

December 5, 2008

Khutbah

Title: [The Most Superior Degree of Faith](#)

DVD title: The Believer that is Superior: A Matter of Degree of Faith

Opening duas. Dear brothers and sisters, the Qur'an is revealing to us today some wonderful 'āyāt on faith. We hope, *insh'allah*, we take note of it given the time of year we are in. Allah says,

And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord, and a garden as wide as the heavens and the earth, prepared for those who guard themselves; those who spend of that which Allah has given them in ease and adversity; those who control their anger, and those who pardon the faults of people. And Allah loves those who excel, and those who, when they do a shameful deed and have wronged their own selves, remember Allah and ask forgiveness for their faults—and who is there to forgive their faults but Allah?—and who do not knowingly repeat the wrong they did.

It is they who will receive the reward of forgiveness from their Lord, and gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide therein forever, and a blessed reward for the workers who do goodness. And many ways of living have passed on before you, so journey in the earth and see for yourselves what happened to those who rejected the truth. This is a

clear statement for the people and guidance, and a cautionary reminder for those who guard themselves for Allah. And do not lose heart or grieve so that you are overcome, if you are believers. That was from Suratu-l-Imrān.

Also Allah reveals,

Surely those who believed and emigrated, and who struggled and made *jihad* by means of their wealth and their selves in the way of Allah, and those who gave shelter and help (the Ansar) are protectors of one another. And those who believed and did not make *hijra*, you are not responsible for them until they make *hijra*. If they seek help in the *dīn* from you then you must help them, save against a people with whom you have a treaty. And Allah sees what you do.

All these ‘*āyāt* of Qur’an to me, to my eye today, and I’m sure I’m missing a lot, tell us about people who have different degrees of faith—enough faith to see when they are wrong, enough faith to make apology, enough faith to repent, enough faith to not try to do things again. Allah tells people in these messages, in this declaration for mankind, these admonitions, that believers are people who act in this way. Believers are people who strive to make the *hijra*, or make *hajj*, or people who strive to do good works. We are admonished to help them. At the foundation of all this is faith/*iman*, to have faith in the system, the process.

Pickthall, in his translation, starts this ‘*āyat* by using the word ‘systems’: **“Systems have passed away before you.”** It is part of the reality of faith. Not just faith as an idea or topic, but faith as an applied reality. Faith enables a person to judge themselves, to

repent, to change their ways, to evaluate their self. Faith allows a person to make plans and act in certain ways in life, allows an individual to commit to the *hajj*, to commit to being a faithful Muslim, to be a person who serves humanity. Faith allows a person to strive to make *jihad al akbar*, to overcome their weaknesses. So in the history of humankind, not only have systems come and gone, but whole civilizations. All we have to do is look around and see. The first thought that comes to my mind when I read these verses, especially the verse about not being dejected or grieving, it somehow relates to having the upper hand in a battle, or *jihad*, to have the upper hand in your own struggle.

The spirit of this message and the meaning of it have many implications and points of view. I think it is much greater and wider than often we realize. Certainly it describes an eternal state of mind which should inspire a believer to be conscious, and to think, and to measure things carefully, and to look at our own values. It also describes a state of life, in which there is great value to things that are fixed and immoveable; even amongst the changes of life, like fixed values, an immoveable character, while all around us is changing. It describes the heart of a believer that should remain firm in the face of all kinds of difficulties, in the face of every situation and condition and standard, no matter who they are in front of or who they are behind.

The superiority of faith of Islam, or faith in our own self, or faith in our identity, or in the values that are Islamic, in the values that we hold dear to us, especially as we relate to our own identity, comes from Allah Swt, and it has to be there and it has to be strong. It means that though we are affected by, and influenced by, and responding to, and often reacting to the different powers in our world—it can be the power struggles in our family, power in our employer, power in government—we have to remember that we have to be above those different powers of this world, especially the ones that have deviated from the values of Islam. [We have to be] above the values even of just this whole *dunya*,

beyond the cultural attitudes, the cultural customs that would undermine the essential spiritual values of our *fitrah*, which Allah Swt has created us with.

We have to even distance ourselves from the laws that are not sanctioned by the faith, tradition, or ideas. It is never to transgress the laws of society, of course; except when they are so unjust in Jeffersonian terms that they require adjustment. But it is to remain faithful to the laws of Allah Swt and the traditions Allah Swt has given us. We have to be above those attitudes, even among the people of our own faith, who distort the values of Islam. These verses tell us that we have to understand that with faith and trust in Allah, in Islam, we must feel that we are superior to our weaknesses. Who's the "we" that is superior? I understand the question that has to be in your mind. There are two aspects of our "I", our self: the one that sees, that senses what is right and what is good; the one that enjoins us to do good and tries to forbid us to do evil. We have to feel that we are superior to those weaknesses. Just like you felt you were superior to your illness, and you beat the illness. Poor people can be superior in values and character to wealthy people.

Superiority is not a sense of better than other human beings, but better in knowledge, in faith, and in piety. This is what Allah says. Who does He love? Those who are superior in their piety, a kind of superiority and supremacy which does not buckle to disbelieving authority, which doesn't get corrupted by social customs or misled by traditions that have been corrupted from the earliest beginnings. It means we don't change our beliefs because populist beliefs make us change, or because the people next to us act differently, or the people our age are different, or because society condones something now that we never condoned before. This [is the] kind of supremacy, this kind of superiority. Note that everything in this world has its analog. Just the fact that something called superiority exists, and has those names and characteristics means they themselves are corrupted, and we get destructive examples of superiority and supremacy in the world.

We don't change our behavior, because we don't change our faith. We don't get tempted by harmful things in society because we have strong *iman*. When our children go into the world, even though the Internet, we want to feel they will not find all the terrible and ugly things there and be tempted by them, not because they are not there (they are there), but because they are not looking for them. And when they find them, they are not interested in them. It's not their value system. They are not even curious about them, *insh'allah*. There is a difference between curiosity and having to taste everything that exists, especially when one is tasting something very corrupting, very bad, and very habit forming. We have to trust our faith and the faith of our children, if we bring them up with faith. If we are steadfast and strong, live our life well, and not only survive but we are victorious on the battlefield of life, then our spirit, mind, heart, and intellect feel triumphant.

Our superiority through our faith is not one act of faith, nor one single moment of passing strength or will, not one single moment of happiness or of well-directed passion, nor is it a sense of superiority based on something superficial like name, title, tribe, or nationality. But it is to understand a superiority and supremacy based on a permanent truth, centered in the core of our nature. In the core of our hearts is a truth that is beyond logic, beyond reason, beyond emotions, beyond mere concepts, beyond the power of even the environment, beyond the names society gives to people and things to lure us and distract us, beyond even the customs and traditions of people, in the anthropological sense; because it's associated with one thing, one thing that doesn't die, one thing that doesn't change, one thing that is ever living—al Hayyu al Qayyum—one thing that is ever-subsisting, ever living, ever sustaining: Allah Swt. That's our identity. That's our culture. That's our nationality.

We don't say, "I Am Allah"; we say "I am Muslim. I am submitted." On top of that, we wear this *abaya* or *kurta* or *shalwar* or jacket or sweater. This one comes from Turkey, another one comes from Syria; this one comes from here or there. But who is wearing it is the same person. Every society has its *raison d'être*. Every society has its foundation, its pressures and heaviness, and the weight it puts on others. Like in our society today, the terrible things economically that are going on, and in the global society today. People who have no protection suffer the most. They don't have a strong force behind them, both in the physical sense: they don't have health insurance, a job. They don't have the retirement protection on the *dunya* level. Even that can be alleviated to some small degree, or even a great degree, by their faith and trust in Allah. The answer to great economic problems may be on an economic basis to enable people to go out and buy more, and the banks to extend more credit. Or there can be a complete change and a sense of equity and frugality and equality and production.

There are all kinds of other ways of economic thinking outside the box, or even inside the box to some degree, to be realistic. Spiritually, also, we have to be realistic. We have to be realistic to have the capabilities in this challenge of life to think in a right way and respond in a good way that uplifts us and others around us, and to create a society and be a member of a society that has strong forces around us, a society that has creativity, and even in our own families, that has strengths of character. The society that becomes weaker is the one that is bereft of new ideas, of courage and strength, that has lost its direction and has suffered from the lack of knowledge. Islam tells us to seek out knowledge, to develop the power within ourselves, to trust in one another, to share the *rizq* and to share the labor.

For the person who stands against the direction of society, where only the powerful dominate, where logic and reason are used to manipulate, where values and standards are

so corrupted they make people helpless and weak, then *that* society is obviously failing and the people will suffer. The people will lack strength, conviction, means, and hope. Allah doesn't leave us behind, though, if we are believers. He doesn't leave us alone in the face of oppression and difficulty. Allah does not create for us, if we are believers, a voice that whimpers and cries in the darkness under the weight of our own troubles. It's not Allah's intention, nor the design of the System, the Reality, for us to suffer in dejection and grief. Rather, there is the opportunity and the possibility of relief, a message that is there if we listen, a message of hope and direction if we look and are strong enough, and if we insist, however we are empowered to insist, that the direction be taken. If we are living, as we are supposedly, in a democracy, then we should have the courage and strength to at least articulate our concerns, our satisfactions and dissatisfactions.

Allah Swt tells us, despite all that, whatever power you have or don't have in *dunya*, **“Don't be dejected or grieve. You shall be the uppermost if you are believers.”** And if we have that sense of supremacy in our faith, then certainly, and we all have our limits, we will be able to survive a little longer. We will be able to strengthen others a little better. We will be able to be creative a little longer. We will be able to have insight a little deeper. If nothing else, the message will relieve us from fear and dejection and grief and unhappiness, which are natural feelings when human beings are in certain situations like we find in the world today. It will relieve us not just through patience and perseverance, but through a sense of our own supremacy. It will relieve us from oppression and protect us from the dominant values of society which might corrupt us. It will relieve us by giving us direction and standards, guidelines, rules, and customs which are not based on habit or dogma, but on the revelation of Allah and the example of the Prophet (sal). It will have the authority of the authority. It will come from the source of all belief.

Then what is to be said of this physical world, and the customs and people of this world in the eyes of someone who is inspired by Allah? One could say that in this person's eyes and heart and tongue there will be guidance. This is a person who is very blessed. There will always be something to learn, some submission, some opportunity for humility. That's why the believer is superior in his or her concept of nature, of life. That is why Allah says the believer is superior. The forms that come from such a believer, the methodologies, the actions, the attitudes, the guidance, the creativity are what again and again rises and saves humanity, whether it is in the form of a prophet every few thousand years, or a *mujaddid* every hundred years, or just us common folk who can help to add to the rectification of the ills of society, and indeed, and insist upon the punishment of corruption.

Picture the world as seen through the eyes of someone who has faith. It cuts through all the different concepts, doubts, fears, worries, definitions, and even some of the logical belief systems and religions. What is achieved by someone who has faith, someone who believes in something philosophers only write about or try to figure out through their writing? A person who has this view of existence is bright and clear. A beautiful person has light in their face and is hopeful and optimistic, even at the worst times. Those who have grasped this view and have this knowledge are superior to others in their standards and values, but they are humble human beings. They feel absolutely the necessity, the mandate, to assist others. The source of this belief is found in our own faith, our own actions, our own consciousness, our own service to others, especially overcoming and facing our own errors and seeking forgiveness; our repentance, our love for our saints and sages, our teachers and guides, and the Prophet Mohammed (sal). Even though our conditions may change, our faith doesn't falter. And Allah Swt says, **“The condition of a people does not change until they change themselves.”** The implication of that is to

deepen one's faith and submission. *Insh'allah.*

SECOND KHUTBAH. Du'ās.