

February 18, 2011

Khutbah

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: [Good Works plus Worship equals Remembrance](#)

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Opening Duas. Allah (swt) has revealed in the Holy Qur'an:

And We did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them as a game or a sport. Had We wished for a diversion, We could have found it in Our Own Presence if We were to do so. No, We hurl the truth against the falsehood and it breaks the head of the lie and behold, it vanishes. And woe to you for what you utter about Allah.

Also, in Surah al-Tīn,

Truly, We created the human being in the best form. Then We reduced him to the lowest of the low, except for those who faithfully believe and do righteous deeds. Theirs shall be a reward unailing.

We find out at some point in our existence that life is extremely serious. At the root of our lives, on those days when we judge ourselves and others judge us, [it will be] as a precursor to Judgment Day, the day of the Yawmi Qiyama, [when] we will be judged for our actions, words and thoughts. Allah has taught us that this life is nothing to take lightly. It is not a sport. According to a famous Islamic scholar, the act of doing good deeds is the keystone of the structure of the life of people in the *jamat*/gathering, or the *ummah*/ community.

These good deeds point to actions that are the result of some things that have been ripened into wisdom in us. Truth has become known to us and accepted, and we have developed some *hikma*/wisdom. In truth, good deeds or good works are the key and the way for human beings, both inwardly and outwardly, visibly and hidden, spiritually and secularly, personally and socially, physically and mentally to show improvement and see progress in life—in other words, to understand what life is. Nothing is greater than a good deed. As simplistic as it may sound, we have countless opportunities every day to perform good deeds and worthy acts. Yet, often, we neglect seeing those opportunities, because we are so turned to our own selfish desires or our own problems.

The good deed is an act which becomes the instrument of progress and growth for us as individuals, and by its nature, for others. Certainly, its benefit is to those who are the recipients of good deeds and good work. That's obvious. But these acts alone are sufficient in themselves to lift us to a very high degree of progress and advancement that will be encoded in us, engraved upon our souls. Indeed, as I believe, they will be engraved in our genetic makeup. One would even think they will be passed on to other generations. When we look at what's going on around us, and see for example, the peaceful demonstrations in Egypt, we can make a jump and say that those young people who participated in those peaceful demonstrations, if they remain loyal to the concept of peaceful change, will encode it in their own genetic coding and pass it on to the generations that follow. If that's true, and I have it on the authority of Jonas Salk that it is true, then peace could evolve in humanity.

That's why we were created, to care for and about others. We say that we do things *fī sabīli-Llāh*, for the sake of Allah, for the sake of Compassion. It is being merciful for the sake of mercy, being forgiving for the sake of forgiveness, being patient for the sake of patience, and love for the sake of love. It's in our nature. That's our *fiṭrah*. The Qur'an

refers to this nature of man in the words, "**Indeed, We have created men/women in the best of molds.**" Now children, when you hear me say 'mold,' I don't want you to think about something growing on cheese or bread. And, "**I have only created men and jinn that they may serve Me through their ibāda (worship).**" What is worship? Does it mean just putting your head on the ground? Does it mean for the Christian, their worship; for the Jew, their worship; for the Magian, their worship? No. Worship is servitude, to be an *'abd*.

Worship is to praise Allah in everything you see and do. That's worship. Then there are forms that remind us: we stop five times a day and remember all the things we forgot to do between Fajr and Dhuhr, between Dhuhr and Asr, between Asr and Maghrib, between Maghrib and Isha. And then there is that big long period of time, if you don't get up for *tahajūd*. We know from Islam that *ibāda* is not just ritual worship. It also means to perform good deeds and help others. It means being the servant, to seek out every opportunity to speak a good word. Indeed, the Prophet (sal) told us that even the removal of a stone from the path of someone who is walking is a form of *ibāda*. He called it *zakat*, or more correctly, *sadaqa*/charity.

Who is it for? To remember to do that is a blessing. It's for you as well as for the other person. Removing the stone so someone doesn't step on it, or driving more slowly down the road so the dust isn't in the face of the people behind you (like I tried to do today) is for ourselves, not just for the person. It's *at-tazkiyat*/purification. It also means obedience as well as worship, upon which everything depends for our own personal and social well-being. In other words, we as human beings are part of a collective purpose, a collective intention. As a result of our good deeds, we become in line and harmonized with the Wisdom/Hikma of Allah. The plan and trust that He has for this whole system of life in the universe [has been] placed in our hands [through] the *amanat*/trust.

Allah (swt) did not create this system as a sport or a pastime, nor did He create human beings with no purpose, but rather with a definite purpose. The purpose is for good and for justice, for just ends and good works. We create robots for specific purposes, like putting the car together. In Japan they are creating robots who look like people to be companions—but we won't get into that. Why wouldn't God create us for specific purpose if we do the same thing? This is a very special organic system of wisdom and discipline that spans this whole universe. It is the Will of Allah behind this system of creation in all its very unique and marvelous ways. It is the Will of Allah that whatever happens in this world – or in the worlds – it should be in line with the overall plan and not against it.

Every role that we play is part of the plan. There is a right way to play and a wrong way, a proper way and an improper way. This constant conflict and struggle that we find in every corner of our world does not mean that there is no order, no discipline, no purpose and no hope. In fact, it's because of constant conflicts and challenges that we can grow. Look at the situation in the Middle East. It's hard to see anything positive out of what is happening in Bahrain today or in Iran or other places. It's hard to see the good that may come out of it; yet, there is a purpose behind it. The inherent purpose is equity, justice and equality. Those who would resist it may have power, but they don't have justice and equity on their side; consequently, they will lose.

If there was no conflict before, it doesn't mean there were no reasons for conflict there. It means there was no struggle yet. It's because of the constant struggling and change of movements that the old situations are changed to new ones. What guarantees the new ones to be any different than the old ones? It has to be the depth of one's real understanding of faith, of wisdom, of mercy and compassion; otherwise, we are just going to be submitting again and again to the control of others whose goals are not the same as ours. Every time we find ourselves controlling anything or anyone, it would be good if in that moment we could ask ourselves what we were doing, and what is the end

to this? It would be good to pause for a moment and realize who it is who is projecting this movie on the screen of my life and pulling the strings of the puppets we call ourselves.

When something dissipates or degenerates, it could be also looked at as the beginning of a revival of the system based on what was there before, discarding what was useless or used, and introducing new things. Perhaps, one of the problems that people intuit that is happening in Iraq or Afghanistan or the Middle East today is when something has been totally dismantled, there is nothing left to build on that the people can recognize. There is nothing left of themselves, their culture, or their ideology. If it is purposeful or accident, we will leave it to the historians, but there has to be something to build on, and invariably, it's the faith in the human being. It is the faith at the core of their heart and soul, our *fitrah*, our essential goodness. It's because of this ever-changing from an old to a new state that the universe remains alive, fresh and new.

Well, there can also be confusion in the midst of it all. Not too many years ago, we had a very warm winter and the geese got confused. They were flying north, but it was very early in the winter. What were they going to be met with? Exactly what they left. That's the real issue behind things like global warming: the change in the system, and what you have to meet those changes. The same thing happens in the system of our own lives. When we think, "I'm making no change," then change is possible because you are contemplating change. The amount of joy and happiness one can get from pushing a little harder or moving a little faster, or being a little more organized, or being a little more considerate, especially when you think you are at the end of something, the climax of situations is an incredible, uplifting experience. Then you find there is more and other things to do. There is more within your own self. Complacency has gone away, and now you have been reactivated.

The thought that change is impossible, goes against everything in the universe. The only thing you can guarantee is change. The universe is constantly changing. The Qur'an

consistently states that human progress is based on good actions, good works, good efforts. The whole universe is moving through some kind of Divine Plan, and part of that plan is our choice. It is heading in a particular direction that we will understand as we increase our good works and make good choices. There is no happiness without good works. There is no success without sacrifice. No difficulty will be relieved without effort. At the same time, you have to attune yourself to a rhythm. Sometimes you have to let things play out and happen in their due time.

We used to have a friend who said, "Hurry up, let things happen." How can you have a good work if you are pushing the time frame or complaining that it is not done? So it is said, "**Allah loves those who are patient. *Innallaha ma'a saberīn.***" "***Innallaha yuhibbus saberīn. He assists those who are patient.***" What does it mean? All those Divine Qualities in ourselves assist us to persevere. Compassion allows us to be patient. Mercy allows us to persevere. Forgiveness, tolerance, all of these qualities are the assistance/*madad* we are given by Allah. This is the value of letting things work out, but always with the intention of having a good end attached to our actions. That's why our discipline is important. For those of us who have little discipline, it's always in our face. I can attest to that.

Discipline doesn't just mean we sit down and do our work. It means we sit down and do our work gladly, understanding that it is part of a process. It is not just doing our work to get a paycheck, or bemoaning what we are not doing. If we do what we do well, and we do it sincerely and with the hope of good ends, then what we really enjoy doing may wind up being what we are doing, and not what we are not doing. If we do our work with affirmation, and we sit down or stand up and affirm it through our actions, [then we are] not just pushing circumstances or avoiding others, but we are encouraging. We are not giving up when things are difficult, but looking at the initial vision and following the principle behind our work. It is not the difficulties that stand in the way, whether financial or personality issues or character issues or cultural issues, or just if you had a

bad hair day. That applies to men too. It is to be positive. *That* makes us look different. too.

Sometimes it's just sufficient to note that a circumstance we are dealing with is important. It may not be important to us. *Alhamdulillah*, most of us are not disabled, but it was important to the disabled people who just came and left for Russia. All of our hard work was important to them, and we have to look at that and say that if we make the effort and operate as though everything will work out – guess what? – maybe it will all work out. The things that don't work out weren't supposed to work out, and that's working out also. No one can judge what the effort of another individual is, but we can see that certain types of effort and engagement work better than others. Certainly, part of that is our attitude. There might be a lot of mental and emotional effort, maybe even physical effort and tiredness that are not seen from the outside, though we feel it inside. But we make assumptions that no action means no effort, and that's not true. The effort we make is very, very important for the outcomes.

I'm not saying anything that is new and profound. I am just reminding. Good works begin with good thoughts and good attitudes. Right action follows right thinking. In Surah Fatir, we are told, "**To Him mount up all words of purity and the righteous deeds cause it to rise.**" (35:10) Righteous deeds are the yeast of life. So, we might like matzo, but we don't want to only eat matzo. We want to have a nice soft bread, too. Matzo was given to the people for survival, not for pleasure. The yeast makes it rise. "**As for those who plot evil, there is a severe torment for them, and their plotting shall itself perish.**" What are good deeds? It's not just enough to talk about them. Who are the people who perform them? They are the *salihūn* (the good people) who work in line with the overall purpose of creation. They are quite different than the evil ones, people who work against it.

The *salihūn* are very constructive people, and they are the ones given the *khalifat*. They are the deputies of the Prophet (sal). We strive, if we are of those, to live a good life on

the basis of *taqwa* and efforts. What are the things that comprise the good works? First of all, you'll see a relationship between good works and faith. It's very hard to comprehend good works without having some faith and trust. Islam really stresses both these aspects of life and places a lot of emphasis on practical things—practice-able things—not just on good things that make you feel good. Praying, doing *wudu*, speaking in a certain way, having a certain attitude, reading Qur'an. You will find the same thing in every religion as the foundation.

We start with such things that are very personal: struggling in the way of Allah. **"Those who believe, and suffer exile, and strive with their wealth and persons for the sake of Allah have the highest rank in the sight of Allah."** Then it gets very specific. There are many verses that tell us to help the poor, to help orphans, to fulfill obligations by returning some share of what we have to those who are in need, to do good to our parents, relatives, neighbors, friends, to people in need, and to strangers who you meet as you travel. Islam is very practical and is concerned with the realities of everyday life. Sometimes we make promises that are hard to fill. We have to make promises that are kept, whether on an individual, group, social, religious or political level, as best we can. But sometimes we overreach. It's hard to conceive of that, especially in politics, because what drives politicians is a lot of ego, often. But it is possible.

The Medinan ideal was held up to us as people who can work together for the common good. We have to safeguard the property of others. People's property is very important to a Muslim and to Islamic society. When we look around the world and see the property being destroyed, a person cannot be a Muslim who does that. They can't do that. They may claim that's what they are, but they can't be that. It plays a dominant role in the development and culture of Islam and gives us protection. In the last address of the Prophet, he said, ***"O people, surely your blood, your property, and your honor are sacred and inviolable."*** There are many references in the Qur'an to that.

Then we are told how to act in our business dealings. It is not just to be truthful, but not to be unjust, not to perform malpractice, not to be aggressive, to avoid possible disputes, to be clear in contractual obligations, to use fair methods, to deal with mutual consent, and other things. We are told to protect life, not just your own, to preserve the peace and security of society, not to barricade yourself in your own home with weapons and keep peace there. That is not Islam. It is to fight against the violation of peoples' rights, all people's rights, not just Muslim's rights, and to struggle with others who do the opposite. The development of peace and security is unparalleled in the development of human growth and culture.

Islam takes every step to preserve human life, even making it difficult to prosecute those who at times may be suspected. Go tell *that* to the ayatollahs and mullahs! Tell that to the King of Bahrain today. It prohibits obscenity, not just what we think of as obscene. Obscene in this sense means impure, things that degrade yourself or others. These are very important questions in our day and age. Go tell *that* to the mullahs who rape and pillage and degrade human beings. Ethics and morality have changed so significantly, as has dress and actions and words, that we have to look to find those parallels in today's society. Another good act is to prohibit false evidence, because of all the implications of violating the honor of other individuals. Go tell *that* to these tyrants.

We see that good actions mean all of these things, the end of which is respect for others and for oneself. It means not slandering, speaking kindly; not gossiping, keeping silent; doing good instead of inaction, not just instead of not doing bad; enjoining others to do good (*maruf* and *munkar*), not just in words but by example; forbidding evil in your own self, so that you may be a model to someone who resists, not of someone who is perfect. At the end of the day, it means repentance and seeking forgiveness, because none of us can do all of this. *Inshā'a-llāh*, when we leave here today with this in our mind and hearts, and perform many good actions, we will also not have so much anger when we see those who don't. We will know that at the end of days, they will be taken to task by

Allah (swt). We are only sojourners here. If we had all that we wanted, we are going to lose it and leave it anyway. We should pray for the best and the good, and try to be good people, *inshā'a-Llāh. Du'ās.*

SECOND KHUTBAH. O Allah, we have learned of the passing of two people this week, Baji's mother and Elias Khashani's mother. We ask You, Allah, today at this time that there is a funeral prayer happening at the mosque in Washington, and we ask You, Allah, that her soul be taken near to You, and give peace and patience to the families. Also Allah, we again plead with You for Your Shifat, for those who are ill in our families and community, who are with us and not with us today, but who are always present in our hearts. We ask You, Allah, to relieve them of their suffering, and give them health and well being, *inshā'a-Llāh.* And renew their purpose in life, because we all take for granted the healing You give us and we forget. Help us to remember. *Amin.*