

December 31, 2010

Khutbah

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: [Heed the Warning](#)

DVD title: Finding Dhikr in Reading and Studying Qur'an and Hadith
The Evolutionary and Maturing Process of Spirituality

Opening duas. Allah (swt) reveals in the Holy Qur'an:

Surely, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day are signs for all who understand. Those who remember Allah standing and sitting and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heaven and the earth. Our Lord! You have not created this in vain. Glory to you. Preserve us from the punishment of the fire. Our Lord! Surely whoever you have made to enter that fire you have disgraced, and for the oppressors there are no helpers. Our Lord! Truly we have heard the voice of one calling us to faith, "Believe in your Lord," and so we have believed. Our Lord! Forgive us our faults and cover over our evils and make us die among the righteous. Our Lord! Give us what you promised us by your messengers and do not disgrace us on the Day of Standing Forth. Verily, you never break your promises. (3:190-194)

And Allah responds:

And so their Lord responded to their supplications saying, I will not permit the work of any worker to be lost, male or female. Each to you is the issue of the other. (3:195)

Asalaamu aleikum. There is a lot in all that, more than we have time to discuss. Hopefully, not more than we have time to contemplate. In the Holy Qur'an, Allah reminds of the importance of remembering Him. The goal of studying Qur'an is to remember Allah through perfecting ourselves, as we have been speaking on and off for three and a half, four decades—talking about the *dhikr* of Allah, speaking about the values of a believer, the values of a good person. As you know, when I speak about *dhikr*, it's in the context not just doing a practice, but what happens to us as individuals. It is in the context of what Islam is supposed to be, in the context of building character, predominantly through following the guidelines of the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the Sīrah of Prophet Muhammed.

The joining of what we have been saying and how to study Qur'an is a very important topic. In psychology, we talk about approach and avoidance. If one avoids *dhikr*, avoids studying Qur'an, it's avoiding the truth. It's a cowardly way to live, quite honestly. It takes no courage to do things that are bad or wrong or destructive. It takes a lot of courage to do things that are good. But that courage doesn't equal effort, necessarily, if the courage comes from Qur'an and trust. We all want to be trusted; we all want to trust, I hope. Yet, why do we not trust the miracle of the word of the Qur'an, the miracle of the word of Allah (swt)? We will then put together what we are talking about, hopefully, inside of our own selves, *inshā'a-llāh*. We can get a base of good understanding.

Look at the things I've asked you to do over the years: get up in the morning, read Qur'an, study a little Arabic, write a few notes to yourself, keep a little journal, say kind words to one another, serve one another, praise one another, praise Allah in the praise of one another, and understand that this is an endless journey. There is no end to it. It is like the stock market. You keep putting money into it, and the big issue is how do you know when to take it out? In this case you take it out when you need it, like a bank account.

When we speak about the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet Mohammed (sal) there are things we have to understand. It is not some autocratic, hierarchical document that says, "Do this and you'll be punished. Do that and you won't." That's not what the real message is there. The message is the cause and effect from our own choices. There are things in the Qur'an that Allah wants us to avoid, and other things to be adopted. From that point of view, you don't have to make much *tafsir*. It's very clear what is expected. We know from our discussions and contemplations and life that it is very difficult sometimes to do what is expected of us, to do what is good for ourselves. So we redefine those things. If I said, "You want to go to a restaurant tonight? There is a crummy restaurant in the middle of the bad section of Bedford, where the food is guaranteed to poison you. You will come home and have very, very bad diarrhea." Will you go there? "There are things that are poisonous, but the food is homemade, and tastes great." Lot of pig lard, lot of fat, all the *haram* things; but it tastes good. Will you go? Will we not heed the warning?

We cannot be among those who speak only at the highest levels, and [at the same time] have no tolerance for the process that is an evolutionary process of the human being: our maturing, growth and evolution. The difference between the high talk of *ulema* and the simple speech of the Sufis is that we know the major part of the process of life is evolutionary; it is developmental. We don't just say, "Do this, don't do that. You are going to Jannah or Hell." We understand it's an evolutionary process. Do we understand that it's an evolutionary process? Human beings may be born in *fitrah*, but the life we have is about perfecting the consciousness and awareness of that. When people stand and rant and rail at you for what you are doing wrong, they are not accepting the fact that it's like telling a child they are not driving correctly when they can't reach the pedals of the car. There is an arrogance that goes along with that.

If people don't tell us, guide us, show us; and if we don't pay attention to the guidance of the Qur'an and Sunnah about what is good and bad, right and wrong, we will get into the

car, our feet will not touch the pedals, and we will crash. If we put the microscope to the lives of many people in the world, we find they are not living up to what they, themselves, wish they would or what they say. It's not surprising. The question is what we spoke about last night: what is the intention? When you give up the intention, you give up the purpose of life.

The Qur'an tells us very clearly about the evolutionary process, and that process is called *at-tazkiyat* / purification. Purification is an assumption that something needs to be made pure. We would not need purification if everything was already pure. At the same time, the process comes under a larger umbrella called *tarbiya*/ education of the self, refinement of the soul, purification, physical, mental, emotional – maturation. From this point of view, each verse in the Qur'an is very clear as a reference source. If we read the Qur'an in the perspective of development of *atazkiyat*, we find that it acts as a living source of guidance to us, like an individual sitting next to us telling us in the first person, "Do this and not that."

If you were learning to fly an airplane, the first day out, you don't say to the instructor, "Let me do it, and you just correct me if I do anything wrong." This was the way the Sahaba used to study Qur'an, and recite it again and again. Abdiya ibn Masood was reported, according to one narration, that he read Surah al-Baqarah in eight years. According to another source, it was in ten years. Then he could read it all in one night (read, meaning recite). Why did he take so long? That's how long it took him to understand it; not how long it took him to memorize it. He did not read it to get done with it. He read it to read it, recite it and understand it, to make *fikr*. Eight years.

That is how we should approach Qur'an. We should read it to understand it. We should read it and pause to let ourselves absorb the words and the meanings, and be absorbed By those words and meaning. Who will take the time? There are too many important things to do. We shove it into a corner of a few sentences every night, or on Thursday, or

Saturday when we have our turn at the prayers for those who are ill, and protection of our community, protection and strength of our people. There are many dictionaries and *tafsīr*, and we have dived into the meanings over the years. Then there is the Sunnah. From the viewpoint of *at-tazkiyat*, after Qur'an, you cannot find anything better than Sunnah.

I want to be clear because of the problems we find around us, to understand what we mean by Sunnah. We mean the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammed (sal), the *hadith*, the life. There are also the *hadith* of others: the sayings of Ali ibn Abu Talib and Jafaar Sadiq and others (may Allah protect them all). We want to include all the wisdom because the Prophet Mohammed (sal) prayed every day for that wisdom, and we pray for the blessings of Prophet Mohammed (sal) and his companions and his family. The fact is that the Sunnah is a very personal message to us. Its existence implies that the Prophet Muhammed (sal), who gave the Sunnah and whose life was an example, and who inspired the *hadith* of others, was discharging the function of *at-tazkiyat* among the Sahaba and discharging this function of purification. The words that he uttered and the actions that he performed had an effect. They were not just intellectual discourses. They had an effect on the heart and the soul of the people—an effect we wish we could have even a small amount of ourselves.

We find that sometimes when you read the Sunnah, the Hadith, the words of the Prophet Muhammed (sal), they seem to steal into your heart and create a kind of personal warmth, a shaking of the head like, “Yeah, yeah, that’s true.” It takes effort to block that. It takes a lot of effort in the world that we live in today to stay in touch with Qur'an and to stay in touch with the Prophet Mohammed (sal), with what is real and true, with the core of our *fitrah*, to stay in touch with the goodness of our character. The basic building blocks of our character lie in Qur'an, not just knowledge—that’s not enough—but *hikma*. You can have experiences, but if they don’t mean anything to you, and you don’t use those experiences for the good, it’s like wasting your life, your breath. There are those among us who know how precious it is.

There has to be something else. There has to be a belief, an *iman*, a resolve, a determination, courage and character. That is very different from wishing and hoping that everything will be okay. That is very different from saying, “Tomorrow it will all change.” Or, “After I take care of this, then I’ll change.” We have to build our character around Islam by resolve and determination. It can be a resolve or a determination that comes with an urge or an idea, or a responsibility or duty. You can want something, but you have to practice. If you want to play the piano, you cannot play it unless you practice. If you want to be a good person, you have to practice it. We have to take the plan and we have to put it into practice. That is very, very difficult, because many of us are judging ourselves and our value by what we can do *only* by ourselves. We don’t ask for assistance. Assistance might take us in a direction we don’t desire to go. That includes the Qur’an.

If I say to you, for example, when you come to me with a problem, “Go to Qur’an and take the assistance of Qur’an.” you reply, “Okay. *Alhamdulillah*. I’ll do that. Thank you, Shaykh.” You go and open Qur’an and try to find the message of Qur’an. Or I say, “Here is a *hadith* on the subject.” You read the *hadith*. I might say to the children in school when they have some trouble in a class or they are confused about something, “Go talk to your teacher. Get some clarification from Khadija or Atefeh or Roya or Allaudin.” I always say to the kids in college, make sure you go visit your professor on a regular basis. Let them know who you are. Ask them a question, so you can understand what they expect of you. You can guide your life better. They will see that you have good character because you do that. They will take things into consideration, though they may not realize it.

Allah says, “**Remember Me and I’ll remember you.**” If you go to the Qur’an, you are going to Allah. If the answer is, “I don’t need that; I can do it on my own. I don’t need you. I don’t need it. I don’t need them. I’ll just try a little harder. I’ll depend on time. I

have all the time in the world” it is not true. Anything motivated from the ego is eventually going to pull us down, or pull down those we care about and love. Anything motivated from the intention to do well [will pull us up], even if doing well means getting a good grade. We are not going to get a lot of knowledge from every class in school. We are not going to get a lot of knowledge from everybody we talk to. We are not going to get a lot of knowledge from every book we read, but, we will get a habit, a way, a means. We will develop a pathway that we have trust in, and it will be the path of Allah. What do I mean? You know what I mean. We may be forced to talk to somebody else who does not have a lot of knowledge. We may know more than the professor does, but they will get something from that—humility perhaps, or adab.

There has to be a resolve and a clear understanding of what we are doing and why we are doing it. Then we have to take the practice, and undertake that practice as a plan of action. I was reading a book that was sent to me by a girl, my friend from high school, Nancy Zonnheiser. She sent me a book that she and her husband wrote about his experiences in World War II. He was a Canadian soldier. One of the stories was there was a fresh lieutenant who came in, serving under a major. They were about to go into a town in France. This young lieutenant who had no experience took command of the unit. He took them in too quickly, and didn’t clear the town out properly. He took his men right into an ambush. The major, seeing what was happening, rushed in to help them. The major was killed, and not one of the unit came out. They all perished there because of lack of experience and impetuous actions. They had a memorial service there.

Our life has a plan. We have to stick with the plan. Our hope and desire should be, *inshā’a-Llāh*, to be effective human beings, to be significant human beings, to be kind human beings. Isn’t that what you would want for your children, your nephews, your nieces? That is what Qur’an tells us and Sunnah tells us. Isn’t that what your parents wanted for you? During the Meccan period, when every kind of pressure was put on Prophet Muhammed (sal) to force him to abandon his mission, his uncle and his last

earthly support asked him if he would not give up his mission. Prophet Mohammed (sal) said, ***“Even if they put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left hand, I will not abandon my mission.”*** This is *adham*.

What is needed is that kind of resolve and that kind of determination which has to come from the center of our hope and the center of our desire. It has to be allowed to come out. We have to permit it to come out of us. It is the way we build our character. We have to have the determination to do well, to be healthy and balanced, and to be complete in what we are doing, to take every gift Allah (swt) gives us and use it. We cannot give it up. We have to program ourselves for success, and not to fail; program ourselves to overcome our difficulties, not avoid them. How do we cultivate this resolve? We cultivate this resolve by difficulty, by hardship. It is not easy.

The way to cultivate that resolve is to reflect upon the *qasas*, the stories told in Qur’an. They are not just there to be story telling. We have to read them the history of the crisis in the lives of people, challenges of the Prophet, challenges of the *awliyā*. We have to look at those: how groups of individuals are successful and they fail; how individuals are successful, and how they fail. Overall, we step back and see that righteousness is better, and piety is better, and perseverance is better, and faith is better, and trust is better than selfishness and material wants. Asking for forgiveness is better and forgiving is better, repenting is better. That is what we find, story after story, religion after religion.

For example, we see how people want to continue on their journey. In the life of the Prophet Mohammed (sal) and the Sahaba, we see how those individuals worked, the adverse circumstances of their lives and the state of their resolve, the state of their determination. Do you think it would have been the same had it been all so easy? The Prophet (sal) comes down from the mountain and says, “Boy, I just got a great message, Khadija. I’m going to tell it to everybody.” No. He comes down shaking and quivering, and she encourages him to be strong. So he starts giving the message, and everyone

accepts it saying, “Great message! We accept it. Fantastic! Glad you gave it! Thank you very much. Fulfills all my desires, because I just like change.” Do you think it would have been the same? Do you think we would even know the word Islam today, or Judaism, Christianity, or Buddhism if it were easy? The Buddha gets up one day and says to his wife, “I think I’ll go out for walk.” “Great idea! Why don’t you start a religion?” “I think I’ll do that!” He kisses the kid goodbye and walks out the door. That is not how it happened.

Allah has created this story over and over again with different names and different faces. Some of those names and faces are here. They are our story, too. Not just a story. When we hear about the troubles, trials, and tribulations, we are not just looking back in history. We are looking at our own selves, too. It’s *baraka*, blessing, truth put into a form of a story so that, like a time capsule or time pill, we can take it and it seeps into our being and enables us to somehow become stronger from the inside out. It’s our history. It is not just saying, “The Prophet (peace be upon him) survived adverse circumstances, and the Sahaba survived adverse circumstances, and the *taba’ain* survived these circumstances—that’s them.” That is the intellect. The Christians say, “Jesus died for your sins, so you don’t have to struggle anymore.” There are plenty of Christians in the world who struggle. They have to resolve that.

No, we have to become strong. When you look at the Qur’an, you have to take the time, because you cannot, 15 or 20 years later, turn back and say, “Well, had I only taken the time, maybe would have learned something.” That would at least be an honest response. It would be worse to say, “I used to read it every once in a while, but I didn’t get much out of it.” If I polled everyone in this room to tell me every story you know about the Prophet Mohammed (sal), how long would we be here? Thank God, there are a couple of people here who would keep us here for a while. Believe it or not, it can inspire you, and answer your questions, and free you if you do this. It allows us to cultivate within ourselves this type of determination. The amount of resolve and the amount of

determination in our life, in a way, is an index of our belief in the promises that Allah (sal) has given us. It is also an index of our belief in the threats that are there, too, the warnings of what will happen if we do not follow and stay on the *suratal mustaqim*.

Shaykh Noorudeen and I were on the phone before I came here. He said, “What’s happening?” I started telling him, and he said, “Wow.” I said, “Yeah, it’s Chicken-Little day. The sky’s falling, but *inshā’a-LLāh*, we have a roof to catch it.” Are you adding to the sky falling, or are you adding to the pillar that holds it from crashing down on your brothers and sisters and yourself. If our faith/*iman* in the promises of the rewards of the here and Hereafter in living a good life and serving others is real faith, then the degree of its reality would be expressed in the intensity of our own personal service. If not, you can dismiss it and say, “Well, I guess I just don’t have the faith!” Maybe you haven’t taken the time or made the effort. It’s not about time, it’s about effort. Where do you get strong determination and intensity from? From the lives and the examples of others, from the Sunnah and Hadith. We have to find the things that inspire us and go over them again and again and keep finding ways to inspire ourselves until that inspiration is who we are. It is just like we go over our desires, again and again and again, until we find a way to fulfill them. That is why spirituality is a maturation process.

Sometimes you find young people who come out of High School, when they go off to college get involved in the social milieu of college. It is a big game, and lots of fun for them, and they flunk out. Well, I had a lot of fun my first year in college. I majored, as you know, in quadrangle guitar. I sat in the quadrangle and played guitar all the time. That was good, because the punishment came right away! Or, they go out and get a job. “I’m not ready for college; I’ll get a job.” They justify blowing college by getting a job. Getting a job is good. By the time they are 23, 24, 25, some feel they have to go back. These same people who flunked out, now they get A’s, maybe. Maybe they realized they blew it; maybe they matured. Some never go back. Some realize that they approached it in the wrong way.

What if there is no going back? Let's say they live in Turkey. In Turkey, you know what they do? You take exams, but they tell you what you qualify for. They tell you what colleges or university you can go to, and that's it. If you don't go, it's very hard, 4 or 5 years later to go. They have 100,000 people graduating from high school every year, and 10,000 go to university—and they tell you where to go. Of course, if you have money you can go where you want.

If we approach life immaturely, the results are that. So many things in life are approached in the same way, not just students, by the way. The world brings them down. They become depressed or upset. What Qur'an gives us, [if we keep] going back and reading and studying and taking the time to really allow ourselves to be inspired, is this intensity and resolve and determination that we all need to face life. Another thing that helps us with this resolve is keeping the company of good people—not friendly people, not drinking partners, not pals—good people. Sometimes good people are silent. They don't want to bother you, or impose on you—the company of people. It helps a lot to cultivate the resolve to be in the company of good people. It's not easy. *Alhamdulillah*, we have a community of good people. We have good people that come here, visitors from far away places. Many people come. We should consider our company the company of Allah, because Allah sends good people to people.

The last principle I'm going to talk about is *amal*. Without *amal* there cannot be any *at-tazkiyat*. It is just the idea of purification. So we have to find ways to cultivate the work that gives us unity in God. I don't mean just the job you get a paycheck from. *Alhamdulillah*, I have a job I get a paycheck from that I love, that's good work. Not everybody has that blessing. If we reflect upon it in a deep way, we have to keep our vision alive. We have to keep our emotions and our passions in check. We have to foster the knowledge, and we have to put that knowledge and all of that energy into work – into practice. We have to be balanced and motivated. That's what our responsibility is for our self, where

our emotions and our intellect and our faith and our piety all come together. If we have knowledge and determination, we can do that.

When we get on the other side of wherever we are that is negative or destructive, invariably we look back and say, “How come I never saw it that way before?” This is the trial and test that, like a fire, converts base metal into gold. Sometimes the fire seems very hot and it is burning us. When we read things, or are told things, or we hear things we don’t like being told, it makes us feel upset or guilty, ashamed or depressed, angry, bothered, imposed upon. But just beyond that is the inspiration. Just beyond that, Qur’an is inspiring us to do more. One of the greatest messages is that it mellows us. It guides our passions. It trains us. It attunes us. The Qur’an is not just a book; it is this whole process. That is why, even if I just listen to it as we do every week here, the more I hope it can change our lives. If we can go to the Qur’an and allow it to motivate us, we could find pleasure and peace in our hearts and in our lives—also the Hadith. There is no substitute for it, no matter what we think, only momentary substitutes.

If we try and analyze the psychology of each human being in this world: what makes them have habits, what makes them informed and deformed in their thoughts, we find that all of it can be healed by love and by the Qur’an, and by the Prophet’s Hadith and, *inshā’a-llāh*, by keeping good company. We should make friends with those who invoke the pleasure of Allah and not the displeasure. We should keep the psychological company as well as the physical company of good people. We should also keep company of Allah in solitude. Then, of course, we should engender in our community and in our *ummah* and our *jamat*, a sense of real fellowship, real trust and real support; and that, no matter what the need is that I have, the need I understand of somebody else is more important than mine.

How do we do this? We pray together, we meditate together, we make *dhikr* together. We cook dinner together. We build buildings together. We serve one another, *khidma*.

We serve the community at large by doing that. We witness to each other the goodness of life. The higher existence of the Ummah depends on good company. The Prophet Muhammed (sal) and the Sahaba, the *imams* and *awliyā*, the truly courageous people, are the best company. Take it off the theoretical plane; take away the excuses; take away the fears and anxiety; take away the lack of courage. All this is promised by Allah.

Remember that our job is to hold fast to the rope. If you were drowning, and someone threw you a rope, you wouldn't contemplate holding fast to it. If you jump off a bridge with a bungee rope, you better know how to tie it, or trust the person who ties it. You might have the thrill of your life, but it's only at the edge of death.

The Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) told us to trust in the *awliyya* and the *shuyukh* and to rely upon them. With that we can make meaning out of life, because life goes on day after day after day after day. There will not be one day where a humble person will not learn something and an arrogant person will not forget something.

Asalaamu aleikum. Du'ās.

O Allah there are among us those who are ill, and yet at the core of their being they are well. Their light is in their hearts. They have shown faith to You, perseverance and courage. We ask You, Allah, to shine Your Light upon their illness and make them whole again. There are those with emotional and mental strains and stresses, questions that need to be answered in their lives. We ask You, Allah, to give them the courage to turn to You, Your Qur'an and to Your Prophet (sal), to be patient and persevere, until the revelation comes to them of the greatness of this journey and the blessing of this life. We ask You, Allah (swt), for those who have passed this week, Your Mercy, Your Compassion, O Merciful of merciful. We ask You, Allah, to bring them close to You in the light of eternal peace and understanding. O Allah, the leaders of this world are faced with great challenges, and our leader in this country with probably the most great of them all. We ask You, Allah, open his heart to the mercy and Your Compassion, and give us strength and honesty and justice and transparency. *Amin.*

SECOND KHUTBAH Duas.