



Approach of the New Year:
The Meaning of Community is in Sharing and Caring

Opening duas. Allah in the Holy Qur'an reveals to us in Surah at-Tawbah:

Truly, the *sadaqa* goes to the poor and needy and to those employed to collect the *zakat* and for the reconciliation of hearts, for the freeing of captives, for those in debt, and in the way of Allah and for the wayfarer. This is an obligation from Allah, and Allah is Knowing and Wise.

My dear brothers and sisters, as a community within the community of Islam, it's very important for us to understand the meaning of the community within the community in terms of caring for one another. As you are well aware, this past month of Hajj and the coming month of Muharram have many, many blessings attached to it. Not only are we to fulfill our obligations by the end of the year for the *zakat*, but also to understand the great sacrifices people have made, exemplified by the sacrifice of Sidna Hussein (as) and by the coming of this near year. Just as the new year is born, so too new blessings every day are born to come to us.

These are months of sacrifice and repentance and reflection upon the meaning of life itself and our role in the world. It's a time for understanding when one should make peace with one another, and to obey Allah (swt), to turn to Qur'an and the practices. It's a time for caring for others as much as we care for ourselves, sharing what we have with others and sharing it with happiness, and sharing our joy at sharing. It's also a time for sharing our struggles, griefs and losses over the year, and caring for one another's challenges. Whether we are sharing our food or wealth or good words and intentions, it's a time to help the poor and to remember what our duties and obligations are as human beings, as Muslims and as Sufis.

In the month of Ramadan, the Prophet Muhammed (sal) said it was the month of patience; and the reward of patience was Paradise. Then a couple of months go by, and we have the month of Hajj. We gather here together on an equal basis and remember what sacrifice really means and what patience demands of us, especially those of us on Hajj. Everybody has a role to play in life. Some people have much, some have little. Most of us are, as we say, of the “99 per cent,” and everybody has a role to play when there is difficulty and when there is need. No one should pass by another human being, let alone a brother, sister, or member of the community without the proper greeting and intention, especially if we know that they have some need and some struggle, and that Allah is demanding of them their patience and perseverance.

The ones who the difficulties comes to are challenged to be patient, have faith, have trust, and have submission, and strive in the way of Allah, trusting in Allah and tethering the camel. The one who the difficulty does not come to has a duty in Islam to provide, to give care, to give help, to give assistance. During these times and circumstances, Allah (swt) wants to see that those of us who are safe from calamity will care for those who are affected by calamity. That makes sense, it is very logical. It is very reasonable. We all know what kind of future we will have. We care about our children. We want to know that we brought them up in the right way. Will they be happy, secure, are they doing well? What of our bad habits have they taken on? What of our good habits have they taken on?

Allah (swt) has put within us a desire to know how we are doing, where we are in this journey. To care about something is one thing. To share a problem, to share the happiness, to share the misery, to share the grief, to share the joy is quite another. Caring is an act of nobility, and an act a believer has in his or her own heart. Sharing responsibility, the joys and the sorrows, the pain and the comfort, reducing the pain, confusion and doubt is a result of deeper understanding of one’s own self and one’s Islam. Certainly, it is the role of those in *tariqah*. We spoke about *tariqah* last night in

the form of *shar'ah*. Certainly, it is a truth during the month of Ramadan, an axial point during the month of Hajj, and an issue in the month of Muharram.

We have to try our best to do something to look after others. If we do that, then even if a few hundred thousand out of 1.2 billion Muslims get it right, it can change the whole paradigm for the world, let alone if 10% would get it right. If a few hundred million people really truly practiced this caring and sharing with the utmost of *ikhlas*, with the sense of *amal*, then the world could change. In fact, if we do this with real sincerity, think what would happen in just a few months. Even if it was just one month, how many of the problems of society would be solved? If everyone who was on Hajj last month had truly committed to make peace at Hajj and returned as a peace maker; if everyone during the month of Muharram gave up the idea of sectarianism, understanding what it means to live and die for the truth, to sacrifice for Allah, think of what it would mean.

If the only means of expressing it was money, think of what that much money would do for good in this world. It would be directed to those in need, orphans, who were ill, who have no food. How much money would pour in for those who are poor and who need shelter? That's the concept behind the *zakat*, that everyone has a responsibility and that money or wealth should be used for the benefit of others. We have to understand how important it is to ingrain in our children and re-ingrain the importance of *sadaqa* in ourselves. It is narrated how one group of people were needy at one time. A dialogue takes place between every one of us and Allah on the Day of Judgment. Allah says, "O my child of Adam! I was sick and you didn't visit Me." "How could I have visited You when You are Lord of the Worlds?" "Don't you know My servant so and so was sick and you didn't visit him? Did you not know that had you visited him, you would have found Me there?" and so forth. In another *hadith*, Prophet Muhammed (sal) said,

To visit the sick, to follow the funeral procession, to request mercy for one who sneezes, to honor the one who pledges to help the oppressed, to accept the invitation and to spread peace.

In another *hadith*, the Prophet (sal) instructed believers to take care of those who need help. ***“Visit the sick, feed the hungry, and liberate the captive.”*** In order to take care of others, their necessities, time, knowledge, willingness and money are all needed. What is really needed is a good Muslim heart, a heart that is in submission, a heart that loves. So it’s necessary for us to recapture in our hearts and souls the spirit of volunteering, giving and employing ourselves in the task of giving. We shouldn’t sit in judgment of those who are in need more than those who are not. We shouldn’t question the goodness of the work people do nor the need that they have to do that work. We know in our heart and in our soul where the goodness of that work comes from.

Look at our own work: we cannot judge our work by the amount of money we have in the bank. Allah has blessed us to have a few thousand left at the end of the year; not a few million, not 10 million, no one gets a bonus of 2.5 million or 10 million or 20 million. We cannot judge our work by the number of young people who come to our summer programs, or that are in our delegations in our work around the world. We can only judge our work by the *niyyat* by which we do that work, and by the response we get from individuals. The *niyyat* by which we do that work is that we do the work *fi sabīli-Llāh*. When we say *fi sabīli-Llāh*, we don’t mean some distant God. We mean the truth and reality that lives within the heart of each human being we serve, so the world is a better place for those young people, for the delegates, for the people we serve that we never know or meet.

People came from places of poverty and they returned to make less poverty in their lands. The young people on staff in the summer are just trying to make careers for themselves, but they leave realizing that it’s more than just a career that is necessary. They have their

hearts touched and opened, most of them. We have to go back and look at, where is our volunteerism? Where is our spirit of caring and sharing every day? There are so many generous people in our community alone who will write that check, whether it's for the community, the program, the *masjid* or someone in need here, and needs the support; whether it is for a plane ticket or for some treatment. This is the spirit of sharing and caring we have to focus on this month and indeed every month.

As a new year comes, we have new responsibilities and challenges. The noble actions we do will bring us peace individually. For many of us, we don't have to reach outside of our community; we have achieved so much. Yet we do reach beyond our community. People here are also in need of *sadaqa*. The whole community is in need. You know it and I know it. What are we waiting for, another letter, another meeting? Allah informs us in Surah at-Tawbah that the avenues of *zakat* are to be used in these states: **“Alms are for the poor and then the needy, those who are employed to administer the funds, those whose hearts have recently been reconciled in truth, for those in bondage, in debt, in the face of Allah and for the wayfarer. It is ordained by Allah. Allah is full of knowledge and Allah is full of wisdom.”**

So remember that every good deed that we do, every good action, will be rewarded 10 times over. For every dollar you spend on others 700 times will be rewarded to you, because the rewards during the month of Ramadan were 70 times alone. You can ask about the rewards of the other month. If we really believe, Allah will provide for us. If we really believe, we won't have any back-breaking weight or needs. That's why over the centuries Muslims have taken responsibility for each other. They pay the *zakat* for so many charities. I want to encourage all of you, and remind myself, to do your best in taking care of other members of our community, and in the larger community of our society through our work and efforts, our organizations.

We spend so much time thinking about what to give, but we need to think about what we have received as well. After all, we are two charities, aren't we? These charities have affected your lives, and people who are not present here today. They will affect your children's children's lives. They have affected some of your parents. They have affected your friends and siblings. They have affected in a positive way so many people. Just today a Christian gentleman from Botswana left, who was deeply affected in the few days he was here. Now is the time to look and say, is it really worth it? It is our duty as Muslims to support this work that we began almost 40 years ago. It has brought to you and others so many moments of happiness, peace, and struggle, questions and answers. Certainly, you know it has affected others in a very profound way.

We are supposed to share our struggles and our gifts. If every community takes care of its own self, every problem in the world, economic, social, education, and religious problem, would be solved. If every community that took care of itself realized that it had to reach out beyond itself and had to take care of one other group or community, just think what would be accomplished. We have to pray to Allah to help us do better, how to take more initiative, how to have confidence. Don't make our brothers and sisters come begging to us; don't make that happen. If we take the initiative, whatever else we are leaving behind, we will be rewarded 700 times. If we do that, Allah (swt) will take care of us.

Let me read you again a *hadith* of Nebi Muhammed (sal) where he encourages us to take care of others, in order that Allah will take care of us, and our problems here and in the Hereafter:

Whoever relieves a believer from one distress of this world, Allah will relieve him of a grief on the Day of Judgment. (Have you done that? I'm sure you have.) ***Whoever makes it easy for someone in difficulty, Allah will make it easy for him in this world and the Hereafter. Whoever protects a Muslim, Allah will***

protect him in this world and the Hereafter. And Allah is to help a servant, as long as the servant is helping his brother.

Yes, that's it. That's the formula. Can you walk out of this *khutbah* today and remember that for more than an hour? When you are paying your bills this month, can you write an extra check, not just 20 cents, but something that will strain you just a little? We shouldn't worry about our needs. We should take care of our needs and Allah will relieve us of the worries and replenish us. We pray that Allah (swt) will guide us and shower His Blessings upon us and encourage and inspire us to do good things, to give us good guidance, to give us a share of mercy, so that we can then give to others our portion of our reward. [We pray] that we can spend for Allah, and have the ability for forgiveness that we may not be insulting and arrogant toward others.

Let us make our *du'ā* on the Holy Prophet, and ask Allah's forgiveness, and show our appreciation for how this community has found the way to care for one another, for our mothers, fathers, parents, brothers, sisters, children. How He will continue to do that is by His Will and by our generosity, by His Love and by our humility, *inshā'a-llāh*. Don't hold back in your prayers, monetary giving, time, efforts, at all. Allah will reward you when the time comes. You need the support and you need the reward. It is up to Him when it comes, but it will come. There is no question. Have faith, *inshā'a-llāh*. I wish at times we would take up the Christian practice and pass the hat around, like in church. Don't forget on Thanksgiving to have some money in your pocket by the way when we go to the service this Thursday.

But really we have a better way, one that is internalized first. We have confidence that everyone will go home and remember this *khutbah*, and that we have two charities and people in need. We have a lot to be grateful for. We have safety and security, and we can build our homes, raise our children, care for our families and brothers and sisters. We can leave our doors unlocked and share our food and love. There is no value we can

place on that. So let's not hesitate, before we go and leave the property, and before the night comes, to really contemplate this and take care of the poor, the needy, the orphans, those with illness, and care for everyone by caring for ourselves, *inshā'a-llāh. Asalaam aleikum.*