



EID al ADHAA KHUTBAH

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Character Determines Destiny

Hajj: Allah's Metaphor of Reality

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9 Takbir

Suratu-l-Fatihah

*Wa azzin finnaasi bil Hajji ya-tuuka rijaalanwwa alaa kuli
Dhaamiriny-ya-tiina min-kulli fajjin amiiq: Li-yash-haduu
manaafi-a lahum wa yadhkurus-mAllahi fiii Ayyaamim-Ma
luumaatin alaa inaa radhaqahum-mim bahiimatil-an-aam:
fakuluu minhaa wa at-imul-haaa-I sal-faqiir.*

And proclaim unto mankind the Pilgrimage. They will come unto thee on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every deep ravine that they may witness things that are of benefit to them. And mention the name of Allah (*Subhanallah wa ta'ala*) on appointed days over the beast of cattle that He hath bestowed upon them, then eat thereof and feed therewith the poor unfortunate. (22:27-28)

**As for those who honor Allah's sacred rites, that comes from the taqwa in their hearts. (22:30)
Their flesh and blood does not reach Allah but your taqwa does reach Him. (22:35)**

According to the Prophet (sals), **"The *hajj* and the *umrah*..."**

...remove poverty and sins as a blacksmith's bellows remove impurities from iron, gold and silver; and *hajj* which is accepted gets no less a reward than Paradise. (Al-Tirmidhi Hadith 795)

The Prophet (sals) also said,

Shaytan is not considered more abased or more cast out or more contemptible or more angry on any day than on the Day of Arafa. That is only because he sees the descent of the Mercy and Allah's disregard for great wrong actions... (Al-Muwatta Hadith 20:254).

In addition, he said:

Those who perform the *hajj* and those who perform the *umrah* are people who have come to visit Allah. If they supplicate Him He will respond to them, and if they ask Him for forgiveness He will forgive them." (Al-Tirmidhi Hadith 800)

Each year is an opportunity to speak about Hajj and the Sacrifice of Sidna Ibrahim, the meaning of the Eid in different ways. The reality of Hajj may have come to only a few of us in the physical sense, but the inner meaning of the gathering of believers; the opportunity to give life to the metaphor of *tawaf*, with our heart as the Ka'ba; and the oft times daily opportunity to make choices that cause us to change our course, to make a sacrifice, to confront our ego, or to just simply affirm our faith in Allah (swt), to which Allah responds with assistance and mercy, is for all of us.

Mu'awiya ibn Qurra reported that his father said, "A man said, 'Messenger of Allah, I was going to slaughter a sheep and then I felt sorry for it (or 'sorry for the sheep I was going to slaughter').' He said this twice. And the Prophet (sals) responded, 'Since you showed mercy to the sheep, Allah will show mercy to you.'"

This is a time for mercy showing. This is a time for us to be merciful.

THE MEANING OF HAJJ

Hajj is like a short intensive course in which the basic teachings of Islam are presented to a world-wide gathering of Muslims. The instructions in this course, however, are not given through lectures but through symbols and rituals. No one takes notes; it's all noted in the heart. A divinely written drama is staged in which every pilgrim participates as an actor, and through this participation learns the basic message of Islam.

The message has three parts:

- 1) A relationship with Allah built through surrender to His will and prayer and other ways of remembering Him (*dhikr*).
- 2) Love and brotherhood among people manifested in acts of sacrifice for the benefit of others.

3) Struggle, which is of two types: struggle to fulfill basic material and psychological needs of at least oneself and one's family; and struggle against all forms of evil.

Sometimes they conflict. I will speak predominantly on the first and the second; and somewhat on the third today.

Tawaf or circumambulation of the Ka'ba symbolizes the first part of the Islamic message. The notion of going around an axis symbolizes surrender or commitment. This notion around the vertical axis which starts from the Ka'ba, the early house of Allah, and reaches into the heavens, to the heavenly "Seat of Allah" (*'Arsh*) signifies surrender to Allah which is the first and biggest step in building a relationship with Allah. Prayers and *dhikr* throughout the Hajj further develop this relationship.

Love and brotherhood of people is taught throughout the Hajj. The coming together of so many people (about 1.5 to 2 million) from all nations and races of the world itself makes the point that human beings belong to a single brother/sisterhood. The pilgrim garment, *ihram*, makes the point further. Dress often signifies a person's nationality, race, social position, etc. By changing into a uniform and simple dress the pilgrims learn that the distinctions made by such appearances as dress are superficial, and that underneath these distinctions of nationality, race, social position, etc., we all share a far more important thing: our humanity.

The stay in 'Arafat also symbolizes brotherhood of humankind. 'Arafat is the place where Adam and Eve met after being separated by the 'fall.' A stay in 'Arafat means that all human beings are children of the same parents and belong to one and the same family. They have come to meet together in the same place where once their original parents met. The sacrifice in Mina on the Eid day means that surrender to Allah and love and brotherhood among people are not to remain mere sentiments. They are to be translated into deeds by sacrificing, for the benefit of others and for the pleasure of Allah (swt), something that we hold dear.

Sa'y, or running between Safa and Marwa, is part of the third lesson of Islam, namely, that this world is a place of struggle. *Sa'y* is an enactment

of Hagar's search for water in the desert. It teaches that men and women must strive to take care of the needs of their families above their own personal desires. This we will emphasize, especially in the world we live in today. Sa'y is thus a reminder that the surrender to Allah learned through *tawaf* (or circumambulation of the Ka'ba) is not a passive surrender, but one which goes hand in hand with effort. To surrender, in other words, means to depend on Allah's Grace, a part of which consists of giving us the ability to make the right kind of efforts and then blessing those efforts with the right kind of results.

Rami jumrat, or stoning of the three manifestations of the Shaytan indicates the second, more important type of struggle, i.e. struggle against powers of evil, both within one's own self/ego and in our society. This struggle is a blessing, though we don't often look at it as a blessing. It keeps us aware of our *nafs ammāra*. It is noteworthy that while *tawaf*, the stay at 'Arafat, *sa'y*, etc. are one-time actions. *Rami* or stoning is done three times, on three separate days. This is because while people can relatively easily learn the idea of surrender to God, to love one's fellow human beings and to take care of their needs, they usually hate to strive against evil, because such striving can often threaten our wealth. To confront evil means to put our attention on something that is difficult and negative, and may actually be supplying us with some of our needs. We love to cling to some of those needs. We need to make it a constant act, a consistent act, so it is done on three days to remind us. Every day we should be stoning that devil.

There are also many other details about Hajj, full of meaning, that we cannot deal with in this talk. All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the universes.

Hajj is a corrective. It is a consummate healing, a cleansing of the blood of the Muslim. Perambulating the Ka'ba, the heart of the community, the tainted the diseased, the corrupt, the dark the imperfect aspects of our self is revived and cleansed. Paying attention to that heart is a process that can be attempted and practiced near and far from the physical Ka'ba on a daily, not yearly, basis. The community is seen and heard, felt and smelled, responded and reacted to in Makkah, as it is on the streets of New York, or the Metro in Washington, or in the *masjid* in Bedford, or in the homes, schools, the *dhikrs* of this community. It is

seen within our self: “and the signs are written and seen on the horizons of our souls.”

Today is a celebration of that purification, and it is a beginning of another confrontation with the life of the human being, the seeker, the believer, the submitted, the trusted. Gratitude has a special sweetness, therefore, amidst the challenges and vicissitudes of life. We are not to change what Allah provides; rather, we are to seize moments every day to be grateful, though they may be brief.

We have committed our life, and our collective lives to this path. That should be a finished subject. Unfortunately, it isn't in some cases; but it should be a finished subject among mature people. We have made alliances, relationships, trusts, friendships, marriages, in the Name of Allah, in the name of Truth, in the names of Islam, and in the name of Tasawwuf: built on the foundation of our word and our character; tainted with our humanness but sustained by our humaneness, *inshā'ā-Llāh*.

We have, are, or will be sacrifices and sacrificers to our Creator, to that Truth, to that Power, to those decisions and wonder that created us, nurtured us in the womb of our mother as we sprung from the seed of our father. Do we remember, honor and promise to affirm that lineage, that sacredness, that commitment to community's core? Or have we become so independent, so driven by our desires or ensconced and veiled in our illnesses, so distracted by 'other' that we have lost our sense of the essence of UMMAH, the Umm, the reverence for the one who carried us to this world, who carried our children and who sustains our souls as the *muhabbat*...the love at the core of our being.

Renewal, revitalization, reaffirmation, repentance: these are the messages of Hajj, of the Eid celebration, of the sacrifice of Ishmael. That is the submission to the way of Islam, of Sidna Ibrahim (as), and the Compassionate, Merciful response of Allah. What is tempting you today? Is it something, someone, some idea, some unfulfilled desire,

something ostensibly good, something that will create disharmony in another, something that demands openness and expansion (*bast*) but receives only contraction (*qabd*)? Let it go today, leave it on in the endless circling of the Ka'ba. Dive deeper today and tomorrow. Set aside the horizontal wanderings of the mind and the deceptions of the *dunya* heart; and dive into the ocean seeking the pearls of wisdom, contentment, peace and love on the ship of patience and gratitude, service and silence. Leave behind the temptation brought on by flattery and attraction to the uninitiated, and be in *suhbat*.

As elders take a noble but humble position, thoughtful but loyal, on what is right and good and Islamic and Sufic. Be patient with yourself, with others, with the path and the *shaykh*, with Allah (swt), with your community.

As youths and young adults, embrace humility and trust in Allah, and in your trust of the elders whom you model your values and behavior after, encouraged by attentiveness, consistency, guidance and exemplary action from the elders. Remember, you elders: you are being watched. This is the community of believers. This is the frame of Islam and Sufism, and this is the way of the real humane being. Be this way, and we can all go to our graves with confidence and contentment after living our lives in peace and gratitude, in true love and service. Don't fear going to the grave. Fear not going to the grave this way. Perhaps two of the most obvious and dominant characteristics of the Pilgrim, and of the *salik*, of the *murīd* are sincerity and trustworthiness, along with brother/sisterhood, all in the context of *ummah*, community.

The Community

The Muslim/Sufic community is based on sincerity, purity of human feelings, and the fulfillment of rights and needs of every member. The Muslim or believer actively seeks out his/her mission in life. To some it means to call people to Islam, but this is a limited view. What is encouraged by the example of the Prophet (sal) is to exhibit the best

character. This is not done for reward of Paradise or fear of hell; rather, it is as an act of sincere love and understanding of the unique role of the human being, the believer, in regard to Creation and other beings. This is our approach. This is the way of Tasawwuf.

Of course, then, a believer / Muslim / Sufi should be a beacon of guidance and a positive source of correction, of education through words and deeds. Such a one understands the force of good and the gifts of patience, perseverance, kindness, respect and justice, and the necessity for refinement and tolerance. Yet today, much of this is missing or not in the forefront of the Muslim life. We live in a precarious and conflicting time, when Muslims are striving to both integrate and receive deserved respect for their values and contributions to society, and remain secure as Muslims in that very same society. This is a process of conscious choice and affirmation of that choice. It is a process that is dynamic, self-reinforcing. At the core, it informs us and encourages us towards submission, trust, and keeping our word to Allah , to our *shuyukh*, to our self, our soul.

Pray Allah gives us the ability to help in a small way to refine ourselves, to make our lives, and the lives of others that follow us better, more fulfilling, and more fruitful.

The true believer has a refined social personality of the highest degree, which qualifies him or her, to be an example to others; to demonstrate and humbly act in practical ways those values effectively transmitting the attributes of Allah (swt) to others to society. Hajj is an opportunity to remain focused amidst virtual chaos, to remain humble and kind in the midst of actual chaos, to dive deep into probably the most personal religious experience in the outer, in the most social situation possible, and to, at the same time, feel humble and perhaps even unworthy. That is clear even from a distance, from halfway around the world; so what is it in the moment at the holy places?

We, too, have that same challenge in the microcosm of our personal lives. How self-focused are we going to permit ourselves to be, and how much will we strive for the balance, and the spiritual experience of inner and outer order and transformation in day-to-day life, which is easily a distraction from that goal? How much will we focus on

discomfort and personal issues, while we have been placed and we live in the shadow of the Divine , in humility and gratitude? Islamic values, which can be seen by the way in which we interact with the people around us are important, not because they are Islamic, but really because Islam is the clear and consistent path to inner peace and contentment. If we permit these values to guide our decisions, our life, we will find contentment and peace.

The believer, the Muslim, the Sufi, as Islam meant him/her to be, is a unique and remarkable person in their attitude, conduct and relationships with others at all levels. He/she treats them well by being friendly with them, humble, gentle of speech and avoiding offence. He/she likes others and is liked by them. He/she tries to follow the example of the Prophet (sal) as he was the best of people in his attitude towards others. He (sal) said: ***“Nothing will weigh more heavily in the balance of the believing slave on the Day of Resurrection than a good attitude towards others.”*** [At-Tirmidhi]

Because Islam is based on truthfulness, the believer strives to be truthful with all people. Truthfulness leads to goodness and goodness leads to Paradise. More important, goodness leads to awareness of the Divine Presence; therefore the believer strives to be true in all his words and deeds, avoids harming others with that truth or words or deeds. Harming another by word or deed is the most unfortunate expression of the ego.

This day is a reflection of, a result of, a reaffirmation of what it means to be a believer, a seeker, a journeyer. This day is beyond the forms and the history, but is truly as our predecessors stated, “solitude amidst the crowd”—literally, in Makkah and Medina (perhaps figuratively here in the crowd of thoughts and distractions).

The believer seeks to offer sincere advice to everyone he comes in contact with. It’s not just the matter of volunteering to do good out of generosity; it is a duty enjoined by Islam, by Allah. The Prophet (sal) said, ***“[The essence of] the Deen is [offering sincere] advice.”*** [Muslim] By the favor of Allah, the Muslim is a guide for others to righteous deeds, whether by his actions or words. The believer never cheats, deceives or stabs in the back. These shameful acts are beneath the believer, as they

contradict the values of truthfulness. The Prophet said: ***“...whoever deceives is not one of us.”*** (Muslim)

When the Muslim promises something, he / she means to keep that promise. This attitude stems naturally from integrity and honor, and indicates the high level of civility and refinement, attained by the one who exhibits it. If people around you feel you are a kind, civil, refined, trustworthy, loyal, committed individual, then BE IT. The greatest loss would be that it would be found out that you were not that image that is held of you by those who know you, or that you have succumbed to the *fitna* that has redirected your life away from the essence of Islam/ Sufism, self awareness, and you haven't repented.

Allah says: ***“And fulfill every engagement, for [every] engagement will be enquired into [on the Day of Reckoning].”*** (Quran 17: 34) What does engagement mean? Promise, vow. One of the worst characteristics that Islam abhors is hypocrisy, therefore the believer must never be a hypocrite. The Prophet (sal) said: ***“One of the worst people is a double-faced man, who comes to one group with one face and to another group with a totally different face.”*** (Al-Bukhari)

Islam does not approve of begging. It makes it a sin that a person should beg when he has enough to satisfy his immediate needs; therefore, the believer does not beg. If faced with difficulty and poverty, he or she seeks refuge in patience, whilst doubling his/her effort to find a way out. The Prophet (sal) said: ***“Whoever refrains from asking from people, Allah will help him...”*** (Al-Bukhari & Muslim) Yet, to receive assistance with humility and the intention for success so you can serve Allah by serving others, is what Shaykh Kuftaro, Samat ul Shaykh (ra), the former Grand Mufti of Syria, called the 6th pillar of Islam: success. Thus it is our duty to give so another is not forced to ask.

A sign of one's excellence in Islam is ignoring what does not concern one. The believer should only participate in what concerns him or her, such as anything that is one's property, right, obligation or under one's control. To be concerned with something entails preserving and taking care of this thing that one is allowed to be concerned with. The Prophet said: ***“A sign of a person's being a good Muslim is that he should leave alone that which does not concern him.”*** (At-Tirmidhi) Hence,

the believer / Sufi never searches for people's faults nor slanders their honor. He or she doesn't slip into the error of pride, boasting and showing off. She or he judges fairly, is never unjust (even to those whom they do not like) nor biased by their own whims, and avoids suspicion. The believer does not rejoice in the misfortunes of anyone, carefully avoiding uttering any word of slander, cursing, malicious gossip and language that is harmful. If he/she does not avoid these things, then she/he finds peace in repenting, not in avoidance or justification. There is no peace to be found in avoidance or justification. The one who believes does not make fun of people but is gentle, kind, compassionate and merciful, strives for people's benefit and seeks to protect and help them.

One of the virtues that is of a great value and importance, that Islam not only recommends, but also orders us to characterize ourselves with is this quality of generosity. Therefore, the believer is generous and gives freely without waste to those who are in need. When one gives, one does not remind people of one's generosity. One is patient, tries hard to control one's anger and is forgiving. One does not bear grudges or resentments, and is easy on people, not hard. One of the worst diseases of the heart is envy, which leads to wrong and debilitating conduct. Therefore the believer is not envious, because he or she knows that the pleasures of this life are nothing in comparison to the reward that Allah bestows upon the believer. The kind, compassionate and generous person knows that whatever happens in life happens according to the decree of Allah (swt).

Why am I listing these points? Does it mean, when I say "Muslim," only a Muslim? It means a believer in truth. Whether Christian, Jew, Buddhist, or Hindu, it doesn't matter. It is a person who truly believes. I'm also saying these things because it is a dark time. I'm listing these things because in this time we must counter it with the Truth. We must remind ourselves that a person who truly understands these teachings from the *dīn* is gentle, friendly, cheerful and warm. NOT what we see in society today, unfortunately.

Yet there are so many people who are gentle and kind and warm; but their voices are not heard. Such a person mixes with people and gets along with them. Such a one is humble and modest; does not look down

at other people; is lighthearted and has a sense of humor, and does not disdain others. Even their jokes are distinguished by their perceptive nature. Such a person is keen to bring happiness to people. It is an effective means of conveying the message of truth to them, and exposing them to its moral values, because people only listen to those whom they like, trust and accept.

How terrible a world this would be, worse than what it seems to be today, if what we see on the news and read in the newspaper actually represented the feelings, thoughts, actions, attitude, and character of most people. We would be living in hell. We forget that it doesn't. But it captures the attention and it affects the momentary decisions, actions, and attitudes of people so they rise above the mean of kindness, love, and gentility; warmth and not interfering with other's lives. They rise above this mean for a moment or two, a week, and then they react. The world becomes darker because of that. People are harmed because of that.

The real believer keeps secrets. Keeping secrets is a sign of maturity, moral strength, wisdom and balanced personality. But not secrets like, "Don't tell anybody this, because I'll get in trouble." It means protecting the truth, protecting others. A believer is concerned about the affairs of people in general. He is happy to welcome his guests and hastens to honor them. The Prophet said: ***"Every religion has a (distinct) characteristic and the characteristic of Islam is modesty."*** (Ibn Maajah) The believer adheres to the principle of modesty in all things, and does not accept every custom that is widely accepted by others, for there may be customs which go against Islam.

The believer does not enter a house other than one's own without seeking permission and greeting people. They sit wherever they find room when joining a gathering. They avoid whispering and conversing privately when in a group of three. They give due respect to elders and those who deserve to be respected (like scholars etc.). Allah Almighty says : **"Invite mankind to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious."** (Quran 16:125)

The believers are aware of their duty to call others to the essence of Islam, the attributes of Allah (swt). That is the real call to Islam. A believer does not spare any effort to do so. We should not assume that people do not have similar values. We should encourage ourselves and others to bring forward those values. They enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, and mix with righteous people. They visit the sick cheerfully and attend to them. They attend the funeral of those who have passed to their Lord. Where are these believers? They are among us. There are more being made in Mecca / Medina this week. Today, people have gone to Makkah and Medina. People not there have made *tawaf* around their hearts, and have become again this kind of Muslim. They are the people of Tasawwuf, also, I am convinced, more than any group. We have a great teaching and a great way.

Eid ul Adha

'Eid al-Adha falls on the 10th day of the 12th month (Dhu'l Hijjah) of the Islamic calendar. This is the day when the pilgrims gather in Makkah by the millions, after having completed many of the essential rites of Hajj, out of *ihram*, and out of the restrictions that go with *ihram* (e.g. the restriction against putting on perfume, cutting nails, cutting beard or other hair).

Ihram (which consists of two unstitched pieces of white cloth for men and any modest dress for women) symbolizes *kafan*, the white sheet in which the dead are wrapped in preparation of burial. The restrictions associated with *ihram* further reinforce this symbolism. When a pilgrim wears *ihram* on or before the 8th of Dhu'l Hijjah, he or she symbolically passes to the OTHER SIDE (of the grave). When on the 10th of Dhu'l Hijjah, he or she comes out of *ihram*, it is like a return to THIS SIDE. At this point the rest of the *Ummah*, which had stayed behind on THIS SIDE, join the pilgrims through the festivities of 'Eid al-Adha.

Thus, 'Eid al-Adha is linked with Hajj, the 'fifth pillar' of Islam, just as Eid al-Fitr is linked with fasting, the 'fourth pillar.' But unlike Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of fasting, 'Eid al-Adha does not mark the end of Hajj, which continues until the 12th or 13th of Dhu'l Hijjah, two or three days after the start of 'Eid al-Adha. 'Eid al-Adha is a kind of joining in Hajj by those who could not make it to Makkah.

This "joining in" is done in two ways. First, it is through the 'Eid prayers. Just as the pilgrims have gathered in Makkah for remembering Allah in various ways, so also the rest of the Muslims gather in large numbers in their own cities, and remember Allah through special prayers. Second, it is through sacrificing an animal. Just as many pilgrims (i.e. those that perform *hajj al-tamatt'u*, one of three types of Hajj) sacrifice an animal on 10th, 11th or 12th of Dhu'l Hijjah, so also the Muslims the world over perform sacrifices on one or the other of the same three days. All other rites of Hajj are bound with specific places, e.g. *tawaf* with the Ka'ba, and *sa'i* with the hills of Safa and Marwa. But getting together and remembering Allah through prayers and *takbirs* (calling "God is greater than anything else") and making sacrificial offerings, one is not so bound to any place.

So the Muslims all over the world 'join in' Hajj through these two types of actions. If 'Eid al-Adha is linked with Hajj in this close way, then its primary significance must lie in the meaning of Hajj, especially the two Hajj rites that pilgrims perform during the three days of 'Eid al-Adha: sacrifice of an animal (*nahr*) and stoning of the devils (*rami al-jamarat*).

Nahr, as we all know, commemorates the exemplary manifestation of obedience and love shown to Allah by the Prophet Ibrahim (as) when he bowed to God's command, and prepared himself to sacrifice the dearest thing he had in his life, his son Isma'il. Such surrender to the will of Allah and love for Him is expected not just of prophets, but of all believers; since all believers are expected to be "Muslims," meaning those who surrender their wills to Allah, and all believers are expected to "**love God most of all**" (Quran 2:165). *Nahr* is meant to remind us of this stage of Islam and *iman* (inner conviction), if not to make us strive to reach it. *Nahr* also commemorates the mercy and love that Allah showed to Ibrahim when He stopped him before he actually sacrificed his most beloved son. This mercy and love of God for Prophet Ibrahim is a manifestation of the mercy and love that He has for man generally, and *nahr* celebrates it.

The second Hajj rite during the days of 'Eid al-Adha is stoning of three pillars that symbolize three devils or three manifestations of the Devil: *batil* (falsehood), *kufr* (rejection of God and His signs) and *dhulm*

(oppression). This stoning clearly is meant to remind us of the need of *jihad* in its various forms against all kinds of forces of evil, jihad that occupied the lives of all the prophets and must occupy the lives of all true believers. This stoning is done again and again on three different days. This is meant to make the point that the battle between good and evil is not a one-time affair, but a perpetual one, and the believers need to engage in it throughout their lives with constancy.

It is interesting to note that although stoning of the devils is done on three different days, many of us spend our 'Eid al-Adha without talking or thinking about it even once. Is this a manifestation of the fact that over the centuries, we have somehow managed to remove from our consciousness the dynamic part of Islam?

'Eid al-Adha, like 'Eid al-Fitr are also a time for enjoyment and entertainment. This is not in contradiction to the extremely serious lessons taught to us by *nahr* and *rami al-jamarat*. For, it is quite possible for a person to maintain a very serious outlook on life and engage in very serious struggle, and at the same time indulge in a little light-hearted entertainment on the side.

Whose World is It?

The world we inhabit and interact with, especially at this time in history, is filled with conflict and contradiction, insecurity and danger, prejudice and fear. These have a subtle and perhaps not so subtle effect on each of us, and make us question our path, our progress, our goals. Our personal security becomes more attached to the impermanent and transitory materiality that gives temporary security, or to relationships that demand our attention and hence divert us from having to look at or deal with interactions with those negative and destructive elements in society and in ourselves. Escape instead of interface with reality is quite appealing; change gives temporary hope of distraction. We become so self absorbed that aside from uttering verbal concerns about the consequences of our actions and words, we become oblivious to those consequences and we become impatient.

Using all kinds of excuses and justifications, we flee to what appears to be difference and comfort; but, it is really just our self in a temporary

state of indulgence, certainly not spiritual abandonment. This is the height of personal, communal, social disorder and lack of discipline; two of which, order and discipline, we preach to our children and we encourage in ourselves. It is in disorder and lack of discipline that we violate our oaths. It is in disorder and lack of discipline that we transgress upon others, betray our trusts, abandon our responsibilities and later find regret and loneliness away from the true beloveds.

This has dangerous effects within our self, as well as within the Muslim community. We already see the dangers in the society at large. The basic psychological responses of flight or fight have taken on almost a perverted manifestation. People in their insecurity are fleeing away from the truth, their knowledge and their responsibilities to one another in a reactive selfishness; or to the contrary, fighting what is good and reasonable. Look at the last election, and you can see clearly the disinformation and purposeful hypocrisy, which was followed by media reinforcement and incitement to abandon reason and logic, in some cases to evoke the idea of vengeance and possible violence, and finally to raise the ugly serpents of racism. But even those who act as social 'warners,' who keep clear minds and look behind the superficialities were not heeded.

Where religion 12 years ago did not deliver fully the support for change, today it is not even needed as the prime motivating force for change, because the moral and ethical veil has been discarded in favor of raw emotion, hate, anger and racism. Each of us needs to see the effect of this climate on us, personally. Personally, it has an effect on us. Communally, it has an effect on us. Depression, anger, discontent, radical changes and actions, a loss of a moral and ethical compass, a divesting of responsibilities to others and to Allah (swt); the deaf ear, the blind eye, the selfishness that accompanies fear and flight. Hear the simple truth, my brothers and sisters. Embrace it if you really have courage. Allah (swt) says: **"Therefore flee unto Allah; lo! I am a plain warner unto you from Him."** (Qur'an 51:50)

Let us reflect on this great advice from the beloved Prophet (sal), which indicates that external and internal order are firmly connected. It is a red signal to warn and indicate that external deviance is reflected on

hearts. In a Hadith the Prophet (sal) said: ***"Do not differ lest your hearts differ as well."*** [Muslim]

Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loves not aggressors.
(Qur'an 2:190)

Fight in the way of Allah, and know that Allah is Hearer, Knower. (Qur'an, al-Baqara, 2:244)

A caller to Allah, the Almighty, is worthier of adhering to the spirit of regimentation and discipline. Mere signs are enough for an intelligent person to understand, but how would she or he act when he receives a clear and manifest prophetic hint? This is a critical question, for it is based on knowledge not emotion, on insight not on preference, on love for Allah (swt) and the Path, not love of this world and its recursive, difficult lessons. Facing the bully, as now even this has become a major topic in the media, in day to day life, is still a clear response, especially when the bully is your own *nafs ammāra*. Listen carefully to Allah's words:

They will not harm you save a trifling hurt, and if they fight against you they will turn and flee. And afterward they will not be helped. (al-Imran, 3:111)

The Prophet (sal) said: ***"Whoever sees something he dislikes in his rule*** (meaning in the rule of where they are) ***should be patient, because whoever leaves the community [jama'a], even by one fraction, and then dies, has died the death of the Jahaliyya."***

Hear it – if you have courage!

The Importance of Declaring Identity

A young Afghan woman sat in my office recently, and strongly suggested that this is not a time for people to hide who they are, to avoid addressing their responsibilities as Muslims—by extension, I should say as Sufis; and by extension I should say, as good humane beings. The damage that can be done is obvious if we look at Afghanistan and the

rise of the Taliban and their perverted view of Islam. Do we not see the seeds of this extremism in the rhetoric of the last election, in the ‘tea party,’ in the racism? This is a time to aggregate our energy, to utilize our knowledge, to flee from the ego and toward the service of Allah (swt).

Outer attractions are not only distractions but are harmful to our families, our community and our society. We all have the comfort to deviate, to be distracted. We have jobs or at least funds coming in; we have a secure roof over our heads; we have food on the table and in the gardens; we have work that serves others and affirms goodness. We have the most important and least appreciated thing: we have each other. We would and have sacrificed for each other. We have cared for each other and each other’s families; we have supported each other materially, emotionally, financially, spiritually. We are here for each other, if we recognize the need to turn toward one another for strength. Who, I ask you, what group of individuals can truly say this and count on it: die before you die. Allah (swt) says:

How should ye not fight for the cause of Allah and of the feeble among men and of the women and the children who are crying: “Our Lord! Bring us forth from out this town of which the people are oppressors! Oh, give us from thy presence some protecting friend! Oh, give us from Thy presence some defender!” (an-Nisā, 4:75)

Well, look around you: you have it. Each one of us has been given the ease to forget it. Yet the ‘fight’ in the outer is one that begins in the inner; the enemy is that which will divide us. It is the selfishness and desires that would cause harm to those whom you love and who love you. It is the true ‘enemy within,’ which we have seen in the history of humanity manifest in wars and conflicts, but it begins within one’s own *nafs ammāra*. It was seen in Medina, and it is seen today. It is seen in society at large, and unfortunately it can be seen even here.

The enemy within captures the heart, closes it to what is good, abrogates one’s vows and pledges, treaties and obligations, usually in the name of something masquerading as good, or religious, or some need that only “I” can fulfill. But all that will end one day, and all we will

be left with is our record and our word. Ask yourself, how much do you have invested in your word, in your vows, in your time and in your service, *fī sabīli-Llāh*? That is what we all have on the table to risk.

All things need preparation, even dying. The Hajj is a symbolic death and rebirth as a Muslim, *inshā'a-Llāh*, to a *mumīn*. Outwardly, one returns back to where they came from, but inwardly the person has and is changing. Starting from the *mawāqīt* and during the Hajj months, Muslims assumes *ihram* when they intend to perform either Hajj or 'Umrah. He takes off his clothes and wears the *ihram* dress, which consists of two white clean sheets, *ridā'* (the upper sheet) and *izār* (the lower sheet). A woman wears whatever she wants of permissible clothes, while ensuring that there is neither impermissible exposure of beauty nor adornment. Before *ihram*, it is recommended to make *ghusl*, apply perfume (for men), and wear clean clothes. What does that remind us of? Death.

When Muslims assumes *ihram*, they are required to loudly repeat *talbiyah*, saying:

"Labbayka Allahumma labbayk. Labbayka laa shareeka laka labbayk. Innalhamda wan-n'imata laka wal-mulk, laa shareeka lak (O Allah, I answer Your Call, there is no partner with You, to You Alone belongs praise, favor and sovereignty, there is no partner with You)."

Thereafter, a pilgrim is required to avoid the known restrictions of *ihram*. That's at Hajj, but that's also today. It's also something we can say. Reflect on the ritual of Hajj in the context of the verse in which Allah, the Exalted, says: **"Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves."** (Quran 13: 11)

Wearing the *ihram* directs us to another important perspective. From the point of Islamic upbringing, a person who seeks internal change should not neglect external change. The human is one unit, which cannot be divided into parts. External disorder causes a far-reaching internal effect. I have already referred to the advice of the Prophet, in the *hadith*: **"Do not differ lest your hearts differ as well."** [Muslim] Likewise, we have been enjoined to straighten rows in prayer for fear of

causing an internal effect. In a *hadith*, the Prophet (sal) said:
"Straighten your rows or Allah will cause dissension among you."
 (Al-Bukhaari) Everything is symbolic. *Ihrām* is a symbol for shifting from one stage to another. It marks the beginning of a covenant between the Muslim and his Lord.

Reflect on this: the Prophet (sal) said: **"When any pilgrim utters talbiyah, every stone and tree on his right and on his left responds with a (similar) talbiyah, until the whole earth resounds with it."**
 (Ibn Khuzaymah) So is there only Hajj in Makkah? Or is everything here saying, "*Labaik, labaik, allahumma labaik?*" Why do we forget? Reflect on this call and the act of repeating it loudly, as well as on its external and internal impact. Reflect on how it is related to the call of the founder of this great rite, the intimate friend of Allah, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), when Allah, the Almighty, commanded him to call people and proclaim the message. Allah, the Almighty, promised him that He will convey his call to all people. Allah, the Exalted, says:

And proclaim to the people the Hajj [pilgrimage]; they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every distant pass and ravine. (Q 22:7)

My dear brothers and sisters, it means, announce Hajj to mankind and call them to perform Hajj to this House, which We have commanded you to build. It is said that Ibrahim (as) said:

O Lord, how can I convey this to people when my voice will not reach them? It was said, "Call them and We will convey it." So Ibrahim (as) stood up (on his place, or on the Black Stone, or on (the mountain of) as-Safa, or on (the mountain of) Abu Qubays, and said, "O mankind! Your Lord has established a House, so come for pilgrimage to it."

We know that the mountains lowered themselves so that His voice would reach all the corners of the earth, and the response came from everything that heard Him: the stones, trees, and those whom Allah has decreed will make Hajj, until the Day of Resurrection. **"We answer your call, O Allah, we answer your call."** (Ibn Katheer)

My dear brothers and sisters, it was narrated that the Prophet (sal) once went out and found his Companions sitting in circles. He asked:

"What made you sit?" They said, "We sat to remember Allah, the Almighty, and praise Him for guiding us to Islam and bestowing other favors on us." He said: "Would you swear by Allah that you have sat for this only?" They said, "By Allah, we have sat only for this." He said: "I did not ask you to swear because I doubt your intention. Rather, Jibreel (Gabriel) came to me and told me that Allah boasts of you before the angels."
[Muslim]

Why are we sitting today? What is our *dhikr*? Why do we do the practices? Why don't we? What has been given by our *shuyukh*, whether you like every one of them, or whether you would have liked any of them, personally, or whether you felt they could be your best friend in the world? Allah (swt) sent us something through our *shuyukh*. Why do we refuse it? Why do we not use it? We come to realize the universal effect of this great rite of Hajj. This is in addition to its internal effects which overwhelm the spirit, and for which the heart palpitates out of yearning and love. This is in response to the supplication of the intimate Friend of Allah, Ibrahim (as), who He raised on one of the days of this great event:

Our Lord, I have settled some of my descendants in an uncultivated valley near Your Sacred House, our Lord, that they may establish prayer. So make hearts among the people incline toward them . (14: 37)

This is a tangible declaration of commitment to the covenant of change, a shift from the past with all its negative deeds, and entering into the future through the gateway of the present time. Wherever we are in the present, it certainly is a doorway to what is good, constructive and supportive, affirming the principles, the values and the promised results of Goodness and Truth; or [it can be] a doorway to selfishness, *fitna*, disruption, denial of the Divine Presence, rejection of one's *taqdir*. Please, attend to that. Allah tells us in Suratu-l-Baqarah:

Those who believe are stauncher in their love for Allah.
(2:165)

In the Qur'an, while speaking of the Divine Apostles, Allah draws pointed attention to their qualities of love, earnestness and sacrifice. **"And We gave him wisdom when a child, and compassion from Our presence and he was devout."** (19:12-13) The wonderful episode of Sidna Ibrahim is a story of love and dedication. It is not a story of mindless belief. The Qur'an specifically mentions how he placed the knife on the throat of his son, and did not remove it until Allah had witnessed the depth and intensity of his sincerity, fortitude and sacrifice.

We called unto him: O Ibrahim! Thou has already fulfilled the vision. Lo! Thus do We reward the good. Lo! That verily was a clear test. (27-104-6)

It is said that real love is generated by the knowledge of the Attributes of Allah (swt) and submission to them, not by manipulation of them by the *nafs*. It is the detailed description of the Benevolent Attributes and their signs that kindles and feeds the flame of love in the human heart. It has been said that the Negative Attributes are the mentors of the mind, the Positive Attributes are the mentors of the heart. Without the knowledge of the Beautiful Names and Qualities, with which the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah are replete, and which have been a constant source of joy and inspiration to His devoted servants, faith would have been reduced to a dogma, and would have lost its capacity to stir the innermost recesses of the heart, moving it to its depths with sincerity and humility during prayer.

Without it, this relationship between Allah and man and woman would have been a mechanical, qualified and restrained relationship in which there was neither breadth nor flexibility, nor vitality nor enthusiasm; and life would be a dull, dry and narrow affair, bereft of the sweet madness of love, and the delightfully poignant bite of desire. So we can see clearly that collectively in certain groups who claim Islam but have no compassion, no mercy, no patience etc., there can be no inspiration let alone fulfillment of human purpose. But this is equally true individually. When there is humility, concern, or true piety there is

success and happiness in our souls. When a person states: 'I am not happy or fulfilled' and looks outward, they are of the first group. But when they look inward toward their commitments, their practices, their prayer, their values and their humble journey, what has been provided for them, and how they are protected, they are of the second group. They will come to fulfillment and contentment, peace and love and true freedom.

If the celestial wealth were taken away from humanity what would there be to distinguish between life and death, between humanity and the vegetable kingdom? It is precisely this love, which flows endlessly from the Divine Fayd of Allah (swt), that alone can quench the thirst of the spirit and to calm down the flame of passion for this world. It is understood by those who truly see, that the heart and the eyes of a Muslim should overflow from time to time, and provide an outlet for the feelings of loneliness and separation that rise from the depths of one's being at certain times in our lives. Of what use is the cup that gets filled to the rim, but never overflows?

The description I have just given you, of the love of Islam, is also a description in its opposite of the world many Muslims live in today: a dry, narrow world, the world of dogma, the world of doctrinaire thought, the world without vitality and enthusiasm, a world that is mad. Each of us has a hidden or known love that we are seeking to satisfy. The House of the Ka'ba and all the rites of Allah that are associated with it and the Hajj are all elements that contain an ideal provision of the satisfaction of this basic human urge. It is, as we would say in Montessori terms, a prepared environment.

And remember when We prepared for Ibrahim the place of the holy House, saying, "Ascribe thou nothing as partner unto Me, and purify My House for those who make the round thereof and those who stand and those who bow and make prostration."

Imam al-Ghazāli writes, "If there is an earnest desire for nearness to Allah, a Muslim will be compelled to strive for it. A lover is passionately attached to everything that bears an association with the Beloved. The House of Ka'ba is

associated with Allah, and a Muslim should, therefore, instinctively feel drawn to it, to speak nothing of the attraction of the Recompense promised on it.”

And Shah Waliullah (ra) said: *“Sometimes when a man is overcome with the desire for his Lord and love surges powerfully in his breast, and he looks around for the satisfaction of his inner urge, it appears to him that the Hajj alone is the means to it.”*

Certainly on a daily basis, the *salat* we offer each day could be thought to be sufficient to fulfill the need of soothing and gratifying emotions, as well as providing one with an opportunity to vent his/her feelings and alleviate the pain of separation. But this would not quench the thirst of the lover whose heart at times blazes like a furnace. So too, fasting can be helpful in quenching temporarily the thirst of the soul and curbing our animalistic appetites. But the hours of fasting are limited, and even if one is successful, the world around the one fasting makes him/her feel isolated in a world of people who are indulgent and self-centered.

A Muslim, therefore, had to be furnished with an opportunity to take a bold and adventurous plunge, which could break his chains and release him from the old prison house of everyday existence. Think of our ancestors who left everything to come to a new world and a new life to escape tyranny, or because of hunger, or just for success. What upheld their spirit and formed a foundation for their success? It was a good character. It was necessary. It was accepting responsibility. And what did they teach us, or our parents' parents? To have good character, to keep your vows and your words, to honor your contracts, to be good to your neighbor, to honor your wife, husband, children; to trust in God, to support your community, and not to indulge yourself in distractions and actions that could make you deviate from the trust that you have been given.

I think, as I say this, of my own grandmother who came, in the bottom of a ship in 1888, to this country to meet her husband, who was waiting for her, but later abandoned her. She raised three children, staying up all night to clean a bar, living in a cold-water flat above it. She carried my mother and her sister to school for the first 10-15 minutes, just to keep them near to her body and keep them warm, because they didn't have

the clothes to keep them warm. Then she put them all through college, and one became a nominee for the Nobel Prize in medicine (my uncle). She never spoke a negative word, nor did my mother. She never had time to indulge herself. She was over the stove, cleaning the house, taking care of the children out of necessity. It was her good character that she passed on – I wish she had passed it better to me, or I had been more receptive to it. Where do we get the time to deviate from our vows, from our word, from our Dīn?

Their immigration, symbolically and actually, was a leap of faith and trust. It was one of submission and love, which in one stride would eventually carry our ancestors from one life to another. Just like our practices, our *bai'at*, our meditations, our *dhikr*, and our community is a leap of faith and trust, submission and love, from a life of contradictions and artificiality to a new and fascinating, boundless world where love reigns supreme, and the heart holds sway over everything. Sometimes we have to make corrections. A world where one is delivered from self absorption and man-made limitations of race, ethnicity, nationality, politics, social degradation and decay, and where one is melted into a pure manifestation of monotheism—*tawhid*—that's what Islam is.

But what is it on a day-to-day basis with us, where humanity, faith, and purpose are clearly understood, and where we live and sing the praises of Allah (swt)? Ask yourselves: what would my mother or grandmother have me do? What would my father or grandfather have me do? What would my Prophet, my Shaykh have me do? This act of trust is one of submission and reverence. Honesty does not begin after we get what we want. Honesty begins at the foot of the Ka'ba, at the core of the true heart, the place where Allah dwells in the life of the believer, in the life of the good person. Let us return to the core of our Dīn in our heart.

I thank you for your long patience. I didn't intend it to be so long. Only Allah knows. *Asalaamu aleikum*.

SECOND KHUTBAH:

I have been asked, and I will comply. Saudi Arabia's top cleric, Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al Sheikh, yesterday called on worshippers in a

midday sermon to espouse moderation, and said Islam would survive, what he described as, attempts to defame the faith. Delivering the Hajj sermon at Namira Mosque at Mount Arafat, he said Allah (swt) endowed us with hosts of blessings and boons. Guidance of Islam is one of them, adding that Islam is not a theoretical religion; instead, it is a practical code of conduct.

Whether we agree or do not agree with the sect he comes from, the message is good. Al Sheikh said Islam is based on justice and equity, which admits of no terrorism, no extremism and no injustice. He said, "Islam will remain strong in the face of the vicious campaign that is attacking it." "Muslims, the dearest thing you have is your religion and your belief. Be proud of your religion; don't ever be ashamed of identifying our religion." He said Islam impresses upon its followers to take better care of their families and societies. It prohibits extravagance, and it is a religion of moderation.

The Grand Mufti stressed Islam intensely condemns terrorism and extremism, and that it warns strict punishment for those who unjustifiably spill blood and spread mischief on earth. Sending Divine Revelations and raising the prophets was meant for spreading the message of Allah's oneness; and this succession of guidance for human being is in progress, he said.

He said, "Allah sent the last and final Prophet with a complete code of conduct that is in harmony with human nature, as it caters to all man's natural and material needs." Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al Sheikh said, "Allah Almighty conferred men with reason and consciousness so that he can differentiate between good and bad. We should respect each other for that."

I would like to add to what the Shaykh said, or what he didn't say. He didn't say that the attack is from within. For that, he made a terrible error. I have done what was asked, to repeat his words. I say to you Shaykh, say it is from within and purge what is from within. Then we can call ourselves Muslims.

O my Lord, perfect for me my Religion, complete Thy Favors upon me, and make me a devotee most grateful, a devotee most generous.

*Allah (Subhanallah wa ta'ala)u laaa 'ilaaha 'illa Huu.
Al-Hayyul-Qayyum. Laa ta'-khuzuhuu sinatunw-wa laa nawm.
Lahuu maa fis-samaawaati wa maa fil-'arz.
Man-zallazii yashfa-'u 'indahuuu 'illaa bi-'iznih?
Ya'-lamu maa bayna 'aydiihim wa maa khalfahum.
Wa laa yuhiituna bi-shay-'im-min 'ilmihiii 'illaa bimaa shaaaa'.
Wa si-'a Kursiyyu-hus-Samaawaati wal-arz;
wa laa ya-uuduhuu hifzu- humaa
wa Huwal 'Aliyyul-Aziim.*

'Aa manar-Rasuulu bi maaa 'un-zila 'ilay-hi mir-Rabbihii wal-Mu'minuun. Kullun 'aa-mana billaahi wa ma laaa- ikati-hii wa kutubihii wa rusulih. Laa nufarriqu bay-na ahadim-mir-ruulih. Wa qaaluu sami-naa wa 'ata-naa: Gufraanaka Rabbanaa wa 'ilaykal-masiir. (2:285)

The Apostle believeth in what hath been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the men of faith. Each on (of them) believeth in Allah (Subhanallah wa ta'ala), His angels, His books, and His apostles. "We make no distinction (they say) between one and another of His apostles." And they say; "We hear, and we obey: (We seek) Thy forgiveness. Our Lord, and to Thee is the end of all journeys."

Laa yukalli fullaahu maf-san 'illaa wus-'ahaa. Laha maa kasabat wa 'alay-haa mak-tasabat. Rabbanaa laa tu-'aa-khiznaaa 'in-nasiinaaa 'aw 'akhta'-naa. Rabbanaa wa laaa tahmil 'alaynaaa 'is-ran-kamaa hamal-ta-huu 'alal-laziina min-qab-linaa, Rabbanaa wa laa tuhammilnaa maa laa taaqata lanaa bih. Wa'fu 'anna, wag-fir lanaa, war-hamnaa. Anta Mawlaanaa fan-surnaa 'alal-qaw-mil-Kaafi-riin. (2:286)

On no soul doth Allah (Subhanallah wa ta'ala) place a burden greater than it can bear. It gets every good that it earns and it suffers every ill that it earns. (Pray): Our Lord! Condemn us not if we forget or fall into error; our Lord! Lay not on us a burden like that which Thou didst lay on those before us; Our lord! Lay not on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear. Blot out our sins, and grant us forgiveness, Have mercy on us. Thou art our Protector; Help us against those Who stand against Faith.

Pray Allah gives us the ability to help in a small way to refine ourselves, to sustain our community, to make our lives, and the lives of other to follow us better, more fulfilling, and more fruitful. Pray that we, the elders, remain good examples to our children, and our children carry a message of peace and goodness to the world. *Amin. Eid Mubarak.*