

June 24, 2011

Khutbah

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: [Our Contract with Allah](#)

DVD title: Consciously Choosing our Contract with Allah  
Preparing for Ramadan in Sha'ban

Opening duas. Allah (swt), in His Holy Qur'an when He was referring to the people, revealed:

**“Give us the portion of this world” and they shall have no share in the next world.  
“O Lord! Give us goodness in this world and goodness in the following world and  
shield us from the suffering and the fire.” (2:200-201)**

**And those who had emigrated for the cause of Allah after they had been oppressed,  
We shall truly settle them in a good place in this world and the reward in the final  
life is even greater, if they only knew.**

**Those who are steadfastly patient and depend upon their Lord.**

My dear brothers and sisters and friends, these are important times. We are ending the month of Rajab and we are entering the month of Sha'bān. There are many things to consider at this time. The most important things are not just the practices that one does, but the foundation of those. As truly as Muslims, we have two choices. We can either choose (or not) to walk in the way of becoming a servant of Allah (swt), to serve Allah (swt), to worship Allah (swt) more and more, so that more of what we do is for the sake of Allah (swt). Then everything you do is for the sake of Allah (swt). Then life is very different. Or Allah (swt) has arranged for us, in this creation, to choose not to walk in that way, to choose to not be in His service, to not be a worshipper of Allah, but to be a worshipper of what Allah has created in the material world, and a worshipper, therefore, of our own selves and our own interests.

Allah (swt) said that He would guide those who want to be guided, and feed those who are hungry, and clothe those who are naked, and He will forgive the errors that we make by night and by day if we seek those forgiveness from Him. This is a context that we are all familiar with. It is not an unfamiliar context to hear from the *minbar* on a Friday. It is not an unusual context to hear in relationship to anything spoken about Islam, as when we say that ‘Allah provides this’ or ‘asks us to do this.’ But when we are sitting here and you with me, we are not talking about a God who is sitting on a throne somewhere. We are not talking about someone who is in the sky with a long beard and whose *thobe* is a certain length. We are talking about a whole and total system of life in creation.

So when we say that ‘Allah suggests this,’ ‘Allah asks this’ or ‘Allah warns us,’ or ‘Allah gives us this,’ we are talking about the values and the qualities of what Allah (swt), the Creator of all the universes, has placed before us. ‘Choosing to live in the way of Allah (swt)’ means that we are choosing to live in the way of compassion, the way of love, the way of peace, the way of justice, etc. We can memorize those names but we have to understand what they mean. As we come to the month of Shaban and Ramadan, we make a little extra effort. We fast a little more. We prepare ourselves. We ask ourselves, “What is the purpose of this life?” We try to create a special time in our day for us to make contemplation. What is it we are contemplating?

We choose to express our life ‘in the way of Allah (swt)’ – a phrase we are all familiar with, or have heard many times. It means in the way of being a compassionate, loving, kind, forgiving, tolerant, patient, persevering, just human being. It is not complicated. It is just difficult. When we enter into a contract with Allah (swt), we are entering into a contract with ourselves. When we are making a promise to Allah (swt), we are making a promise to ourselves. Because Allah tells us that “***You will find Me in the heart of the believer.***” As I said yesterday to some of you, as near as your life vein. We are entering into an ethical and moral contract with Allah. We are saying to ourselves that we value ourselves a great deal. We are putting the high value on ourselves that Allah (swt) placed on us as we were created. We may use this word, “He” like

“He created” but we know that in Arabic there is no distinction in gender in this way. We are sort of limited using these words, and we are better off when we say that ‘Allah said this’ and ‘Allah said that.’ instead of He.

The mystery of that Creation will always be a mystery. The origin is not a place and it is not a time. Indeed, there is a good case that can be made to say that this Creation is being created and ended every moment. But the reality of the situation is that we have this life in this world and we have to make a distinction on how we are going to live it. Whatever our career is, whatever our goals in life are, they have to more and more become goals and intentions, attitudes and means of communications with our brothers and sisters. Then our life becomes *ibāda*/worship for the sake of Allah (swt), because we are worshiping where Allah (swt) resides, in the hearts of other human beings, and in ourselves. Perhaps it is even correct to say that we have to choose, because more often what we have to do is reject certain things.

Allah (swt) created us all good, with *fitra*. We are not Christians who say that we were created in sin. We are Muslims who were created with good. So the question is, “How do we stay on the *sirat al-mustaqim*?” How do we stay on the good path? What does it mean to do that? It is not about giving up things. It is about embracing the Beauty and the Truth that is Allah (swt). We begin our lives as infants in the womb of our mothers in submission to Allah (swt). Then, we began with this unconscious (or less conscious) contract. It began with the first glimpse, the first light into our own consciousness to find a purpose for us. We are born as biological beings, but there is something more inside of us. There is a spirit, a soul inside of us.

As we grow, we hope that we grow in the Attributes/*Sifat* of Allah. What does that mean? It means that we should grow with a social purpose in mind. We should grow with compassion in our hearts. We should grow with a sense of justice for everyone. We should grow with increased patience. We should grow with the strength to persevere for that which is good. We should grow, in other words, with the deeply spiritual relationship with the One Who created us, *inshā'a-llāh*. And we should make that contract personal. One may be born a Muslim, but I

have always believed that a person needs to make that contract themselves. So we may be born and we may have whispered in our ear “*ash-hadu ilāha illa-Llāh, wa-ash-hadu anna Muhammadan Rasūlullāh.*” But at some part we must say, “This is my *contract*. This is my contract.” And what is it a contract to? It is a contract to try to mine the wealth of that wonderful mine of our *fitra*, our goodness.

We do have choices to make because Allah (swt) gave us those choices. He did not give the trees a choice. They grow where you put them or they don't. The fish don't say, “I don't like this stream. I think I will go to another one.” The elephants don't say, “Gee, it is awfully hot here in the forest. I think I will go live up in Virginia where it is cool in the winter time. I am going to migrate to Virginia.” That is not how it works. Just human beings have these choices. Unfortunately, human beings make choices in not such great ways. All we have to do is open up the newspaper (those things that were printed on paper once; all we have to do is google Washington Post). All we have to do is read headlines to see what choices human beings make. We get a choice to back out too.

It is also equally true that we have this contract and we can re-affirm it consciously, or we cannot. There are those of us who do not know we have this contract, who were not brought up knowing that we have this duty, this obligation and this contract with Allah (swt). Some people came to know when they became Muslims consciously, but some people never come to know it. They just re-affirm their choices in the material world over and over again, self-centered. Some of us had to discover it. Then we have to accept what we discovered. And the world we live in makes it very, very difficult for us sometimes.

For every breath we take, for every step we take and every intention we make and every word that we speak, whether it is a prayer or not, a *du'ā* or not, for every action that we take that is done in this way, in the consciousness of affirmation and choice – all those things that we are doing is in worship/*ibāda*. *Ibāda* is not just sitting here on Friday. *Ibāda* is not just putting your head on the mat five times a day. It is the conscious choices that you make every day to realize

that Allah (swt) is present in your life. In that worship, in that *ibāda*, we have to understand that it is pure worship, because it is done for the sake of Allah (swt). What is being done for Allah is also being done for our sake. Because Allah (swt) says, **“Remember Me and I will remember you.”** It does not say, “I will remember you and then you will remember Me.” It is very important that we take that first step, because Allah (swt) tells us that if you take one step towards Him, He comes running towards you.” From how far? Down the road, or up the hill or from the sky? Oh, no – running to your consciousness. Running to your aid from where? From within your own self, from your own goodness, from the truth of the foundation of who you are. Even in worship, Allah, makes it so that it is for our own sake that we worship, not for “His” sake.

In Qur’an, there is this sort of *dyad*. There are two parts. I like to say that Qur’an is in a positive bi-polar, not in a negative. Everything has two poles. The North Pole, the South Pole. There is an up; there is a down. For the outside, there is an inside. For a top there is a bottom. So Qur’an is also this way. One *dyad* is the prayers of Ibrahim (als) compared to the prayers of Prophet Muhammed (sal). When he was going to be thrown into the fire and the angels told him, “Will you not pray to Allah for help?” Sidni Ibrahim said, “No, because whatever happens is His will. It is ok if He wants to throw me in.” But the Prophet Muhammed (sal) would pray all night, often asking Allah (swt) for His guidance. He prayed at the Battle of Badr to win it.

So there are these two ways of praying. It can be either, ‘whatever is happening is Allah’s will,’ or you pray and you pray and you pray, and you stay in contact. For the people of *tariqah*, it is hard to say what is the right and what is the wrong way of doing things; but I think that the Prophet Muhammed (sal) was somewhat closer to Allah (swt), because Allah (swt) asks us to pray for Prophet Muhammed and make supplications. In one *hadith* it says that Allah loves it when people pray to Him. It also says, **“Remember Me and I will remember you.”** Allah wants us to ask Him for something. On the other side of it, we have to accept whatever His response is. Indeed, whatever comes is His response. Whatever happens to us, whatever state we are, in it is the response to something—to something. It is for us, not only to try and understand what

that something is, but to be grateful for that. If something negative or something seems to happen and we have a negative response, we have to take a moment, make *muhasaba* and ask, “Where is that coming from?” Then we must be grateful for that moment of reflection, for an opportunity to reflect.

What seems to be bad has a foundation in what is good. What seems to be difficult is, in some way, to give us an opportunity to reflect and to find ease. Then Allah (swt) gives us five times a day to do that specifically. On our own, we are not going to stop. We are going to keep going, keep going. It is even hard enough for us to stop when we have the five times a day. It is hard to stop when you are in a country where the call to prayer is called. A lot of people find it difficult, up to a point. So we have that to help us. Then we have to make the choices ourselves to spend a little longer, to take more time, to read Qur’an, to reflect, to make *muraqabah* (meditation), to reflect on things (*tafakkur*), and to be in the company of good people. Nothing is more important, if you are going to be in the company of anyone, than to be in the company of good people.

It is very important as we come to Ramadan to understand that our worship should be done with the intentions to please Allah (swt). We say, “to fast for the sake of Allah (swt),” but it is to know as much as we can know who this Allah (swt) is. It is not just to appease some God, nor because we fear the fires of hell, nor because we desire the paradises. But it is to come to complete our life, to fully complete our life, to maintain our contract, if you will, to make the good choices in life, and to learn from the ones that are not so good. This is the way we please Allah (swt). This is how we find *mizan* (balance, harmony, resonance). This is how we find *sakina*/tranquility. This is how we find *taslim* (safety, security and peace). This is how we find such, a kind of security and peacefulness that comes from reconciling those things that are out of sync, out of harmony in life.

It is very, very important, as we approach this time of year, which is set aside for this kind of reflection, to understand that our intention should be good, that nothing stand outside the

purview or the territory, or the realm of *ibāda*/worship – nothing. Everything and anything can be turned to worship. Other than the physical prayer, the audible prayer, all prayer and all responses come from the *ghaib*, from the unseen. In that sense, they are invisible. We sit and think about what our needs are, and then we speak to Allah (swt) in our mind and heart. Those words are invisible. But we say that Allah (swt) hears it, because Allah (swt) is present. Then when we think we get some response in our hearts, we have to hope that we see it and we feel it properly, and then follow it with gratitude. Then we are in harmony with this universe. Then we are in harmony with the Creator, with Allah (swt). There is this give and take, so to speak. The results of the worship will have relevancy to our lives, because we have done it *fī sabīli-Llāh*, for the sake of Allah (swt).

Allah (swt) is responding to us. Just like when I throw a stone in the pond, the pond responds with little wavelets. Just like when you say to someone, “I love you,” even just a twinkle in their eye is a response. Just when you eat something that is sweet, Allah has given you tastebuds that respond and say, “Ah, that’s good!” There is this constant give and take, a constant response. Some of us want to know more about that. Some of us don’t just want to do the practice, putting our heads on the ground, and then going on with life. Some of us want to understand the vastness of this universe. We want to understand it in scientific terms, in humanistic terms, and in philosophical terms. Some of us just want to go out and sing a song in praise of Allah, or write a poem in praise of Allah. It doesn’t even have to have Allah (swt) in the poem. You can praise the birdsong or the sun rising over the horizon. You can write a poem about love, as so many have written. In your heart, you know that you are completing the circle. There is you; there is what you are observing; there is the Creator of what you are observing, and there is your ability to speak of it, write of it, paint it, photograph it or worship it.

This is the journey also of Ramadan. It is not just to say your prayers, or just to have *serih* in morning and the *iftar*. It is not just to stand up and make 21 *rak’as* or 8 *rak’as* in *taraweeh*.

No, it is to take the time to be in the Presence of Allah. In this month coming up, we are preparing for it, as we should have been in Rajab also. It is a busy time of year for all of us. It is a hot time of year here. There are strains on the physical body. There is so much beauty that Allah brings this time of year, too. So we say in this sort of personification that Allah is not trying to make things difficult for you; it's just the way it is. To find that divine in our heart and in our lives is a wonderful opportunity for us. We pray to Allah to give us good in this world and in the Hereafter, and protect us from the torment of the fire. That torment of the fire: you can take it metaphorically. The worst thing in the world is to be unaware, to be ignorant, to do what is painful to yourself or harmful to others. Many of us have felt that we are burned by situations. We even have that phrase in English: "Oh, that person burned me." "I was really burned by that situation." The person who says that doesn't necessarily believe in hell. All these metaphors are guidelines for us.

In the end, we have this choice to affirm our destiny or to reject it; to be a servant and a seeker, or not; to accept the challenges or reject them. If we reject them, we are going to become overwhelmed by our ego, by our fears, and very attached to only things of the material world. None of them last, including us, and then we will wonder, "What happened?" When we gain knowledge and faith, and we lose the attachment to the worldly things, it doesn't mean we don't love things in this world, but we [realize that we] are not those things. Then we are at peace, and we are giving good service. We understand the unique role that we play, *inshā'a-Llāh*, as human beings. So may Allah help us to remember these things in our lives, *inshā'a-Llāh*.

SECOND KHUTBAH. Duas.