

March 20, 2009

Khutbah

Title: How We Choose To Remain Blind

DVD title: Turning Away from The Mercy and Compassion of Allah
We Choose to Remain Blind

Opening *du'ās*. There are many places in the Holy Qur'an about the value of the *Rahmāt* of Allah Swt. In Sūratu-l- Zukhruf, Allah says in relation to this in terms of *Shaytan*:

And We have appointed *Shaytan* as a comrade for whoever chooses to remain blind to the Universally Merciful. And surely they turn them from the way of guidance when they think themselves to be rightly guided. (43:36-37)

We hear in this simple and profound '*āyat* two very distinct realities. "Those who choose to remain blind." That is, it has been made clear to the person that they can see in another way, but they choose to remain blind]. How do you choose to remind blind? Do you say, "Allah, I choose to remain blind." How many people do you think will say that? None. Choosing to remain blind happens in many different ways. For example, we choose to remain blind, by knowing there is a way not to remain blind, by choosing not to do practices, by choosing not to pray, by choosing not to be a servant of Allah, by choosing not to choose compassion, by choosing not to be patient, not to sit in *muraqabah*. This is choosing to be blind. Allah Swt is very clear on this subject.

He says that your comrade will be *Shaytan*, but you will think you are rightly guided. We

know from Suratu-l-Fatihah what that means: “Choose to remain blind.” That could be the *khutbah*; certainly that’s enough to contemplate. Is it choosing one time? No. Is it choosing ten times? No. It is both attitudinal and factual. We choose to be blind many times, sometimes many times in a day. Whoever turns away from the *Dhikr of Allah* – and it doesn’t mean saying, “Allah, Allah, Allah.” Plenty of people who think they are rightly guided are making *dhikrullah* and putting their heads on the mat, and following the *hudud*. It’s not just saying, “*La illaha il’Allah Muhammedan Rasula, Allah, Allah, Allah.*” No. In remembering Allah Swt, He uses the word “*rahmatan.*” He does not say “Allah,” but uses the Name of Allah: *Rahmāt*. Why? As we learned this week from the teachings of Allaudin Attar (ra), this attitude is very important. To have the attitude of compassion and mercy is extremely important. It is so important that we say it every time we say, “***Bismillahi r-Rahmāni r-Rahīm....*** in Suratu-l-Fatihah.

Why is He revealing this statement in terms of compassion and mercy of Allah? When there is no *rahmāt*, there is no Islam. When there is no *rahmat*, your companion is *Shaytan*. Your associate is *Shaytan*. It is because of this you can be turned away from the path. Without the observation and remembrance of Allah through what Allah has planted in us as His *Rahmāt*, in any situation, in every situation, we become turned away from the path. Though they, the people, persistently assume or imagine that they are rightly guided, they are not. In Suratu-l-Fatihah, we see that juxtapositioning also: *rahmāt* and *magdubi*—in just this one *sūrah*. Don’t dismiss it. Don’t think it’s not important. [A person might think], “I’m a compassionate person. I felt bad for the mole outside which the cat ate. Oh, poor mole. See? I’m a compassionate person; therefore, this a ‘*āyat* doesn’t apply to me.” Ah, but it does.

These [are] two realities of God’s Name that Allah uses in this revelation. He doesn’t say, “Whoever turns himself away from the remembrance of *as-Salām*, or of *al-Adl*, or of *al-*

Mālik, or of *as-Sabur*. He says, “*ar-Rahmān*.” I can’t repeat this enough times. This repeated theme comes in Qur’an of the importance of *dhikr* (remembering Allah), and the contemplation and remembrance of Allah Swt in the aspect of His Mercy and Compassion. The entry door for *Shaytan* is when you are not compassionate toward yourself or towards others. That doesn’t mean you don’t love yourself (we all love ourselves), or that we are not concerned with ourselves (we are overly concerned with ourselves: our health, our welfare, our well-being, our monetary state). Compassion toward ourselves I spoke about last night about how you position yourself in relationship to the *Tariqah*, how you position yourself on the path—not with the *hudūd* only, but with the *shahar*, on the broad path that leads to water: *shahar*. You can understand that Allah reveals this teaching to the people of the desert: they know how important it is to find the right track to water. It also indicates that this entry is an invisible entry, an unperceived arrival, so that the person remains unaware that he has been turned and deflected away from the path. You think you are a pious person, that you are rightly guided, but you don’t know that you have been deflected from this path.

So the theme underlying these two ‘*āyāt* is of people turning away from the Mercy of Allah Swt and the Compassion. Perhaps it is because they want special recognition of their sect or group or viewpoint or tribe, or their political attitude or social status. They are using the framework of piety to accomplish some worldly gain. No remembrance comes to them from Allah toward them. Allah says, “**Remember Me and I’ll remember you.**” They are not remembering Allah out of mercy and compassion; therefore, Allah is not remembering them—or remembering us, if we are like that. “**And I’ll remember you in a gathering greater than that,**” Allah tells us. If Allah Swt is looking to remember us, but we have the companionship of *Shaytan*, He turns away from us. It’s like the story of the man calling out to Allah and throwing stones. Allah sends *Jibreel*, saying, “Go help one of My believers. He is calling out My name and is in need.” *Jibreel* goes and

comes back in a flash. Allah says, “In such a short time, you helped him?” He said, “No, Allah. He is calling out Your name but still throwing stones at the people attacking him. He is not totally submitted to You.”

Rahmān and *rahīm* are two ways of looking at mercy: the All-Embracing Compassion of Allah, *Rahmāt*, which pervades throughout all existence, and the *Rahīm* which is defined as a more specialized focused Mercy of Allah. We know this. The impediment to engaging in this remembrance is the heart, if we find it difficult to open the door to the heart, it's because we, ourselves are that door and we have locked the door. We have locked the door because we are forgetful, selfish, negligent, have careless habits, are lazy, or have acquired over our life times many bad habits which really form a veil or hindrance to our inner awareness or consciousness. When we are in that state, then the *dhikr* is a means of recognizing there is a door, and there is a means of approaching the door, knocking on it, and opening it. It is through acting compassionately and receiving the compassion of Allah.

That, I submit to you, cannot be done only verbally. One has to go inside themselves, *tawajjuh*. One has to reflect upon themselves what Allah is reflecting in them. So that Divine mercy and compassion has to find its home within our heart. Our thinking, actions, words, and how they manifest in our work, our worship, our relationships with our friends, companions, family, and community and in the wider world have to become a manifestation and expression of this mercy and compassion. When that happens, the *dhikr* becomes a transparent protection. You can buy a piece of plastic to put over your cell phone or computer and it protects it. The *dhikr* becomes a protection against the innumerable ways in which *Shaytan* can inject himself into our lives. That's why in this ‘*āyat* it implies that one persistently and wrongly imagines they are rightly guided. It's not just one time.

It's like me taking an umbrella because one drop of rain will fall. What do you need an umbrella for? Odds are if you run, it won't hit you. We have all tried to run in between the big drops of rain at times. But that's not the way it is. There are a lot of drops, and we need to have the protection. Imam Ali (ra) provided this guidance: "*Be not misled by their prayers and fasting. Rather, try them when it comes to telling the truth and fulfilling their trusts.*" Only a person who has the taste of *Rahmat* of Allah Swt will give you the taste of the *Rahmat* of Allah . When trying to understand a person's character, quality, or trustworthiness, don't look at a person's prayers, fasting, or even their hajj. We know for a fact that you cannot determine the character of a person just by those acts. Look at the people who are extremists, who blow up people who break every law of Islam, who kill innocent people, who destroy property, who hate the *Ahl al Kitab*, who destroy the animals, who justify murder, because they don't understand what the word "*dimmi*" means. They do all those [spiritual things] things (like fast, *hajj*, etc.), so there has to be another litmus test.

We all have to do those things. But what makes us really someone who *can* be guided and whose companion is not *Shaytan*. Even though we think we are guided, we are not guided. No. You have to look into the character. What kind of work do they do? How do they treat people? When someone comes to them, how do they speak to them? How do they respect another human being? What do they tell their children, their neighbors? When they make an error, do they say they are sorry? Do they repent to the person? Do they repent to Allah? Or are they arrogant and quote the Qur'an and Hadith? Do they disparage the people of the *Injil* or the Torah and make *takfir*? Without compassion, without mercy, they are misguided. Then we can see what they are attached to. Because the prayer and the fasting, the quoting of Qur'an and remembering of Qur'an, these are the means. Originally, they may be an end in themselves, but they are an extraordinary means

for remembering Allah through worship, which is our obligation. They never cease to be a means of expanding our understanding.

Remembrance is a means of awakening our sleeping consciousness, which is in turn, a means of transforming us. The transformation leads to an inner awakening. This inner awakening makes it possible to draw near to the One to Whom we are praying. Prayer is a means, and each prayer is an opportunity to advance in this process. The question then becomes: what has our prayer made of us? The Prophet Mohammed (sal) said, **“Whoever had no worldly life has no religious life.”** Does that mean we should just dive into the ocean of *dunya* in worldly pursuits? Or does it mean that one who separates his inner religious life from his outer life within the trials, vicissitudes and distractions of this world has not grasped the full meaning of this religion? Does it mean if we pray and fast and go to the *masjid* and perform the rituals, and consider this the entirety of religious life, that we are good Muslims or holy people? Or does it mean we have been just secularizing and separating ourselves?

Our inner life, the result of the means we use, has to be tested by our worldly life. When it is tested, the question is: is the world going to get the better of us? Or will our *iman* get the better of us? Will we be guided by our *iman* and our *rahmat*? Or will we be guided by only the things of the world? How our character becomes elevated is through this method, as we free ourselves from the lower attachments. Some of these things are easy to apply in our day to day life. Some people find it very easy to be truthful. Some people find it easy to be patient. Others find it difficult. Some people find it very difficult to remember what they were trusted with. Some people find that fulfillment of their trust is the most important thing. Some people speak well; some people speak poorly. Some people have difficulty with manners and *adab*. Some people are extremely generous, and others find it difficult to be generous. To some people kindness comes

easily, and to others, humility comes easily. To others, it is difficult and they have to work at it. Some people look for ways to help the weak and those in need. Others just give their dollar or whatever away, and feel they've done enough.

We have to involve ourselves in the affairs of the world and our society. We have to participate in the guarding of the rights of individuals, and we have to do this in a manner that is beautiful, without being difficult, without being rough in our speech and our actions. Like the Prophet Yusef (as), who, living in a foreign country among foreign people, who had a foreign religion rose to a high level of recognition. Through what? Through his reliance on Allah and His Mercy. He acted with patience, truthfulness, with light on his character, the *Nūri* Mohammed, the *Nūr* of Allah. He said, **“Most surely man’s *nafs* is wont to command him to do evil, except those who are connected with their Lord’s *Rahmāt*. (12:53) We reach with Our Mercy whom We please, and We do not waste the reward of those who do good.” (12:56)**

The society in which Sidna Yusuf (as) rose to high recognition did not look through his prayers or rituals. They would have been foreign to them. They would not have understood them. But they looked at his character, his patience, his truthfulness, they looked at his sincerity and knowledge. They looked at how he fulfilled his trust. Without these, no matter how efficacious his prayers and fasting were, [he] would not have been understood. But they were the means through which he became who he became. He didn't seek just to blend in. He became known through his good *adab*. When our hearts are upset, and we are made uneasy by circumstances in our lives, the best direction we have is to turn inward for the remembrance of Allah Swt and use the means of *muraqabah* and *tawajjuh*, and to remember that **“Truly, in remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest.” (13:28)** Allah as *ar-Rahmān, ar-Rahīm*, will be our guard at our doors. Otherwise, **“whoever turns himself away from the remembrance of Allah, to him We**

appoint a *Shaytan*.”

So this remembrance begins with a tongue and enters our mind and consciousness, and settles into our heart, cleanses our heart, manifests in a myriad of ways in our actions and becomes a shield. Allah says, through the tongue of Prophet Mohammed (sal), “**I am the sitting companion of the one who remembers Me.**” It cannot be, therefore, just the people who sit around and say the words. It has to be people who not only say the words, but worry as to their piety, turn their attention inward in their *muraqabah*, soften their hearts, open the doorway, lift the veils, and allow the character to change; otherwise, everyone who prayed would be perfect. It cannot be because of religious ideology, by whatever name, and politicization of Islam. That allows people to walk into a marketplace or *masjid* and blow themselves up and take the lives of innocent men, women and children. That ideology is not Islam. That is the ideology of *Shaytan*. To say that it brings harm to the religion is a gross understatement. It cannot be someone who turns around at the center of their anger and callously and willfully makes declarations of *takfir*, accusing others. Someone will take that declaration as a *fatwa*, and it will become at the level of a legal precedent. Groups will continue to perpetuate that confusion, that strive, and that *fitna* for generations into the future, as we have seen. They will be seized upon by people who have *Shaytanic* ideas, and justify their actions.

Is it something new? Of course not. At the time of Sidna Ali, there were the *khawaraj*. They turned their back on the *Rahmāt* of Allah. They believed themselves to be the vengeance of Allah upon all those who, according to them, had betrayed their faith. They made themselves judge and jury in determining who those people were. They became ruthless and indiscriminate executioners, carrying out the sentences against the people. They would take their swords to the marketplace, where innocent people gathered together without being aware of them. They [would] suddenly cried out “This decision is

God's!" They lifted up their swords against anyone they happened to overtake, and killed them, until they, themselves were killed. The people lived in constant fear of these people.

Who were these people? They were not Muslims, and they exist today. Why? Because there is no *rahmāt*. Yet, if you watch them, they are very rigorous in their religious duties. But the politics of the time turned them away from the Mercy of Allah and made *Shaytan* their companion. There was no clemency, pity, understanding, compassion, or tolerance. They were deceived by the damage they caused and the power they got. If people think they can witness and be the judge and jury for others, and pronounce *takfir* and snuff out the lives of common and ordinary people, even in the *masajid*, even in the markets, the *souk*, then they are the modern *khawaraj*. **“Whoever turns themselves away from the remembrance of *ar-Rahmān*, we appoint for him a *Shaytan* who becomes his close companion and associate. And most surely, their *Shaytan* turns them away from the path though they persistently imagine that they are rightly guided.”** (43:36-37) *Asalāmu aleikum. Du'ās.*

SECOND KHUTBAH