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Khutbah



Title: Enslaved to the World or to Allah?

DVD title: [Struggling with Burdens and Tests in Life](#)
As a Servant of Allah, or a Slave to the World?

Opening *du'ās*. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, in Sura al-Insan:

Truly, We have prepared for the deniers of truth, chains, fetters and fire.

Again He says in the same *surah*:

Truly, We have sent down to you the Qur'an as a revelation, given over time. So be patient with the judgment of your Lord and do not follow the willful wrongdoer from among them, or the ungrateful denier. And remember the name of your Lord morning and night, and in part of the night prostrate to Him and glorify Him throughout the lengths of the night. Truly, those who are unmindful of Allah love this fleeting life and scatter behind themselves all thoughts of a grievous day.

Asalaamu aleikum. This juxtaposition of guidance and warning comes throughout the Qur'an. Here, Allah is saying there is a reward for us if we strive during our time upon this earth. We will find acceptance for our efforts. I tend to see it as a sort of tuning. It is just as if you hear something beautiful, some beautiful musical instruments or something sung by a beautiful voice, and a doorway in your heart opens. You receive something more than a text or a terminology. You might not even understand the words that are being sung, but our hearts open to it. If we are distracted, no matter how beautiful it is,

and no matter how beautiful the words are that we might understand, we don't hear it. So this is attunement and not being attuned. Allah says:

We revealed to you the Qur'an and its revelations. So submit patiently to the Lord's command and obey not those who are guilty or disbelievers.

In other words, those who don't understand, who don't see, and who would distract us. He gives us the way by *dhikrullah*: **“Remember the name of your Lord in the morning and evening and worship in the night.”** [The way is] to glorify and praise Allah through the long night, and realize that this fleeting life will be put behind us. We want to enter the doorway of love and peace and understanding and beauty, and hearing the kind of attunement that would open our hearts. The real '*adb'Allah* (servant of Allah) has not accidentally, but through a lot of effort and a lot of struggle dealt often with heavy burdens (which are usually personal burdens). There are collective burdens like war, poverty, and hunger that segments of populations suffer with and share, but mostly the burdens people find themselves with are personal ones. Even those that are collective must be dealt with on a personal level.

There are some people who carry their burdens well, and others who don't do so well. Most people at times think the burden is too heavy, and that the struggle is never ending. Then there is the one who wants nothing, and really cannot serve anyone other than Allah, no matter what the burden is or the suffering is. Even in the service of one's own family and loved ones, one has to think that one cannot serve them without the blessing of Allah; because the blessing of Allah takes place in the quality we have in our own selves, and with which we serve one another. It is through the blessing of Allah, or the imparting of the attributes, shadows or reflections of Allah in ourselves that we can, not only carry the weight, we can also serve those whom we love. Allah promises us even

when we say, “I have this weight. How can I carry it?” He said, **“Did We not lift that weight from off your chest? Alam nashra laka sadrak?”**

The comprehensive love in this creation is revealed to us if we remember and make *dhikr*. If we do the things that give ease, if we make *du'ā* and *durūd sharīf*. In a sense we cannot have consciousness and awareness unless we commit ourselves virtually, like a slave, to that awareness. We realize that ‘I cannot accomplish anything without Allah,’ but even in the delusion that I can, there is only so much I can do until I realize that I need the assistance of something beyond myself. Just like in day-to-day life, we need the assistance of others beyond ourselves to do many things. The food we eat, the fuel we put in our cars, the lights that come on in our homes, the clothes we wear on our backs – there is hardly anything that doesn’t need the assistance or skill of other people—even the roof over our heads.

We cannot stand, most of us, being unaware and unconscious of things. Those of us who are on this journey want to know, to understand. It is something we have in common: to ask questions and try to understand. We forget there are people who don’t really care about understanding anything. They only understand the minimum of what they have to understand. In fact, there is no freedom without a kind of servanthood. Perhaps, we should see very realistically that for most of us, especially for the moments and time we are living in, we are not as free as we think we are. There are significant events that happen every day that let us know we are not so free, like earthquakes, tsunamis, tornados, insignificant little things like war and genocide, and even elections. It reminds us that we are enslaved to something we don’t think is really enslaving us.

There is the delusion that the people who are ultimately in charge of our finances, the services provided to us, and the justice that is meted out, are somehow altruistically wonderful people who would do nothing bad and nothing wrong; therefore, we should

trust them to the utmost. Or, we should trust other people who are at the other end of the spectrum who are just absolutely crazy, as we saw in the last couple of weeks.

The bottom line is, perhaps we are too enslaved to our expectations: our expectations of our own self, and our expectations of others. The fact is we can't be too enslaved to the expectations of Allah, because Allah makes it very clear. You may not like the first *'āyat* that I read about iron chains and fires, but in its graphic tone, it is a very serious warning. Certainly, people who have been in war or in prison can easily relate to the metaphor, or to the reality of it. We have not, by the grace of Allah, faced that for the most part (some of us have seen some of that). The fact is our world is filled with those kinds of experiences: fires, pain and chains and shackles. If we are not enslaved in the physical sense, many people are enslaved in their minds, or to their history, or to certain aspects of their culture, or by their education and lack of education, and form of education that takes place, or to our doubts, fears and circumstances around us. Allah refers to this when He says:

For those who have covered up, We have made ready chains for them, an iron collar, and a furious fire.

It doesn't mean covering up secrets or instances or circumstances; it means covering up your consciousness. It means walking away from the potential that Allah (swt) has given us to be thinking, kind, considerate, serviceful, strong, courageous, strong of will human beings. Covering up our ability that Allah has given us to see beyond the material realities. To cover is *kufir*, and that person is a *kafir*. Certain things need to be covered: seeds need to be covered with dirt in order for them to grow. But there are things that we shouldn't cover up.

What is this iron collar and chains? They are symbols of enslavement. But when you are enslaved to something, you are enslaved to everything that created it. In other words, if

you find that you are a slave today to expectations, you are a slave to everything that created those expectations, if you project the circumstance that has come before you, and you project the circumstance onto the future. Yet, we use the term '*abd*' in positive ways. One who is enslaved to Allah is not in chains, and not facing the fire. This one has decided to become a servant of Allah, and finds a great deal of joy and happiness in service, which we all do. Everybody in this room, including the children, know the joy of service.

The person who performs service is called a servant. So, we can become servants and slaves to our doubts, fears and expectations, and perhaps to some aspects of our identity, which are a reflection on our past, how we were raised, and what our values are or were in the negative sense. Or we can become a servant, based on what we know also from our culture, our past and our history that is good; what we have learned; and for what reason we turned our attention to the spiritual life.

To be *abdallah* means to be a slave to the present, to being now, choosing now to serve, being in the totality and unity of an absolute Truth that is there, if you care to look and to see. Whether you see it or not, or understand it or not, you accept that there is a greater truth. We are all enslaved to something, and if we don't create the servitude and the relationship with that servitude in a way that reflects the attributes and qualities of Allah, the will of Allah (swt), certainly we will be influenced by those things that are distractions.

In Surah 76 of the Qur'an, Allah speaks also of Paradise. It's not because the state of mind, this *taqwa*, the sense of meaningfulness cannot exist on earth, but He talks about springs and fountains in Paradise which, even if you just treat them as metaphors, we sense they will satisfy and fulfill us in the future—our family name, our popularity, our financial success, how we regard ourselves versus how other people may regard us. We may regard ourselves as extremely successful, but we might have come to success by

being mean, aggressive, and manifesting a destructive nature. Others won't see us in a good light. Or, we may feel that the only way of success is financial or social success; but we might not see the beautiful qualities inside ourselves that others see.

Fame is a metaphor to another, greater satisfaction; fame, not in the material sense, but fame that comes by the hearts, lips, and on the tongues of others who speak kindly of us and who give us a kind of spiritual fame and acknowledgement. Once we have submitted to Allah, we can be like a conduit to those springs in Paradise, in whichever way Allah wants us to be, in whichever way satisfaction comes for us. The idea is that these springs of Paradise exist in our hearts. They are manifest analogically in our hearts and veins and capillaries in our bodies. They reach to every part of our body and give it life. They remove from the body its impurities, and brings it back to the heart where it is purified again.

This body of ours and the circulatory system is a metaphor for Paradise. If you can imagine a body that would live forever, you would imagine Paradise where this purification is taking place all the time and life is springing. Sometimes we need a little help with that, so we take some remedies, some medication. We should eat good food and build the strength of our body. We know it is not just the body. We know the mind also benefits and becomes clear. The mind is the way we conceptualize our own beingness, and our own relationship with Allah. It's not that we are just physical beings walking on this planet, acting mindlessly (although some people are like that). But there is a relationship between the cognitive abilities and the physical mind and the state of our emotions, whether we are happy or not happy, impressed by life or depressed by life. These springs that exist within us are ready to be discovered, just like the springs of Paradise are ready to be uncovered, ready to be expanded and to renew themselves. I want to say, ready to be drunk from, but we are not vampires in the metaphor, so I won't talk about drinking from streams of blood, but drinking from the springs of Paradise.

What is available to us then is a unique kind of success, a unique kind of wealth and material happiness that comes from being healthy, and from being able to physically manifest good things and serve others. The concept of expanding into a state of submission is an idea that brings us to the idea of a sense of dying before we die. Very practically, it means you have to expose yourself and be vulnerable until such a time when there is nothing left but just the “I,” [until the time] that allows us to see Allah, until the last atom, the last molecule has had its power released from it, and we see life from a totally different perspective. In that sense, if we are enslaved, then we all have some type of ability. If we are enslaved to the world, we all have some disability and we all have to be rehabilitated. It starts with how we act outwardly to one another, and then to how we work inwardly to the core of our being and our heart.

The heart is at the core of our being. That is the place of our *at-tazkiya*, our purification physically and spiritually. If we don't fulfill our capability, and we don't try to fulfill our promises and our potential, then we find ourselves in a conflict that leads socially and inter-humanly to things like hypocrisy and arrogance; inwardly physically, it leads to disabilities; then, spiritually, it leads us to being asleep. On the other hand, if we do fulfill our capabilities, the exact opposite takes place.

It is this gap of who we are, how we act, and who we think we are that we have to resolve. The misunderstandings we have of ourselves lead to misunderstandings of others. There is chasm that needs to be bridged. There is the distance between what we promise ourselves and what we deny ourselves, what we assume of ourselves and what our *qadr* has laid out for us, what we won't accept of ourselves and what we must accept that Allah has made for us to accept, between our conflicts in the outer and our inner peace in the inner. If we choose the inner journey, have the faith in Allah, accept with gratitude every little thing that comes to us, not only will more come to us, that acceptance will be a natural state to us, and we will be at peace.

If we are alert and attentive and sensitive enough, we would fear the arrogance and the hypocrisy. We would try to live fully as a humane human being, and the strength of our identity will not be based on some material gain or praise from others. The strength of our identity is because we feel strong in the manifestation and expression of the Divine Attributes that have been placed within us. Our belief will have deepened; our faith will increase; our submission and trust will have been embraced, and we will have realized that submission to Allah (swt) is the only topic.

There is a verse in the Qur'an that warns us and inspires us and urges us to take a good look at the relationship between what we say and what we do. Certainly, within the context of our intention, sometimes our intention can be good, and sometimes it appears that we are saying one thing and doing another. The verse refers directly to the Day of Awakening. **“And who feeds with food out of love for Him the destitute, the orphan and the prisoner.”** When these verses came to the Prophet (sal) it was a very specific situation. They didn't lose their applicability for us, however. This particular verse refers to a vow that Iman Ali (ra) took.

He was having some problems, and he asked the advice of Prophet Mohammed (sal), who asked him to fast for three days, because from constriction comes expansion. So Imam Ali and his whole family undertook the fast. They possessed very little as most of the Sahabah possessed very little. His wife Hazrati Fatima baked five loaves from very coarse barley to break their fast at sunset. (You are familiar with the story, but I'll tell it again.) At the time of breaking the fast a poor man came to the door. Imam Ali gives his bread to the man, and Hassan and Hussein, his two sons, gave their two loaves as well. So did Hazrat Fatima, daughter of the Prophet (sal)(peace be on her).

On the second day, they fasted, and bread was baked. At the time of breaking the fast, an orphan came to the door. Again, they gave their loaves to the

orphan. On the third day, just as they were about to break their fast, a prisoner of war came to them. He was on his way home, and needed provisions. In Islam, no prisoner was to be kept for longer than 3 days before judgment was to be passed as to whether he was to be kept or freed. (We don't follow that today, do we?) That same evening, Imam Ali (ra) visited the Prophet (sal). When he explained to the Prophet (sal) why he looked so weak, why his face was wan and thin, and why he had no energy, this verse was revealed.

We have to look at the purity and freedom of that household, the household of the Prophet, the Ahl al Bayt. They not only give what they have; they give the best of what they have. The giving is not just for the person who is receiving; it is also for the giver. Anything that you do that is good is good for yourself. Anything that you do that is wrong is against yourself. The giving of what we like trains us to live a healthy kind of life of detachment. It is not a beat-yourself kind of detachment. When we die, obviously, we become detached from something we are very attached to—our bodies and the physical world. It stands to reason that we should not become habituated to what we are attached to, or we will not die peacefully.

When we give, we should give for the love of Allah, and not only for the love of other reasons. Then it is pure giving. Allah says in the same *surah*, “**We feed you only for the Face of Allah. We do not want any reward from you nor any thanks.**” There is no reward and no thanks because the feeding for the Countenance of Allah is absolute purity in action. There is no expectation for anything in return or change in people. Imam Ali and his family didn't expect to see any of those people again. They just acted with purity and they were cleansed themselves. As a result, the questions of Imam Ali were answered. This is not just a story about charity, nor pure action and not expecting anything in return, nor is it just a story about how to prepare to die at the end of your life. Nonetheless, we are the sum total of all of our actions. Every one of these types of actions comes about from the goodness of our hearts and with sincerity.

Remember, he comes to seek something from the Prophet (sal), who gives him one thing to do. All this comes from the one thing he gave him to do. If we try to be decent and helpful and friendly, and try very hard to be generous, then that's who we become. That's who we will continue to be. We are not that by not trying; it's not some genetic chromosomal thing. We have to go through the burdens, trials, and tribulations. If we are selfish and we backbite, if we are malicious and we live fearfully, if we have too much desire and are too greedy and self-absorbed, if we collect too much and store too much and hold back, that's what we are and that's what we become. That's the world we have entered into. The result of tomorrow is what we are today; the result of next year is what we are this year; the result of twenty years from now is what we have been for the last twenty years. And that point is where we may leave the physical world.

We may have a lot to fear, and we may have a lot of pain, but we may have a lot to look forward to. We may be awakened. To be patient and trusting is really to avoid being impatient and misunderstanding. If we watch and see ourselves being distressful and impatient, then we should extend an invitation to patience, and not forget that patience is also the name of Allah. Let's try to be strong in our patience and perseverance, and be clear in our evaluation of ourselves. Then let those who surrender and who live a full life be those who have the greatest rewards. None of us knows the results of all of our efforts, our patience, our labors. We don't know what we are going to get, but we do know that it is promised.

The results of these types of efforts are going to bear fruit, because we have seen them bear fruit in our lives. It's not like it's a totally foreign idea. We know that sixty days after planting tomatoes, there will be tomatoes on the vine (unless there are deer). We know it will give fruit, because it is built within it to do that. We don't know how much it is going to give, what is going to attack it, but we know that is the rule of the tomatoe seed. Allah follows His Own rules. We have on our property, trees we planted seventeen

years ago, and they are 70-80 feet high. They give shade. We have some fruit trees that were planted. Some of them give fruit and some do not, but we have to know it is in their nature that they will give fruit under the right circumstances. Allah says that if you do one atom of good, you will benefit from it. So let us remember to do that, *inshā'a-llāh*.