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Khutbah

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: Kalima Tayyiba: The Good Word

DVD title: Kalima Tayyiba: Striving for the Good Word
The Power of Kind Words

Opening duas. Allah has revealed in the Holy Qur'an:

Do you not see that Allah made the night to pass into the day, and makes the day to pass into the night? And He has subjugated the sun and the moon, each running in its orbit for a specified term. And Allah (swt) is informed of whatever you do.

Again, He says in Surah al-Hadīd:

He makes the night to merge into the day, and the day to merge into the night. And He is the knower of all that is in your hearts.

Also in Surah Ibrahim:

Do you not see how Allah sets forth a parable? A good word is like a good tree. Its roots are firm, rooted in the earth, and its branches in heaven. It is producing its fruit in every season by the permission of its Lord. And Allah sets forth parables for the people in order that they may remember.

In these ‘*āyāt*, all of which are metaphors and parallels to the power, knowledge, presence and systematic consistency of life in creation and production, Allah sets forth

these metaphors and parables so as to encourage people to be humble and realize all things are within the purview and control of our Creator. For example, in Surah al-Isra'a, Allah says: **“And tell My worshipers to say that which is best. Surely, Shaytan induces discord among them. Surely, Shaytan is a clear enemy of the people.”**

These types of metaphors, similes and parables are to encourage us to be humble. One of the ways in which humility is best established in our own hearts and arrogance is eclipsed, if not excised, is when we have an attitude of goodness and kindness, and we speak in good and kind words. Now there is a lot to that subject, a history to it, patterns, and habits, defensiveness and ego—so many things. But in a short period of time, I hope I can present in a good way the *kalima tayyibah*, the good word.

Allah (swt) has taught us, and enjoined us to say good words daily, on occasions that we can't remember, and to be conscious. He instructs us to refrain from what is bad and evil in terms of words as well as deeds. The Qur'anic word for 'bad words' is '*habitha*.' In Surah Ibrahim, Allah (swt) explains to us the similitude of a good word and an evil word. Again, in another '*āyat*, He says the corrupt word is like a corrupt tree, torn from its roots on the face of the earth, and therefore cannot endure. The idea of a good word (*kalima tayyibah*), which leads us to the *hayati tayyibah* (the good life), is explained (in Surah al-Fatihah) that Allah (swt) accepts from us good words and good deeds. It is made clear that it is He, and He alone, Who gives us the good word and the good deed. Also in other '*āyat*, Allah (swt) gives us power, the might and intention, stability and perseverance.

The positions we hold in this world and the Hereafter are determined by how we live our lives in this world. Therefore, He instructs us to speak well, speak good words, speak kindly to people. If we don't, we lose them, and we lose the ability eventually to even speak kindly and good words. To speak kindly in difficult circumstances means we have to pause, think and remember the real goal and purpose of life, and the purpose of communicating that goodness. We see all the problems in the world today, and what has transpired just this week in this country where the despotic Lybian ruler says he will

crush everyone and kill the opposition. All these words invoke certain attitudes, and evoke and provoke certain responses. Those responses are such that we might ask, “To what degree do we stand for this kind of slaughter?” Questions of justice and ethics come in.

Those decisions are supported by how we interpret the words that have been spoken, and then the actions that follow those words. That despotic, tyrannical leader crushes his own people, like happened before in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and in Africa and Darfur and other places. You see that words preceded this. Threats came, and they were fulfilled. They evoke justice. Justice that comes from Allah swt is placed in the hands of other people in the *dunya*: the president of a country, the military, whatever; and ultimately judges. These kindly words that each one of us may, at times, struggle to speak (and I include myself) have a far-reaching import and effect. The idea of a good word, *kalima tayyibah*, is very, very important. When we are instructed to speak well, speak good words, it’s also because in the creating of a good word, one creates the good life.

That good life we say is one of Islam, one of submission, safety, security. It is one that gives us the power to do good, and that provides stability, the strength to persevere in the positions we hold in this world. They are important ones. To speak kindly even in difficult circumstances means we have to pause and think. We lose respect for others. We may lose others in the physical sense because of bad words. Shaytan then plays his part in dividing us and creating animosity between us as that whisper whispers into the heart of people. Allah says, **“Tell My servants to speak that which is kindlier. The devil sows discord among them. Lo, the devil is for man an open foe.”**

This tells us that kind words are more than just kind words. They are more than pleasantries. They are more than just winning someone over. Kind words have power, and they have the power to stave off Shaytan. The person who speaks kindly in all circumstances has a tremendous amount of power, and probably, I should say, had to

strive to get to that point. That striving with the kind words is a goal. The striving itself is the means. That is the transformative process. It's not just that if you speak an unkind word you are condemned for it, or you condemn yourself for it. It's the striving that is important.

An open foe is something right in front of us. Right? So, if the Shaytan is an open foe, we have to realize that Shaytan doesn't have to hide. If he hid, he could not accept all the invitations we offer him all the time. Shaytan doesn't have to disguise himself. If he did, we would not be able to recognize all the temptations that he wears as a guise. We give Shaytan the opportunity to be our companion by our own behavior, our own weaknesses. In Surah al-Baqarah, Allah commands that we speak kindly to other people, that we establish regular prayers, that we should pay the *zakat*, that even if there is already discord and disagreement and contention between people; even if people are actively clashing with one another, the effort to speak kindly shouldn't change. Just because one person doesn't, doesn't mean you have a license to speak unkindly. Each one of us is a bulwark against Shaytan for ourselves and for the other.

The Muslim is supposed to, and is commanded to, enjoined to, encouraged to and hopefully inspired to by their own willingness to listen and to say good things and do better than even what one says. In Surah al-Fussilat, Allah tells us that the good deed and the evil deed are not alike. **“Repel the evil deed with one which is better. Then lo, he with whom there was enmity will become as though they were true friends. But none are granted this except those who are steadfast. And none are granted it but the owner of great happiness.”** (41:34-35) We tell what the outcome is, to discover what is inside of us already. It's a very powerful *‘āyat* that tells us no matter how powerful Shaytan is, our good deeds outweigh [Shaytan], to the point where it can transform enemies into friends. However, it is for the person who is steadfast in their faith, who performs the prayers, who gives the *zakat*. That person has happiness.

One could extrapolate and say that Shaytan cannot stand to be in the presence of happiness. We know this is true: if you are unhappy, things that are difficult become overblown. Worries become your fixation. Criticisms become compelling. We have to see that we have to persevere and maintain our intentions, our *niyyat*, our practices. We have to act well toward one another, and not just if someone acts well toward you, not whether they respond well to us or not, not just if they initiate a situation, not just if we are in a good mood in that moment. “TGIF, it’s Friday! It’s Shabbat! It’s *khutbah* and *jumah* for the Muslims, *alhamdulillah*! I’m in a good mood today. I’m going to say nice things.” But tomorrow... better watch out!

The transformation doesn’t come with the first good word. It is not sustained with the first good deed. It may come on the thousandth or millionth good word; therefore, we are always told to persevere—persevere with your prayers, persevere with your *wudu*, persevere with your *zakat*, persevere with your kind words. We have to believe and have good faith in that good word and what it can evoke. We have to have faith and maintain the intention, no matter what. I was told today about some difficulty. I wrote back and said, “Sometimes these difficulties in the moment are very hard to understand. But people of faith will understand that Allah is not only teaching a lesson, but probably avoiding something worse.” Transformation comes about.

To assume we are right is foolish and might be delusionary. If we persevere in a situation and practice good acts, good words and good deeds, we change also. We bring to the root and core of this life our happiness in our words and actions; and we have to persevere. Allah (swt) instructed the Prophet (sal) to repel that which is evil with that which is better, because evil doesn’t thrive and does not succeed in the long run, and certainly cannot grow in the soil of goodness. It is like trying to take a breath in outer space. In Surah al-Mu’minun, Allah says, “**Repel evil with that which is better. We are aware of that which they allege.**” The good word, the *kalima tayyibah*, is what

people should remember and benefit from, and what people should follow, and what we should encourage others to do. The best encouragement is to inspire others by our own good deeds and words.

There is something else, and that is to establish the relationship and friendship. It is not based on some official thing: you are my fellow Muslim and my brother; you are my spouse; you're my sister, my mother, my whatever. But establish the real friendship that allows us to encourage others, and they to receive the encouragement. Sometimes, without the depth of that friendship, the encouragement may become insightful. "I don't want to say anything because..." What's the foundation of that relationship? If you are always criticizing, the person is not going to trust what you have to say. If you are always praising, and they know there is something not to be praised, that's also something different. If your ego is involved in it, if you have something to gain, or if you are in a teaching mode, that is problematic. But love: love. Friendship: love. And that has to be earned.

The evil word may increase hatred. Even a good word can incite. But the good word is to be said purely, sincerely, so the *kalima khabitha*, the bad word, will bring bad results to the ones who 'mis-pronounce it.' It's described as "foam which passes away like the scum on the banks of a river." In Surah al-'Arad, Allah says, "**Thus Allah has coined the similitude of true and false, as for the foam that passes away like scum on the banks. While that for that which is of use to mankind, it remains in the earth and Allah coins these similitudes.**" Allah instructs anyone who is assuming leadership, responsibility, who are in a position to call forth goodness, who make the *kalima*. Each one of us in our own way, I hope, fits one of those descriptions. For each one of us there is an opportunity to lead, to guide, to speak good words, and to guide ourselves and others away from what is evil and destructive with those good words.

The Prophet (sal) was praised by Allah for his beautiful character and wonderful behavior. In Surah al-Imran, **“It is part of the Mercy of Allah that you do deal gently with them. Were you severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about you.”** If it applies to the Prophet (sal), it applies to all of us. The beauty of words, the demeanor of those who use them changes. The more beautiful words you use, the more your character and demeanor change. For those who are placed before us, to whatever degree we are able to see them, who are selfless servants and lovers of Allah like Hazrat was, we have to hold ourselves up to that light, in that mirror. We see the pious good people before us, and the kind words they say, automatically. When they have bad news, they make *du'ā*. Immediately, they say something good, and they feel the pain in their heart of someone suffering, like my mother-in-law. May Allah sustain her life for many, many years in health and well being, and keep us in her light. I'm sure we will all become a bit smaller and a lot better.

We cannot demand of others to abide by the teachings of Islam if we ourselves are not following them. Or if we do, we have to say, “Do better than me!” **“Invite all to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching. Reason with them in a better way. Lo, your Lord is best aware of those who go right.”** Allah (swt) blamed those who preached one thing and did something else, and threatened them if they didn't straighten out. In Surah al-Saf, **“O you who believe! Why say you that which you do not? It is most hateful in the sight of Allah that you will say that which you do not.”** A good word and a bad word come out of the same mouth. Sometimes you eat something very sweet, and your breath is very bad. They mix with the blood that flows through the same heart. They reflect our personalities and attitudes in the moments we are facing. They reflect the mentality of our innermost self.

Our beloved Prophet (sal) said, **“Clearly, whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him say good or be silent.”** He also gave advice to one of his followers to control his tongue if he wished to succeed and be saved. He asked, **“What is safety, O Prophet?**

And the Prophet (sal) said, “Get hold of your tongue, and let your house encompass you, and weep for your mistakes.” Do it. It’s good. Grab your tongue. (In the old days, the *shaykh* would say for people to do something, and people would do it. Those days are gone.) There are many *hadith* on this subject. **“*Silence is wisdom and few who are that do it. May Allah and His Mercy be upon one who keeps silent, and hence who is saved; who has said something good, and he is benefited. Most of the mistakes of the child of Adam are from his tongue.*”** So at this point, I will grab my tongue. For those who didn’t do it, maybe you will find the courage to do it in private.

Duā’s.

O Allah, for those who are ill, we ask You for Your *Shifat*. Whisper your most sweet words into their cells, and fill their cells with light, and make each cell smile as if it has a huge smile in its face, and repel all darkness and all evil. For those who have passed this week, Allah, we ask You for Your Mercy on their souls. We ask You to give them the opportunity in the Hereafter they didn’t have in this world, if Allah You see goodness in their hearts. Even one iota of goodness, You have promised, can lift a person to your throne. We ask You, Allah, to protect the community of Muslims in this country who are under attack by the bigots, the prejudiced, and the political people who have forgotten their humanity and the principles of this great country. We ask You, Allah, to make justice reign in the true sense in the hearts of the people here and in humanity. Amin.