

September 24, 2010

Khutbah



Title: [The Need for Tolerance and Gratitude in the World Today](#)

DVD title: The Door of Tolerance in Islam:
Letters of the Prophet and the Khalifas and other Stories

Opening duas. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an,

And for those who strive for us, We shall surely guide them to our ways, for surely Allah is with those who excel in doing good. (29:69)

Allah also says in Suratu Saba:

They made for him what he willed of sanctuaries and statues, cooking pots like watering troughs and cauldrons firmly anchored. O family of Daoud! Work in thankfulness, and surely few of my worshipers are truly thankful. (34:13)

My dear brothers and sisters, we find ourselves always coming together on these Fridays with news of more intolerance. Of course, the news is filled with intolerance toward Muslims these days, and then there is the news of intolerance among Muslims toward Muslims from other parts of the world. We should take our guidance from the Qur'an, which should be in our hearts immutable, and not affected by time. We should be thankful to Allah (swt), and we should remember that it is in the hearts of the believers that is found the peace and understanding necessary to have that gratitude.

There are guidelines for us as we look a little at ourselves and toward the world in which we live. I think we cannot let go of the latest examples of the problems we face in the

world. We look at the newspaper, turn on the tv, or look at our computers for the latest news that is going on in the Muslim world and the US. Of course, we come across age-old stories of anger and hypocrisy and politicization and the misuse of religion. As Muslims and students of Tasawwuf, we need to look very deeply and sincerely into the world in which we live, but in a slightly different way. We are fully aware of the hypocrisy in the world around us, we are also fully aware that hypocrites can say good words. Yesterday, for example, Ahmadinejad, a lying killer, murdering *munāfiq* (in my humble opinion) says all these wonderful words about protecting women while they are killed in the prisons of Iran. Or he speaks about the peaceful use of nuclear energy, while he goes about creating nuclear bombs. I don't want to give him this much time in quoting him, just to say all around us are hypocrites.

The hypocrisy doesn't stop at the doors of Islam, but enters into the doors of Islam. We cannot hide behind the supposed facts that are quoted and say, "The ideas are good but the deliverer is bad." No, the message becomes polluted by the messenger. We have to go very far back to a time in the 7th century when the Prophet Muhammed (sal) sent a charter of freedom to monks in St. Catherine's monastery in Sinai. Here we see the true nature of Prophet Muhammed (sal). I want to read to you what the Prophet sent to the monks.

This is a message from Muhammed Ibn Abdullah, as a covenant to those who adopt Christianity near and far. We are with them. Verily, the servants, my helpers and my followers and I defend them, because Christians are to us, citizens. By Allah, I hold out against anything that displeases them. No compulsion is to be on them. Neither are their judges to be removed from their jobs, nor their monks from their monasteries. No one is to destroy a house of their religion, or damage it or carry anything from it to the Muslims's houses. Should anyone take any of these, he would spoil God's covenant and disobey His Prophet. They who are my allies have my secure charter against all that they hate. No one shall force them to travel

nor oblige them to fight. The Muslims are to fight for their rights. Even if a female Christian is married to a Muslim, it is not to take place without her approval. She must never be prevented from visiting her church to pray. The churches are to be respected. They are neither to be prevented from repairing them nor breaking the sacredness of their covenant. No one from the nation of Muslims is to disobey the covenant to the Last Day.

It's a very appropriate message for today. It should be well-distributed, actually. There is another story we are familiar with.

Sidna Musa overheard a shepherd boy saying to Allah, "Come and sit by my hut. I will cook for you some rice, because that's all I have. You can sit on my three-legged stool. I will clean Your feet and comb Your hair, and free Your hair of lice and bugs." Musa said to this young boy, "Don't you know who you are talking to? How can you speak to disrespectfully to Allah! Do you think Allah has hair like you, that you can comb lice out of His hair like you have it in your hair?" The shepherd boy was very dejected and very sorry, weeping. Musa felt very good that he had taught him a lesson. Allah came to Sidna Musa and said, "How dare you speak to those who love Me in this way! I am in the heart of My lover. Whatever the one who loves Me thinks of Me, that is what I am; and if the person who loves Me thinks I have dirty hair, I have dirty hair. If the person who loves Me thinks I like rice, that's what I like. How can you, Musa, say these things to one who loves Me? Go back to him and apologize. Tell him that Allah told you this, and that He loves him and will come to him whenever he wants."

I've embellished it a little bit, but that's the traditional story of Musa and the shepherd. There are certain things we have to remember and speak about. One is of the sacredness of the sincerity of the believer. There is no end to our working on our sincerity, or to Allah's mercy and love that makes our sincerity something quite sacred to us. To do that,

we really have to have good intentions. During Ramadān, we have good intentions; but now it is after Ramadān. It is Shawwal still. We have to make our intentions last. Because Islam is such a flexible and open system as we see, it gives us the opportunity to think about something we should like to change in ourselves or become, or see an image of ourselves we are happy with and know that others might be happy with. We have to ask ourselves the question, “What is it that blocks it from us?” We have to work the problem backwards. What is it that keeps us from doing these good things, from thinking this way?

We are going to right our intentions. “I am not going to be so judgmental. I will hold my tongue. I will not speak as much,” or whatever. But you have no image of yourself as not being judgmental until you make the effort. Somehow you know intellectually that you are judgmental, that you speak too much, or you say things incorrectly, or speak too quickly, or burden yourself and others. Maybe you have thought it. But along with that, you have to see yourself in the way you want to be. You have to ask yourself, what is it that blocks me? Then you have to have an image of yourself as being unblocked from the problem. Take that along with the other instructions that come to you regularly from me, and to me. If the *niyyat* is created around the image, it is possible that you will see yourself in that situation before you know it. Sure, you have to ask yourself with blocks it, so that you can see the block every time, and know where you are coming from, so you can change the direction you are coming from, and change the direction you are going to.

There are 1.6 billion Muslims in the world by name. Of course, nobody knows how many [real] Muslims there are. There may be hundreds of millions of people who will fast during the month of Ramadān, but who knows they are fasting but Allah? It’s important to know why you choose to do what you do. I remember that during the month of Ramadān, we talked about praying at night. It’s never too early, never too late; you stay up and turn your attention toward Allah. Why does it stop after Ramadan? Why don’t we take the essence of it and bring it into the rest of our year? All around us,

especially those who work with people who are not Muslims, we realize that people don't really understand Islam, or why we do what we do. And most of them are afraid to ask.

They read in the newspaper and hear on the television about the Muslims, and they throw us all into one big pile. Then there are people who are pre-disposed to understand, like the ones we visited the other night for dinner. I venture to say they never thought us to be Hizbul Tahrir, or Tabliki Jumayyad, or Jamia Islamia. They never had that in their minds. Why? Because they know we couldn't possibly be. How would they know that? They know you cannot label people just by the name of their religion. They have heard good things about us. They know there is a community of good people. Then when we go and visit them, they are assured by our presence, *alhamdulillah*. We are just poor *fuqara*. It's important to think of what works for us, that poverty of spirit, that love of Allah, and the service that we do.

We have our identity in which we are absolutely free to be whoever and whatever we want to be, and then we have the wisdom to choose what is best to be. We have freedom to choose, and the basis upon which we choose is the most important thing. We choose on the basis of Islam. We choose on the basis of our family culture. We choose on the basis of our sense of service to humanity, and on the basis of our belief in the essential goodness that lies within our own selves—to be the best person we can be, the best Muslim we can be, the best Sufi we can be. So we don't lose our identity. Of course, we all have a second identity that people see in us, and we hope these two identities don't conflict with each other. Maybe someone sees us as a worker, someone else as a neighbor. They should be consistent. It's important to realize and not hide behind or use any excuses. People hide behind the flag, wrapping themselves in the flag and do all kinds of terrible things in the name of patriotism.

I think it is important to encourage people to understand Islam, to understand us as individuals. At the same time, I feel it is just as important for us to go out and do the

work that we do, be the people we are, and let them ask: who are these people who do this good work? Let them read the bios, see our children, and hear the talent that comes from here. Let them see the beauty of our land, how we keep our homes and our land, if they happen to come and visit. To encourage people to understand what Islam is, is to encourage people to understand what are the values and qualities of their own religion and self. We were out the other night for dinner on Wednesday to this Episcopal church, and we met good Christians, *alhamdulillah*. What made them good? Their hospitality, their desire to meet, the conversation that was held, the good *adab*, the kindness that was shown to each other, and even the tears in the eye of the pastor. People to people.

I remember when we had Tom Johnston speak at our Legacy meetings. He always says the most important thing is people to people, meeting people all over the world. It's true. It's the most important thing for gaining understanding . We should look to do that on a regular basis, but we can't spend our lives doing that. We have to spend our lives doing what we do, and doing it in the best way we could do it. Encourage people to ask question. Encourage our own children to ask questions. We don't go search out people who have questions, but we meet every day people who have questions. We don't wear our religion on our sleeves, but we also don't hide it.

It's very important to understand that the best way to combat the *munāfiqūn* in Islam, to combat the prejudices within society today, is through education and being good examples. We should proudly be who we are. We should say to people, "This is why I do what I do, because I am who I am." It's also important to realize that this thing we call Islam comes from within our own hearts and souls. It is not something that is forced out upon us. It is something that resonates with what is in our *fitrah*. So when you hear about it, you say, "Oh, that sounds good. That sounds right to me." To be compassionate, merciful, kind, loving, tolerant, patience, understanding, to persevere, to see the beauty in nature, to evoke goodness from people, and give people good direction and right actions, to be an example—these are all attributes of Allah (swt), and they resonate with us.

I will never stop saying it, and you will never stop hearing it as long as I'm alive. This is where our attention should be. Our attention should be there whether we are speaking to Muslims, as Muslims, or non-Muslims. The Prophet (sal) came to teach that every person is responsible to Allah for their beliefs, and that no human being had the right to persecute or question another human being's beliefs. They don't have to account for their actions to any other human being, only to God/Allah whether Muslims, Christians, Jews, or whoever. On a personal level, we may have strong feelings about certain topics. I wrote a letter today to a man who I knew many years ago; he has a blog and wrote a thing trying to debunk 9/11 and all that. He's one of the conspiracy people. He's an intelligent man, and I wrote him a letter today because he was praising Ahmadinejad, or referring to him. I said, "How can you do that? It's like inviting Hitler to open up a synagogue. You can't do that. The man is a killer, a murderer. Anything that comes out of his mouth would denigrate what you are trying to do." I don't necessarily believe what he's saying, though I understand it. But why would he put himself in a position to quote a person who has no morality, no ethic, and no character?

We have to be very careful: how committed we are and who we reach out to. Let's remember that Sidna Umar, and all of the Sahabah and the *khalifas* had a real understanding. There may be historical problems and resentments, but there is a letter that Sidna Umar wrote to the head of the Zoroastrians in Persia. I'll read the letter to you:

Verily, I have made you safe with regards to your lives, property, wives and prosperity. I have granted you the promise of God and His protection, as well as the protection of His Prophet (may God bless him and keep him). And [I have] ordered those among the Muslims faithful to their creed to obey God and His Prophet, and also the rulers of the provinces, commanders of the truth fighting in the cause of Allah, and the commanders of the garrisons and the frontier regions to that effect, that they must protect and defend you, show you kindness and

goodwill, remove oppression from you. I have abolished the head tax payable by yourselves, your children, and your descendents, and also royalties for your cows. I have made you absolute masters of your houses of worship, the Zoroastrian fire temples, which are built for yourselves, all endowments, lands and properties belonging to them, as well as other grants and estates and necessary repairs. I sanction the custom, current among your community, according to which every man adherent to the Zoroastrian religion pays yearly as a tax 1 dirham to the head-man from amongst yourselves, who is charged with religious authority over your community, as well as adjudicates the causes that arise amongst yourselves.

I have made inheritable property according to Zoroastrian creed, but themselves of mixed birth to pass to the head of your religious community. I have heard the apostle of Allah (swt) saying, "People descending from the parents of two religions do not inherit." All this I said to you when I satisfied myself as to your position in your community, and the chieftanship of it. Also your remaining is conducive to this benefit. I decided this when I realized your sincerity in counsel, your devotion and affection for the people of your religion. It behooves the faithful men and women professing Islam that they should defend Zoroastrians concerning whatever is perpetuated of the Zoroastrian customs. They should not impose claims of their own invention or restriction. They must be generous, and generous among the Zoroastrians and not condone their faults. They should never, as long as Zoroastrians exist, demand head taxes from them. The Muslims should not compel them to change their religion according to the will of Allah (the Blessed, the Most High). There is no compulsion in matters of religion, only expiation of the difference between the right way and error.

That's history. That is what was written. It is not what was lived. It is important to go back and remind these crazy people, this is what was written by Hazrat Umar, who they don't like particularly. But this is what was written. It was written because it is the truth.

This is what Islam should be. This is what every religion should be. That is the intent. It is the way of Islam. It would be wonderful if we could resurrect Hazrat Umar just to teach those crazy mullahs something, too. We have to understand that, unfortunately, time warps many things. The Prophet Muhammed (sal) put universal tolerance of religion as the most important practice, and warning about the protection of life, property, and religious belief and culture. No conquering race or faith has given to its subjects a nobler guarantee than we found in the words of the Prophet (sal). He said to the Christians and Sinai and the surrounding territory what I read to you. And look what time has done.

The security of God and the pledge of His Prophet are extended to the lives, religion, and property to the present and as well as the absent and others besides. There shall be no interference with the practice of their faith or observances, no change in their rights and privileges. No bishops shall be removed from his bishopry and no monk from his monastery, no priest from his priesthood. They shall continue to enjoy everything great and small. No image or cross shall we destroyed, and they shall not oppress nor be oppressed. They shall not practice the rites of blood vengeance as in the days of ignorance. No tithes shall be levied for them, nor shall they be required to furnish provisions for our troops.

Letter after letter by the Prophet (sal) and the *khalifs* who followed him to this end... a letter to the Nestorians at the time of the Prophet. Even the Christian fathers discussed the merits of Islam and Muslims. The Muslims gave them hospitality, and when the Christians remained there several days, there came Sunday, the day of their Sabbath, and they were permitted to pray. For Muslims, the whole earth is a mosque, but the Christians had to find a church to pray in, but there was no church to be found. The Prophet (sal) came to the rescue and offered them his mosque, the very house of Allah, the holy house. It became the house of God for the Christians, but today Christians are not allowed to

pray in Medina, and they are not allowed in Mecca. **“He begets not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him.”**

A place of worship becomes a place of worship for those who believe in the begotten one. This kind of benevolence, kindness, and love could not but help at the time to create a dam against religious persecution in Islam. It would do the same thing today. We have to ask ourselves, what is in our hearts toward one another? At the same time, we see that there has been created so much fear. So often good people create fear in those who have evil in their hearts, and often a good example makes us uncomfortable. That fear has lasted to today, and though it is true and undeniable that some Christians have suffered at the hands of individual Muslims, one has to remember the time when Islam had total control over millions of Christian lives, and only a handful of individuals suffered instances that could be considered breaking of the law.

Just as we have crimes today, among us there are over 2 million people in prison in the US alone. A retarded woman was put to death last night in the state of Virginia, which has the second highest number of executions in the US. The fact is, almost 1% of the population of this country is in jail, and 60% of those are African-American, unfortunately. We can make a case that it is a racist reality. We certainly have seen the ugly face, and tasted the ugly taste of racism in our country recently, and see it every day. We know these problems are mostly social and economic issues and political manipulations. They are like cast issues in other countries; the darker the skin color, the less important people are.

Every society has people who break the law. Every society has bigotry and prejudice. Every family has it to some point. We need to be positive and affirm the truth that is Islam. That's why the statutory claims of Islam are very clear on this point, and leave no possibility of doubt that such intolerance would not be permitted. Remember the story of the Prophet (sal) punishing the son of his own governor? In a world today that is

supposed to be very tolerant and educated and illuminated what has gone wrong? One thing is (if you've seen the news, or bumper stickers on Christians' cars today) how "tolerance is weakness." One can understand why people say religion is the cause of misery in the world. The fact that Balkan states existed proves a great deal about the tolerance in the Muslims as well as the ability to live in peace with others up until the early 90's. Or we can look at democracies like India where there is communal violence, but where people live in harmony for the most part, or in Europe. We see what happens there. Things have to change. We have to be grateful for the blessings of our faith, and give manifold thanks to Allah.

You should consider that if you have been created at the very beginning of this world, and would sing praises of the blessings of Islam to eternity, you still would not have cancelled the debt of gratitude incumbent upon you for the blessings of Islam.

A Sufi once prayed to Allah for many favors, and Allah granted him every one he asked for. Then a decree came in an assembly of thousands of scholars. The decree said, "I have granted him many favors, yet he has not thanked me for them. If, in his whole life he had thanked me even once, he would not have had the blessings snatched away from him. Losing favor once granted is the most difficult of all punishments to bear.

Very few of us are grateful enough. So let's try to be grateful, to be merciful and to reach out and reach in. A person can be generous even though they have little; they can be merciful even though they are in pain; they can be forgiving even when they have anger; They can have a good personality even when things are bothering them and their life is short, the way is difficult and the mountain is high. It takes a long time to climb the mountain. The fact is, whenever Allah wants a servant to pass along a difficult way, Allah makes it easy for him. **"Inna ma'al usri usra."** *Asalaamu aleikum. Du'ās.*

O Allah. Some of the people in our community are ill, some are traveling. We ask You for the healing of the ill and the safety of those who travel. We ask You, Allah (swt), to keep the rest of us well and healthy so that we continue to serve You. We are thankful and grateful to Allah for the healing You have sent, and for the safety that You have given. We should learn to recognize what has come to us, and not just what hasn't. We ask You, Allah, to increase the yield of our hearts and our hands and our crops. We ask You, Allah (swt), to send Your merciful blessings upon those who have angst or worry or fear. Give us life that is long enough to serve You properly, and health to go along with that and mental clarity. *Amin.*

SECOND KHUTBAH *Du'ās,*