

September 10, 2010

Khutbah



Title: We Are Meant To Be Different

DVD title: No Compelling in Islam: Differences are Natural

Athan. Opening duas. *Alhamdulillah*, it's a wonderful day, a beautiful day. We get to gather twice today, by the grace of Allah (swt), by making this Eid on a Friday, *alhamdulillah*. Allah (swt) says in the Holy Qur'an:

There is no compulsion in religion. The path of guidance is clear from that of error. And whoever rejects the idols and securely believes in Allah has grasped a firm handhold that will never break, and Allah is hearing and knowing. Allah is the protecting friend of those who securely believe. He takes them from the shadows into the light, and those who cover up the truth, they are the protectors of the idols and he will take them out of the light and into the shadows. They are the companions of the fire. They are in it forever.
(2:256-257)

My brothers and sisters, on this wonderful Eid al Fitr, it is good for us to remember that we are of one community. **“Had it not been for a word that had gone forth from our Lord, it had been judged between them in respect to what they differ.”** (10:19) It always serves us well for us to review and remember basic principles of Islam. The principle that there is no compelling joined with the idea that people are different—different in following Allah's will in the way that life is presented to them.

First let us understand what compelling means. It does not mean trying to force someone through some kind of liturgical, philosophical, intellectual or religious argumentation to become a Muslim or a Christian or a Jew or whatever. There is one way that is preaching

to people by a kind of evangelical or pentacostal means that we find in this country and in the Muslim world. Christians have for many, many years used those means. In the Muslim community is a similar scene, though maybe not quite as intense for many. They tend to first preach to their own people, and then second to non-Muslims. The idea is to encourage people, but sometimes it is a very compelling or forceful argument.

Compelling can take other forms. Sometimes compelling can be through economic means, through material ways. Many are the stories of Christian missionaries who have gone from here to Africa and drilled fresh water wells in villages, and said, “We’ll put a well in, put sewage treatment in, and in appreciation you should become Christian.” The people say, “Sure, of course! I’ll be whatever you want me to be.” I was in India many years ago. We would go into a village and see pictures of Ganesha, Vishnu, Shiva, and Jesus. I asked, “Why do you have all these gods with Jesus?” They’d say, “Well, they’re all gods.” The missionaries come into the village and say, “Ooo, you have to take those down and leave only Jesus up.” They say, “Why? They are all the same.” “Oh, no, no, no – you’ll be in trouble with God if you do that.”

The missionaries would say, “We’re here because our God sends us here to do this. Here, have some fresh water.” I remember one of our staff members (he was a customs official from Ghana) told how these missionaries came to his village and dug a well. Everybody became a Christian, but when the well broke, they couldn’t get the missionaries to come back and fix the well. They were somewhere else converting people. They didn’t have it in their plan to come back and fix wells—only to drill wells and make Christians. This is symbolic of the *niyyat* that was not made, as to the *niyyat* that could have been made. I don’t mean to be focusing on Christians; these just happen to be Christian stories. I can tell you enough stories about Jamiyat Islami, Tabliki Dirmayat, Hizbul Tahrir, and other people who are forcing and forcing religion. I want to show you something. This is show and tell. Everybody open your mouth. You can’t

get this (holds up Qur'an) down somebody's throat. Even a small copy won't go down easily.

There are other means also of compelling. There are ways of compelling through humiliation. There are ways of compelling through love and affection. We say that we win the hearts and minds of people, and they feel compelled from within. You lose your heart and mind if you feel compelled to compromise your values or your understanding. No, [one must be] compelled from within. This is how Islam came to Indonesia, and why Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world.

That's why, for the most part – except recently, unfortunately – for hundreds of years people in Indonesia loved one another, respected one another, worked with one another and celebrated each other's festivals. They enjoy the beauty of Diwali and the Eid, and of all these festivals. Why? They are strong in their *iman*. You don't have to feel threatened if you are strong in your *iman*. You only feel threatened when you are weak in your *iman*. Is it good to be a Muslim? “Ohhh. There is a lot of trouble in the world today. It is time to become a Buddhist. Let's get assimilated. We should become Bahai” or whatever. But now the world has reached out. Some poison has dripped off the tongue of certain places and poisoned people to fear this person and those things. That is too bad.

We must come to understand that *dawa* is responding to a person's calling out to you to say, “Oh, what are you? You are Muslim. I'd like to know more about that because you are a good person. You helped me and helped my family. You live a good ethical and moral life. What is it that you do? Give me a call some time, I'd like to talk to you.” That's *dawa*. *Dawa* is not taking this book and forcing it down someone's throat, or having a bunch of kids in a *madrassa* memorizing and memorizing, and they have no idea what it means. But, *alhamdulillah*, my experience with Indonesia is that the children

do know what it means. Thank God we've had a lot of experience, because it's a good model.

Compelling is not just standing there with a Bible or Qur'an or some other religious tool and convincing somebody of something. Very early in revelation, Allah (swt) revealed to the Prophet Muhammed (sal) that this is not the way of Islam. I'm not going to talk about Muslims who do not understand that; but about those who do understand it as we understand it. We are not people who compel people in religion. **“The right direction is distinct from error, and he who rejects false gods and believes in Allah has grasped a firm handhold that will never break.”** What does that mean? It means that we have a great personal responsibility to be a believer within our own rights, to give ourselves the opportunity to use our own minds, our intellect, our heart, our soul, our value system, our culture, to support our values, our beliefs, our religion, our *dīn*. When we do that, then it's automatic that we reject what is wrong. We don't have to think about it. You know what to believe in that is right. That is the firm handhold, *alhamdulillah*. That's your default if you know.

Why I link these two quotations about 'being one community but different' with the first one is important. Islam is a religion of nature, and we are here in a very spring-like fall. It's not quite fall, still in summer. Grateful for the bounties and beauties Allah (swt) has given us, such as weather like this, we may even deceive ourselves into believing that winter is not going to come. We may think that this will be the year we skip over winter. We will become more alive in ourselves, instead of going into the winter sleep that nature goes into. The nature we see around us is the same as the nature within us that calls us to be consistent, to cycle through different periods every year in our mentality, and in our life. It is just like nature cycles that remind us that one cycle follows another, and we really are governed by laws that are beyond our control. It reminds us that we have to follow certain laws, which make certain demands on *our* nature, and we have nothing that

we can do to stop that. *alhamdulillah-Llāh*. We live our lives thinking we can control everything, but in fact of course we cannot. Nature teaches us that.

If we can find a way not to be corrupted or soiled by the vicissitudes of daily life and the ravages of time, by the destructive qualities of nature within society, by distraction, delusion, impulses and emotions, by impulses of our fears, of our desires in the society in which we live, then we can begin to really understand the truth and the essence, the Haqq that is Allah—not the Haqq of Allah, but the truth that *is* Allah, that *is* al-Islam. To do that, we have to understand what we call our nature to goodness. Our good nature, we say in English, our sweetness, which we see in the spring of the year, for example. The fruit and bounty that comes after that is the same as the call within us to do good and follow our interests, as long as those interests are for the betterment of ourselves and of our community, others, the *ummah*.

Last week we walked out into the yard. It's fall. Pears are on the tree. Guess what else? There were flowers on the tree. The tree likes giving pears so much it wants to do it again. But we are not in Indonesia, so we only have one growing season. The fact is, the tree even wants to give more when it has bounty. This is what it is saying to us: it was a good year; I'm going to try to give more to you. There needs to be no coercion. That is of course quite natural. But we have to understand what coercion is and is not. The winter is not coercion; it's a season. It comes naturally. It's part of the natural process of life just like we go through the different stages of our life. Dr. Montessori tells us there is a stage from 0 – 3, 3 - 6, 6 – 9, 9 – 12, and 12 – 18. Then there are different stages in our adulthood.

Those challenges we meet in the world, the opportunities, distractions, and positive and negative aspects of life are part of a natural cycle. Seeds do not have to be compelled or coerced out of the ground. Birds do not have to be coerced to migrate, or flowers to bloom, or fruit to ripen. It's part of the natural cycle. Coercion is unnatural. Love is

natural; love is not coercion. Care and concern is natural; it is not coercion. These are the natural things in the hearts of all human beings who exist: black, white, north, south, yellow, whatever language or culture. We find it hard to find any human society in which these are not the natural aspects of life. So too, individuals only need to be convinced of the truth and righteousness of the Message of Allah (swt) through the Prophet (sal) and the *awliyā*. It is not just [learning] how universal the message is, but allowing it to become personal, which is not to have a preconceived resistance or interpretation or repulsion to things that just don't seem to fit in our life in the moment, but to have a personal openness.

Once the way of truth is known and has been explained clearly, sweetly, and plainly, and differentiated from wrong ways of life, wrong actions (*maruf* and *munkar*), [one can freely choose]. The Prophet (sal) said, “***Speak to people in a way they can understand.***” [These ways] are obvious to most human beings, except those who are overly distracted, who are overly selfish, who are opportunistic or fearful. [Once the truth is known], then it is for individuals themselves to find restraint of their free will, alongside the meaningfulness of their *qadr*, of their faith. I have spoken many times on this subject. For an honest individual, it's very important to decide which way you choose to take. Whether or not one takes the way of the truth and what is good, what is Allah's experience for the *ummah*, one needs to allow themselves to be convinced what the truth is.

For all of us, when we see around us the nature, and understand the cycles of nature, when we look inside of ourselves and take the time to see the nature of our own beings, the compelling message within ourselves, there may very well be messages some of us don't want to hear. There will be rain and ice and sluch tomorrow; it will last all week, and the roads will be dangerous. It's part of the natural cycle, but we don't want to hear it. I have to drive tomorrow; I don't want to hear it! The compelling message is to accept the advice, believed in what has been told to us, guided to us by Allah in Qur'an,

by our Prophet (sal) and by the *shuyukh*. It is a message which I firmly believe is not owned by any one group, any one religion, but has become very clear in Islam—clarified.

If on the other hand, people are very doubtful, caught in divisiveness that comes from cultural differences or circumstances, if those people come and listen, but they are overwhelmed by their ethnicity or nationality, or if someone is manipulating their minds for their own selfish needs, then they may choose something else. Their loss is theirs, or their gain is theirs. We certainly see that people are at a loss. We listen to ourselves and say, “I could be doing a much better job if I was acting in a better way, if I understood things in a better way, if I wasn’t very silly about this (like the children can be silly at times), if I was more patient, less angry, less intellectual and more in my heart.” There are many things we can say to ourselves. It is not to convince anyone else, but to convince ourselves that inside of us is a template for truth; it’s called our *fitrah*.

Sometimes even though you know the truth, it takes courage to follow it. People say, “I follow the law of my own inner nature. If I follow the Shar’iah, the Hadith and the path of the Prophet (sal) then I might not find my own nature.” That’s just not true. That’s how you find your own nature. A person would choose a good way, a beneficent way. In other words, they would choose what is natural. You can say that’s my opinion, but it’s backed up by thousands of years of teachings and teachers from many different paths.

What is for sure is this: We have to know very clearly what our words, our attitudes, what our effect does in the eyes of others who are seeking. We have to, by definition, be a person who is seeking, who is really seeking, looking at, not just glossing over. We [have to be a seeker who] really accepts that we have a responsibility to examine, question, weigh and measure, but with an attitude to learn, not to challenge—just to learn. [A real seeker has to] take a look at good examples, to see if our eyes are bright and our face is bright, if we have good thoughts and hopes in our hearts that are reasonable, and if we include others in our hopes and thoughts, not just for our selfish needs. We have to

consider the poor, the needy, the orphans, the destitute, the hungry, those impoverished. Even brilliant and wealthy individuals [can experience destitution] if, all of a sudden, a flood comes and they are all in tents in the mud. Whether in Pakistan today or Aceh a few years ago, it doesn't matter. No one asks, "Are you a rich person or poor person, educated or not educated, powerful or not?" The laws of nature make everything equal.

And then what? Then you have to submit and embrace trust and surrender and love, and have concern and care for others. There are many proofs and arguments that can be made to support my claims today, and convince one of the truthfulness of them. But we all know that when we open our eyes and our ears, [after having] **"eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear,"** when we have eyes that see and ears that hear, things change. We have to demand of ourselves those things that are asked of us, that are suggested to us, whether it is praying five times a day or fasting during Ramadān. These are not the demands of some hostile agent who demands something of us else or we will be punished. They are demands that are good for us, like a parent insisting that the child have good *adab*, or insisting that the child eat something, or go to bed at a good time, or get their homework done, until the child insists it of themselves, because they know it is the right way. They know that is the right thing.

Health, education, knowledge, good *adab*, kindness to one another, these are good things because they reflect our *fitrah*. We can spend 20, 40, or 50 years thinking about this journey, that it is something to be convinced about. "If I spend enough years with the Shaykh, he will convince me." No. When your journey begins you believe. Is it before you are convinced? No. The 20 year journey towards truth is a journey that begins with belief and faith. Whether it's 20, 30, or 50 years doesn't matter. You shouldn't be counting the years. You should be looking at the intensity of our capacity to believe and do good works and act.

Allah says, **“If We had willed, We certainly could have brought every soul to true guidance.”** (32:13) Clearly this verse explains that there is a principle working behind human creation, and that’s Allah’s will. **“Had it been Our will to give you all guidance, We could have guided you even before this. But We did not do so, because We had a different plan for you.”** That tells us something else. The plan was one thing, and Allah changed the plan. If Allah (swt) is flexible, we should be flexible. Isn’t that true?

In Sura Yunus, Allah tells us, **“In the beginning, all people were one community, but afterwards they invented different creeds and ways. Had not your Lord ordained a decree, that thing in which they differed would have been resolved.”** We all grow and make choices, and we should make the right choices. It’s in our hands. The message is to worship Allah, keep away from that which is evil, keep away from those things which would coerce you, and allow yourself to be brought near to Allah (swt) Who is near to us. *Inshā’a-LLāh*, it’s a message which we can try to remember along with so many other messages. *Asalaamu aleikum.* (Duas).

SECOND KHUTBAH During this month of Ramadān we have known people who have passed. There has been sickness among us. There have been pains and aches; there have been questions and doubts, many things—these gifts, these flowers. We ask You Allah to bring the souls of those who have passed near to You. We ask of You for those poor souls who, during this month of Ramadan, found their homes, livestock and grains floating down the river to give them sustenance, O Allah (swt). Help them to have the true spirit to rebuild. For those of us who have suffered, really little compared to that, we ask You to give us the strength, so that we have no weaknesses, and so that we can serve You better. For those who are among us who fasted inwardly, but were not able to fast outwardly, we ask You Allah that next year, *inshā’a-LLāh*, You give them the opportunity and health to fast outwardly, and if not, to deepen their inward fast. Your Hand is the

hand over all things. You are the One Who can make things easy and bring serenity into our hearts and bodies. We beseech You with a faith that is everlasting, a submissive heart, beneficial knowledge, certainty that is genuine, religion that is straight, well-being that is free from affliction, continued well being; and for all that, we are thankful. So we ask You for thankfulness for that well-being. *Amin.*