

April 9, 2010

Khutbah



Title: [Iman: The Means by which We Perform Righteous Deeds](#)

DVD title: Iman: Requirements of Faith for the Believer

Opening *du'ās*. *Salām aleikum Rahmat Allah wa barakatu. Inshā'a-Llāh*, everyone is well today.

Allah (swt) said in Holy Qur'an in Suratu-l-Anfal:

Oh you who believe! Answer Allah and His Messenger when He calls you to that which gives you life. And know that Allah intervenes between a man and his heart and that to Him you [all] will be gathered. (8:24)

And again in Suratu-n-Nisā':

And [as for] those who believe and work righteous deeds – We shall let them enter gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they shall abide forever. For them are pure mates and We shall [allow them to] enter into deep shades.

Truly, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due, and when you judge between people, to judge justly. Truly most beneficial is that which Allah instructs you [to do]. Truly Allah is Hearing, Seeing. (4:57-58)

The foundations of these '*āyāt* lie in what we can truly say is *iman*/faith. To follow any guidance and to believe requires a faith in something far beyond our own capabilities and

far beyond what we normally see as manifest in the world around us. So there is no end in contemplation of *iman*. In these texts, we find a recitation about believers and the apparent rewards. As people who are Muslim in the sense of believer, the *mu'min*, regardless of the *dīn* that we follow, as well as for those of us who are of Tasawwuf, we see these texts as injunctions for us to contemplate, to make *tafakkur*. It is not to be necessarily literal about the reward, but rather this metaphor or this reality (however you want to see it) is the natural state of the good human being. It is the state of the person of *fitrah*, whose goodness dominates their life. So in this text, we see that there is great deal of information and guidance even in these small 'āyāt.

Certainly, the subject of *iman* is one that is endless and depthless. It is explicit in defining who a *mu'min* is, a true believer. The word is widely interpreted as the complete believer, the full believer. Because many of us like to choose and pick what we believe, what taste good or is pleasant or convenient. Until we are starving or dying, we wouldn't consider eating anything that is not *halal*. But we know in Islam, that when it comes to food, the *halal* is to be kept, the kosher is to be kept, and what is *tref* to be left behind. What we understand in the case of life and death, in the case of absolute need, what is *haram* becomes *halal*, because life overrules rules. In the same way, the complete believer is a person who does not pick and choose, but who follows as best they can the way that is set out for us by Qur'an and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammed (sal) and from the *ambiyā*, the prophets who preceded with the same message.

The very idea of completeness in *iman* dictates a kind of dynamism that is again and again, over and over again underscored as faith/*iman* increased or strengthened or extended. That dynamism has an evolutionary implication that we are on a journey, and that our life is not just dynamic exchanges, but it is for development. Qur'an also encourages us to reflect on the nature of the relationship between *iman* and the righteous acts. It is a relationship, which I think should be very critical for each one of us sitting in this room who have structured our lives, consciously and purposefully. The children have

been brought up in a purposeful and conscious structure where righteous acts are very important.

There are many requirements for *iman* that are dealt with in Qur'an and we have just chosen a few today. The text that we read today is specifically from the beginning of the Medinan *sūrah*, The Spoils of War/Suratu-l-Anfal, which deals largely with the events surrounding the Battle of Badr, the sanctity of treaties and therefore the importance of the faith of the believer. These 'āyāt are sometimes regarded as a rebuke to some of the companions of the Prophet who were displaying a bit of exaggerated interest in the spoils of the war. There seemed to develop a degree of resentment or acrimony among some of the companions, after being told that these spoils rightly belonged to the community. [One should not] be too eager for material gain, and one should not impair the relations between individuals. The companions were reminded about the nature of faith, the importance of faith. Their faith was being injured by greed. Certainly, we are all familiar with different forms of greed. I have known it once or twice in my life. I expect that maybe you have too.

In ethical and religious terms spoken in Qur'an, *iman* is rarely discussed in terms of its etymology. There is an assumption that we understand what it is. But I think it serves to understand the etymology, the morphology of words here in the form of the verbal noun *alif, mim, nun* ('-m-n). The roots suggest something that faith should always bring, and which should also drive an individual, impel an individual forward in their belief and in their service to Allah (swt). [Faith should always bring] security and trust—trusting in and turning towards—which then follow other meanings: good faith and fidelity, sincerity and loyalty. The fourth form of that verb has a double meaning, which is interesting: to believe and also to give one's faith. The primary meaning is to become true to the trust with respect to the trust that Allah (swt) has confided in us by a firm believing in one's own heart. It is not by just professing belief, not just by saying "I believe" with the tongue.

When the *alif, mim, nun* is followed by the particle *b*, it means to acknowledge or to recognize. It is also used in the meaning of trust, in the sense of when one feels secure upon trusting something. If you trust, you feel security in that trust. You do not trust until something goes wrong, or trust until some doubt enters your mind, but trust until the trust bears fruit. Our faith is secure in our trust in Allah, and Allah's faith or trust in us gives us that security.

It says, also in Qur'an:

Allah coined the similitude of a township that dwells secure and well content, its provision coming to it in abundance from all sides but it disbelieved in Allah's favor so Allah made it experience the garb of death and the fear because of what they used to do. (16:112)

When you look at the Qur'an, you can count at least 244 times when variations of this word *iman* appear. Most frequently it appears as an expression of those who have *iman*, over 50 times. The term is essentially used with reference to the Prophet Muhammed's followers (*sal*); but in 10 or eleven instances, it also refers to the followers of Sidna Musa (*as*). In over 20 instances, [it is used in reference] to other prophets and their followers.

When we say faith in Arabic, when we say faith in Qur'an, we are talking about the faith of all believers. It is not the faith of Muslims in the term of a religion, but faith of Muslims as people who are in submission to God, to Allah (*swt*). In the Qur'an, there is a sense of being at peace with oneself, a sense of commitment, of contentment, of security – there are many references in Qur'an to this, I just read one. There is a sort of security from external threats, but there is also the concept of security and safety that comes from a trust, in the sense of the *amanat*. It is the trust that Allah (*swt*) had offered

to the mountains and to the seas who refused them, but only that human beings accepted that trust.

Allah said, **“Woe be on you, o human beings, who accepted the weight of this trust.”** Basically, “You don’t know what you are getting into” in modern terminology. To have faith in this *amanat*/trust that was given to us, and in the trust which we are to give back to Allah—to have faith and trust, herein lies our security. It is this exchange. There is the offer by Allah (swt) for us to be responsible human beings, elements of His creation, truly elements of His intention and His will (if you see us as sort of being part of a more dynamic system that is only apparently expressed as opposed to really expressed), and [there is] also that response that we give. The trust that is given by Allah, and the trust that is returned back to Allah—there we find our security, just like we do in human relationships.

For each of us, we have to contemplate when we use the word faith, these things. I think that to just distinguish between faith and belief and commitment, we have to really contemplate what it means. Is it just a practice: is it an identifier? Here we find in Arabic that it is a verb, in that sense. So it is dynamic. There is also, according to Qur’an, a way of looking at *iman* as an act of the heart, which when one, with decisiveness and with sincerity, gives oneself to Allah (swt), to the message, to His messenger, one gains a peace and a security against problems that affect the heart.

For those of us who are in this *tariqah*, who are on this journey of Tasawwuf, the heart is so important. It is the deepest of subjects to us, and the focal point of our lives. We have to understand that the relationship between *iman* and *qalb* is a very, very critical relationship. It is a relationship of love. It is a relationship of life. It is the center. Just as the Ka’ba is the center of the Islamic world that we all turn to, the heart is the center of our physical body, and the center of our attention. It is protected. Allah (swt) put it behind this rib cage. It is protected. The two most critical parts of our body are most

protected: our heart and our brain. We know that the heart can change the brain. The brain can rarely change the heart.

There are a lot of different definitions of *iman*, as I have told you, and it depends on who is defining it, but it almost always includes certain qualities. One is affirmation silently, silently/*khafī* within one's own self. Another affirmation is one that is verbally given. Another key subject is righteousness—righteous action, righteous conduct, choosing the things that one does on one's life for the benefit of others *fī sabīli-Llāh*/for the sake of Allah. What does it mean, “for the sake of Allah”? It means for the sake of compassion, mercy, justice, truth, kindness, understanding—at least 99, and truly over a thousand Attributes of Allah (swt).

There is something that *iman* gives us, more than just recognition or verbal testimony. There is the commitment that builds again and again, that evolves in the heart of an individual towards righteous action. The more you do, the more you do. The more effort you make, the more you want to do. The more life reveals to us what the needs are. It is hard for us who live here to believe that there are people walking around or living within a stone's throw of us, basically, who have no sense of what is going on in the world; who have very little compassion for the needs of others; who may make a donation, every once in a while, if they do, or may bring a neighbor some food, but have no sense of their global responsibility or the human responsibility that human beings have for other human beings. It is hard for us to believe that, but it is true.

As we get these revelations coming to us of the needs of humanity, and we put our small efforts out, we see how quickly they are magnified. A small story about love, about a whole household of members who take care of the elderly goes out across the world. It goes across the world because somebody discovers it and puts it out on SoulTV. Or the work we do with our organization that affects a lot of people on five continents. The message is spread by Allah, by the good works, by the truth, verbally.

We can try and understand Prophet Muhammed (sal) for example, as a person, who not only had deep and profound faith, who was trustworthy and is secure in the trust given to him, but also as an individual whose actions were righteous and who is exemplary, who conducted himself in a righteous way. That is what we also call a *mu'min*. I can say with some authority, I think, supported in Qur'an, that affirming one's faith and good conduct, an individual increases one's faith/*iman*. The stronger one's proof is of one's *iman* in one's actions, the less a person has doubt. The greater the amount of affirmation, the more one increases their faith, and increases their awareness of the greatness, the majesty and wisdom of Allah, and deepens their ability to serve in righteous ways. There is almost a circular relationship.

Who among us, in this place, in this room isn't encouraged when asked to share our knowledge and our expertise, when someone shows interest in our actions and our words, shows interest in our deeds and wants to share them not only with us, but wants to share them with others? You can call it networking or you can call it respect. You can call it many different names, but we ourselves, are very grateful to have the opportunity to share our knowledge, our expertise, our contacts and our work with others. Why? Because we have a sense of what we spoke about last night—*jamat*, togetherness, gatheredness.

Our good actions are motivated truly by our faith, and our security comes from right conduct. The affirmation of our faith and safety, the commitment we feel to that affirmation depends on our ability to serve, not just other human beings, but to serve all of Allah's creation. The reason for this is explained in Qur'an where we see that the direct result of our faith is a certainty in a sense of anxiousness to be obedient—
anxiousness to be obedient to Allah (swt). What does it mean to be obedient to Allah (swt)? It means to be consistent in justice, to be consistent in mercy, to be consistent in love, to be consistent in peace, to be consistent in patience. This is certainly, at least, a lifetime's work. But we know that Allah (swt) is Rahman and Raheem.

So, though our actions might fail, our sincere intentions will be judged. Certitude, and affirming, and piety, and contentment are the results of our sincerity. These are the causes of change, not only in our society but change within our own self. These are what give a new life to our heart, a new awakening to our heart. However, despite the reluctance of some people to limit the definitions or understanding of *iman*, we have to never let it leave our understanding that it is dynamic and evolving. It is a process that we need to embrace and need to remember. We find among ourselves [there is] a relationship between our *muhasabat* (our self-accounting) and our *iman*.

Our ability to reflect upon ourselves, to recollect our essential belief, to extend our faith and our trust to Allah, depends on our willingness to reflect on our own actions, our relationships, our strengths, our weaknesses; to say “*Astaghfiru-Llāh*,” and ask for forgiveness for those shortcomings; to affirm the things that we have done right; to turn piously, sincerely towards Allah, everyday, if not five times a day, at least once a day in *muhasabat*, or even more. As we know, the Prophet Muhammed was constantly in a state of *muhasabat*.

Perhaps the most important and significant issue when we deeply contemplate *iman* is to what degree we have a personal recognition of the Divine Presence in the world around us in our day to day life. Are we aware when we feel contentment? Are we aware when we feel compassion? Are we aware, when we remove the stone from a pathway so no one trips on it, that these are remembrances of Allah (swt), of the Divine Presence, that this is *zakat*, truly *zakat*? We know that *zakat*, though it is translated as charity, does not mean charity. It means purification, a process of purification. [Are we aware] that those simple acts of remembrance are the most important ones? They are the ones that tell us that the Divine Presence is just within our grasp. Allah (swt) says, “**I am as near to you as your jugular vein.**” If you find that hard to grasp, then you can say that Allah (swt)

and all the prophets are walking right next to us. All you need to do is extend your hand and your hand is taken.

Perhaps the most important and significant issue, when we deeply contemplate *iman* is then that Divine recognition. This aspect of our faith is reflected in a *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammed (sal): ***“The least of iman will save one in the hereafter.”***—the least of *iman*! ***“Iman is of various kinds and has seventy branches,”*** he said. ***“The highest is the testimony that there is no deity except Allah (swt), and the lowest is the removal of an obstacle from the road. Even modesty is a branch of iman.”***

So this is what the most important sign of faith is when the Prophet (sal) said to remove an obstacle in the path of someone. Metaphorically, it can be a stone in the road or be just a word that sets somebody at ease or it can be a handful of rice in the obstacle of hunger. It can be anything. It can be everything.

These are the levels. In the ‘*āyat* I recited today, there is the idea of presentation. Many of us, perhaps, if we are sincere in our belief and in our actions, to the point where our faith becomes a conscious part of our day to day expression, we can achieve the state of understanding, of belief and of faith. I think we can safely say that Qur’an is telling us, all of us, that we are going to experience many dimensions in our faith, and many challenges to it. We have our friends in Kirkhistan today. Elvira, who is at the funeral of her dear brother, I am sure is having a crisis in faith today. We sent her good words, *inshā’-llāh*, from Qur’an and good hope about perseverance and patience. There are many mysteries that are hard to understand, but we have to be ready and willing for the lessons to come to critique our understanding, to challenge us, and to show us the promise of deepening faith here and in the Hereafter.

Allah (swt) says in Qur'an, "**O those of you who have attained to *iman***"—attained to *iman*. He is telling us that it is a process. We have to put our attention, our direction and our life in such a way as to orient ourselves away from the things that are just wrong, for things that affect our weaknesses and pull us towards the material world. We have to also understand that we have to balance even the good works that we do in this world with some very deep personal *muraqabah*, meditation, contemplation, recitation, *dhikr* Allah. We have to put our attention internally, also. We cannot just use the needs of the people of this world, or the world itself, or the planet itself as a replacement for our personal relationship with that Divine Presence, with those characteristics and qualities that need to be evolved and developed in us. Maybe we are the most sacrificing human being. Maybe it takes us no effort for us to serve other human beings, but maybe it takes us an effort to sit and contemplate Allah (swt).

So what comes with ease is fine. Allah says, "**With hardship goeth ease.**" But also with ease comes hardship, sometimes. So we have to address those things that are difficult. *Inshallah*, we have a slightly deeper understanding of *iman* and we can remember what, I hope I emphasized today, the dynamic aspect, the relationship between our faith, safety, security and contentment, and the deeds that we perform in righteous ways, not just righteous deeds, but the way we perform those deeds, *inshā'a-llāh ta Allah*.

Closing duas.