

July 3, 2009

Khutbah

Title: [Gratitude and Performing Good Acts: Jannah](#)

DVD title: Shukr: The Gateway to Real Freedom
Gratitude Even for Limitations

Invocations

Asalaamu Aleikum, wa rahmatullahe barakatu. Normally I would save for the second *khutbah* what I am about to say at the first. But it is a very joyous day to have new faces, and it is a sad day because we will not be seeing enough of you in the future. *Insh'allah*, Allah will keep you healthy in your new work in Qatar and bring you back to us again and again and again, *insh'allah*, by the grace of Allah Who brought you here. I say this in the first *khutbah* because the *khutbah* is on gratitude. We realize the importance of the work, but we also realize how important it is to be grateful to Allah (Swt) for enabling us to do this work and to do all the services.

Very few people understand the degree of preparation that it takes, and the amount of time that people who have normal jobs put into getting just this facility in order. The preparation of this facility, the teaching, all the training and everything that goes on behind the scenes—very few people realize the depth and the breadth of the people here. I like during the time of the summer program to extend my gratitude also, and to thank Allah (Swt) for the opportunity to perhaps bring some light and some new perspective into the lives of the young people. We are happy to see you here and wait for the day that you are in our summer program.

Allah (Swt) reveals to us in Qur'an:

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Whoever desires the harvest of the final world, We increase his harvest. Whoever desires the harvest from this world, We give him something of it, but he has no share in the Final World. (Suratu-ash-Shura 42:20)

The implication of this comes from the previous ‘*āyat*.

Allah is tender with His worshipers and He provides for them as He wills. He is the Invincible and the Almighty. (42:19)

To have gratitude means to have gratitude for what Allah (Swt) has provided for us. In discussing gratitude with you today, one also has to contemplate what we don't normally have gratitude for, including our own limitations. When we enter into this journey of life, or on the *sair ul suluk*, in *tariqah*, we enter this journey as travelers on a road through life. Each one of us has many goals. In childhood we have goals. In youth we have goals. In our young adulthood, we have goals. Sometimes even, our goals are to have no goals. Even babies have an unconscious goal to walk and to talk. They reach out to grab something. They reach out to hold. They stumble until they walk. They creep until they crawl. They learn to get their food by crying or by different types of cries that only the mother understands. Then we also learn to understand that too. But the goal of the human being, the essential goal, *insh'allah*, for all of us is some kind of freedom, some kind of liberation from the limitations that we all feel in our life. It can be intellectual or physical limitations. It could be spiritual limitations. It could be characteristics of laziness or distractions. But we all experience some limitations, limitations in the depth of our faith, our submission.

What is that freedom? Inner freedom is what I am most concerned about today, although

outer freedom is very much in the news. This path on the way to freedom has a gate. Maybe we can say many gates, like many of the walled cities have many gates. And one of the gateways to real freedom is gratitude/*shukr*, to be thankful to Allah (Swt). This *shukr* is an end in and of itself. It is not a means, really. Most of us treat it as a means. But it is really an end, a goal... to get to a state, a *maqam* of gratitude. If we can get to this station/*maqam* where one attains it, then we never will use it. The Sufi definition of a *maqam* is that you attain to a station that you never leave.

We all have periods of gratitude in our life. But it has not become, for most of us, a stage that we never fall away from. The path on the way to freedom through the gate of gratitude/*shukr* leaves our heart clear and free and open most of the time. But we go through life in a state of assuming that what is happening to us either should be happening and we deserve that is happening, or it should not happen and we have not deserved what has happened to us and what has transpired. People very rarely go beyond that. Most people fluctuate between these two states. Most of us are not filled with a sense of giving thanks to what comes to us, no matter what it is. So being that there is no real attachment to the moment to moment aspects of life, we just sort of flow through life hoping for the good. Something good that is going to happen, that is great. Something bad happens, then that is, of course, terrible. Something peaceful happens, *alhamdulillah*. Something not so peaceful happens, we say, “Why do I deserve this? I don’t deserve this.”

Sometimes we are not attached to, let alone aware of the meaningfulness of these moments. Our heart has already detached itself from what it was attached to, and we still don’t express our gratitude. Maybe the best way to say is that we are so attached to the moment in every situation that we don’t detach ourselves long enough to have that gratitude. We are totally involved with what is happening. In the ‘*āyat* where Allah made it known that “...if you are grateful, He will give you more...” (and if you are

ungrateful chastisement will be there) means in effect that with gratitude our *iman* and *yaqīn*/certainty increase, and our knowledge, awareness and sensitivity increase. Each individual is able to see more the cause of what has happened to them, and is able to anticipate more what is coming to them. Even if you have gratitude for what you are learning in school, in work, in your own study, it increases your knowledge and your ability to grasp what has been given to you. But there is another kind of knowledge that is necessary, an inner knowledge. We tell the parents, “If your child is doing something that is not too good, try to not get angry at them. Try to tell them what it is that you do not like them doing.” Sometimes, that is a little difficult to do. What it takes is for us to stop and take a moment to think. We have to give reason to ourselves, not just to our children when they are not doing something correctly. You don’t just say to someone, “That’s bad,” and walk away. You want to give a reason for it.

It is the same with our own self. We have to look at what is happening to ourselves and give an understanding and a reason for what just transpired, why it has transpired, and be mature and secure enough of a Muslim to say, “*Astaghfirullah*. Thank You, Allah Swt, for showing me what is not correct, what I could have done better.” Allah Swt is not saying, “So and so is doing something bad, and I am going to show them.” But infused and imbued in us is a sense of what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad, what is proper and improper, what is true and what is false. That becomes clearer and clearer the more deeply we seek inner understanding and awareness. Allah Swt is constantly responding to us just like the waves are constantly on the ocean and we are constantly feeling those waves. But we have to put our attention there.

For us to understand properly the trust that is implied, the trust that is implied in gratitude, one has to grasp that it is a very high state. It is a very high state to be able to be grateful for what happens. Most of the laws that govern our lives are quite neutral. Fire does not

burn us because the fire is angry at us. There is no malice in the fire. The fire doesn't say, "So and so did a bad thing," and then jump on us and burn us. That is not the way the Universe works. Fire does not think. It has no anger in it. In the same way, if you read Qur'an and it tells you that if you do something bad, hell fire will come to you. That is neutral. It is not something that is malicious.

If you are grateful and perform good actions, good things will come. If you are not grateful, and your actions are self-centered, then the same thing that will nourish you will burn you, will cause you unhappiness. It is not that there is just a place called hell that people are thrown into if they are bad. Some people like to think about it only in that way. But it is a neutral place that responds to our own intentions and our own actions. Just like guilt. We can do something, find out that it is bad, feel guilty and learn from it. Or we immerse ourselves in self-pity. One way will take us up and lift us up, and we will see what we have done. The other will take us down. In fact if we are taking ourselves up or we are taking ourselves down, it is not that anything is doing anything to us, but it is our responsibility. As human beings, it is our responsibility as Muslims.

It is our responsibility as people who are seeking knowledge and seeking Truth to take that responsibility and to try and enter the gate of peace and freedom. Allah (Swt) tells us many times in Qur'an that this gate is the gate of gratitude/*shukr*. It is really a key. It is a key that opens up a doorway to peace and happiness. Allah (Swt) has given us this key because He has also given us the potential to see our abilities and how we manifest them in this world, either positively or negatively. Of course, that too, then, can also be a way of understanding Paradise in Hell. When I speak to the children in camp, some of them want to know, "What is Paradise? What is Hell?" Is it something real? Of course we say, "It is in Qur'an. It is something that is real." But the question is how you perceive it. How do you perceive it? Reality is many things. Some things are heartbreaking and real

to the person whose heart is broken. The same thing is not heartbreaking to somebody else. So you cannot say that if such and such a thing happens, it breaks all the hearts. You cannot say that. It is not true. Since Allah (SwT) reflects everything in the world, in the here, in the *dunya*, what is in the Akhirah and in the *ghaib*, we say, “Yes, Hell and Paradise/Jannah are real, but real in the perception of the individual. How is that perceived?”

It is a place that is born of our *niyyat*. It is a place that is born of our intentions. These are places that reflect our own attitudes and our own actions. And they are real, just like you go to bed at night and you have a dream. You have a beautiful dream, it is paradisaical. You have a miserable dream, it is hell. You go to sleep at night and you have a nightmare. You are scared to the core of your being, until you wake up and say, “*Alhamdulillah*. That was just a dream.” But when you were in it, it was more than just a dream. It was a reality. So who is to say then. Allah is always going to show us in our wakeful state and in our sleep state, in our attention and in our distraction, in our giving and in our taking a reflection of everything that He tells us in Qur’an. What is paradisaical comes from good thoughts and good actions. We are told that. Actions follow intentions. If you are good, if you act well, if you remember Allah, if you are grateful, your place is in paradise. If you are the opposite, your place is in hell.

Some of the kids say to me, “Mr. Rash, do Muslims really believe in heaven and hell?” What do you say? “Yes. It is here [in the Qur’an]. It is here. This is the word of Allah.” But understand, you make your heaven and your hell. He tells you this is a textbook. It is a guide. It is a teacher’s guide. It is a learner’s guide. It is a “How to Do” manual. How to do manuals sell better than anything: “How to Garden.” “How to Build Furniture,” “How to Have Good Health.” The “How to Do” manuals are the best selling

books. That is why Qur'an is such a good selling book. It is a "How to Do" manual. How you make life. You will find that there are certain core things in the "How to Do" manual, and one is a key to the gate, the key of gratitude. Gratitude must have its source. The source comes in submission to Allah. If gratitude is the key, then submission is the metal from which that key is made. Metal is made out of fire. You have to extract the metal from the matrix and then put it in the fire and you have to shape it.

As we know, it is difficult sometimes to have submission. It sometimes takes fire to make that submission, and then it has to be molded. It's molded in the character of the human being. Submission in this case means offering one's trust to Allah Swt. It means to seek out peace. It means to find the safety and security that can only be found in faith and trust. We have the possibility to do all that. The great Sufi mystic of Andalou, Ibn Araby (ra), said, "*When the veil is lifted, it will be seen that a man sends himself to the Garden or to the Fire.*" We are not sent by some distant god to the Fire or to Paradise. We are given the manual and the directions, and it's written in good language. Sometimes you get a manual where someone in China wrote it in English and it says [something unintelligible.] This one is written in a language you can understand. Here's what you can do: if you want to send yourself in that direction, read carefully.

We realize that in this physical world, we cannot have total satisfaction or total gratification. We are limited by the physical and biological boundaries of this world. We are limited by time, space, energy, age, physical capabilities. We cannot at the same time pursue all the beauties of the world and seek out all the security of the world, because there is only one heart, one direction, one person called myself. Some of you went on a trip and saw all these beautiful places: Turkey, Scandinavia, Italy, all these places. You want to live in every one of those places. "I'd like to live here! I like the food here. I like the coffee there. I like the people here. I like the weather here." Then a

moment of reality comes. “Ah, got to go back to Bedford, Virginia. That’s where my home is.” But our home is in our heart. It is in Allah Swt, the Reality. The fact that you can make your home anywhere means you have submitted and you trust in Allah. You have gratitude. We are limited by certain things, but you know the old saying: you cannot be a servant of two masters. It means that the heart cannot be divided partially for the good, and partially for evil.

Our heart can be expanded into good and contracted into evil. You can’t say, “That person really has a good heart, but there is an evil side to him.” Sometimes we see there is a dark side, but you can’t say, that person is a perfect wonderful person. I trust my money, my children, my wife, my house, and my money to that person. But they are evil. It doesn’t make sense. This is why Allah Swt has put us at crossroads: between life and death, between the inner and the outer, between truth and falsehood, between reason and lack of reason, and between good and evil, right and wrong, Jannah and Jahannah. We have the choice. Allah Swt tells us, **“Allah has not put into the breast of man more than one heart.”** Cows have two stomachs. Worms have lots of hearts. A human being only has one heart. Some people have heart surgery; and some people even have their hearts replaced with someone else’s heart. I have never known anyone to say, “Doc, as a backup, can you give me two hearts? Just in case one fails later, I’ll have a backup.” That’s not the way Allah created. The whole concept of backup is a human creation.

We are going to get what our heart pursues. It will either bring us close or separate us from the reality we know as Allah Swt. It will either increase our compassion or reduce it. It will either increase our mercifulness or reduce it; increase our peacefulness or reduce it. That’s how the goal is. It means that our freedom really lies within certain boundaries. How we face these boundaries or limitations defines our freedom. If we are told there are no limitations, then by the mood of someone or some principle we don’t

understand, all of a sudden we are acting one way and we are stopped and feel constrained. We see that in many people, especially people who have attained to a lot of fame. We are in the week where Michael Jackson died. All these people say, “He brought us so much happiness and joy.” But he brought himself all this misery. So you wonder: what is the price one has to pay? Allah gives us boundaries.

The boundaries are called Shar’īah, the guidelines, the Sunnah, what is right, what is good, Truth, Reality. It gives us boundaries and limitations on our bodies. It gives us even some boundaries in our minds. When someone gives us good advice and tells us, “Be grateful to Allah Swt. Look at all He has given you,” you say, “But look. I have all this pain. I’ve had this illness. I have this loss. I’ve had these challenges.” Be grateful for those. All of us have to practice that gratitude. Without that, we don’t know which direction we are going. But when you practice that gratitude, it’s very clear which direction we are going. We are going in the direction of Paradise/Jannah. Whether you think it’s a place, or a state of mind, it is certainly a reality. We have all experienced moments of peacefulness and happiness in our lives, and we have all experienced moments of misery and unhappiness. Allah Swt constantly reminds us of this.

We have the young people who are here visiting us; they are from Iraq. Every one of them has stories we don’t even want to hear. We may hear them, but we prefer they don’t have them, and we don’t want to hear them. Yet, you see in them hope. You see in them a willingness to change, to work together, to make their nation better; their willingness to understand even the people who invaded their country. You stand in awe of it, and think, “I don’t understand how they can feel that way, after all they have seen and done.” One young person said, “I’m grateful to be here. I’m learning a lot.” This is what Allah placed in every human being: a yearning to be free and a yearning to learn. There are some not very good stories also, and some of them have problems and issues. Of course,

we can understand that. But to have that yearning that can overcome such difficulty and misery should make us feel that we are not spending enough time reflecting on what we have, and with the gratitude we have. I think it is an important subject to remind ourselves of, especially when it is right in our face. A great Sufi said:

Woe to you who lay claim to service, for you have bound the turban of knowledge on the head of your own excellence, and have refused to be contained within this world. Look carefully whether you are in a row of friends or in the midst of enemies. Woe to you, O creature of habit, who ties upon your head the turban of assumption that you serve Allah, and draw up the skirt of your own purity away from men that you may not be contaminated. Be careful lest the dress of perfection bear you off to the grave. Busy yourself in looking after another's shoes, so that the sacred thread of habit and the pride of custom may perhaps be removed from your neck.

Along with gratitude is the necessity for sincerity. The more we increase our gratitude, and the more we increase our faith, the more our knowledge and our certainty will increase. *Alhamdulillah*. Yahya related from Malik that his father never brought food or drink or even a remedy but that he said, [Arabic du'ā]:

Praise be to Allah who has guided us and fed us and given us and blessed us. Allah is greater. O Allah, we have found Your blessing with every evil. Give us every good in the morning and evening. We ask you for its completion in gratitude. There is no good except your good, and no God other than you. You are the God of the salihūn/righteous and the Lord of the World. Praise be to Allah, there is no God but Allah. What Allah wills there is no power except in Allah. O Allah, bless us in what You have provided us, and protect us from the punishment

of the Fire. (Duas. Asks for blessings upon the ill.)

SECOND KHUTBA Duas.