

June 25, 2010

Khutbah



Title: [Every Guideline, Sweet or Bitter, Comes from Allah](#)

DVD title: Taking Meaning from Life's Lessons, Bitter or Sweet  
Taking the Medicine in What Allah Provides

Opening duas

Allah (swt) has revealed to us in Holy Qur'an:

**As for the one who repents and believes and performs good deeds, righteous deeds, he will be among those who are successful. Your Lord creates what He wills and what He chooses. The choice is not up to them. Exalted is Allah and high above anything with which they associate to Him. And your Lord knows what is in their hearts, what they conceal and what they make known.**  
(28:67-68)

It was reported in a *hadith* from Prophet Muhammed (sal) that "*he who is not content with My decree and doesn't believe in My destiny, let him seek a God other than Me.*" And also: "*None of you believes unless he believes in the decree its goodness and its badness, its sweetness and its bitterness.*"

My dear brothers and sisters, in our Islam, because we have learned the harsh reality that there is not one Islam that people practice, but that there is one Islam in Truth. We are told that life is not only to be sweet and wonderful with no problems, and then hear a lot of excuses for the things that we have done wrong. We are told that everything is learned from its opposite. There is no absolute and total balance in creation at any given moment.

There is only fluctuation in the seeking and the searching of *mīzān*, which can only be found in Allah.

We become used to this motion, or dynamic of life in the search for tranquility and peace. And the tranquility and peace can only be found in the heart of the believer, not in the measurement of what happened to be this moment or the moment before, or what I expect to find in the next moment. There is the positive and the negative, and an up and a down, just like we have an inside and an outside. There is good and bad; there is the right and the wrong. It is very realistic teachings. We are told that every one of these occurrences and circumstances in our life has meaning. What is sweet is meaningful, and what is bitter is meaningful; what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong, and what is proper and improper all have their teaching, all have their meaning to a believer, to a Muslim, to a *mu'min*. That is because everything holds a lesson because everything comes from Allah.

Sometimes the lessons have to be learned in difficult ways, and sometimes they can be learned with ease. He chose the lesson for us as individuals and sometimes collectively. And as we personally strive for a level of refinement and character in our action, we also try and find, therefore, the extracted lesson from every moment. There is a degree of perfection and refinement that each one of us can attain to. That is because within us we have that essential goodness, that essential *fitrah*. If we really refine ourselves, we really come to understand how to come to peace within ourselves and with our circumstances. Not that it is best to have an idea that there is this goal out there that I am supposed to attain to, but rather that there is a goal moment to moment within ourselves. The goal within ourselves allows us to measure our place and to measure the dimension of our movement, our inner dynamic.

Certainly, there is the promise of the Hereafter when Allah looks at us and our destiny and sees how we have chosen to live our life, to display our choices, to fulfill our destiny,

and how we have chosen to fulfill the capabilities and the capacity that Allah (swt) has provided for us. It is in the moment-to-moment choices, however, and the moment-to-moment understandings that we extract where we will find our peace and our tranquility. That interfaces very much with choice, and choice is a very important part of Islamic life, human life. Even the smallest child has to learn very early to choose what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad.

We have to understand that we have guidelines and rules that are not there to torment us, not to restrict us, but to give us direction and to offer us protection, just like the signs on the highway show us where to go and where not to go, and give us indications of what is to come. If we crash into the metal, there is little chance that we will go over the edge, so even there is protection. We have to understand the laws and guidelines are not there to create some kind of restrictions, but they are the means to which we can traverse the path with as much safety and security as possible. Every pathway has its guidelines and every pathway has a certain amount of restriction, in the sense that water is restricted when it goes through a pipe so that it can arrive at its destination, and so you can turn on the tap at the sink to get a glass of water, instead of going down to the stream, or we can water the garden.

If you don't believe that these guidelines and laws are set on purpose with a clear intention from Allah (swt), then we will think, "This law and this guideline I like and this other one I don't like. This one is sweet and this one is bitter." We depend on our reaction to how the events turn out, how we approach circumstances and events and wait for the response, and then say, "Oh this is good or this is bad. This is sweeter or this is bitter," instead of understanding that everything, every guideline coming from Allah (swt) has a purpose. Because we have a choice, we will stay away from the bitter ones, obviously, unless you happen to like bitter foods. If we understand that all those guidelines that we are given come from Allah (swt), if we look for meaning in them... that is really the key, to look for meaning in the moment. When we string the moments

together, it is like stringing a *tasbih*. It is like stringing a string of pearls. The beauty may not be seen when you have two pearls on a string, but when you have fifty or a hundred pearls on the string, you can see the beauty of it.

If we have acted in error, if the rules and the guidelines come down to us and it is proven to us that what we have done is really an error, we will consider it bitter until we accept the reasons for those guidelines and the reasons for the laws. Instead of reluctantly accepting the guidelines and the laws, when we understand the reasons, our reluctance goes away. Even though there may be a bitter taste in our mouth, we understand that some good medicine often is bitter. If you ever had a broken pill, you understand what bitter is. Very, very bitter, but it is good medicine. We raise our children as we awaken ourselves. We have to give reasons and rationales for many of the things. Sometimes, we have to say, “This is the way it is. You will see later. Trust me. This is the way it is.” And your child looks at you and says, “Hmm. Okay.”

Allah (swt) has told us in the Qur'an, “**This is the way things are and you will see.**” If we have done something in error and find out that we have, don't consider it to be bitter forever, because understanding brings sweetness. Medicine is bitter, but it brings health. If we do consider it this way, we understand the laws whether we like them or not in the moment, whether we like the guidelines or not in the moment. If we have a molecule of faith, than we have to act out of that molecule of faith, even if it is just a tiny little bit. Because that faith is closely associated with trust, and if we want that trust to be absolute, then don't lose what you have. Let it grow and become unshakeable inside of us by seeing the value of that trust. It is associated with peace and it is associated with security. Knowledge and peace and security and trust are all wrapped up together, sometimes in packages that look a little restrictive, and sometimes in ways that are very, very sweet.

I am sure we have all received a package that somebody has lovingly wrapped up with four hundred wrappings and lots of really sticky tape. By the time you open up the package, you really are frustrated; and then there is something very beautiful inside of it. We don't understand all the tests and the trials, but there are very few people that I know that can't recognize a test and a trial. At least they can recognize a trial. All the opposites—the sweet and bitter, the good and the bad, the happy and the sad—are recognized within each one of us as a result of causes that interact with us and our circumstances, circumstances that, for the most part, we have chosen or that come about to us because we are where we have chosen to be.

Certain events can be desirable in one moment and undesirable in another moment, even if it the same event. Only when we recognize how this process works, how we can develop it in our own self can we develop any insight into any situation, and be able to ask ourselves: "How am I responding to this test?" You can say, "I wish I didn't have it. This is a really hard test!" But you still have to ask yourself how you are responding to it. "How am I responding to this situation, to our children, to our husbands, our wives, our co-workers, our employees, our employers?" How am I responding? Children, when they are in good moods and playing with each other, everything goes fine. A few minutes later, something happens. There is some irritability. Somebody made a mistake or misunderstood something, misread an intention. Something intervened.

We try and find the causes: "What happened? What happened? Why are you upset? Everything was going fine just a few minutes ago!" In the moment something happened and the focus went to what was wrong. "They said this." "No I didn't. I didn't mean to say that." We try to understand. We try to make amends. We try to use our rationality, we use love and at the end we say, "Give each other a hug. Everything will be alright." It is the same thing in all other aspects of life. Something happens and our faith is tested;

and every time, ultimately, because it is related to what we think is a cause/effect process. It is related to trust, related to submission to Allah.

Understand that there are two sides to everything: the sweet, the bitter; the right, the wrong. That relationship between cause and effect is, in a sense, a unity in itself between two apparent opposites that make a whole. If there is an outer, there is an inner. Something happened: there was cause and it had an effect. Sometimes it reminds us of those kumquats. The skin is sweet and the inside is really sour. Some of us really like them. “Oh, how can you eat those?” “I really love them.” First you get the sweet then you get the sour.

*Remember the story of Zain al-Abudīn? “I went out until I came to this wall and I leaned against it and there was a man wearing two light garments looking at my face and he said to me, ‘Ibn Ali Hussein, what is the matter that I see you sad and depressed? Do you have some grief over this world, provisions from Allah already good or evil?’ I replied, ‘It is not about this that I am sad, but it is as you say. It is the sadness about the Hereafter. It is the promise delivered by the Compelling King, Allah Himself. It is as you say.’ ‘So what is the sadness from? Fearful of a plot from Ibn Zubair?’ The man laughed. ‘O Ibn Ali Hussein, have you seen a man who is fearful of Allah and Allah has not saved him?’ ‘No.’ ‘Have you known a man who has asked Allah (glory be to Him), and was not given what he asked for?’ ‘No,’ I said. Then I looked and there was no one in front of me.*

Now you can look at that in two ways. It could have been some mystical man came and appeared before him. Maybe it was Khidr. Or you can see this as a dialogue within his own self, two parts of his own personality struggling to understand something. Allah rewarded him by answering his own prayer. Do you think that if I pray for \$25,000 today, Allah is going to give me \$25,000 today? I don’t think that is what it means. It

means that you understand that the reward that Allah is giving you is the answer to your prayer. The circumstances that Allah has given you, bitter or sweet, is the answer to your prayer.

Here we also see the example of how minds, even the mind of one who was a great *imam*, can get involved with the every day issues of this world and be fearful of someone plotting against them, forgetting where his protection and where his greatness came from, forgetting about the *ghraib* and what comes from the unseen world. From the unseen world this man appears and reminds him. He became a very happy man again. He became a tranquil man again. This *imam* was at the highest stage of his own possibilities of his own worth. You would think that he would have no doubt left in him. He was of the Ahl al-Bayt. But his sadness was from his concern about another person's capacity to do evil and do harm. He was afraid of the problems that man might bring on his fellow men, and not that he was afraid himself. He was worried about the ignorance that would lead another person into darkness.

So this is his concern. It was not for himself. It was sadness about what he could do for others. The voice of Truth came to him in the form of another man and reminded him that as long as we are aware of the danger, as long as we have *taqwa*, we are safe. Whether it was a physical being that appeared or the knowledge within himself, that's the message. Whenever we truly ask Allah for guidance, Allah will give us guidance. But we have to be ready to accept it. Once the voice was heard in his own heart, it served its purpose and the worry disappeared along with the man who disappeared. If it had not been for the worry, he would not have heard that voice. If it was not for the challenge, if it wasn't for his concern, if it wasn't for his sadness, he would not have heard the voice; therefore his own beliefs would not have been reinforced.

*Imam Jafar Siddiq (ra) grandson of the Prophet (sal) reported once that the Prophet (sal) laughed until his teeth showed and he said, "Do you not ask me*

*what causes me to laugh?” All around him said, “Yes, O Prophet of Allah. Tell us.” “I am surprised at the Muslims, because there can be no decree that Allah can make upon them except a good end of their affairs, yet still the people do not believe.”*

Has much changed? Not much has changed.

*It was revealed by the same person that Allah (swt) revealed to the Prophet Musa (as): “I did not create any creation more loved by Me than My believing bondsmen. I only afflict him for that which is good for him. I restore to him what is good for him, and I am more knowledgeable in him in what makes right his affairs. So let him be patient upon My inflictions. Let him be grateful for all that I bestow upon him. Let him content with My desire. I will then write him among those who are confirmers, those near to Me. If he acts according to what makes Me content and if he obeys My command.”*

So this is the challenge for all of us. Why should we think that the challenge would be less for us than it was for Zain al-Abudīn (ra) or Imam Jafar Sadiq (ra). How arrogant can we be? These are the challenges that Allah (swt) gives to us and the contentment that is in store for us, if we are not lazy and we act upon His command, if we accept our faith and our belief. It is not for us to say, “This is what Allah has given me. This is my lot and it is not enough, and I am going to give up.” [Rather, we should say,] “This is what Allah has given me to discover what is a Muslim, and to act under the condition of how a Muslim should act.”

All of our destinies exist because of the way events in our lives unfold, and how we interact with them. If there were no unfolding of events, then how would we fulfill our destiny. But a real Muslim seeks perfection and Truth behind their destiny, perfection and Truth behind what they are witnessing and living. Each one of us has expectations.

Each one of us has appointments and disappointments. Each one of us has preferences. But if we believe that Allah (swt) is perfect and that His way is perfect, if we have based our belief on past experiences and on the experience of those we know, love and respect, we will know that even if the first impact of a situation is difficult or disagreeable or painful, in the end we will benefit from it. The remedy lies in being patient. If a person brings themselves to a state of real contentment, a real inner contentment, the likelihood of that person seeing the benefit of that situation will be greater.

*It was related that the Prophet Musa (as) said, “My Lord, I am content with Your destiny. You cause the old ones to die and the young ones to continue to live.”*

*Allah, the Majestic One said, “O Musa, are you not content that I am the One Who gives provisions?” And Musa said, “Yes. You are the Best of Guardians.”*

We have to learn to be content with what Allah has given us and gain knowledge from it, indeed, gain wisdom from it. [We have to] understand the balance within ourselves, the balance between this world and the Hereafter, the balance between health and illness, the balance between knowledge and ignorance, the balance between the seen and the unseen, because all of these worlds are unified in this way. The Prophet Musa (as) sees the perfect relationship between cause and effect, the seen and the unseen, and with that understanding, he declares total dependency on Allah and contentment with Allah for all the provisions known to him and for all the ones that are unknown to him, for all the circumstances he knows that have come to him and all the circumstances that may come to him.

Let us all remember that in these circumstances, and in such circumstance, especially in times that are difficult like ours, we have to be patient, *inshā'a-Llāh*, and we have to persevere, *inshā'a-Llāh*, no matter what. This is what we have to do. No one can do it for us. We can say, “I’m really tired today. I don’t have the patience to be patient today. Will you be patient for me?” There is no way it can happen. Every day we repent and

we strive. We repent and we strive. Things happened yesterday that I wish didn't happen. I can indulge myself in that, or I can promise myself that I will make them not happen again, *inshā'a-Llāh*. I don't think any of us are any different. At least we can say that in *adab* on that I am in the good company of Zain al-Abudīn (ra), or Imam Jafar Sadiq (ra) or Prophet Muhammed (sal). We are in the same boat. We need the winds to blow that boat down across the sea.

*Asalaam aleikum.*

Closing duas