

March 18, 2011

Khutbah



Title: [The Way Out of Corruption](#)

DVD title: The Way out of Corruption:
Remember what is Real

Opening du'ās. Allah reveals to us in the Holy Qur'an:

Ah, but the human shall be an eyewitness of his own self, even though he may offer excuses. Do not move your tongue in haste. (Surah al-Qiyama)

In Surah al-Anfal, Allah says:

O Prophet, say to those captive in your hands, if Allah knows any good in your hearts, He will give you something better than what was taken from you, and forgive you. Allah is Ever-Forgiving and Singularly Compassionate.

We ask Allah to send special blessings to us on this day, and special blessings upon the prophets/*ambiyā*. We live in a time which outwardly is very, very difficult for man-made and natural reasons, a very materialistically challenging time when we are all under a microscope, especially the Muslim community. The microscope has some pretty bad lenses, and people make misjudgments about what they are seeing, or they have pre-judgments. It is time just to survive in many cases, and even that is challenging for people in Japan or Libya today, where there is rampant destruction or rampant violence and loss.

Despite the time we live in, which has many difficulties, this world in a strange way is more closely knit because of just the fact that we know what is happening.

Communication is so open and transportation readily available. We cannot say, therefore, that everything material is bad. The question is how the material is used. It has a positive and a negative aspect. I'd like to say that the materialism is just another 'ism,' another religion that people have taken as a way of life. As a result, it has caused many difficulties, unpleasant things in the world, because people have turned away from true values to materialistic values. In a positive sense, materiality in terms of technology is a means to gain more and more knowledge. How we use it is what is important.

People find themselves gathered together in many different circumstances for reasons they never would have guessed. People are sharing homes in Japan who didn't know each other. People who are nominally at odds with one another are brothers in the struggle for democracy in Egypt. People of many backgrounds and cultures share the same experiences, just like we do here, looking for similar if not the same kind of success in life, and sharing values. Wherever we work and look, as our work takes us more and more places internationally over these years, we see the phenomena more and more in this world of the conflict of the use of technology and knowledge. Who benefits from it, and who benefits most from it? On the one hand we see a report of how a democratic revolution takes place through the Internet and through this technology. Then we see how people are targeted with drones and selectively killed by similar technology.

We live in a world where we as Muslims are committed to sustain what stands for the good and to abjure that which is wrong and evil. We have to look for aspects of life that bear the weight and the tests of time, and apply those teachings today in a most positive way, instead of looking at only the negative or looking into the past, thinking somehow that the past was always better than the present or future can be. Things change. The masters of wisdom have always known that things change. The prophets and *shuyukh* have always known. They have drawn our attention to it time and time again. Imam Jafar Sadiq (ra) said, "*Do not expect your children to be like you, because they are born at a different time*". Each one of us who has children and who work with children see those

subtle changes in generation upon generation. There are things about us we would like our children to have, and maybe there are things about us we wish our children didn't have.

Certainly, the technology, the globalized world we live in today, the greed and corruption is almost beyond belief. The conclusions you can come to from reading about the rampant corruption in the world, country by country. Corruption in government and business is amazing. It has to be dealt with. It's not just about corruption, but indeed, the one thing the young professionals we deal with say is corruption, corruption, corruption. That's the major problem. The vast majority of the people in this world are good, simple people. They work hard and depend on systems that work. They earn a living despite the systems. They put food on the table and feed their families for the most part. That's the vast majority of people.

We understand that in countries that are impoverished, 'third world' countries, there is hardly anything. Not only is it hard to put food on the table, but the corruption is even more. People look at opportunities in different ways. We look at 'second world' countries and see corruption there. Then we look at our country and see corruption here, supposedly a 'first world' country. At the end of the day, those terminologies mean nothing. There is corruption everywhere. It takes the form of greed and power-hungriness, hegemony, misuse of resources, exploitation of people. This is all in the outer world.

The very same people who are corrupting the world today are the same people who get up in the morning—whether they live in Saudi Arabia or the US or Morocco, wherever there is corruption—and they identify themselves as Muslims. They put their heads on the ground, pray their prayers, and go out. Then they gouge the people in the market; they inflate the oil prices, and kill their fellow men and women. They make the poor people poorer, and they oppress women. Then they cross the sea to Monaco or England and

gamble and make deals for foreign weaponry, with which they kill their own people. They try to develop weapons of mass destruction, and then go and pray the next prayer. I'm not just talking about Muslims. There are Christians and Jews who pray in their churches or synagogues, on their Sabbath or Shabat days. I am talking about people all over the world, no matter what the name of their religion is. But we are concerned mostly with the Muslims today because of the oppression in this country, and because of the suppression in other countries, whether it's the Afghan Muslims growing opium, or the Saudis with the oil markets, or the sectarian violence in Bahrain.

The President, who is a Christian I understand and born in America, gets up in the morning and prays. Perhaps he gets down on his knees. Then he goes out and makes deals and contracts with people, and says things he didn't say while running for President. He punishes people who are poor by taking away their heating subsidy, and doesn't punish the people on Wall Street. You think I'm talking about President Bush? I'm talking about Obama. That's the Christian corruption. In India there is BJP and RSS and nepotism; there is corruption everywhere. Each one of us knows we are slightly, if not a lot, different than those who came before us. Yet there are things that somehow people inherit, like greed and corruption.

Also, there is a lot in us that is the same. Perhaps, what Imam Jafar Sadiq (ra) meant when he talked about the young people ("*Do not expect your children to be like you, because they are born at a different time*") is that situations may be different, but the inner core, the inner values must be the same. We have to bring into our lives, and into the lives of our children, the essence of an inner self-control and self-direction, and we will find good aspects of tradition that will continue, and the bad will fall away. Children who are raised without a sense of entitlement will do a lot better than children who are raised with a sense of material entitlement. Certainly, they are entitled to all the good qualities of Allah. Spiritual knowledge, in the sense of faith, will be transmitted from

generation to generation by people who have spiritual knowledge and faith, and who are not bigoted and prejudiced. It will be passed on even genetically.

People have dealt with many issues: trying to maintain an almost closed society, a ghetto society; and sometimes they have done it just through symbols they use. Anti-Western symbols, even down to costume symbols. We see what has happened in these autocracies: they are falling by the wayside. Some people try to maintain their identity, like the Hasidim who walk around dressed as if they were in the 16th century; or the Amish, driving around in buggies. In many places of the world it is just symbolic, to try to hold onto the idea that they have principles and values.

A very realistic view is to bring forth the essence of those values that are important, every day in the lives of ourselves and our children. Though time and situations change, truth does not change, nor does the love that expresses that truth change. There will always be people who love the Prophet (sal), who love Allah, who love the people of the Prophet and of Allah. There will always be people who do not understand, and who dislike, and who even hate. What thing that doesn't change is the polarity between love and hate, and the polarity between truth and lies, between honesty and corruption. We cannot just make a law and say what all things wrong are prohibited, and people will obey the law.

We have laws that say the speed limit is 55 miles per hour, and some of us might exceed that from time to time. There are many laws broken every day, laws that are on the books and not on the books. We cannot just prohibit people from doing wrong, although that would be wonderful, terrific. At least, we cannot prohibit what is wrong without telling what is right, giving a good example, and showing the rewards and benefits of doing what is right, acting what is right and thinking rightly. Along with that would come gratitude.

The way to call people to do what is right and to show them what is wrong may be slightly different in different generations and cultural groups, but the Qur'an and Allah (swt) tell us to do that. The way to do that may change from generation to generation. We have many examples in that in Islam. There are people in Islam who believe women should be totally covered up and in *purdah*, they quote certain aspects of the Qur'an to support that. We also know that it is a custom that has nothing to do with Islam. Other people believe that certain people should be in the background; however, there are places in the world where such people, like women in Afghanistan, are presidents. And then what happens? People go to Mecca on Hajj and everybody becomes equal—Islamically, but not necessarily culturally.

It's very important, this idea that these things which are attracting people to wrong and immoral and unethical acts are prohibited. There are things that make people more susceptible to doing what is wrong, unethical, and evil and corrupt. These things should not be permitted. To call people to what is good and correct has to go with examples that represent what is good and correct at that time, place and circumstance, not abandoning the meaning, the value, the intent, nor the subtlety that has to be taken in order to guarantee what needs to be guaranteed to keep society and individuals in society, stable and balanced. Sometimes it requires different circumstances. Sometimes a different language is acceptable.

If we look at the Prophet's (sal) Tradition, we may get some insight. For example, if we want to all people to what is correct and right, perhaps they need to have the experience of the presence of the Prophet (sal) in their lives. Perhaps they need to experience the Divine Presence. How do you do that? The Prophet (sal) said, "***Allah loves excessive remembrance. Whoever loves Allah much will be free from the fire and free from hypocrisy.***" He has given us a way. It's called *dhikr*, remembering Allah. The way one remembers what is true and real is also by negating what is not real. We begin with that in the Shahadah, "*Lā ilāha illa-llāh.*" First you negate what is not real. We are saying,

“This is unacceptable, but that is acceptable.” There is one truth, one God. Being arrogant, being selfish, being self-centered, being ignorant, having excessive desires, having possessiveness, jealousy, envy, hypocrisy, avarice, excess anger—these things are not acceptable. We have to negate what is not acceptable. These are not the ways one comes to love the Prophet (sal). This is not the way people come to love Allah, if we don’t negate them. Rather, I should say, this is the way to love the Prophet, by negating what is wrong and evil.

We have to begin by what is real. What is real? Compassion, mercy, trust and love are real. Forgiveness is real. Tolerance, patience, perseverance, and creativity are real. Other things are real. Knowledge, truth and peace are real. That’s what has to be affirmed. How do you remember to do that? Usually, you remember from the opposite. The meaning of that *hadith* is to remember Allah. He or she who remembers Allah is a good person in every circumstance and in any circumstance. It doesn’t matter who or why they are, or what they are doing, because the person is remembering Truth, the Creator, the Compassionate and the Merciful.

How can a person remember and respect Allah(swt) (however way they call Allah), and then go out and create corruption in this world? It’s amazing. How can they do it? They have to be in a state of ignorance and denial. They have to be in a state of forgetfulness. You cannot be greedy and remember Allah at the same time. You can’t be harming people, destroying their future, taking their wealth and property, or their lives and their resources from them, and then making *dhikrullah*. You cannot think that you are acting like a prophet. Did the prophet take resources from anyone? It is only the resource of their love.

We are time travelers. We live in a time and space continuum, and are subject therefore to the laws of time and space. We get tired and we sleep. We get up and eat. There are things we can do when we are younger that we cannot do when we are older, like stand

for a long *khutbah*. We are always aware of the time as we get older. Time becomes our constant companion. Perhaps we can even begin to resent time, just a little bit. Even when we are younger and love someone, but we have to go off somewhere, we feel the loss. When we are apart from the person we love, time weighs very heavily. We sense that there must be something permanent and real where time exists as free—free time—limitless.

What is limitless? It contains everything that is limited. We cannot be free from time in this world. When people are corrupt and try to put away millions and billions of dollars and resources, and control the world around them, and control the destiny of their people, how aware of time can they be? They are trying to hide their sense of time. They are trying to run away from the reality of time, and think somehow they have become involved in the apparent permanency of what is happening in the outer. But there is nothing permanent in the outer.

The Prophet (sal) makes an equation between fire and hypocrisy. Both are destructive. Islam is a collective force, a unified force that makes a connection between the seen and the unseen, because this life is one and the next life is another. We recognize that what is good normally comes to us through our experiences. Also, what is bad comes through our day- to- day life. The concept of *tawhid* is based on our seeing the One hand, the One eye, the One voice that is behind everything, even though it appears to be different and diverse forces and voices. We learn to see unity within diversity, or diversity within unity. In a *hadith* by the Prophet (sal),

A Bedouin came to the Prophet (sal) and said to him, “Teach me some of the strange and higher forms of knowledge.” The Prophet (sal) turned to him and said, “What have you done concerning the head of knowledge that you have come to in its unusual aspects?” Then he said, “Are you asking about something unusual because you have already grasped what is usual?” And then

the man asked, “What is the head of knowledge?” The Prophet (sal) replied, “To know Allah truthfully as He deserves to be known.” Not wants to be known, deserves to be known. Don’t we all want to be known for what we deserve to be known for that is good? This tradition we find in many sources. **The Bedouin asked, “What is it to know Allah truthfully as He deserves to be known?” And the Prophet (sal) said, “You know Him without comparing Him with anything, because there is nothing like unto Him.”**

Imam Ali said, *“If here was any other than Him (Allah), we would not have had His messengers.”* And we have had messengers. We have had many messengers, but they have all come from the same Source. If there was another god, there would have been messengers from that other god. If there was another truth, there would have been messengers from that other truth. But we have only had messengers from the same God, from the same Truth. They all said similar things, painted similar pictures, and sang similar songs. They repeated similar prayers. The Prophet (sal) continued the teaching to the Bedouin in the sense of what Hazrat Ali said.

Surely, He is One without number, the Outward and the Inward. He is Evident but he is Hidden. He is the First without firstness, Last without lastness. Allah is beyond time and space. Time has emanated out of Him.

How? We don’t know. Even if we could determine how this all took place in physical terms, it would not give us the whole picture. It would only give us the excuse or explanation, which would become our truth. But that is always less than the greater truth. We can only allude to certain things. We want freedom, trust, permanence, love, dedication, kindness. We want everything that is already part of our essential human imperative. The Prophet (sal) continued,

The first and the last, there is none equal to Him. He deserves to be known.

Why is there no equal? Because He is the only Reality and He is Unique. We look around the world and say, who can understand this? It is not just the people who pray. It is not just the Christians and Jews and Muslims who pray, or the Hindus or the Buddhists, and then they go out and are corrupt. It cannot just be the matter of a label, or the name of a religion. It has to be something hidden in the remembering—remembering the Prophet (sal), remembering Allah (swt), remembering the way to Allah is through the light of the Prophet, through the light of the Ahl al Bayt, the light of the *shuyukh*. Light is that subtle aspect of reality, the light that makes us understand the value of our actions, and the importance of our actions. Allah (swt) is the light of the heavens and the earth, he tells us.

The human being now becomes the evidence against himself, or for his or her change. In the secret of our heart of hearts, we have to pray that those corrupt people in this world, full of corruption, look into their own minds and hearts and see what Allah (swt) is trying to tell them. They have to know. They have to become aware of who they can be, and how limitless their reality is. When the people are corrupt and try to hide away billions of dollars, and try to control the world and the destiny of people, how aware of time can they really be? Is it not possible they are just trying to hide the sense of time, trying to run away from the reality of time, thinking somehow they have become involved in some permanency? The Prophet (sal) made the equation between fire and hypocrisy because both are destructive. Islam is a collective and unified force, and susceptible to destruction if it is not guarded, watched over, and cared for.

The same thing applies to us. We are going to self-destruct unless we are cared for, loved, sought after, and responded to. This is the story. Corruption in and of itself will be found everywhere in this world, but in the heart of the believer who wants to find peace within their own self and be an example for others, that corruption can only be

overcome by remembrance of Allah (swt), meditating on Allah (swt), serving other human beings. It may be true that our children need lessons in different ways than we had them, but the essence of those lessons are the same. They may need better examples than we are, but we can be pretty good examples, given the world around us. So as we go on with our lives and work, especially in this beautiful spring, as we journey more into the world and take the lessons we have learned, let us pray to Allah that He gives us good direction and good parameters by which we can live our lives fully. Let us realize the fullness of going inward is even greater than the fullness of going outward. I pray that Allah gives us a good life, health, peace, and that we find that goodness in ourselves. Amin.

SECOND KHUTBAH. Duas.