

December 11, 2009

Khutbah



Title: Choices and Good Actions.

DVD title: Good Deeds are the Cornerstone in the Structure of a Believer's Life

Opening duas. *Asalmu aleikum*. Allah (swt) revealed in the Holy Qur'an,

And We did not create the heaven and the earth and what is between them as mere sport. Had We wished for a diversion, We could have found it in Our Own Presence were We to do so. No, We hurl the truth against falsehood and it breaks the head of the lies and behold, it vanishes. And woe to you for what you utter about Allah. (21:16-18)

And also in Qur'an Allah reveals to us,

Whoever it is that wants power and glory should know that the might and power belongs to Allah. Good words rise up to him and he raises virtuous actions from himself. But whoever plots evil deeds, terrible punishment awaits, and the plotting of such people come to nothing. (35:10)

It was revealed in Sūratu-l-Ambiyā that falsehood and false things we ascribe to are just like idle sport, and that this whole concept of creation has to be understood in a larger context. According to Islamic scholars, the context is best described in simple terms: the act of doing good deeds. Doing good deeds and actions is a cornerstone in the structure of the life of a believer. You will find a believer who does good deeds among good companions. These good deeds point to actions that

are the result not only of knowledge that ripens into wisdom that becomes manifest and accepted as truth; but good deeds and works are the keys for all human beings to live a successful life outwardly and inwardly, visibly and hidden, in their spiritual activities and in their secular activities. Indeed, secular activities become spiritual activities. Personally, individually, socially, collectively; the physical, the mental capacities, the emotional capacities we have to make progress become realized as progress.

We learn from those experiences. Everyone can make progress. Even the disbeliever who is living a degenerate life can make good progress if they do good actions and turn their attention to Allah (swt). Certainly the benefit of good actions is to those who are the recipients of the good deeds and good works also. These acts are sufficient in themselves to lift us to a high degree of awareness; what we call progress or advancement, which will be encoded in us – engraved upon our souls. So that on the Day of Awakening, when we walk through the gates of paradise, the scanner scans us and lists all the good deeds automatically at terabyte speed.

One would hope to find that the good actions we perform and the good words we speak not only make an impression on us, but if you click on “view” as Allah does, He sees them. Or you can click on “list” and they are listed. Or they are cascaded, if you want. But they also make an impression on the generations to come, too. Not just because they are heard over and over again, khutbah by khutbah until you graduate from high school, or until you escape from the community and go get a job somewhere else, but they are encoded in your heart and soul, because you repeat them to yourself. What you do is full of meaning to you.

There is ample reason to think the very core of our genetic coding is affected by all that is good and all that is bad. It's not merely a question of the environment that the child grows up in, although that is exceedingly important, as we know. It is not just the environment that will determine if they perform good actions or not. It's also the attitude of the parent and of the community, the attitude of the people they come into contact with. We must remember that the people we come into contact with are also "virtual": the people you are Linked-In to, that you are Facebooked to.

The people our children come into contact with, the people we come into contact with, that change our moods and our emotions, give us strange notions, make us feel like we are over our heads in some kind of disgusting lotion, or drinkin' a potion that makes our emotions very strange (loose, if you understand what I mean). On the screen of life, don't mean to demean anybody, but it's a dream we have to have. Sometimes it makes me want to scream, jump out of my skin. Makes me feel – even a big man like me – thin... of ethical principle. (I'm trying to think of what rhymes with principle). It makes you invincible if you understand what you can! Virtual reality can be scary. You don't know how it affects our minds. The news that you choose gives you the blues every day. Puts the screws to your mind. Don't know what's false or true. (I'm using poetic license).

Then we repeat it and we hear the children repeat it. You watch the Disney channel and kid's movies – which are just adult movies in animation to make it look like children's movies. They put clever voices behind it, but you see all kinds of misery and things like that. Not that it's bad; not that somebody can't learn from conflict as long as it has a good ethical and moral end to it. Sometimes, it's better to feel sad over a movie than reality. But it's carried to extreme lengths.

The point is, we have to understand where these good actions come from, and understand that we were created with fitrah. We were created to do good; therefore, it is the nature of the human being to gravitate to doing what's good. When those definitions get mixed up and they become acceptable social conventions that are not good, then we have a problem. We inherit and pass on, generation to generation, those valueless values or attitudes.

The Qur'an refers to the good nature of the human being in many ways. **We created human beings in the best forms. (95:4) We have only created men and jinn that they may serve Me through worship. (51:56)** And in this sense, *ibāda* means obedience as well as worship, upon which everything depends for our personal well being. We have to obey laws and rules. We should obey our elders and our parents. We should obey the guidelines that keep us safe and secure. We can look at what this means for our personal well being, analogously to what I have been talking about recently. We are human beings, and as such, we have a collective purpose as well as an individual one. We should have a collective intention as well as an individual one. We are the prime focal point, the axial point of the Creator's Niyat.

It stands to reason that as the result of our good actions, we become harmonized with the Vision of Allah, with the Wisdom of Allah, and the Plan that Allah had for the creation of this system of life and universes. He didn't create this as a mere sport or a pastime, nor did He create human beings with no purpose. There's a definite purpose for us as individuals and collectively, and that purpose is described very well by the *Asmā' al Husna*: to be just and kind and compassionate, loving, merciful, understanding, tolerant, patient, etc. Robots can be created for a purpose. They put the widget here, the door here, and drop the engine in as it goes down the assembly line. They don't have to look like human beings to do that.

Why wouldn't Allah create us for a specific purpose? If we have a place in the universe, then every place in the universe has a purpose. It's a very special organic system of wisdom that spans the whole universe. It's the will of Allah behind the system of creation in unique and marvelous ways. Whatever happens in this world ultimately could be in line with an overall plan. Or it runs contrary to the plan, by an individual's choice. Choices that are not just, I'm choosing not to do good. I'm choosing to do bad. There are choices that are motivated by other choices. People make choices to exploit people, and people lose their homes. They lose their incomes and their capacity for rational thought. They become fearful, and make choices based on that. It has a domino effect on society and on the human beings in society. Then there is resentment, aggressiveness, passivity, fear, and doubts that come about from these things that could be good. It's not always people who want to do evil that find themselves sitting amidst evil.

How many times have we heard the story? A young person grows up in a Muslim country, raised beautifully by their family. They have good values and morals. They get sent to some Western or Eastern country for education, and their friends all go to bars, take drugs, smoke dope and all kinds of things. It wasn't the way they were raised, but environment becomes stronger than will. Then you start the whole cascade of fear, doubt, guilt, sense of loss, and with that shame comes the feeling that you can't change the situation. So these things happen. It's not because the person is inherently bad. We're not going to get into a discussion of *qadr*, right now, because someone will raise that question.

If we put our lives in such a way that we are always pushing against time frames and things that need to be done, overstressing ourselves, extending ourselves and over-extending ourselves materially, financially, mentally and emotionally, the exact opposite will happen. Good will not come out of it, only discord and worry.

If we sit around and wait for some kind of blessing to descend upon us from the heavens, we could be waiting a long time. How can we have good work if we are pushing against a time frame that makes us compromise the way we work? How can we have deep and profound thoughts if we don't have any time to think? How can we have good accomplishments if we don't hone our skills in the right way to do that? How are we going to have understanding and good consultation if we are consulting with the wrong people? We have all experienced these pressures and frustrations.

The Qur'an says, "**Allah loves those who are patient,**" (3:146) and who have trust in Him. There is a value in letting things work out. There is a value in not being obsessed by time. There is a value in understanding that, over time, if one keeps themselves balanced, things will work out. That's true, but only if you have a good intention at the end of it. There is no time, no place where we can avoid making intentions. We all are making intentions all the time. We make them every day unconsciously, whether deeply purposeful or not. The alarm clock goes off in the morning, and we reach over and hit the snooze button. It's a form of sleep called snoozing, between alarm and alarm. We make that intention in the split second: I'm going to sleep a little longer. Then... "My God, I only have 5 minutes to get there! I overslept!" Then someone invariably says, "You must have needed it." And you go, "Arrgggh." But in the back of your mind, you know they are right. "Thank you. You are looking at the positive side. I should have looked at the good side of it myself."

Sometimes it's very important for someone who is trying to attain a certain state of understanding and awareness for someone to affirm it. Maybe it's important to give that person a moment of silence or encouragement. None of this can be done unless we seek to live a balanced life ourselves. If I'm uptight and someone else is uptight, I'm not going to give them a good word. We know that good works begin

with good thoughts. Right actions follow right thinking. Those good thoughts and good words can have much more free expression among good people and good companions. **“To Him mount up all words of purity and righteous deeds.”** (35:10). They rise up to Allah. What are the good deeds? You have to think of the *sālihīn*, the good people who work in line with the overall purpose of creation. These deeds are different than the evil deeds of destructive actions and thoughts. The *sālihīn* are very constructive people, and they are given the *khalifat*.

If we strive to live a good life on the basis of *taqwa*, out of humility and gratitude, then there is very little that will compromise our life. We have to see the relationship between our good works and our *iman*. It’s hard to comprehend good work, and at the same time, without it, Allah knows best what would happen to us. People become very skeptical of the kind of quality of student that can be produce from a *khanaqah* or *zāwiya*, or the quality of a citizen that can be produced from a group of believers, or the quality of a teacher or a guide that can be produced from a group of submitted believers. Every student is not necessarily the same. Every teacher is not the same. Every person who has a religious belief is not the same. A student is not just produced from an academic set or institution based on test scores and examinations. A good student is produced by bringing out the qualities of that individual in a good environment, and with the love of knowledge, and by responding and interacting with that student in a way that gives them excitement and understanding in a positive environment... in an aspect of their life they wouldn’t normally be placed in, in just some institutional presence.

It’s the same thing for a Sufi, for every one of us. There are so many verses in Qur’an that tell us to help the poor and orphans, to make the world a better place, to be conscious of the environment, to be faithful to Allah, to be good parents, good students, good children. There are so many examples in Qur’an and Hadith that we could quote them or read them for hours and hours. What does it mean?

It means that Islam is and should be concerned with, engaged in encounters that help others—whether they are poor, orphans, our kith and kin, or strangers along the road—to fill our obligations, to keep ourselves in a good mind and heart state. Every day we forget so many times. So, when we remember that we forgot, we repent and ask forgiveness.

We should not expect someone else to remember just because it is their job to remember. We have to remember. “It’s Jehan’s job; she has to remember what is best for the community. It’s the Shaykh’s job, he has to remember what the teaching is. It’s so and so’s job to remember that.” I’m sorry I keep hammering at this subject. But I sit late into the night, and I wonder and wonder what will change the paradigms that need to shift here, in this community, here, inside of myself. What can shift me or us away from the very thing that makes something acceptable and unacceptable? What can shift in this country to make this country acceptable to others again, and good for others in the same way our philosophy says it should be?

In his last address, the Prophet (sal) said, “***O People! Surely your blood and your property and your honor, are sacred and inviolable.***” What does that mean? It means Allah does not want us to be unsuccessful. He wants us [to be successful] – if you want to use that kind of terminology. We were created to be successful. There is a viability about the capability of human beings. At the same time, we have duties to others. We are told how to act in business, with our children, with one another, with our *shuyukh*—as if we are in the company of Allah. Even though we are not seeing Allah, He is seeing us. We are given guidance by the Sharī’ah, by Qur’an, by the Sīrah of Nebi Mohammed (sal), in the Sunnah of the Prophet (sal) about justice, about responsibility, about accountability, about cleanliness, about order, about trust.

None of this is there for us to squander. None of it is there just for me. Islam should fight against the violation of people's rights. Islam should never harm individuals who are innocent. (Islam can't do things; I should say, people who follow Islam.) Islam encourages us to take responsibility for ourselves and others. It takes us every step of our life to observe human life, and makes it difficult for us to find fault with others; but when we do, we know we have put it through every test. It encourages us to gain knowledge. The Prophet encourages us all the time to be courageous, not just on the battlefield, but in the battlefield of day to day life. [We are encouraged] to have a Sufic point of view of love and concern and care for everyone. This takes a lot of courage, and good choices.

Good choices are only going to come from seeing good choices made as we grow up. Good choices are going to come from knowing what is good and what is bad; what is constructive and what is destructive, and from understanding that this world is our responsibility. We all agreed to that in the *ghaib*. The collective soul of humanity agreed to that. "I didn't agree to it! Not me, boss!" Yes, you did. Your *rūh* agreed to it. Allah spoke to the *rūh* of people and said, "If I create this, who will be responsible for it?" The mountains refused and the oceans refused, but the soul of the human being accepted. For those of us who sit in *muraqabah* and go deeper and deeper, [we] have an ever more personal relationship with Allah (swt), than [we would] by the name of the religion, the culture, or the family tradition we might come from.

Those of us who feel some stirring in our hearts, or find ourselves among the *fuqara*, among the Sufis, maybe you didn't know what it meant at the moment you joined up, but you find out what it's about in the realities of life. Just like a soldier who joins up out of high school doesn't know what it will mean, we find out in the day to day training and battles of life. It's a contract. You said to Allah,

“Here’s my being, here’s my consideration,” and you put your hand there. You say to Allah, “I am sincere and loyal, so please consider revealing Your secrets to me. Please, O Allah, let me look behind the veil because You can trust me. I’m not going to deviate.” ***“My hand is over your hand.”*** **“Know that those who pledge their fealty to you, pledge their fealty to Me.”** In that birthing process, in that breathing process, in that human process of becoming a human being, we agreed to take responsibility for the people we don’t know about, for diseases that haven’t been cured yet, for conflicts that haven’t been waged yet, for truth that hasn’t been spoken yet, for ideas that haven’t been conceived yet, and for peace that hasn’t been made yet.

From the moment we cared about anything beyond our own selves, [we begin to understand the responsibility]. Maybe when we were five or six or eight or three or four, we cared about an animal. Maybe a bird flew into the window, and we cared about it. “Oh, Mommy! Birdie, birdie...” “Here, he’s not dead. Put a little water in his mouth.” “Oh! Bird flew away.” “Bye, birdie.” [We go] from that moment to caring about people on the other side of the world, who you might not even agree with. You don’t like their food, or their culture. Maybe you don’t like the way they smell; they offend you. But you realize that you have responsibility for them also. Your compassion transcends your bigotry and prejudices, your fears and ignorance.

[You come to an understanding of that responsibility] the moment you are worried about someone involved in ethnic cleansing, and the moment you felt compassion for others, and anger over the deaths of people in Darfur, or Iraq, or Iran, or wherever, the moment you realized you had to deal with misunderstandings and misinterpretations about your religion, about Islam, or what people say about you. The neighbors said to the little girl in our school, “We won’t talk to you anymore because you go to that Muslim school.” She said, “I don’t care. They are my best

friends now.” What she should tell them is, “Let he who is without sin cast the first stone. I thought Christians were this.... They don’t dislike you, why do you dislike them? You don’t know them; why are you judging them? People who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones.”

You come to an understanding in yourself where you feel comfortable with who you are, with your *dīn* and your Tasawwuf, because that’s the deal you made. It wasn’t made a hundred thousand years ago or a million years go; it was made now. It was made in the now. Allah is always in the now. Every time you sign on, every time you agree, every time you try to follow anything in Qur’an, every time you espouse what is true and right and good, you are saying that’s your compact. That’s your contract. Click here. If you agree, you can go further into the site. Who reads [those contracts]? You want it more than you want to read it. [You click,] I accept. You are giving *bai’at* to Google and Yahoo. I accept. Why? Because you desire it. I want that app. Do you accept the terms of it? Yes. Did you read it? Noo. Not only are they going to sell your name, but your soul as well. They own you. You have signed your life away a hundred times already.

One day you will accept something, and there will be a knock at your door. “Come with me.” “What do you mean, come with you?” “You accepted.” “I’ll call my lawyer!” “No, did you see the clause on page 133?” Once you accept, you cannot call a lawyer. It’s a disclaimer of humanity. Don’t you know that maybe all this stuff is to train us to click on “I accept” until the moment comes when the matrix puts up the right thing, and you say I accept, and then POOF, raptured. “I accept.” It’s time to reflect. We have to ask: “Am I committing my heart and mind? What am I really committed to? My career?”

Today on the news... there was something really wrong with the Today show. They were given one good story after another! Three kids who got cochlear

implants at the same time. Then there was a story about someone who did something good. Then there was the story about a guy who was a quadriplegic who climbed a 108 story building. He spent most of his childhood in a wheelchair. He got himself out of the wheelchairs and became a decathlon and marathon runner. Then he had a bike accident and became a quadriplegic. They said he couldn't walk, but he is. Will to live! And not just to live, for what? So he can go fishing, write another contract, fulfill his career? No, so he can be an encouragement to someone else. So he can help someone else. Look at what a human being can accomplish; that's his whole life.

We need to take some time and reflect on the decisions we are making. Don't put them off until you are thirty, forty, fifty, or sixty. We have to have high standards, and not to expect the magic wand, though the magic wand will come. Expect that the forces of good are directed toward us. Know that our prayers and *du'ā*, our study and service to one another should be an opportunity to send out everything we collected between our prayers, everything we have collected in our life that is good and direct it, *inshā'a-llāh*. Are we going to remember it? I don't know. There are a lot of people who need for us to remember, and not just among ourselves.

DUAS. SECOND KHUTBAH: DUAS.