

April 24, 2009

Khutbah

Title: [Build a Sound Heart / Good Character](#)

DVD title: The Sound Heart is the Source of Good Character  
The Purified Heart overcomes Heart Disease

Opening *du'ās*. Allah says in the Qur'an:

**And for those who strive for Us, We shall surely guide them to Our Way, and surely Allah is with those who excel in doing good. (29:69)**

**Truly in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent example for the one who hopes for Allah in the final day and who remembers Allah abundantly. (33:21)**

Allah tells us what has to be done and how to do things in Qur'an. The subject of understanding this really resides in what we were speaking about last night when we were reflecting on the subject of the heart and love. The subject of the heart is really a subject of how to build the kind of nobility and character we are enjoined to build as Muslims. Allah tells us in Qur'an when we strive for good character, we get guidance from Him. The basis of what we have been talking about over the last few *darus*, about striving to do good and the heart and to understand the methodology and value of the process allows me today to review a few things for us in terms of Islam.

What we have been talking about in the good nature of the human being doesn't just mean the temperament and disposition. It means how we go about developing

good character. If we are going to be on the *sayr ul suluk*, this journey through the seven stages of awakening, if we want to be near to Allah and understand the reality of forgiveness and *rahmāt* and *rahīm*, we have to truly begin to understand what the correct standard for a spiritual life is. A person who does all their prayers and can recite Qur'an but doesn't have a good demeanor or nature is not necessarily a bad person, but it is not the standard Allah Swt is looking for. Someone asked *Rasulallah* (sal), **“Who is the best Muslim?” He said, “The one who is better in conduct and nature.”** It has to do with not just what we are, but how we act and manifest that.

In Qur'a'n, Allah Swt says: **“You stand on an exalted podium of character.”** And: **“Truly in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent example for the one who hopes for Allah in the final day and who remembers Allah abundantly.”** (33:21) If we allow ourselves, we get a picture in our mind of what it means to have good character and nature. Many examples are given. It goes back to what we mean by having a sound heart. He tells us in another *sūrah*, **“Nothing will avail you on the Day of Awakening, not your wealth or your children, but those who come to Allah with a sound heart.”** (26:88-89) There is not going to be two different standards. It's not good character *or* a sound heart. It's going to be that a sound heart is good character, and a person of good character has a sound heart.

What is a sound heart? A sound heart is talked about in every tradition and religion. You may remember from previous talks and discourses that even in Chinese, the ideogram for thought, love, virtue, and spirit is the same one for the heart. We say I love you with all my heart, from the core or depths of my heart, the *huwal al bātin*, the innermost core of the heart. This seed that is at the core of the heart, the *hubb*, is the most important thing.

We also remember that sometimes we have heart disease. Some of us are inclined to that. Even Allah, in this whole system, [allows] you to look at as people having inclinations toward things. The Hindus call it karma. You have to overcome [these inclinations] in life. We know that as Muslims in our *qadr*, our destiny. So too, Allah repeats that phenomena for us. Some people are inclined genetically toward heart disease. It's reflective.

What is heart disease? It could be a hard heart, or a cold-hearted person. You have examples every day of people who have hard or cold hearts, people whose hearts don't contain the inclination toward truth. You think, how could they possibly say what they are saying, or feel that way? Don't they feel anything for humanity? They have cold hearts. They don't allow the truth, the compassion, the love to guide them. Of course for us, this is a very strange thing. This person has a diseased heart. They might even be the kind of person who has to have multiple heart surgeries. These analogies shouldn't be wasted. We should research the references to the heart. It's important what Allah tells us about the different faces and places in the heart. Remember also that the Qur'an defines three types of people: the *mu'minūn* (believers), the *kafirūn* (disbelievers), and the *munaḥiqūn* (hypocrites). Remember also that the *mu'minūn* are people whose hearts are alive and who are strong. Allah says, "**Look for Me in the hearts of believers.**" The *kafirūn* are the people whose hearts are covered/*kufr*, sealed. The *munaḥiqūn* are people who are misled because their hearts are diseased. It's not accidental that these things come about.

Allah gives us examples in our faces of things we are concerned about. He tells us: "**In their hearts is a disease and they were increased in their desire.**" (2:10) When their hearts deviated, Allah made their hearts deviate further. When we turn away from the truth (from that moment when I could show compassion but I don't), from our good nature to our bad natured side, when we turn away from our joy to our anger, from

contentment to desires and discontentment, from satisfaction with what we have been given to our wants and desires, these are signs of deviation. They compound. If we wake up in the morning and we want something by the end of the day, we feel we have nothing if we don't get what we want. If we wake up in the morning and feel we have nothing, by the end of the day we can feel that Allah has provided everything for us. You wake up in the morning poor, and at the end of every day you are rich. If you wake up in the morning rich, all you want is more. These are elements of the heart (materially).

The *siratal mustaqim*, the straight path we are on is an active, day to day, moment to moment process in life. The heart is dynamic. It is filled with miracles. The heart itself is a miracle. It pumps a hundred thousand times a day, a hundred gallons an hour, 365 days a year. You do the math. That's the little thing that going bup-bup in your chest. What is it delivering? It's a beautiful example of sustainability and renewable resources. It's delivering a precious commodity that renews and purifies every beat, and travels the equivalent of 60,000 miles, 2 and ½ times the circumference of the earth daily. The heart we know is beating before the brain is formed, without any central nervous system to control it. It's not the mind that things first, controls or gives orders, or sustains life. It is the heart. Allah Swt created our hearts to be the dominant, self-initiated communication tool in our bodies. Where did he put it? At the end of our finger where it can get hurt easily? No, He put it in our chests, where it can be easily hurt from other things, but not physically.

He says: **“They have hearts they are not able to understand with.”** (7:179) It is not that you are not able to understand your heart, but you don't know how to use your heart to understand everything. (“With”—see what one word can do for a sentence?) The center of human consciousness is the heart, and there are over 40,000 neurons in the heart. I think I said 50,000 last night, or an image of me said it on the video. That's an

important thing. You see yourself make some mistake [on video], and you can yell out, “No! Don’t use that word!” But the image can’t hear it. Watching the video last night, I realize I could have said this or that, but it didn’t make any difference; it was gone. Take a moment and think about how many times your heart communicates with your brain, and your brain with your heart every day over issues and situations, feelings and emotions, relationships and decisions. When someone is upset, you say, “Why are you upset?” “I don’t know.” Meaning, my mind doesn’t know, but my heart knows something. “I know I am upset, but I don’t know why.”

According to *hadith*, Nebi Mohammed (sal) said, “***The heart is the source of knowledge.***” How did he know that? It’s factually true. He tells us wrong actions cause inflammation, and irritation in the heart. Wrong actions come from wrong intentions, which we know from another *hadith*. When we do something against our hearts or against the heart of someone else, we are actually acting against our own souls that affects us to a huge degree. Our hearts become diseased, covered up, and we become sick. We forget there are two kinds of diseases. The heart, with all of its beating and pumping and dynamic activity, is designed to be still, quiet—not stopped—still, quiet, contemplative, peaceful. We know what happens when the heart stops. There is a kind of disease that comes to us as a test by Allah that strengthens our *iman*. Then there is a kind of disease that is reflective of the wrong state of our heart and mind. When someone has some kind of heart disease, it doesn’t mean their heart is bad. It may very well mean that Allah is given a strong person a movement toward deeper and more profound understanding and spirituality.

You can tell when a person’s actions are bad. You can see how the heart is cold. So we have those examples. We live in a world today where we fail to recognize, when we look at the terrible things happening around us, and we refuse to look at ourselves. We wonder

why all these things are happening in the world: whether in the Middle East, or Pakistan, or the miseries throughout Africa, AIDS and now swine flu. People are dying from it. We see the anger between nations, racial violence, and human misunderstandings. Some of us ask, with all sincerity, “Why is this happening?” We have to come back to an understanding about ourselves. We bring the suffering of the world upon ourselves. We bring that misery and misunderstanding. Allah tells us clearly that He places some oppressors over other oppressors because of what their hands were earning. The truth is there is no oppression but what is created in irritated, closed, diseased, short-sighted minds and hearts.

The still heart is the heart of the *mu'min*, a believer, a heart of generosity, compassion, kindness, love, self-sacrifice and effort. When there is oppression on this earth, it is the result of someone else being oppressed. We see clearly the actions that we saw in Gaza this year are clearly the actions we had seen years and decades before against the oppressors. Nobody likes to hear that. It's not politically correct. It's not being said against a religion; it is just reflective about the way people tend to be. Maybe you can call it the Stockholm syndrome if you want. But there's no reason to believe that unless there are changes in people's hearts, that 50 or 60 years from now, the situation won't be reversed. There's no reason to believe that. Everyone of us has some tendency toward heart disease more or less. We can test a young child for high cholesterol. We know it has something to do with the diet a person eats. Diet means what we consume and convert from what Allah has given us in one form to another form. Again, it's a matter of choice: the thing that makes human being distinctive. Do I want to eat a pound of cheese a day? Nothing is stopping my hand from doing that. But what do I know about it? If life is not about converting ideas, thoughts, desires, or food into something sustainable, healthy, and better, then I don't know why we were created.

Life is about creating more and more a smooth, serious, balanced, resonant process, a seamless process of living in the Presence of Allah Swt, open-heartedly, healthily, lovingly, kindly. We can see every day that some of us have a chronic disease from our own words, attitudes, reactions, restraints or lack of restraints—and we strive. But Allah tells us that it is our intention and our striving that will be measured and judged. Notably, He does not tell us that just because I judge you by your intentions and your striving that you cannot lengthen your life and have more time in this world to refine yourself. You may have the best of intentions, and you may get a great reward for that, but if you don't watch how you eat and how you act, you may have only a short period of time in this world.

When a *mu'mīn* is tried and tested, he or she responds with patience and perseverance most of the time, hopefully—a true *mu'mīn*, all the time. Allah Swt gives victory to the one who is a believer. When the *Sahabah* were oppressed in Mecca, they remained non-violent for 13 years. But within 23 years, Prophet Mohammed had conquered the entire Arabian peninsula, and all the people who previously oppressed him were seeking his mercy. And even though some of them deserved to be paid back with harsh punishment (and a special commission could have been called to investigate their actions during that time), he decided to go forward. Not that he was forgiving them for the actions, but that it was better to go forward. This is the difference between a person whose heart is clear and pure, and someone whose heart is impure and revengeful toward the people who sometimes live and work on the high hill. Impure hearts oppress themselves and others. Pure people forgive their oppressors and conquer by the power of the Will of Allah. Muslims must recognize that the only solutions to the problems we have individually and collectively have to do with this purification of our hearts.

If we want to work for justice, we have to work for purification of hearts. It's how we

work in and on our hearts individually, and how we encourage others to think and act from their hearts. We have to work with a sense of nearness to those who are near to Allah, real believers. We have to be in the accompaniment of those who love Allah, and we have to do it with the love, *maiyyat ul hubbi*, with the accompaniment of love in our life. It is a very great blessing that Allah Swt gave us our hearts before He gave us our minds. He gave us this beating entity before reason and thought. When we know how to turn our face, *mutawajjuh*, and learn to contemplate what is good and right in this world, *muraqabah*, then we are using the techniques that Allah Swt gave to the Prophet Mohammed (sal), to the *Sahabah*, to the *imams*, and to all the brilliant and great *awliyā* and *shuyukh*. These are the basis of all the techniques and a prescription for our heart disease.

We go to the doctor, and the doctor can give us a chemical medicine, or say, “Change your diet. Change your exercise. Reduce stress. I don’t really want to give you all the chemical stuff, so try this first.” But the doctor cannot force us to do either: take the medicine, or do the exercise and change the diet. It is left for us to take that responsibility. All of our great teachers come to mind who speak about this. Abdul Qadir Jilani, Imam Jafar as-Sadiq, Abul Hasan ash-Shadhili, Bahaudin Naqshband, Ahmed Farooqi Sirhindi, and more (may Allah’s blessing be upon them all) [enjoin us] to remember Allah, to purify our hearts by having good nature in whatever we say and do, to act in confidence that Allah Swt is giving us His *madad*, to act as if we are a part of that Message of Allah, and to serve others with heart and with love. *Insh’allah*, we remember this. [Perhaps, we] can continue this discussion at a time when we are not limited by the appropriate time for a *jumah khutbah*, but let’s all try to remember it, *insh’allah*.

Du’ās. SECOND KHUTBAH. Du’ās.