

April 29, 2011

Khutbah



Title: [Human Progress is based on Good Deeds and Works](#)

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Opening duas. Allah (swt) reveals in the Holy Qur'an:

And We did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them for a game. 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 falsehood, and it breaks the lie and behold it vanishes. And woe to you for what you utter about Allah. (21:16-18)

Also, in the Holy Qur'an, Allah (swt) reveals:

Those who believe and emigrate and struggle in the way of Allah by the means of their wealth and selves are greater in rank in the sight of Allah. It is they who are triumphant. (9:20)

My dear friends, brothers and sisters, *asalāmu aleikum wa rahamatulahe wa barakatu*. I welcome our guests (a college professor and students of a 'Sufi mysticism' course in the local area), and am very grateful that you are here. Just what we read so far should be about 25 years worth of *khutbah*, so we will try to focus a little instead. It is very important for us, especially in the days we live in today, to understand human progress. I think it is something we are all concerned with when we turn on the news and watch what's happening in the world today. We wonder whether or not there is really progress happening in the world today, or are we finding ourselves slipping backward into some

kind of continual conflict, wars of attrition, and abrogation of human rights and civil liberties.

Human progress is based on good deeds and good works. Allah (swt) did not create this creation as a game. For those who are visiting today, I want you to understand when I use certain words what I mean. When I use the word ‘Allah (swt),’ I’m not talking about a god sitting on a throne somewhere, hurling thunderbolts or making micro-management decisions. When I say, “Allah,” I take it in the most deepest context. Allah is the sum total of all the names and attributes, and more than that, and more than that. On tv you hear Muslims saying “Allahu Akbar!” and it’s always associated with some revolution, or bombing or something else, but linguistically in Arabic, it’s comparative. If you look outside and say, “Oh, my God! What a beautiful day it is! Allahu Akbar,” it means, however beautiful it is, God is greater than that. It can’t be described. We can only say comparatively, Allah is greater than that.

When I say, “Allah created,” I don’t mean someone sitting there in a laboratory. That’s very important to understand. Of course, I could have many fights with my brother Muslims over that, especially people living somewhere distant from here. Anyway, I won’t get political today. The other thing to realize is that when we talk about good deeds, we talk about the reflection of the Attributes of Allah. Who is Allah? Allah is all these attributes, and more than that. What attributes? We call them the *Asmā’ al Husna*, the Names of Allah. What are the names? Ar-Rahman, Al-Malik, As-Sabur, Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of Allah: the Compassionate, the Merciful, the Peaceful, the Loving, the Kind, the Creator, the Owner, the Protector. This is the only way we can know who Allah is, by these attributes and qualities. And where do we find them? We find them everywhere.

When the Qur’an says, “**Wheresoever you look, there is the face (countenance) of Allah,**” what does that mean? It means that these attributes have been infused in this

creation and in each one of us, and they reflect in us. When I use these terms, I don't want you to think I'm someone standing here saying, Allah has some kind of a magical laboratory, sits on a throne, commands people to do things, and creates this universe out of some kind of things. Rather, it is created out of the Attributes of Allah (swt) in the moment of creation. **“Kun faya kun. Be and it became.”** Sound like anything? Like the big bang theory? Well, it is. It's the big, big bang theory, and it's also creationism. All these things come together.

It's only been a few hours since millions of people were uplifted by the wedding of William and Kate. Now, you couldn't have guessed I was going to talk about that! What that is, is an indication to us that those estimated two billion people in the world who watched the wedding – good thing we didn't have to invite them to a dinner, it would have been very expensive, even for the queen – have hope. Human beings look for hope. They want to hear good stories and see good endings. *Inshā'a-llāh*, it's a good story and a good ending. We care about people and their well being. It's natural. We are hard-wired for compassion. We are hard-wired for love, for mercy, and for patience (believe it or not). Those are Attributes of Allah (swt) that have been placed in us. This journey in life is to make those things real to us, to have faith that they exist, and to live the kind of life and do the kind of works – and those of you who are Christian know about good works – that bring forth these attributes and qualities in each one of us. In that we find hope for humanity.

In what I recited, Surah al-Bayyinah, Allah tells us why He created this earth, and what He could have done but didn't do. I'm saying “He,” but remember what I'm talking about. In this process, this system that was created, there could have been anything. But we were created for something very important. According to many Islamic scholars, the act of doing good deeds is a cornerstone in the structure, the keystone in the building of the *masjid* – and this is a *masjid* – of day to day life. This is a *masjid*. Those are all *masajid*. All these bodies are *masajid*. We have to understand also that these good deeds

are the result of knowledge, knowledge that has ripened into wisdom, wisdom that also is accompanied by personal experience. In other words, for us, Islam is not memorizing this Book (picks up the Qur'an). Many people in the Muslim world memorize the whole Book, but they don't know what's in it; they don't know what it means.

Many who memorize it don't know what it means, because they speak another language. That's a shame, isn't it? How can you learn the lesson of the Book unless you know what it means, unless somebody tells you? How do you know what they are telling you is the truth? You have to understand. It means it has to be translated into your language, and preferably you learn a little bit of Arabic in order to be able to understand what's in it. What's in it is a guidebook to day to day life, a guidebook to doing good works, good deeds. In truth, good deeds and good works are the key to the way for human beings, outwardly and inwardly, visibly and indeed invisibly, spiritually and secularly, personally and socially, physically and mentally to improve and make progress in their life.

The good deed is an act which becomes an instrument of progress and growth for us all. Certainly, to benefit from these good deeds is to do those good deeds with an attitude of service, and without expectation of reward. These acts alone are sufficient in themselves to lift us to a very high degree of progress, to a high degree of advancement, to become content with life, to become grateful for whatever comes toward us, and to be a servant of all human beings. Muslims say everyone is born a Muslim. People say, "Oh, no, I was born a Christian!" Or a Jew, or a Buddhist, or an atheist. What does it mean? Muslim means not just in submission, but in safety and security. Don't we see that every baby is protected? *Inshā'a-LLāh*, it should be so. We wish it were so. It's the design that it should be so, protected by its mother and father, its environment, to be fed. What baby do you ever know was born and said, "Well, boy, I'm glad I'm here. Get out of my way, I'm running, And by the way, I'd like to have a nice, Big Mac for dinner!" No. Submission is inherent.

We begin our lives in total submission. We have to transfer our submission to higher and higher authority. To be able to accept what comes to us in life. How do we get to the point where we can be content with life, generous to others, grateful to what comes to us, and humble in the way in which we live our lives? That is to do good works and do good deeds. It is to worship the Creator or the creative force, and to understand what we represent in our own bodies, in the systems of our own bodies. The independent systems of our body: respiratory system, digestive system, circulatory system, reproductive system, etc. are represented in the universe, and in everything around us, and in the institutions we create.

How do we come in harmony and in balance / *mizan*? We do good works. We serve one another, because we are serving Allah. Is serving Allah, serving a god on a throne? No. We are serving Compassion. We are serving Mercy. We are serving Love. We are serving Patience. We are serving Generosity and Prosperity and Peace. If we live our lives in this way, we are serving Allah / God. This is the core teaching. Cultures change things. People impugn certain things to Islam that are not Islamic in their essence, but this is the core – serving Allah by serving His creatures, and His creation. It includes the stream, the rocks, the birds, the trees, the animals, and every other human being. Hardly the image we have of Islam in the world today! Hardly what people understand it to be what Muslims believe. But it is what Muslims are enjoined to believe; I cannot say it is what every Muslim believes.

One of the primary reasons that Allah (swt) tells us we were created, and one of the bases of our human nature is to perform these good acts. The Qur'an refers to this nature in the words I quoted: **“Indeed, We have created men in the best of molds.”** In this sense, the word *ibāda*/worship means also obedience. And *adab* is a very core word that comes from the same root, which means courtesy, good attitude. Did you see the wedding this morning? The royal, regal courtesies that were afforded for people, the behavior. We

may make fun of it, and think they are very stiff and British, but how many Americans were watching that today. The *adab*, the courtesies are very, very important – almost to the point you could say it was ritualistic worship. So you have this relationship between courtesy toward Allah and worship of Allah. What does that mean? It means before you cut down the tree that you have to cut down because it might fall on your house, you act courteously toward that tree. When you divert the stream because you need to bring water, you are courteous to the stream. That may sound a little strange. When you cut the flower, you say, “*Bismi-Llāh*. In the Name of God, I am cutting the flower.” Or the mosquito or stinkbug you swat, “*Bimi-Llāhi*.” Don’t do that to the stinkbug, though.

In the Name of Allah – what does it mean? The Names of Allah are what? Compassion is a name of Allah. You could say *Bismi-Llāh*, or also Ar-Rahman. “I’m killing you out of Compassion. You and I are at war right now because you are sucking my blood and causing me a problem, and I could get malaria. *Bismi-Llāh*.” What does it mean? That everything eventually for the Sufi, and *inshā’a-Llāh* for the Muslim is a reminder. Everything is *dhikru-Llāh*. Everything is a means of remembering Allah: the beauty in nature. Everybody says it: “Oh my God, what a beautiful sun rise it is.” The sunrise reminds you of God, and we have to make that mental connection. You don’t just say it as an idiomatic expression in English, but it’s there. “Oh, how beautiful it is!” Everything reminds us of Allah. “Oh, my back!” Everything: the joys, the pains, the questions, the challenges, the hopes, the fears.

You heard in the first reading about fear: fear Allah. There are two words used for fear. In this case, the word *taqwa* really doesn’t mean fear like “I’m afraid.” It means fear like, I’m disappointing. Did any of you ever take any kind of music lessons? Did you have a piano teacher or teacher of music, or theatre or dance and you had to perform? You get afraid, “Oh, how am I going to do?” What does it mean? You are not afraid that teacher is going to come and punch you in the nose. I had a German piano teacher. Herr Meissler. He would take his cane and hit the piano bench if we made a mistake. That

was a different kind of fear; that was called *khawf*. That was FEAR. If you had to give a recital, you don't want to disappoint you friends, or your parents, the people in the audience. You don't want to disappoint yourself. This is *taqwa*. This is piety. You want to do the best you can. This is what we mean when we say, "Fear Allah." You want to have that kind of respect, and you don't want to make a mistake.

I'm sure Kate didn't want to make a mistake this morning. I'm sure William did not want to make a mistake. When they gave their 3-second kiss, for which the odds were 9 – 1 that it would be 0 – 3 seconds... ! They both blushed. I have a funny idea that they don't blush every time they kiss. But they blushed today, because they were in front of humanity. If you want an analogy, think about realizing that 2 billion people are watching you kiss someone, and everything you do. That's *taqwa*. Think about Allah as being those 2 billion people, and everything you are doing is in front of Allah. Then you will have humility, even if you are living together in Wales before you are married for several years. That purity is deeply planted in the heart and soul of the human being. No matter what culture is doing it, no matter what is acceptable in the times, deep in the heart of the human being is planted this *taqwa*.

What stimulates *taqwa*? Love. Along with love came what with these people? A sense of duty. They live their whole lives in public. They are always being watched. If that isn't an analogy to, what we say in Sufism, *ihsan*. *Ihsan* means to act as if you see Allah in everything, and if you don't, know that Allah is seeing you. It comes from the Hadith Jibreel, to act as if everything you are doing is being seen. We know that Google is watching; and we know that Apple is watching, and they can even take pictures through your camera when your camera is off. Maybe that's a different kind of fear we ought to have about [invading] privacy. There is no place you can go where Allah (swt) is not watching. There is nowhere to go that those attributes don't exist. There is nowhere to go, except to go inside yourself. How do you come to these kinds of realizations? By

doing good works, by doing good deeds, by understanding that we are all children of Adam.

We like to say that among the *Ahl al-Kitab*/the People of the Book (the Jews, Christians, Muslims, and Magians/Zoroastrians) that we are all children of Abraham, especially the first three. But we are all children of Adam and Hawa. We are all related, and we all have a common journey. This journey begins long before we are in the wombs of our mothers, and it never ends. The idea of thinking of something that never ends, might be on Kate's mind today if she thinks: if I live to be a hundred, I will have to live like this for the next hundred years. It could be like an eternity. We should live every day doing the best of kind works we can do, *fī sabīli-Llāh*, in the name of Allah (swt).

Unfortunately, people make choices and do things in the name of religion that are disharmonious, that are destructive.

We have a program going to Morocco. We have Moroccans and Egyptians coming in this week. What happened in a city where we are working? In Marrakesh yesterday, 15 people were killed by a bomb. I can bet you that was done in the name of religion. How would you like it if someone committed a crime in your name, and left your name at the scene of the crime – your wallet, your driver's license, and maybe even your fingerprints? You wouldn't like it very much, would you? That's the state of the Muslim world today. You see these polarities: the doing of good works, and doing the worst crime you can do – taking the life of another human being.

Allah (swt) says in Qur'an, **“If you save the life of one human being, it is as if saving all humanity. And if you take the life of one human being, it is as if taking the life of all humanity.”** I would like to be able to say this humbly, but I say it with some pride, so I have a little work yet to do. In our work, we know for a fact that we have saved some lives. What does that mean? Can we sit back and relax and not do anything else? There's a *hadith* that says, **“Two daughters are the keys to Paradise.”** I have two

beautiful daughters. I can do anything I want! I've got the keys to Paradise! No, it doesn't mean that, does it? It means now you know the way you are responsible. This is the way of Islam. At least, it is the way a Sufi thinks, *inshā'a-llāh*.

My friends, there are endless things we can talk about in a world that sometimes seems very black and white. Fortunately or unfortunately, we have many challenges ahead of us. Allah tells us very clearly in the Qur'an that the time will come when a person will go to sleep as a Muslim and wake up as a disbeliever. What is a Muslim? A Muslim is a person who is born in safety and security, who is surrendered to God, to Allah. A Christian is a Muslim, a Jew is a Muslim. A person who practices Islam is a Muslim. A Buddhist can be a Muslim. Anybody can be a Muslim if you understand the terminology. That is different than putting your head down on the mat, or counting your beads, or paying *zakat*. Those are things that a person who embraces Islam, saying "*ash-hadu an lā 'ilaha wa-ash-hadu anna Muhammadan Rasūlullāh,*" does. One becomes a Muslim and now practices that form of faith.

But we are all born in submission and surrender, as I was saying before. The fear is a person will go to sleep a believer, and wake up a disbeliever. The word "*kafir*" comes from *kufir*, which means to cover over. Like you put a seed in the ground and cover it with dirt, to veil it. Things can be distractions. You forget the meaning of your life. You forget the purpose of your existence. You forget the relationship you have to one another. You forget the responsibilities you have for what we call the *amanat*/ the trust, which the Christians call stewardship. You forget that. Now, all you remember is 'I, I, I' and no 'Thou,' anymore. The Prophet (sal) also tells us in a Hadith, "***There will come a time when what is up will be down, what is inside will be outside, what is good will be seen to be bad, and what is bad will be seen to be good.***" We could make an argument for that!

Or we can look at it and say, there are moments in my life when I feel like my life is turned upside down, when I don't know what is good and what is bad. I'm not sure what is the right thing to do or what is the wrong thing to do. Things are not clear. We see that our lives are also cycles. Not just the cycle of birth and life and death, but it also represents the whole universal cycle that nations, communities, and families go through. That's why the system I'm talking about is very internally consistent. This very special organic system of wisdom and discipline spans the whole universe. And it seems to be that the Will of Allah (swt), behind this system of creation, is a very marvelous and unique will.

Whatever happens in this world can be for our growth and development, our knowledge and understanding. In fact, Allah swt can take the things that do wander astray, the people that wander astray, and bring them back to the truth because of the moment to moment realities of our daily life. You can get so far out there that you get scared. You can turn, *qalaba*, back to your heart and say, "What am I to do? What can I do to get myself back to where I was?" Out of love we can serve, or out of fear we can serve. In a state of peace we can serve, or in a state of agitation we can be awakened. This is the miracle we find in Islam, and this is the miracle we find in our lives.

When we look at the terrible things that happened yesterday and day before yesterday, and the people who died in the tornados, and what happened in Japan, and before that in Banda Aceh, we have the normal questions: how can this happen? What is the reason behind all this? I'm not going to have time to try and answer that question in the *khutbah* today, but there are patterns and intentions and lessons to be learned. This life should not be valued over the next life to such a degree that we feel the next life is some kind of punishment. At the same time, we should make the most of this life that we can, in the doing of good acts and deeds.

We know from science when something degenerates, it's a sign of revival and the beginning of something new. We live in a time when we need a great deal of renewal and revival. In Arabic, it is called *tajdid*. We need a time of renewal. We see in Egypt, Tunisia, the wave of what we call democracy, and freedom is flowing. We don't know how strong the rip tide will be. We know the wave is very strong. If it was a tsunami, the rip tide would be very strong. But if it is a gentle wave that goes over people, [it could be saying], "Look, here is your opportunity. Here is the moment for change." Christians and Muslims were praying next to each other in Tahrir Square. Men and women were standing next to each other in prayer. Then [that is when] we can say there is hope. But what part am I playing in that? That starts with me, in my life. Each one of us has a tremendous responsibility to create good deeds.

Inshā'a-llāh, we can contemplate some of these things, and hopefully some meaningfulness in our own life, and to remember that it's very difficult sometimes to understand what is transpiring in our own lives, let alone in the world around us. But it is not very difficult to know what a good work is, what a good deed is, and a commitment to the well-being and welfare of other human beings. This is at the core teaching of Islam. This is at the core teaching of Christianity, as far as I know. It is Judaism, as far as I know. And indeed, it is the core teaching of any truth path that leads you to the one truth that all is Allah—everything we experience. *Lā ilāha illa-llāh*: no there is no god (small g), no truth, no reality but the one Reality. Think of it as if you were just one little cell in your body. How would you comprehend the whole body? You are just busy doing your work. Well, each one of us, as a human being, is only one small part that serves to sustain the whole – not sustain Allah – but the whole of this creation. This is all created by the will/ *irāda* of Allah (swt). That will is planted inside of us. So our journey is to access it within us, and then manifest it through ourselves, *inshā'a-llāh*. Take a moment and make your own prayer to Allah (swt). *Asalaam aleikum*.

SECOND KHUTBAH (Duas).

