

November 19, 2010

Khutbah



TITLE: [Impartiality is One Guidance towards Justice and Equity](#)

DVD title: Establishing a System of and a Sensitivity to Justice/'Adl

The Purpose of the Messengers of Allah

(Opening duas)

We sent before time Our Messenger with clear signs and sent down with him the Book and the balance of right and wrong that men may stand forth in justice; and We sent down iron wherein is great might as well as many benefits for mankind that Allah may test who it is that will help the Unseen and His Messengers, for Allah is full of Strength, exalted in Might. (57:25)

Allah (swt) also said:

The good deed and the evil deed are not alike. Repel the evil deed with one that is better. Then, lo, he between whom there was enmity will become as if he were your dearest friend. (41:34)

The main purpose of Allah sending His messengers to give guidance to all of us, to all of humanity, was to establish a system and a sensitivity to justice, '*adl*. *Inshā'a-Llāh*, eventually it will be a sensitivity almost unthought of, but a reality we accept; a sensitivity to equity in this earth so people could live in peace finally with one another, without oppressing one another and without aggression.

We have many times talked about a spiritual framework and talked about the misery and suffering in the world today, a subject I find myself talking about almost continuously. I was in conversation today with our brother and friend Harold and another man about public health issues, globally. It is very hard for us to understand why people do to others what they do. Why they withhold from others what they withhold, and why they give to themselves that they don't give to others. None of the reasons we ever hear seem at all justifiable. In Surah al-Hadid, the function of messengers is made clear when Allah said:

We have sent our messengers with clear explanations and sent the Book and the balance down with them. (57:25)

This verse succinctly outlines the function of the messenger of Allah, which was that human attitudes and human systems of life, individually as well as collectively and socially, might be established upon the principle of justice and equity. That's at least one of the cornerstones. On the one hand, it is very necessary that every individual should know their duties to their Creator, their duties to their own self, their duties to their work, or to their family, to other people with whom they have to deal with in their society, life, home, school or business; whether present or on the other side of the world; whatever their relationships to us are, whether they are our employers or our servants, our employees or our friends, our family or people with whom we share this planet.

On the other hand, the system of social life, itself, has to be built on principles where no kind of tyranny or oppression is left in society, despite the differences between different elements of human society and culture and ethnicity and language and religion.

Remember that Allah said, **“Had I wanted to, I would have made you all one religion.”** But He didn't, so that we could come to love, respect, work with, tolerate, be principled, be equitable, be kind, be understanding toward one another. It must work itself out in society over a period of time, by the structure and function of society, itself,

and every aspect of one's culture, every aspect of one's civilization – the community, family.

We realize there are certain elements in social and communal life that have to be preserved and protected from extremes, so that the right balance is established in all aspects of life: social, moral and spiritual. We see that those extremes are prevalent in our society today. People have to receive their rights and fulfill their duties with a sense of justice and equity. The objective or the *ijaz* of the messengers was individual and unique, but at the same time it encompassed the whole realm of what was good and what was right and what was just in society. They who came before us (and we, I hope) wanted to establish justice in the life of each and every individual in society, so that the balance would be created not just in institutions, but in the hearts and the minds and the character of individuals. This is why I said in the beginning that almost an unconscious sense of justice and equity has to be developed through people's conduct and behavior toward one another. I don't think it can be manifest without a system of values that are implanted in the hearts of all people brought forward.

In a phone conversation I had with our friend and brother who does such good work in Africa, I said I think what makes his and our work similar and different (and I may be wrong) is that they come from the heart, from human values. It is not just some institution or philanthropic organization that feels some obligation or has a specific interest in a disease, for example, like malaria, and then throws money at that. It's the idea of heart to heart, human to human interaction that can make the difference eventually, that affirms the values of society. It is not that others don't have values, and it is not that their intentions are not good. They are good. But they are often distracted, or shall I say, unclear in motivation.

Established justice in the social order of society is what some call the rule of law—not as statutory law but Divine Law. It is created so that individuals who realize they have a sense of justice within themselves, and a sense of equity within themselves reveal it through their choices, their behavior, their conduct and their ideas and knowledge, so there would be a sense of balance and cooperation dominating in the world. Where we see there is no balance and no cooperation, I will go out on a long but thin limb and say, “I don’t think there is justice there. I don’t think there is equity there. And I certainly don’t think there are human values there.” We need this sensitivity throughout human society, in other words, people who are just recognizable by their words and actions, which reflect the highest values of justice. People who help one another in their spiritual, ethical, material well-being are recognizable despite the names they call themselves, the culture they come from, or the religion they follow.

Allah (swt) says in Qur’an, we hear:

Do not approach the orphan’s property save to make it better until he reaches maturity. Give full measure and weight with justice. We do not burden any soul with more than it can bear; and when you speak, be just, even if it is about a near relative. And fulfill the covenant with Allah. This He has enjoined upon you so that you remember, and this is My straight path. So follow it. And do not follow other ways, unless they cause you to deviate from His way. He has enjoined upon you so that you might guard yourself for Allah. (6: 152)

This protection and affirmation of justice is a protection of your own self. Not only does it mean to stay on the ‘straight path,’ but it means we do not deviate from our duties and responsibilities in life. We know that is very, very difficult. This is an extremely high standard. It is a very, very high standard, but it is the standard. If you are going to go to

battle for the flag, it had better be the flag of justice. The changes that have to come about in society have to come about through equity, and care and concern for others. That's the protection for ourselves. Hear what Allah is telling us: if you do that in society, it is the protection for you, yourself. It's a very, very high standard, but the real standard of Islamic justice, of Shar'īah. "Ooo— hoo, bad word in America. We don't want Shar'īah law in America!" But we have it. It's called justice. That's like saying, "We don't want your god, Allah." Allah means God! Shar'īah means the path of justice and truth.

Unfortunately, it is not the standard that we see in most places. It commands followers not only to do justice, but to bear the standard of justice in order to eradicate all injustice in the world, and to establish right justice in its place. This is a tremendous duty and a tremendous responsibility, even in the case whether a person is rich or poor. Impartiality is supposed to be the guidance behind what is just and good. We do not see this kind of justice often. Indeed, it is hard to say if we have ever seen this kind of justice on earth. Nonetheless, it is what is enjoined and what is required; and Allah says He does not place a burden on a person that he/she cannot bear. It does not distinguish whether a person is your relative or your enemy or your neighbor, or someone you have no knowledge of. Justice should be fair.

The real test of the believers then is that we have to administer this kind of equitable justice to everyone. That administering brings up a lot of other problems. It adds a level of complexity, enforcement. The Prophet (sal) commanded us to do justice in these words. He said, *"If you judge, judge in equity between them. For Allah loves those who judge in equity."* In Surah al A'raf we read: **"My Lord has commanded Justice."** In fact, the whole social, political, economic system of human beings has to be established on the basis of this kind of justice and equity in order to keep it free from corruption, which is obviously all around us—free from exploiting the poor, free from exploiting the weak, the ill, the disenfranchised (how about the people who don't have

health insurance?), free from exploiting the resources, exploiting the resources of others. Any deviation from equity destroys the functioning of the system, and undermines the interest of the people, and it separates them. We can see this to be true today in our own country, in the Middle East, and in Afghanistan, and in countless other places.

When that happens, one sees the ever increasing injustices beginning to grow and take foothold. People use lame excuses, and mouth platitudes like, “Take back our country!” From what? Where did it go? “We are going to move forward.” From where and to what? People repeat these things. Underneath it is the exploitation of people by race, or by class, or by gender, by nationality, by birth certificate. (That was a joke, though not a very good one). People who were once wealthy are rendered poor overnight. People who were once safe are now insecure. People who were once healthy, when they become ill, have no means of getting better. If they are mentally ill, they find that funding has gone. Culture has become sublimated to greed, and people find they have no place to turn for some diversion from their pain and difficulty. Free concerts will be gone. Arts will not be around anymore. You won’t be able to go to a museum without paying an entrance fee. That’s what is happening. Where is the justice in all of this?

What do we mean by justice? The Qur’an describes the sure process of destruction in societies as clearly as it describes the sustainability and equity in societies. Allah (swt) says:

When We have decreed that a habitation should be destroyed, We give commands to its well-to-do people, and they commit transgressions and are disobedient to Allah’s command. The word of doom is proven true against them and We totally exterminate them.

Phew, that's heavy. In whose hands is this destruction? It is in the hands of the people who bring it on. It is given to the arrogant, the rich to destroy their society, not the poor, because they have the choice to be good or not. This is within the context of the original command to do good and to abjure evil, destruction, not only of individuals, but of nations. When the rich and powerful people become aggressive towards others, ignoring equity and justice, taking the last drop of blood from poor and starving people, the last molecule of their integrity, it is a sign of their coming destruction. Allah (swt) does not destroy any people. He gives them opportunities to destroy themselves.

The Qur'an is simply stating the facts of history. How nations, by their own aggression and destruction, begin their own journey down a miserable road to miserable ends. It is their own injustice that takes them to the ultimate end, and no one can survive it. Justice itself keeps society whole and intact, and preserves the rights of everyone. As long as people keep some principles of fair play, of justice, of common good (of the "common weal," as we used to say in this country), of mutual benefit with others, then they will prosper. If they, however, as it seems to be happening today, throw those away for selfish ends, then they become weak. The more they maintain some sense of fair play and justice and commonality, the stronger they become. The culture will be increased and enriched, and their civilization will become civil. As I like to say in the other aspect of my work, civil society is a society of people who are civil toward one another. That is why Qur'an insists upon this principle more than anything else, more than even worship itself. It is meant to strengthen the human will/*irāda*, to be just and to protect people's trust and rights and claims.

In Surah al-An'am, Allah (swt) commands justice and benevolence and forbids injustice, obscenity and rebellion. He instructs that you may receive an admonition. This is the importance of mutuality, agreement, maintaining the systems of social life. It reminds

people of the ridiculousness and the stupidity of those who try to destroy it. That is why you find stupid people saying stupid things, stupid people hearing them, and stupid people responding to them and repeating them. I'm sorry, but ignorance abounds. Islam places so much emphasis on upholding mutual agreements and contracts, because they insure justice between the parties. But look in the Muslim world! Is that what is happening? Contracts are also treaties between people, whether it's a marriage contract, or a contract to do business together. Agreements between nations, agreements between any parties are based on what is just and good, hopefully. But then sometimes people manipulate that, too.

We know that human society tends to degenerate and become corrupt if obligations are not fulfilled. Everyone wants to grab a little piece of the pie. They do not care who suffers. They think only of themselves. There are wonderful examples that exist, however, in the Prophet (sal) about human nature. If someone calls you names and you keep quiet, it may not stop them from abusing you, but it is the right action on your part. That is good. If you then pray for the good and betterment of that person, it will not only put them to shame, it will probably make it so that they never again abuse you in the same way. That's the principle. But then, there is the principle of punching the bully in the nose. Unfortunately, that's where we are. Sometimes we want our leaders to stand up and punch the bully in the nose. If they do, you have opened the way for them to find the truth.

That is the teaching of Qur'an. That is what the Prophet (sal) showed in his practices. He set such a high standard for good behavior and kind conduct, even his adversaries could not understand it. He boggled their minds. In Qur'an, Allah (swt) says:

Hasten to follow the way that leads to forgiveness from your Lord and to the gardens that have been prepared for those pious people who control their anger and forgive other people.

No doubt this is the higher path. No doubt a person can walk that path, totally understanding that people will not see it, will not accept it, won't recognize it, won't affirm it, and won't follow it; but still they choose to walk the higher path. It may not be the most expeditious way to get things done. It may not be the way to alleviate the pains and sufferings in society, but it may be the example people need, as in the case of the Prophet Mohammed (sal). On the other hand, there is a time when one has to resist injustices. Allah (swt) likes such good people very much. Muslims are advised in these words. He said, **“But pardon them and forbear. Verily, Allah loves doers of good. Make due allowance for man’s nature and enjoin the doing of what is right, and leave all those who choose to remain ignorant.”**

I think that is probably the crossroads we find ourselves at today, to make that higher choice. It's very difficult. How do you know when to speak back, when to resist, and when to submit and trust? We have to turn to the Qur'an and see what Allah says. Yes, you can do this. You can resist and fight there, but pardon them and forbear. We are human beings. We make mistakes and we do frivolous things. Hopefully, we recognize them and repent of them. Allah (swt) pardons us, but we do not pardon one another quickly enough or deeply enough. The Prophet (sal) explained in simple words, ***“All creatures are Allah’s children. The one’s dearest to Allah are those who treat His children kindly.”***

Aisha reported that Allah’s Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) said, ***“Allah is gentle and likes gentleness. He gives for gentleness what He does not***

give for harshness and for what He does not give for anything else.” Again, Aisha said, ***“Keep to gentleness and avoid harshness and coarseness. Gentleness is not found in anything without adoring it. It is not withdrawn from anything without shaming it.”***

Because we are who we are, we have to try to walk that higher path, and teach our children to walk that higher path. Though some of us may come from a place where we would like to punch someone in the nose every once in a while. We may scream at the tv set when certain people get on there and utter their hypocrisies. We may sit and frantically type off an email to the producer of this show or that show, or twitter Rachel Madow or Keith Olbermann. We have to remember that our primary role as Muslims and Sufis is to have this attitude: keep to gentleness, avoid harshness and coarseness. And maybe our community’s light can grow stronger. I think we are at a time when we have to change lightbulbs and put in the halogen, long-lasting ones. We have to repair the roofs because they are leaking. We have to put a welcome sign out that reaches certain people’s hearts.

Allah’s Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) said, ***“Shall I not tell you who is kept away from hell and who hell is kept away from? From everyone who is gentle and kindly, approachable and of an easy disposition.”*** In the long term, we have to balance what we say. I began with my worries and critiques of society. Now I’m at the point of giving the other side of patience, tolerance, and love. That’s *mīzān*. That’s the balance. That’s justice.

Even in the Prophet’s private there are clear examples. We know the story of Abul Sufiyan who had waged war against the Prophet (peace be upon him) for so many years, and sent a mercenary to Medina to kill him. When Abu Sufiyan was brought to him after the victory of Mecca, the Prophet (peace be upon him) met with him with great affection.

When Hazrat Ali wanted to kill him for past atrocities, the Messenger said, “No, do not do that.” He not only forgave him, but declared his house a sanctuary of security.

Whoever entered it would be safe and secure.

When Mecca was struck with famine and people were starving; when the people of Yemen, who had become Muslim, had stopped the wheat supply to Mecca, the Meccans appealed to the Prophet. He took pity on them and sent a message to lift the embargo. The people of Taif had beaten the Prophet (sal), thrown stones, and chased him out of the town. When their delegation later came to Medina, the Prophet (peace upon him) made special arrangements for them, and treated them with kindness and affection. A Jewish woman had poisoned food at the time of one of the conquests. He ate the food and felt the effect of the poison. She admitted it. He did not take any action. When one of his companions died of the poison, then the woman was punished, but not for the attempt on his life.

At the time of another peace treaty, a group of 80 men of the Quraysh came quietly from the mountain to kill the Prophet (sal). By chance they were caught and brought before him. He freed them, and did not say anything to them. Once, a man made up his mind to kill the Prophet (sal), but he was caught by the Companions and brought before him. Seeing the Prophet, he was frightened. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “Do not fear. Even if you had wanted to kill me, you could not have.” A similar incident happened when he was returning to Medina from an expedition. He camped when the sun was very hot. The Companions rested under the shade of the trees. The Prophet (sal) also rested under the tree and hung his sword from the tree. The enemies were waiting for an opportunity, and a Bedouin came up and grabbed the sword. The Prophet awoke to see the man standing over him with the sword. The man said, “O Muhammed, tell me. Who can save you from your plight?” The Prophet replied, “Allah.” Hearing the

beautiful voice of the Prophet, he put the sword back in the scabbard and the Prophet repeated the whole incident to the Companions, but did not say anything to the Bedouin.

There is story after story after story concerning justice and how it is lived. It is hardly the image that people are given of Islam today. It is hardly the image that people are told who this strange Prophet of Islam was. History is replete with these stories. Muslims know these stories by heart, but they certainly don't know the meaning of them. We have to think very deeply and clearly on these stories and how they apply to us today, here and everywhere. We know they do not apply to the leaders in the world today. We don't see people following those examples, often. We know the direction that injustice takes us. We may actually see one leader with these qualities who cares more about accomplishments than re-election. It's possible.

Everywhere around us today, we find the Shaytan. Amazing how he can dress up in so many different clothes, faces and uniforms. Amazing how Shaytan can be seen in so many places at one time. It is very hard for us to find a way to heal the ills of society. We have to pray to Allah that He will heal them, because there is no sickness Allah cannot heal. Then we have to do our job, our duty. Our success lies in our service, in our willingness to make changes. *Inshallah*, may Allah guide us in the changes that need to be made. (Duas).

SECOND KHUTBAH