My preparation.” One hundred and thirteen times, minimum, He says: **“Bismillahi r-Rahmāni r-Rahīm.”** Whatever is going to follow, I’m going to tell you about hell, misery, loss, good things, pain and suffering, history, or reality, but I want to prepare you to hear about it. **“Bismillahi r-Rahmāni r-Rahīm.”** He didn’t say, *“Bismillah, in the name of Allah,”* nor *“Bismillah Mālik.”* He said, “Listen: in the name of compassion and mercy, I’m telling you this.” If we could all remember this, we’d be much better off. Allah has put this protective covering over the *‘āyāt* of the Qur’an, and put these two kinds of blessings. Allah has put His compassion and mercy over them. They extend over everything He talks about. Therefore they extend over everything in creation. This all-encompassing reality of the *Rahmāt* of Allah, and the special, unique mercy and beneficence of the *Rahīm* are the protection and the means for us to understand what comes next.

This generalized ocean of mercy encompasses everything. When we talk about the system of Islam, it is the systemic regulating force—the compassion and mercy of Allah. It acts as a kind of consistent, algorithmic means of balance and mercy that gives resonance,

harmony, order, benefit, structure and form to everything that's created—including us, all the systems that are within us, the sub-systems, the subatomic particles, and the galaxies and the universes. They are all held together by the relationship of *Rahmāt* to Allah Swt. Sometimes we can't see those benefits. Sometimes they are concealed, because there is a lot of complexity. Sometimes our life seems very confused and chaotic. But the *Rahmāt* of Allah, when we recognize it, and when we relate to it properly (which is to respond to it humbly) leads to the *Rahīm*, to His Mercy.

The more we are looking at that mercy, containing the special *Bāraka* of Allah, the *Fadl* of Allah, the *Nai'ma* of Allah, we become more and more the willing 'Abd of Allah, which of course is the name Abdullah. What's Abdullah? Whose name is it? The father of Prophet Mohammed (sal). And it was the favorite name of Prophet Mohammed. When the *Rahmān* of Allah is not seen as a blessing, it is as if we reject it as an 'āyat, a sign. That's the not-seeing Allah talks about in Qur'an: **“They have eyes with which they do not see.”** (7:179) You are rejecting that compassion, that Divine Presence. You are rejecting embracing that power, that force, that pulsating force that keeps everything in balance. Whatever you love in existence has received a patina from Allah's Attributes. The Beauty and Goodness of Allah is the 'āyat, the pointer, the indicator, the sign, the *alam*, the symbol that points to the source of all beauty and goodness. That sign is a marker which allows us to find the truth, and to see behind the veils which conceal that truth—those veils (many of which we carry within ourselves) of our doubt, the veils of our arrogance, the veils of our anger, our fear, our desires, etc.

There is an 'āyat that says: **“There came not unto them any signs from the signs of their Lord but they turned away from it.”** (6:4) When this capability of seeing, *basīra*,

is turned away from, the connection to those signs is broken. When humility is acquired and used in seeing the blessings of these signs, then we again have the opportunity to see the meaning behind those signs. As an individual or a society, we can move out from the protective light of the *Rahmāt* or the *Rahīm*. Or we can turn away from that and remove ourselves from the shelter. Any turning away from something also means turning toward something else. It's the nature of the world. If there's an up there's a down. If there's a back there's a front.

In a *hadith* describing the creation of 'aql/intellect and ignorance, Allah Swt commands this 'aql. It responds by turning toward Him. He commands ignorance, and it turns away from Him. Any turning away from Allah's Mercy and any arrogance toward His Guidance, we find this is the beginning of deep ignorance. It means that ignorance grows within us and takes a hold on us. It turns us away from what is true and honest, good and fulfilling, serviceful and secure and safe to a world like we are living in today. We can say that world is bereft of Islam, of *taslim*, of safety and security, and of trust and submission. We turn away from the things that would stabilize us, balance us, and anchor us, and deepen our knowledge. The more knowledge a person really has, the more humble the person is. We say in English, "The more I learn the less I know." What happens? Your humility is deepened. But we keep seeking more knowledge, even though we know we will know less.

The key to our ignorance is to be satisfied with the knowledge we possess and place all our trust in that. The key to our wisdom is to not be satisfied with what we know, and place our trust in the One Who gives us this knowledge and develop humility, and make ourselves open to the insights of the divine love and divine grace. The key to knowledge

is the desire, as Imam Jafar said, “... *to continuously exchange one level of knowledge for a higher level, together with divine grace and guidance.*” When the signs of Allah are ignored, it’s as if more and more veils are pulled down over the eyes, and perception is dimmed, and the mind is weakened, and the intensity of desire is increased, and a person, or even a whole community of individuals or a nation, even if they have unparalleled power and instruments of great education, still choose the path of ignorance as far as the means, ends, ethics, and conscience are concerned. Look at our country today. All those people, in Wall Street, bankers, politicians, are all educated people. They went to Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Wharton School of Business, London School of Economics. They are Rhodes scholars with MBAs and PhDs. Somewhere in there, the arrogance made the ethics go away, and the conscience became quieted. I guess you could make a case for a very specific kind of college education for everyone in the country. Who would you hold up as models? I think we should hold up the model of people who are really faithful, not just religious, but people with *taqwa*.

We see what happens when ignorance has a hold on someone. Perhaps their ignorance is somehow destructed periodically by some problem, some breach of confidence, some loss of confidence, some shock that comes along. Allah said that along with the prophet comes a shock designed to awake people and teach them. So for a small period of time, people are brought into a state of humility designed to awaken their hearts, and soften them from their arrogance, their worldliness, and their expectations, to make them aware of the distinctions between what is real and unreal, true and false, good and bad, constructive and destructive, what is transient and ephemeral. It is said that afflictions, trials, and tests to a believer are a means of spiritual upliftment and a corrective, a reminder of what we have forgotten as truly important. [They are a means] to aggregate the diverse and often

fragmented aspects of one's self around something that is stable, lasting, steadfast, and persevering, around knowledge that is everlasting.

In Qur'an, Allah Swt reminds us: **“And the servants of the Merciful are those who walk on the earth with humility.”** (25:63) Even it is said that the fruits in Paradise hang low on the trees in humility. It is an attribute of creation that recognizes Allah's Signs when it is in awareness of His Presence. We grow humble in that awareness of His Presence. Allah Swt is not overbearing and does not cause pain or difficulty for those who love Him, whom He loves, and who love His Prophet. The Qur'an also tells us the other part—remember the *‘āyat* starts with **“Bismillahi r-Rahmāni r-Rahīm”** – He tells us: **“Those who run forward with their necks outstretched, their heads uplifted in arrogance, their hearts a gaping void.”** (14:43) **“For those who turn away, We have put yokes around their necks, right up to their chin so that their heads are forced up.”** (36:8) People are bound to their own arrogance, their own faults. No matter what blessings they receive, they didn't correct their own hearts because they are not thankful. We don't want to be of those people.

When we become aware of, and hold onto the awareness of the Majesty and Beauty of Allah, and the purity of His Attributes, and we allow ourselves to be in awe of His Nature and Presence, in awe of His Mercy, then whatever we undertake is colored by that awareness. Just like when we have the opposite, it is tainted, because there is no humility. Humility exists as a reality for this purpose: to keep us aware. All actions are deflected from a true course when there is no humility; when there is ego, arrogance, and overwhelming desires; even [when there is] too much personal ambition and pride. We

are here. We are placed in this world and tested in many situations. Some [people are tested] with difficulties, calamities, and losses. Others [are tested] with wealth and luxury and power. Some [are tested] with both: tested with adversity and hardship, *and* benefits and blessings. Every form of test is also a form of teaching to bring out the shine in the gold that Allah Swt has covered everything with.

The testing in affluence is a very serious trial. That person or society that is free of hardship, and blessed with so many means and capabilities, may not have access to the understanding, to the limitations of those who find themselves in calamity, adversity, poverty, hunger, and injustice. Then it can switch. Those people who had much, can have little. People go to bed, as Prophet Mohammed (sal) said, as Muslims and wake up as *kafirs*. People go to sleep with wealth and wake up impoverished. People go to bed with health and wake up ill. These tests and trials by Allah are a relief for us if we have humility and thankfulness. Though they will come, we can understand them and embrace them in a different way. We come into this world blessed with the Presence of Allah. He tells us: **“I am as near to you as your jugular vein.”**(50:16) We suffer some trouble. We suffer some trials in life. We are given many blessings. Then, if we dealt with it all in a good way, we move to an internal state of thankfulness. But every day, we have to remember, because Allah Swt tells us: **“Very few of My servants are grateful.”** (34:13)

In the ‘*āyāt* I read to you today, we are told that people say, “This is how the world is. Sometimes you have bad things, sometimes blessings. It’s just by chance.” They may imagine they are independent, able to create their own version of reality, but without thankfulness and recognition of the mercy, the *Rahīm* and *Rahmān* that is Allah, even the

good fortune makes them lose. We don't listen to the warner who was sent. What is the straight path? It is one of cultivating, maintaining, and remaining firm in our consciousness and our faith, humble, guarding our humility. [It is] a humility that manifests in our outlook, in our philosophy, in our action, in our relationships. [It] manifests in our repentance/*tawbah* and in our *shukr*/thankfulness, so that we might sit under the shade, as we will in Paradise, Allah tells believers, under the shade of His *Rahmāt* and *Rahīm*. As long as we individuals retain that, and expect and demand it of those around us, and especially from those who are in power over us, then we will be shielded both in this world and the next. We will be able to deal with what Allah Swt has given us. *Asalāmu aleikum*.

SECOND KHUTBAH Du'ās.