

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Success depends on What you Build your Life on Inwardly
Not What it Appears to Be Outwardly

Allah Swt has many quotations in the Qur'an about success. In Surah al-Baqarah:

Alif Lam Mim. This is the book in which there is no doubt; guidance for those who consciously guard themselves for the sake of Allah. And those who believe in the unseen and establish ritual prayer / salat and spend on others from what we have provided for them, and those who believe in what has been revealed to you and what has been revealed before you, and they have certainty in the final world. It is they who have guidance from their Lord, and it is they who are successful.

Also in Surah al-Imran:

On the Day every soul shall find whatever it is done of good present before it, and what it has done of evil will wish that there was between it and its deeds a great distance. And Allah cautions you against Himself, and Allah is most kind to His worshipers.

Say, "If you love Allah, then follow me; and Allah will love you and forgive you your sins, and Allah is ever-forgiving, singularly compassionate."

You see that the link between being successful and following the commands of Allah are very clear. Islam is to be seen by us not as a religion per se, but as something that points us toward success; and success comes to us through humility, and

worship, and following the commands of Allah as we find in the Qur'an. Allah references directly back to the Book. So this Book is the guide, without any doubt. In Qur'an, the scripture, or the words of Allah measures human activity in terms of success and in terms of failure very clearly. It invites us to follow a path of success and avoid the path of failure, not only in an outer Islamic environment, but in an inner Islamic environment, where there is prayer 5 times a day, and where you are praying for success, and to avoid the path of failure. Allah also says:

This is the book we read whereof there is no doubt of guidance to those who are Allah-conscious (*muttaqīn*), who believe in the unseen, who perform the prayer, who spend out of what We have provided for them, and who believe in what We have sent down to you (that's the plan), O Mohammed, and that which we sent down before you.

This is a continuation. You believe in the Hereafter, you are guided by the Lord, and you will be successful. This is what it takes for success, both individually and for the community. Allah could have, I guess, told us which stocks to invest in, if you believe in the omniscience of Allah. He could have told you which property to buy, and which jewels to own, but that's not what he says. He doesn't tell us about putting money under the bed or having large pieces of land. He doesn't tell us we should have 350 children, or to be sure to be covered by insurance in our old age. He doesn't tell us anything about anything else other than, this is the plan. If you follow this plan, whatever you do subsequent to that will lead to success.

That's the foundation. Unfortunately, we turn it inside out. We work for the world; we work for this and that. We buy property. We provide for the children and do all of this stuff, and then, incidentally, we do our prayers and practices. We do it

habitually without understanding what it means. I don't know if you know what's going on over at Iman's house. Some local workers were checking things out, and found out that all the piers that hold up her deck and her house are rotted. The original builders didn't put footers in. All of them rotted. The irony is, these workers also went to the lake house, and said don't have a lot of people stand on this big deck, because the piers are rotted out. The same thing happened there. They had to put 2400 pounds of concrete in there, and digging out all those piers.

Everything looks fine. All the activities are going on. We're not talking about someone living in poverty. Everything looks successful, but the whole thing can collapse. Do you realize what would have happened if it had collapsed? The house had already sunk three inches on one side. Sunk, not settled. You get the point. Here's the guideline. How complex was that? Five things to do. Are you going to build your life on a job, on an education, on passion, on love? What are you building it on? There is no success unless we build our lives, not just on the Qur'an as a book, but how it is taught to us, and presented to us. Not just on the book. I guess you could put this (holding the book of the Qur'an) in the ground and put a pier on this, but this would rot. It's a book with pages. How do you build it on the word?

"Oh, sure, Shaykh. Same old story again. I have to put food on the table, take care of the kids, gotta get the job," get whatever it is. Then you say, "Well I know it all comes from Allah." Do you really? Do you REALLY know that it comes from Allah? Or, is it that everything looks fine so it must come from Allah, because everything's fine? Do you REALLY know who is led astray and who is not, and you can tell right away? No, you can't tell. Who can tell, unless it's something really egregious? I am making a case for Tasawwuf. I'm not making a case just for Islam.

There are all those Muslims out there: nice ones, good ones, people who come to our *halkah* every once in a while in Washington. But where is the guidance? What are the decisions that are being made? You make a decision today that looks just beautiful. You buy a house, it's beautiful. You go and buy a lot of stuff and put in it. You paint the walls beautifully, decorate it with beautiful things. Is it sustainable? Is the job sustainable? Is the relationship sustainable? Is the prayer sustainable? Is the love sustainable? What's going to make it sustainable is to understand what it takes to have that kind of confidence and commitment to Allah Swt, to this path.

When this Qur'an was compiled and put in the order that it is in today, it all made sense. Surah al-Fatiha and Surah al-Baqarah are right next to each other. It makes a lot of sense. We can talk a long time about the little space between Surah al-Fatiha and Surah al-Baqarah. What's the space? Alif, Lam, Mim. That's the space. It's a whole other world. What does it mean? I've talked about it; go back and look.

This criteria for success is quite different than how we count our successes normally with our houses, and cars, and positions, and bank balance, and our children, and our influence, and our name, and whatever. None of these things are bad. But how do they get their relevancy? Certainly, they are important and necessary, but they are not the way you measure success. And it certainly is not just the way you measure happiness. It may be we support our spiritual success in some other way. It may be that we contribute to the success of the world by the way in which we create in our lives a continuum of successes to our children and children's children. These are the important things. It may be the way our contribution to the world is continued, but success is measured by these *'āyāt* described in Surah al-Baqarah. In another verse, the success paradigm is said in this way:

The believers have indeed attained true success; those who humble themselves in their prayers, who avoid whatever is vain and frivolous, who pay *zakat*, who strictly guard their private parts, and those who seek beyond and are not transgressors, and who are true to their trusts and their covenants and who guard their prayers. These are indeed the inheritors who shall inherit Paradise and shall dwell forever therein.

One of the trusts is your *ba'iat*. The first one as a Muslim you gave was the Shahadah. The second one was to this path. The Prophet Mohammed (sal) received guidance that is often summarized without details. Through his own insights and Divine inspiration elaborated on these '*āyāts* and *surahs* and commands, but he also exemplified them in his life. Without following him, it's very difficult to understand the essence of this Qur'anic guidance. Even more difficult is to put the Qur'anic commands into practice. You need a template. Following Rasūlu-Llāh (sal) is an important part of success. Those who follow the Messenger, the Unlettered Prophet (Nabi Ummi), he enjoins them to do good; forbids them to do evil, makes lawful to them the good things and makes unlawful those things which are impure. He relieves them of their heavy burden and the shackles that were upon them. Thus, it say in al-Qur'an:

Those who believe in him and honor and support him and follow the light that has been sent down with him are the prosperous.

Again, defined for us, clearly defined, Allah tells people in Qur'an:

Say, if you do love Allah, follow me. Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. Allah is All Forgiving.

All of this has been given clarity by the Prophet Muhammed (sal). We can't follow this paradigm without striving to follow the template, the example. The failure paradigm has also been illustrated. It has been mentioned as non-success, or loss. Failure has been described as many activities. Those engaged in these activities are described as those who are not successful, losers, or of the lost. Activities that make one of the lost are many. At least 50 times, associating partners with Allah (*shirk*) is mentioned. [Other such activities include] imposing lies on Allah; leading a life of a disbeliever, *kufr*; engaging in evil deeds (*dhulm*); involvement in transgressions and oppression; making Shaytan one's guide, one's *wali*; breaking the covenant with Allah; preferring disbelief over belief; preferring ignorance over knowledge. These are some of the things that make one lost. You think those are hard things to do? They are all easy things to do. It's easy to disbelieve in a moment. It's easy to engage in a wrong action. It's easy to transgress and break your word. It's easy to oppress someone else. It's easy to break a promise, and certainly easy to become ignorant.

The worst losers on the Day of Judgment will be the ones deprived of Allah's Rahmat. Those who lost themselves and their families on the Day of Judgment are the real losers. Allah considers those who are not able to save themselves from the wrath of Allah, and consequently the punishment of hell, as ones who are lost. But what does it mean? In the temporal gains, you might not see anything. You might see a beautiful house, and not know that the piers are rotting away. Whatever it is, your wealth, power, possessions, they are not indicators of success. Obviously, they will not help you be among the successful ones on the Day of Judgment. They may help you get a loan from a bank, buy a boat, fly to a vacation spot, or enjoy yourself somewhere.

We were having a wonderful time at the beach in Florida last year; then Sabreen got hit in the arm by a jellyfish or something, and had to go to the hospital there, pain, shave off the spikes and do all this other stuff. It was beautiful, paradisiacal – then boom! If it's not clear about one's state in the world as being an indication of success – one's money, power, home, cars, family, name, whatever it is – then you can ask yourself a simple question: would all those things save a person from the worst circumstances after death? Everyone can know that of course these things are not going to save you. It's how you deal with those things. How do you deal with yourself, your money, your work, your power, your family? How do you deal with the ones you love, and the ones who love you? Those are the things that will save you from yourself and them from themselves.

In the paradigm of Qur'an, real success in the world is measured by one's activities that would qualify one to receive the *rahmat* on the Day of Judgment in order to enter Paradise where life would be unending. This is okay for most people—the threat of hell / the promise of paradise. But we are intelligent! We are educated! We have graduate degrees! We're smart. We are not going to buy into that kind of right and wrong, black and white thinking. What about this? What about that? We are going to question all that stuff. We don't like to think about hell and fire, and being turned into an eternal marshmallow. Come on, that's all a metaphor, right? I don't know. Better call someone up and ask them. We're not going to buy into that kind of stuff. There are wonderful references in Qur'an: 23:111, 33:71, 19:85.

Failure is measured by one's disqualification in receiving Divine Mercy, which would lead a person to this punishment of hell, the lasting abode for many of those who enter there. How many times can you go to the hospital? How many operations can you have? How many interventions can you have? How many miserable days and

nights can you have? How much submission can you bear that is forced upon you? How much can you deal with no choices anymore? Just yesterday, I was choosing what I was eating. Today, I can't choose it anymore. Yesterday, I was choosing where I was sleeping and when; now I can't do that anymore. Yesterday I could walk; today I can't. Yesterday! Very few people go into the hospital decrepit and come out well. You go in feeling well and come out decrepit. You walk in; they tell you the good news or the bad news, and then you have to recover.

You may say, "Yesterday, I was feeling fine. I didn't know I had this stuff inside of me" that was eating away at the piers under your house. Now you feel lousy. What are they going to do to heal you? Make you feel more lousy! And on top of that, there are the side effects of this and that; and it's in your side and it's the effects of it. Then it's an infection, and then this and that, and the blood goes up and down, and this and that. "What do you mean, I can't have marscapone cheese anymore? Who's going to know?" Those little things are inside of you eating you up. More sugar! Sugar tastes wonderful. House looks great. Everything's fine. Love! Happiness! Joy! Where's the success?

We need the Rahmat of Allah Swt. That's why it says in Islam, you are not going to get it on your deathbed. You can repent and Allah can be merciful, but **"...whoever is spared from the hellfire is admitted to Paradise, and has indeed been successful. The life of this world is nothing but an illusory pleasure."** We learn this in Surah al-Imran. Yet at the same time, Allah tells us that there must be balance in what we do in this world, and how we prepare for the Hereafter. Allah tells us: **"Truthfulness shall profit the truthful. For them are gardens beneath which rivers flow, and they will live there forever. Allah is pleased with them, and they are pleased with Him."** What's the last line? That is great success.

That's what success is. It's as if you practice in the world, but when you build a house, you make sure it's built correctly. Basheera, God bless her, is a very trusting person. She was in Oklahoma, called up the builder, and said, build me a house. She didn't check the foundation or anything. *Alhamdulillah*, she trusted that person. That's great. Time will tell. I'm not saying it's a bad idea; just that it's an unusual idea. It's better to check the piers and this and that. "Oh, I don't want to do that. I don't want to be bothered. They won't like me! Did you put the concrete down, did you do this, did you do that?" "Don't tell me my business, I know my business. If you don't like what I'm doing, you can get someone else to do it." "Okay, I will." You have to give due diligence; at least vet the people, which she did, because she knew them.

Every time you take a risk, don't forget that you are part of the result. You are a partner in it. In Islamic banking, there is risk in labor. Everyone shares the risk and the labor. What is the greatest success? That Allah is pleased with us and that we are pleased with Allah. How we achieve this is by keeping Allah at the forefront of our mind. "O Allah, are you pleased with this work I am doing? Are you pleased with the way I'm doing the work? Are you pleased with the person who is my partner, the one I'm going to marry, with the tasks I have at hand, with my students? O Allah!" And how we achieve this is by keeping Allah Swt not only at the front of our minds, but it's through *ihsan* that this happens. Only through *ihsan* can we find success. *Ihsan* can come about through *islam* and through *iman*, but can one see Allah in everything if you are not surrendered? Can you see Allah if you have no faith?

This triangle is pointing us toward Allah. Each vertex of that triangle is pointing toward Allah: *islam*, *ihsan*, *iman*. Where is Allah? Everywhere. **"Wheresoever you**

look, there is the face of Allah.” Picture a triangle: if you go this way, there is Allah. If you go that way, there is Allah: *islam, iman, ihsan; iman, islam, ihsan; ihsan, islam, iman*. In the highest triangle with Allah are those who believe, who have emigrated, who have striven in his cause with their wealth, with their person, in their poverty, and in their love. It is those who are successful. The examples of those are the *Sahabah* of Nebi Muhammed (sal) and his family, the *Ahl al Bayt*. **“The Lord gave them glad tidings of mercy from Him. Good pleasures and gardens wherein they have ever lasting bliss. Therein shall they abide. Surely with Allah there is great reward.”** What is this? That’s Paradise.

Take it literally. The presence of that Paradise and hell is constructed and lived in our own reality. If anyone were asked, “What would be the most comforting, pleasurable, peaceful thing you could think of for yourself,” you would seriously think about it. A normal being would think something very paradisiacal. “Oh, a nice island, beautiful this, all the fish I could catch and throw back, all the fruit from the trees, beautiful people and good conversation... and the New York Times on Sunday.” [You are] not necessarily saying rivers flowing with milk or that there is gold everywhere. Right now we’d just say: a little rain and an end to the drought; people around you whom you love and who love you; good food – Turkish food!

And if you are asked, “What is the worst thing you could think of,” some people might describe spending your life living in Bedford, Virginia. I’m teasing. It’s one of the best things – not like the Lower East Side in the 1960’s, between Avenue D and Avenue C – that was pretty bad; or Mexico City in a brownout; Guadalajara on any day of the week; Tijuana, the murder capital of the world; something terrible, uncomfortable, separated from the ones you love; not understanding the love around you; having unkindnesses shown to you; being unkind to someone else, and

then realizing it; living in a hell that you thought wasn't hell, until you find out that it was; experiencing pain and misery; causing pain and misery to other human beings; not fulfilling your potential; not being able to focus your life; always worrying in the back of your mind, "What am I going to do? What's wrong with me?" These are hells.

Allah promises these things and describes to us what anyone in the world can identify with. Anyone in the world can identify with these things, and you can subtract from it or add to it and say, "I don't need honey and milk. I'll be satisfied with just a river with plenty of fish in it, and all the bait I ever need – or just being able to reach in and pull out a fish."

Those who obey Allah and His Messenger, fear Allah and beware of Him, they shall attain to true success. (24:52)

Those whose activities would clarify them as losers, but at one point they realize their mistakes and decide to redress them, they can hope for forgiveness from Allah, for Allah is all forgiving, and to be on the side of those who are successful if they repent and embrace true faith and act righteously. This is the opportunity to shift the paradigm from failure to success. If you want to achieve it, then act in the right way. What's really important is to understand what Allah says:

O you believers! Turn you all together towards Allah and repent so that you might be successful.

It is not just that you turn, or you and your wife turn. All together, turn. You don't trade in all the believers for one believer who you happen to like. You don't trade in

your family for one person. You don't turn in your one success for all the success you could have in the future. Don't do that. Don't trade out the community for something that is transitory. We are all concerned with success; you'd be a liar if you said you weren't. We are all worried about failure; you'd be a liar if you said you weren't. But I don't think we define it properly, so let's pray for success, and also for those who are in need of our prayers today, for those who are recovering, and *inshā'a-Llāh*, will recover completely from their illnesses.

SECOND KHUTBAH. These things are all mysteries to us, but we can see some patterns. Allah gives us the pattern, and says there are exceptions and mysteries. The only way we can understand them is to really trust in the way and do the best you can do. *Asalaam aleikum*.