

August 21, 2010

Saturday



Title: Reflections on ‘Adl/Justice

DVD title: ‘Adl/– Going beyond Injustice:
Being in Resonance with a Balanced Universe

Opening prayers. *Bismi-Llāhi-r-Rahmāni-r-Rahīm*. We were talking at dinner and I mentioned that Allah said that He would show you the signs on the horizons and within your own self. One of the examples I gave was that I was planning to speak an ‘*adl* tonight, and the prayer for tomorrow is on justice. Of course, Ramadān is a month of signs. In my life, I have been able to see things—not things that are going to happen, although I trained myself to do that at one point when I was teaching about parapsychology, but you get to see the resonance between [things]. Certain things keep coming back over time, and they are signs to you. For example, earlier we were talking about music and the messages in music.

Abul Hasan asked me if the things you were seeing were just there, or were they being created for you when you see them. Both, in a way. Sometimes you are seeing what is there that you never saw before, because you are becoming attuned (especially during Ramadān) to these signs. The question is what are you seeing? You can see the signs of your *nafs* and it can be very disturbing, or you can see the signs of Allah, the Divine Presence, and that is very uplifting. You see the workings of your mind—not just during Ramadān, but especially during Ramadān.

If you are committed to your practices (and the practices make all the difference) and to your sitting, you are going to see Allah and the signs of your commitment all around you. If you are not, then you will see the signs of your *nafs*. That is what is going to happen. I am not saying this out of fear. I am not saying, “fearfully do your practice.” It is just that

the more you do *dhikr*, the more meditation you do, the more you will be aware of the beauty of nature and the blessings of Allah in your life. You will see more of that. They will reveal to you your character and your potential. But if you are not, what you will be seeing is a reflection of your *nafs ammāra*, some of which is always present.

Technically, it is always present. But some of it is very specific to your mental attitude and your choices or non-choices. Mevlana Rumi said,

“If you pass your night and merge it with dawn for the sake of heart, what do you think will happen? If the entire world is covered with the blossoms that you have labored to plant, what do you think will happen? If the elixir of life that has been hidden in the dark fills the deserts and the towns, what will you think will happen? If because of your generosity and love, a few human beings find their lives, what do you think will happen? If you pour an entire jar filled with joyous wine on the heads of those who are already drunk, what do you think will happen? Go my friend. Bestow your love, even on your enemies. If you touch their hearts, what do you think will happen?”

It is a nice translation, I am sure, because it was done by Nader Khalili who does nice translations. Also, from the Mathnawi, Mevlana says, *“What is justice? Giving water to trees. What is injustice? Giving water to thorns. Justice consists in bestowing bounty in its proper place, not on every root that will absorb water.”* So, in the interest of watering trees and not thorns, nor wetting everything that can absorb water, that statement really is something one could ponder and should ponder. It really is a statement about making an effort to obey the will of Allah’s (swt) commands from the ‘*ālam al-amr*—not the commands, “do this, do that”—but the wisdom that comes from the ‘*ālam al-amr*.

For the Sufi—some of whom we can call believers, some of whom we can call *salik*, some of whom we can call *mu’min* and *salik*, some of whom we can call Muslim, some of whom we can call *mu’min* (I will just say ‘for the Sufi.’ You can decide where you are

or where you are not, where you were or where you are or where you are not yet.)—we are, to some degree or another, consciously, gratefully, happily or reluctantly, but, like the fish on the hook fighting to get off of it, we are striving to obey His commands. And, we are also striving to keep other people informed of our own efforts through our activities in this world, through our work, through our words, through our writings, through our service. We are trying to inform other people that there is something very wonderful, just and true in keeping your word to Allah and obeying Allah. After all, if you don't obey Allah (that is what we were talking about earlier), you are out of resonance. That is where we started the conversation.

In music, if you are in tune, you are in consonance; and if you are out of tune, you are in dissonance. If you could take one day of your life, and put it in a musical form, you would know very clearly where you were at. You would hear the diaphanous or the consonance or the dissonance. The melody or it would sound like some kind of a Stravinski 12 tonal piece or something. Indeed, we can do that through *muhasabat*. It may not sound like music to your ears, as we would say. It is good to keep aware of our states. If you could transpose your thoughts, challenges, day to day life into a musical piece, you would definitely know where you were at—by just being able to do that. Anyone who knows how to write music, [knows]. Many years ago I would give Khalil pieces and he would transpose them like that. It was fantastic! He would notate them just like that. If you have the ability, you should do that with your own life. Listen to the symphony of your own life, the *ghazal* that you are writing every day.

Justice, *'adl*, is a very big topic. It is one of the topics that Shaykh Nooruddeen and I are going to discuss in our upcoming series of talks. So I thought I would prepare by thinking about it and talking about it a little bit. You may hear parts of this later on. Allah (swt) says in Qur'an: **“Oh you who believe, stand out firmly for Allah as witness to your fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others for you make you swerve to wrong and**

depart from justice. Be just. That is next to piety, and fear Allah for Allah is well acquainted with all that you do.” (5:8)

Hafez said, *“Show me where it hurts. And every cell in my body burst into tears before his tender eyes.”* To believe in ‘*adl* is really to believe that all actions of Allah are in perfect accordance with justice and perfect reason. Allah is just, which means beyond all injustice. So we hear statements that Allah (swt) does not like cruelty and He does not oppression or doesn’t like any kind of injustice among His servants. But what does it mean? Again, it is the same thing about consonance and dissonance. The discussion about justice among Muslims, historically, has been a big discussion. The Asharites denied Allah’s justice, for example, because they believed that Allah had full power to act and do whatever He likes or doesn’t like, which means that a criminal could be thrown into Paradise and a good person thrown into hell. That is what they believed. At least it is not what I believe. I don’t know what you believe. I don’t believe that.

Most people, I think, understand that it is true that Allah has supreme power, but that supreme power is Allah. That supreme knowledge is Allah. Supreme authority is Allah. It is not that He has something, as though it existed outside of Himself. There is no Himself. It is true, therefore, that what happens, you cannot ultimately challenge the act or the decision, but also the tendency is to take it all out of context. In the context of something much greater that we may not completely understand, and probably don’t, we can watch man’s inhumanity to man, and question why a God or Allah would allow such a thing to happen, and consequently continuously forget that it is not Allah that is letting it happen or not happen. It exists. How it is manifest is part of the choice of human beings, the empowerment of human beings.

I think it is important to know the meaning of justice because sometimes it is confused with equality, for example. A person who does not really understand the correct meaning of justice, might ask questions that are not really correct questions, such as, “If Allah is

just and all his actions are based on justice, then why are some people rich and some people poor, some people healthy and some people sick? We have all heard those questions. If we are in a mood to be obstinate or in a mood to stop making effort, then those questions start to become very important to us, and we forget the answer that we already knew—that it has nothing to do with Allah. It has to do with all the possibilities that Allah created and put into the hands of His creatures. Why are there black people? Why are there white people? Why are there smart people? Why are there stupid people? Why do people die young? Why do people die old? All questions that we have all had, I am sure. They can be confusing to a person. They would call that justice or injustice, if they don't really know what justice means.

It is important to know the meaning of justice, and justice is not equality. These two words have totally different meanings. They are different words; they are not synonymous. Hazrat Ali (ra) gave an accurate definition of justice. He said, "*Justice means to put a thing in its right place.*" Watering the tree, not the thorn. In contrast he said, "*Injustice is putting things not in their due place.*" For example, if you walk into the library with your books in your hands, and you sit on the table and put the books on the chair, they are not in their right place. There is a relationship, of course, between justice and *adab*. Because *adab* often tells you what the right place of something is. If you pay a high wage to someone who is a highly qualified person, and you take someone who is not qualified at all teaching the exact same thing, and you pay them the same wage, that would be injustice. Or if the bad student in the class gets the same grade as the good student in the class, that would be injustice. So you see, it has nothing to do with the principle of equality. In a way you could say that justice means that everyone gets what they deserve. But equality is not the condition for it.

It is also important to realize that the many cases of injustice (and we see them all over the world) come about because people don't live a spiritual life. They don't live by the principles of their own religion, whatever that may be. They often use the religion as an

excuse, but they are not living by it. Allah (swt) is just, but the scope of this justice is not just limited to this world. We say that there is this accounting that will take place—*muhasabah*. Allah is never unjust in the least degree, we are told in Qur'an. Then He says in Suratu-l-Baqarah, **“We shall set up scales of justice on the Day of Judgment so that not a single soul will be dealt with unjustly in the least.”** (2:281) Whether or not you like this idea of scales or you don't like the idea of scales, whether you buy into the Yawmi Qiyama or you don't buy into the Yawmi Qiyama, I think it makes perfect sense to us that somehow the universe [is balanced]. There are statements like “what goes around comes around” because there is some kind of balance that tends to happen; hence, the image of the balance scale in the picture of justice. But then, Allah tells us that the way to justice is through kindness and charity.

“Allah commands justice, kindness, and charity to one's kindred and forbids indecency and oppression.” (16:90) That is why many people believe that *'adl* is *the* or *a* very basic belief in Islam—that there is Divine Justice in the natural system of things. So it is not a one for one, or a tit for tat kind of thing. It is not that there is so much bad in the world that equals a tsunami, or there is so much bad in the world that equals a Katrina. But Imam Ali's (ra) definition of justice makes sense when you look at the laws of nature. In science and astronomy, the exception is when something does not appear to be in its right place. That is the exception. Allah says in Qur'an, **“Everything has its measure, its form.”**

So when things are out of place, we sense it and feel it, just like dissonance music and the example I gave in our conversation earlier. The precise balance of the rotation of our earth around the sun allows us to live. If it was disturbed or any of the planets were disturbed, what we know as the solar system would collapse. This beautiful balance is demonstrated throughout nature through how nature abhors a vacuum and replaces something with the space that is there. I guess, in a sense, this is an example of Divine

Justice. Every atom in the universe has its rotation and has its purpose and has its speed, and can only be utilized under certain circumstances.

We can also see when we disturb the natural order of things, like when we create an accelerator. We accelerate these atoms to high speeds like plutonium, and create ‘weapons grade’ uranium and plutonium. We disturb things, and then we have responsibilities that we don’t know how to handle, because it is out of phase with our capabilities. That is something else I think we need to contemplate about our own selves. When we accelerate things in our own selves, and we make assumptions of things in order to maybe excuse some of the characteristics of our *nafs*, in that disturbance of things, there is potential self-destruction. This is why, in every path, every teacher and every teaching has its form and its practice. It is known that if one follows it, one moves to a higher and higher state, or a deeper and deeper state, because you are coming into more and more resonance. The song that will come out of you on that day will be beautiful.

Though we don’t use the term in this way, it would not be an incorrect from an Islamic and Sufic point of view to say that Divine Justice is found in every atom in the universe because there is balance and harmony. Justice prevails everywhere in the universe—watering trees. Just think about the fact how in nature everything has its right size for its environment and its living conditions. The right living conditions for a flea, the flea has to be a certain size. It is not that the living conditions change, the flea changes—so too with us and anything in this world. If the living conditions are not there, then the animal can become extinct. An elephant needs a lot of grasses to eat. You shrink their natural habitat, they will die out.

So Allah (swt) has created everything in this life with incredible balance. “**He has raised the heavens and set up a standard for everything,**” (55:7) it says in Qur’an. So where do we fit in that? We have to fit in that. Of course, we can talk about how we destroy or

misuse our environment, and how we don't see it. I was having a discussion with someone the other day and the observation was we all become lazy. We leave lights on. We burn up energy. That is okay to have lights on, but we should also be conscious of the environment. We turn to some of the principles that we began with. Use the energy of the sun instead of the energy of the coal. Allah has provided all of that for us, but also has given the ability to misuse it. If we are watering the thorns and misusing it, then we are committing injustice.

If we are committing injustice in our environment, then we will be committing injustice on ourselves. If we are feeding our lower nature and feeding our fears and we are feeding only our desires, if we are feeding our discontent, than that is all we are going to see. Others around us will be hearing static and dissonance. We ourselves will be having all the excuses in the world for being the way we are, and acting the way we are acting, and speaking the way we are speaking, and thinking the way we are thinking that to us it all sounds fine but we know that we are making excuses. Then we are out of sync, out of resonance, and we are committing injustice. If we are not committing an egregious injustice to another human being—though we probably are and we don't know it by hurting someone we love or putting up barriers to understanding—we are contributing to the larger injustices in the world. We are so self-absorbed, we are turning a blind eye to what is happening somewhere else. That would be the grossest thing. We would be turning a blind eye to the genocide that's happening in Africa, or to what's happening in Palestine or to the people of Iran.

We see it, but we don't see it. We hear it, but we don't hear it, because we are so self-absorbed. Self absorbed means we are watering our *nafs ammāra*. We are watering the thorns, and you know what happens. When you get a prick from the thorn, it really hurts badly. There is something in the thorn (maybe some alkaloid or something like that) and if you grab a rose, it will hurt you for days. We have to remember. The Qur'an is really quite a perfect text and tool. Allah says, **“He has raised the heavens and set up a**

standard for everything.” What does it mean to ‘raise the heavens’? Why not just say, ‘set up a standard for everything’? He has lifted up a dimension of reality above this physical world that we can literally look up to, as if it’s up there somewhere. Nobody has actually discovered it up there, though we have sent rockets. It means He has created a dimension between us and the heavens, the earth and the firmament.

This word ‘*adl* really captures the essence of *shar’āh*, the essence of *marifah*, the essence of *haqiqah*. But most important to us is it captures the essence of *tarīqah*. *Marifah* can be just knowledge, and *haqiqah* can be just the truth as it is spoken, but *tarīqah*, coming before these two, makes it your experience. It lifts you to a *maqam*. One word that describes the dominant component or foundational ground for real Islamic values (*akhlaq*) is ‘*adl*. It is an essential part of *akhlaq*. When you are just to yourself, to your loved ones, to your husband, your children, your wife, your brother, and your sister, it means you are watering the tree, not fomenting difficulties. When you are doing that, then that justice creates harmony and peace between people. It is a prerequisite for *adab* and for a larger *adab*, the *adab* of the community itself.

In the Qur’an, Allah (swt) said, “**We sent aforetime Our Messengers with clear signs, and sent down with them the Book and the Balance that men may stand forth in justice.**” (57:25) Historically and religiously, or theologically, Allah sent prophets to establish justice in the world and to end injustice. But behind that is something even greater, which is to say that neither love nor hate can be allowed to compromise what is just. The Prophet (sal) said in a *hadith* narrated by Sayed al Khudri, “***While we were with Allah’s apostle, who was distributing some property, there came Dhul Kuwasiri, a man from the tribe Bani Tamin. He said, ‘O Allah’s Apostle, do justice.’ And the Prophet (sal) said, ‘Woe to you who could do justice if I did not. I would be a desperate loser if I did not do justice.’***” And further, the Prophet (sal) explained by example how it was to do justice, even if it was against loved ones.

A woman belonging to a very prestigious family was arrested for theft. You may remember the story. The case was brought to the Prophet (sal), and it was recommended that she might be spared the punishment for theft. The Prophet (sal) said, ***“The nations that lived before you were destroyed by Allah because they punished the common man for offenses, but let their dignitaries go unpunished for their crimes. I swear by him who holds my life in his hand, that even if Fatima (my daughter) had committed this crime, I would have amputated her hand.”*** He made it clear how it was to establish justice with non-Muslims as well. None of like the idea of amputating the hand, but we sure can look at the world we live in today and see how there is no justice. How people can “find religion” or apologize in some way, and live out for four or five years and then return to the political scene as hypocrites tells you where our society is. Just like if you listen to the song of your day to day life, it tells you where you are.

During the Khalifate of Hazrat Ali, he lost a very valuable coat of mail in the battle of Sifn. He found that it was in possession of a Christian. He asked for the armor back, but the Christian refused. So he filed suit in the court of the Qadi Akufa. When asked to produce witnesses, Ali could only produce two witnesses, so the judgment went against him. The administration of justice ruled against the Khalifa, you realize. Because it did, it so impressed the Christian that he returned the armor, admitted his guilt, and became a Muslim. He saw how fair Islam was. That’s what the Indonesians saw. That’s how Islam came to Indonesia and other places. That same Christian became a martyr in the battle of Nahrawan.

During the time of Hazrat Umar (ra) (you know the story), a woman brought a claim against him. When he appeared before the judge, the judge stood up as a sign of respect to him. Sidna Umar reprimanded him saying, “This is the first act of injustice you did to this woman, standing up for me.” Think about what we sit down for, and what we\ don’t stand up for, because we are so absorbed in our own state and our own situation, our own job, our own good works, our own worries, our own debts, our own fears, our own loves,

our own passions, our own excuses. Just think what we stand up for and what we don't stand up for.

Of course, there are many examples of non-Muslims who understood the importance of justice in Islam. We live in a world today where you get as much justice as you can afford to have, so it is linked with money. It reminds us of the statement by Albert Einstein: "*Academic chairs are many, but wise and noble teachers are few. Lecture rooms are numerous, but the number of young people who genuinely thirst after truth and justice is small.*" Or, "*I traveled the Islamic world and found little Islam. I traveled the Muslim world and found few Muslims.*" I don't remember exactly that the statistic was I saw a year or so ago, but there was 3 times more chance of winding up in a court of law in a law suit than in a hospital. That doesn't mean we are healthy.

There is a core belief in Islam that has another sense to it as a Sufi. That is that Allah is Ahad/One—unity. Unity means absolutely nothing, unless from a Sufic point of view, we understand that unity means harmony and balance. When we look at our own lives, we see what the harmony or balance is or isn't. I will go out on a big limb here and say, if there is lack of harmony and balance in your life, it is because of your bad choices. If there is harmony and balance in your life, it's because of your good choices. The bad choices have to do with your own ego, fears and worries; the good choices have to do with your love, your service, and your piety. Acts of injustice destroy harmony and balance. Doing just acts, watering the tree, does not just keep you balanced, it improves your *akhlaq*. It deepens your understanding. It clarifies your questions. It heals your illnesses, and makes Ramadān more meaningful for us today.

Those people who have the best *akhlaq* we say are the closest to the Prophet (sal) on the Day of Judgment. Well, do you do it for that reason? No. There are plenty of examples of doing things for one reason, and getting benefits in another way. If you don't get excited, and you are going through security in the airport, and you are very calm and very

nice, you're not going to be pulled aside and questioned (unless you are a Middle Easterner!). In other words, our behavior, our sense of justice has other benefits to it that we don't even see. Allah happens to tell us what they are, and then people say, "I'm going to do it because of that. I'm going to be a good person because of that." But to be a good person because of anything, you still have to put the effort into being a good person.

In this month of Ramadān – and of course, it's only important in this month of Ramadan, right? -- we come to understand that if we are suffering injustice or feel we are; or if we are imposing injustice, we have to eliminate certain things in our own life. We have to eliminate feelings of anger, resentment, doubt, envy. That, said in the negative, is a way of upholding justice. Not only does peace come to you or me when we do that, it comes to the society. More important than that, not only does it come to us outwardly, it comes to our soul and makes us feel close to that Divine Creator. When people say, "I turned it over to Allah and all the anxiety went out of me," it means peace comes to the soul because you have eliminated certain reactions, certain attitudes. That's more important than what you went out to get. What you got rid of is much more important.

The next time we meet, I'd like to talk about how to improve the lack of justice within our own self, and by extension, our society. Of course, the first thing you realize is when you act justly, you become just. You behave in a just manner. We'll talk about that some other time, *inshā'a-llāh. Asalaamu aleikum.*