



Five Sunday Series 2010-2011

'Justice'

Weight-ing for Justice: Seeking the Balance

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OPENING DU'AA

*Allahumma inna nasalaka mujibati rahmatika
Wa'a'za'ima magfiratika, wa salamata min kulli itmin,
wal-ganimata min kulli birrin, wal-fawza bil-jannati mina-n-naar.*

O Allah, we ask You for words which will make certain Your Mercy,
actions which will make certain Your Forgiveness,
freedom from every offence, a supply of every virtue,
entering Jannah and safety from the Naar.

*Allahumma, yassir lanaa umuuranaa ma'a-r-raabati li-quluubinaa
wa abdaaninaa wa-s-salaamati
wa-l'aafiyati fee diininaa wa dunyaanaa.*

O Allah, make it easy for us in all our affairs, with ease for our hearts and our bodies and safety
and protection in our religion and our worldly affairs.

*Bismi-Llaabi-r-Rahmaani-r-Raheem
Bismi-Llaabi-l-ladhee laa arjuu illaa fadlabuu wa laa akh-shaa illaa 'adlabuu wa laa aa'tamidu illaa qawlabuu wa laa umsiku illaa bi-hablibee*

Bika astajeeru, yaa dhaa-l-afwi wa-r-ridwaani mina-dh-dhulmi

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent the Merciful.

In the name of Allah, I do not ask for but His generosity, I do not fear but His justice, I do not count on but His words, I do not cling and hold to but His rope [love and friendship of Muhammad and Aali (children of) Muhammad].

INTRODUCTION

When we look around at our communities, our country, our world, we can find many examples of justice and injustice.

- A child born in Swaziland, for example, is nearly 30 times more likely to die before the age of five than a child born in Sweden.
- If you are black in America, you are twice as likely to be unemployed, three times more likely to live in poverty, and more than six times as likely to be imprisoned compared with whites. (Urban League report, 2010)
- Less than one per cent of what the world spends every year on weapons is needed to put every child into school.
- The three richest people in the world have assets that exceed the combined gross domestic product of the 47 countries with the least GDP.

When we hear these statistics and look at the inequities and un-answered injustices in the world, we wonder: “Where is the balance?” We wonder: “Where is the justice in a system in which where you are born determines your chances of living or dying, or of being well fed or under-nourished, of living under rule of law or the rule of a dictator?”

Are these things injustices? Does justice mean that all things should be equally divided and equally shared? If not, then what is justice? Does one measure just in terms of equality, or equity? Should it be measured according to ‘have’ and ‘have not’? Should it be measured in material standards or in spiritual standards? How do we balance the rights of the individual with the needs of the society? Is legal justice different from social justice, personal justice, or even spiritual justice? And, most importantly, where is *al-‘Adl*—in our societies, in our communities, in our lives? How do we promote justice, serve justice, be just? What does justice mean for the Muslim, for the Sufi?

In Qur’an, Allah tells us that justice and equity, balance and harmony are the foundational standards used in the creation of the universe. The Prophet (*salla-Llahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) said, “**It is with justice and equity that the heavens and the earth are established.**” And in Suratu-l-Hadid:

Laqad arsalnaa rusulanaa bi-l-bayyinaati wa añaalnaa ma’abumu-l-kitaaba wa-l-meezaana liyaquuma-n-naasu bi-l-qisti...

We have sent our messengers with Clear Proofs and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance so that the people might uphold justice. (57:25)

What this and Hadith are telling us is that the concepts of justice and balance are tied together in our universe; thus, we must keep in perspective the overall balance of creation, and the forces and counter-forces that work for and against justice. As human beings we have a responsibility to respond to every instance of injustice in the system. We must respond to genocide, greed, corruption, state sponsored terrorism, abridgment of civil liberties, hate-motivated crime, racial and ethnic profiling... just to name a few. But we also must not lose sight of the larger picture, the greater system of justice. We have a responsibility to educate and to affirm the Divine intent for goodness and balance in the world. That, of course, begins with our own self, with our ability to be fair, to keep justice in our own lives, to keep things in *mizān*/balance.

MEEZAAN: THE FOUNDATION OF JUSTICE

Allah says in Suratu-r-Rahman:

Wa-s-samaaaa'a rafid'ahaa wa wadd'a-l-meezaan.

Al-laa tatghaw fi-l-meezaan.

Wa aqemuun alwazna bi-l-qisti wa laa tukhsirun al-meezaan.

**And He has raised up the sky and established the balance--
that you may not transgress balance.**

And so weigh with justice and do not skimp in the balance. (55:7-9)

The principle of justice in Qur'an is based on a dynamic of balance. As anyone who's tried to walk on a narrow ledge knows, balance isn't a static concept. It is something that requires constant corrections, constant re-adjustment, and consciousness. One has to work both to achieve and to maintain it.

Similarly, justice has to be carefully looked at and meted out according to situations, because things change. Things that were considered just and balanced in society in one generation are not seen that way in the next.

There are many issues in the world today related to justice; I mentioned just a few of them already. Allah has established the standard of and process called justice, **“In order that we do not transgress balance.”** (55:8) Addressing the question of whether things are ‘in balance’ is a way to put into context some of the inequalities that I began with today. We also understand that a certain amount of inequity exists, even in the most perfected societies, but inequality in the extreme is a sign that the ‘system’ is out of balance.

The concept of justice in Islam is based on achieving that balance (*meezaan*), with *qist* and ‘*adl*. The word ***qist*** means: justice and fairness and fair-mindedness and rightness and correctness. ‘***Adl*** means to act justly and not discriminate, to be equivalent, to make straight, to be in a state of equilibrium and impartiality, justice and straightforwardness. We can see that these terms are very similar; but at the same time, there are subtle differences. For example, the word *qist* is used in the context of fulfilling an obligation. ‘*Adl* is used in the context of treating people equally.

The concept of ***meezaan*** comes from *wazana*, to balance, to equalize, and to weigh. Another derivative of the word means ‘mental health.’ It is used in the context of balancing different aspects of nature and refers to the natural human capacity, inclinations, characteristics to judge between what is right and what is wrong—and, in so doing, creates and supports a state of mental clarity and balance; thus countering the ill effects of worry and anxiety.

Then, of course there is the name of Allah: ***al-Adl***; from the Arabic: ‘*adala*: to act justly, equitably, with fairness; to treat everyone with indiscriminate justice. This definition also includes to straighten or make straight, to set in order; to balance, right and rectify; to be in a state of equilibrium, to be balanced, to be equal. Thus this name encompasses all the meanings and subtleties of justice.

So, as I talk about justice today, I hope we can appreciate the far-reaching meanings of the English word, ‘justice.’ The Qur’an uses all these terms to illustrate the natural sense of balance in the System. Allah sent down the Qur’an with guiding principles of balance and fairness for establishing justice. In Suratu-n-Nisaa:

Yaa ayyubaa-lladheena amanuu kuunuu qanwaameena bi-l-qisti shuhadaaa’a li-Llaabi wa law ‘alaa anfusikum awi-l-wa-alidayni wa-l-aqrabeena inŷy-yakun ghaniyyan aw fa-qeeran fa-Llaahu awlaa bihimaa. Fa-laa tattabŷnu alhawaa...

“Oh you who firmly believe! Stand for justice, witness for Allah, even if it is against yourself, your parents or relatives, whether they are rich or poor, for Allah is a Protector for both. So do not follow your desires [in matters of justice].” (4:135)

And in Sura al-Mutaffifin Allah further emphasizes the importance of fairness and justice:

*Waylul-li-l-mutaffifeen
Alladbeena idbaa iktaalun 'alaa-n-naasi yastanfuun,
Wa'idbaa kaalunhum aw wazanuuhum yukhsiruun.*

**“Woe to those who give short measure—
those who, when they are going to take their due, demand it in full.
And when they have to give measure or weigh what they owe to theirs, give less.”** (83:1-3)

You can see in this *ayaat* the dynamic of the balance exemplified. There are many examples like this that are given in Qur'an. As, again, in Sura al-Isra:

Wa anfuu al-kayla idbaa kiltum wa zinuun bi-l-qistaasi-l-mustaqeemi; dhaalika khayrun-wa ahsanu ta'weelaa.

You shall give full measure, when you measure, and weigh with even scale; this is the best way and will prove to be the best in the end.
(17.35)

We are familiar with the relationship between justice and balance—symbolized by the scale (and the blindfolded woman holding the scale). If Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*) were to drop this scale of balance and justice in creation for even an instant, the entire cosmos would be utterly annihilated. In the same way, as Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*) holds onto this just scale, so too does the 'abd hold tightly to the scale of *Sharee'ah*, which Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*) established as the means through which a human being can attain to knowledge, gentleness, felicity and mercy.

So, when we talk about justice today, we have to keep these inter-related concepts in our minds. In Islam, justice does not just refer to legal justice (or the 'justice system'), but to the whole system of creation and the balance that must be maintained in that system through indiscriminate fairness and equality.

JUSTICE IN SOCIETY

It was narrated by 'Aisha that:

The people of Quraish worried about the lady from Bani Makhzum who had committed theft. They asked, “Who will intercede for her with Allah's Apostle?” Some said, “No one dare to do so except Usama bin Zaid, the beloved one to Allah's Apostle .”

When Usama spoke about that to Allah's Apostle, Allah's Apostle said (to him), “Do you try to intercede for somebody in a case connected with Allah's Prescribed Punishments?”

Then he got up and delivered a sermon saying, “What destroyed the nations preceding you was that if a noble amongst them stole, they would forgive him; and if a poor person amongst them stole, they would inflict Allah's Legal punishment on him. By Allah, if Fatima (the daughter of Muhammad) stole, I would cut off her hand.” (Book #56, Hadith #681).

Thus is the importance of justice and fairness, equally applied, in a society. Justice is a force that is more powerful than any individual, the consummate ‘leveler’ and equalizer. Justice and rule of law is possibly the single most important thing to create a stable and peaceful society.

It is only through the constant balancing of justice and equity that human beings have the potential to create a society that is civil. (Hence, we get the term civil society.) It is only within the framework of justice that a society can have meaningful interactions to address things like health, or community responsibility, or business transactions, or governmental laws, or advocacy, or education. These all are part of the rule of law.

I pause here to directly address a point that I will not have time to expand upon, that of semantics/semiotics. In this case, how we use language, its morphology and the cultural and personal assumptions that accompany it, carries certain assumptions. I will illustrate this with an example from Qur’an on the administering of justice:

...

Yaa ayyubaa-lladheena amanuu kutiba ‘alaykumu-l-qisaasu fi-l-qatlaa... fa-man ‘ufiya labu min akheebi shay’uñ fa-ttibadum bi-l-maruufi wa adaaa’un ilayhi bi’ihsaaniñ. Dhaalika takhfeefum-mir-rabbikum wa rahmatuñ ...

Oh you who securely believe, retribution is prescribed for you in the case of killing. But if anything is pardoned, a man by his brother, then let it [the pardon] be adhered to with friendliness [*maruufi*] and the payment [*diyat*] be made with beneficence [*ihsaan*]. This is a lightning [of the burden] and Mercy from your Lord. (2:178)

This *ayat* speaks of the *diyat* (compensation—i.e., a fine a murderer has to pay the family of the murdered person in case he or she is granted pardon). This *ayat* refers to *maruf* of a society; *maruf* means the customs and the conventions of a society. At the time of the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) the *maruf* was that the *diyat* of a woman was half of a man, but the *maruf* of different societies may be different; therefore the *maruf* of each should be followed.

This is yet another example of justice in Islam—where it has not obligated us to discriminate between a man and a woman, slave or free man, Muslim or non-Muslim—but to follow the *ma'ruf* of our society.

We can see, as in today's societies, when the foundational principle of justice is abrogated or subverted with principles of greed, or the superiority of one over another, or principles of acquisition, we have a world that accepts the kinds of injustices that I began with today. We live in a world that accepts that if you're skin is a particular color, or you're from a particular economic background, or you're born in a particular country, the rules of justice apply differently to you—rules, which on the surface appear to be clear, but are interpreted quite arbitrarily at times.

This, along with today's general lack of civility among individuals, the partisanship in government, and the general bigotry and prejudice are all signs that we are not 'upholding the balance.' Forgetting that 'balance' is by 'weight' not 'kind'...weight of evidence, weight of argument or principle, not 'kind' as in race, religion, national origin, gender.

I will now continue in more general terms... having pointed you to the subtleties.

In most societies the rule of law is the manifestation of the principles of justice. If individuals and groups of individuals in society embrace, adhere to, sustain social order, and behave in a way that is not only acceptable by the vast majority, but which affirms and reinforces the value of civility (*adab*), then they have found a way to ameliorate many of societies conflicts and tensions, and questions of what is acceptable and unacceptable.

However, when people, or groups of people, do not act according to the principles of justice, then some action is required to restore the *meezāan*, the balance. The action is 'adl, and the one who acts is an 'aadil. Of course, we know that people are not always civil, or just, or truthful, and their motivations are not always for a civil society; thus, there has to be some way of enforcing justice, restoring the balance. The responsibility of enforcing justice is, as part of a balanced and just society, a duty of the civil, just and fair minded citizens of that specific society. As Allah says in Qur'an:

Wa mimman kbalaqnaa ummatuñy-yahduuna bi-l-ḥaqqi wa bibi yá diluun

Among those whom We have created, there are some people who guide others with truth and establish justice therewith. [7:181]

So, there are certain people in a society who are particularly given the responsibility of establishing justice and correcting the balance. But every individual in this society is equally responsible to keeping the balance of justice. If people take that responsibility and don't abuse it, then you have a just society. But if everyone see themselves as enforcers, but not examples, and have no higher authority over them, then they can abuse their position and 'take the law into their own hands.' So, even in the administering of justice, there is a delicate balance.

Uthman bin Affan (*radiya-Llaab 'anhu*) explained the balance this way:

The dictates of justice demand that a proper equation should be maintained between the rights and obligations of people. Whatever is their right should be conceded to them, and steps should be taken to ensure that whatever is their obligation is duly fulfilled.

Thus, when it comes to justice, we all have certain rights over each other, and we all have certain responsibilities and duties in the preservation of the balance and justice in our society. Allah teaches us to observe certain principles as a society, not only so that we have success, but also so that society is in balance and people are at peace. Peace and justice go together. Peace and justice are concepts that involve the whole *Ummah*. If we establish justice in our lands and communities, we cannot do it as individuals, by fiat or edict. It must be done by consensus, by consultation, appropriate interpretation, *ijmad*, *shu'uraa*, *ijtihad*; and by creating and following laws and principles, which will help to ensure not only justice and balance, but will tell us what to do when they are transgressed, and how to act.

FINDING JUSTICE IN OUR LIVES

I began today with examples of injustice in our global society, and in our country. Just as we can look around and find examples of injustice, we can also find examples of peace, balance and justice. When we look at the system, as a whole, we could say that in certain nations, among certain people, the scales are still tipped in favor of balance and justice.

This will remain the case as long as good people remain guided by principles and understanding, governed by sound policies and strategies, accompanied by efficient, committed, non-biased and non-prejudiced guides, leaders, administrators who hold in the highest of esteem the opportunity to serve justice. Where can we find that? I will tell you that the closest I have found is what has evolved in our small community. Our values center around the *tareeqah*, which is at the core of what is Islam. Not that it is anywhere near perfect, rather its imperfections are pointers to effort. But it is what comes naturally from the heart of the sincere seeker, the sincere, humane human being—the faulty, imperfect, challenged, inconsistent, even at times doubting human being—who has chosen and been chosen, accepted and been accepted.

So, whether it's our community and the way it is administered, with love and friendship, common sacrifice and common benefit, or whether it is your home and how you administer it, or whether it is the local county, or town, or country; still the same principles and values are necessary: Justice must transcend the political.

Justice begins and ends with the individual's relationship (*nisbah*) with Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) and how that relationship is expressed in society. It begins with our personal accountability and it ends on the *Yamm al-Qiyama*, with the final judgments. As Allah reminds us in Sura al-Ambiyaa of His Balance and Divine Justice:

Wa nadd'u-l-mawaazeena-l-qista liyanmi-l-qiyaamati fa-laa tudhlamu nafsuiñ shay'añw-wa'iñ kaana mithqaala habbatim-min khardalin ataynaa bihaa wa kafa binaa haasibeen.

We shall set up a just Balance of the Day of Standing forth [from the graves] and no soul shall be treated unjustly in any way. Even if it is no more than the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring forth and Our accounting shall suffice. (21:47)

As we think about living our lives with justice and maintaining the balance in our hearts, minds, families and communities, remember everything has its weight (even the weight of a mustard seed). Listen to this *hadith*.

The Prophet Muhammad (sal) is related by Abdu-Llaah ibn Amr to have said: "Verily Allah (Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa) will bring a Muslim into the presence of all men on the Day of Judgment, and will show him ninety-nine large books, and each book as long as they can reach."

Then Allah (Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa) will say to him: "Do you deny anything in these books? Have my writers injured you?"

And the Muslim will say, "O my Lord, I deny nothing that is in them."

Then Allah (Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa) will say: "Have you and excuse?"

And he will say, "No."

Then Allah (Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa) will say: "I have good news for you, for there is no oppression in this day." Then Allah (Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa) will bring forth a piece of paper on which is written: "Ash-hadu an laa illaha illa-Llaah, wa ash-hadu anna Muḥammadin ʿabduhuu Rasulu-Llaah." Allah (Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa) will say, "Go and weigh your actions."

And the Muslim will say, "What is this bit of paper compared with those large books?"

And Allah (swt) will say: "This bit of paper is heavy, weigh it." Then the books will be put in the scale and the bit of paper on the other side, and the books containing the actions will be light, and the bit of paper with the shahaada will be heavy.

It is under the umbrella of Mercy that justice finds its place in Islam. As we know, we are always in need of the Mercy of Allah to maintain the balance.

As He says in this *hadith qudsi*:

O son of Adam, if your sins were to reach the clouds of the sky and then you would seek My forgiveness, I would forgive you. O son of Adam, if you were to come to Me with sins that are close to filling the earth and then you would meet Me without ascribing any partners with Me, I would certainly bring to you forgiveness close to filling it.

But this is the subject of our next talk in this series. While independent talks, you can see how they are all interconnected: Peace, Justice, Mercy, Love and Freedom. So, for now, we will leave the subject of Mercy and return to Justice.

INNER JUSTICE

I have been speaking about civil society, in the outer, about social justice and social order as necessary for a peaceful society. But what about taking all these principles and turning them inward—not only using them as the template of the civil society, but seeing that it is also the template for a balanced spiritual human being? What are the characteristics of *‘adl*, *qist*, *meezaan*, when it comes to a human being? In the same way, there is a correlation between the individual and the society. We realize that there is only the possibility for peace in the society if the society has established some guidelines and rules. The same is true for the individual. There cannot be sustainable peace in the individual without guidelines or principles that are embraced and lived by that individual. That is a process, ongoing and dynamic, and it is in my mind and heart, and at the core of Sufic Islam. If we have rules and guidelines which are followed, with the cooperation of individuals and groups of individuals in society, so too, we can have clear and progressive success in our society toward balance and harmony through good people doing good works.

I have already mentioned our small community in Bedford, because we have certain principles that we try to follow, practices that we do, and hopefully, because we have cooperation as individuals and as groups of individuals within our community, we have, for the most part, *meezaan*, balance. Our shared belief and commitment to the Path provides for us certain guiding principles for establishing justice in the terms, in the context of *‘adl* and *qist*.

Looking for justice in the world, finding, analyzing and making judgments about what is happening in the world, the causes for travesties like genocide and hunger, poverty, prejudice and bias are all well and good; but there is an analogue, internally. All the good works we do, and all the good intentions we have, collectively or individually, to address those problems will have some good effect. But if we don't address the same issues within ourselves—our spiritual poverty, our spiritual hunger, or our lack thereof (because, as you know, one of the signs of starvation is that you stop being hungry)—if we do not address these internal imbalances and injustices, then we will never be able to address the external ones.

Of course, to the sincere and compassionate human being, it makes sense to be just, fair and equitable in one's interface with others and with society at large. But that value must be sought equally within our own self; otherwise, the nation of self, or the nation of "I" is going to become bankrupt and become more and more corrupt, feeding on its own greed and immorality, until it has abrogated what is just *de jure* (in the law), and made corruption even more obvious and powerful in society.

When justice and mercy and love disappear, so does hope for peace and understanding, so does emotional, mental and social stability. Rampant individualism in the outer is anarchy; in the inner it is *kufr*, or at least misguidedness (*maghdumb*). Allah reminds us in Qur'an of the importance of standing for justice, inwardly and outwardly:

Wa yaa qawmi anfuu al-mikyaala wa-l-meezaana bi-l-qisti wa laa tabkhasuu-n-naasa ashyaaa'ahum wa laa ta'thaw fi-l-'ardi mufsideen.

O my people. Give full measure and weight in justice (*qisti*), and do not deprive people of what they are due and do not act wickedly on the earth [by spreading] corruption. (11:85)

So you see, Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*) is reminding us about the larger agenda that begins with us, but spreads to others and to our earth. Let me share with you a story that illustrates the intersection of the individual and society, when it comes to justice.

In a city there once took place a murder. Two men were apprehended as suspects; one of the men was innocent while the other was guilty. When the trial took place and the court finished its deliberations, the guilty man was acquitted while the innocent one was declared guilty and sentenced to hang. A friend of Allah was watching all this and wondered about the fate of the two men. He whispered in his heart to his Lord, “O *Dhaahir* and *Baatin* of the Universe, I know that Your ways are mysterious and man can never comprehend them. But still, it is puzzling my mind greatly why an innocent man was allowed to hang while the guilty one was let go.” As the friend of Allah was thus talking to his Lord, he fell asleep and had a dream during which Allah revealed to him the answer to his question:

“I behave with men according to what they hope from Me. The man who was acquitted of murder even though he was guilty of it used to pray in jail, ‘O the Gracious One! Have mercy on me.’ So I had mercy on him and let him go free, for I am free to do with My creatures what I will.”

“As for the innocent man who was hanged, he used to pray, ‘O Just One! Do justice.’ Now long before he was apprehended for murder he was sitting on the bank of the river with a twig in his hand. An ant climbed up the twig while he was watching. He dipped the twig in the water flowing beside him, and the ant drowned and died. Since he wanted justice from Me, I let him hang in exchange for the life of one of My creatures that he took without any reason.”

So, O man, while you should do *jihad* for justice in the world, never seek justice for yourself from Allah. For, before Allah we are all guilty and it is only in His mercy that we can find safety.

This story reminds us of where I began today: with justice as a dynamic *meezaan* (balance). Sometimes, the system is so big that we cannot see where the balance is, where the justice is, but we should remember that it is in Allah’s hands. There is individual justice and collective justice; there is social justice and there is spiritual justice. There is spiritual balance and there is disbalance. All of these things, all of these things embrace the concept of what we call justice. But what is most important to establishing balance and justice in our lives is to ask our selves: “Am I a just ruler, or a just teacher, or a just elder, or friend, or not? Are my actions coming from my own *meezaan*, my own balance, or are they coming from my head, my doubts and hypocrisies?”

A Demeanor of Justice

We all know when we are in a state of *meezaan*, balance, and how different that is from when we are in a state of reaction/dis-balance, ricocheting back and forth between emotions, justifications and preferences. So, how do we get ourselves to live a life of justice and balance? We can begin with how we approach our work, our life, our families. There’s an *adab* to justice, and a demeanor that reflects it. We see in courts of law there is a certain formality and demeanor, courtesy, but it applies to all of our duties and responsibilities. It should be obvious on the face and attitude of the person.

Think about the type of person who makes a good judge: He or she has a certain coolness toward life, toward the things of this world, even a detachment, but at the same time, tempered by deep sincerity, humility, and compassion. He or she should have an air of dignity and nobility, having a measured and patient approach to every problem, listening to all the facts, researching the history of the issues and the people, and being equitable in their actions and choices.

Inna-Llaaha yuhibbu-l-muqsiteen.

Truly Allah loves those who are equitable. [60:8]

This is the way we would all like to be in our affairs, with our family, and in our work. Abu Hurayra reported that the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) said,

Allah will give seven the protection of his shade on the Day when there will be no shade except His shade. They are: a just ruler; a youth who grew up with the worship of Allah; a person who’s heart is attached to the masjid; two persons who love and meet one another, and depart from one another for the sake of Allah; a man whom a beautiful and high ranking woman seduces for illicit relations, but he rejects her offer by saying, “I fear Allah;” a person who gives a charity but conceals it to such an extent that the left hand might not know what the right hand has given; and a person who remembers Allah in solitude, and his eyes well up in tears.

The Prophet also said,

The people in Jannah will be of three kinds: a just, successful ruler, a man who shows mercy to his relatives, and a pious believer who has a large family and who refrains from begging. (In other words, one who takes responsibility for his family.)

As you see, justice is always a part of these definitions of the best kind of people. But the most important message for us is to try to be just in all of our dealings, to be equal and equitable, and kind, and fair; to be straight with people and treat them with probity.

We have to step back and look at our lives, interactions and relationships in terms of *meezaan*, *‘adl*, and *qist*. Whether it is in our social relationships, or in our businesses or professional careers, or dealing with our income and finances, or even when if one is extracting some kind of retribution for actions that have been done, like oppression, one has to find balance. When people say, “That person is not balanced,” it means they have something wrong with them. They are not conforming to social norms; they are overly emotional or irrational. On an individual basis, justice begins with a state of balance. Individual justice includes refraining from backbiting, from slander, from what is often referred to as greater sins. It means acting with restraint—restraining our emotions, our selfishness, our nafs; restraining oneself from actions that are not worthy of the bounty and generosity of life Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*) has given to us.

JUSTICE AND CORRUPTION IN OUR LIVES

As I have previously pointed out, but again emphasize, the absence of justice, balance and equity leads to corruption throughout society and in the individual. The roots of in-justice and corruption begin in the hearts of individuals. We see a lot of corruption happening in the world today. Just as the root of corruption is at the heart of the individual, it is also a disease at the heart of society that needs to be cured. In society, it is in the heart of the unjust

leader. If it's in your family, it is in the heart of the abusive parent or spouse. If it's in the corporation, it's at core of the decision-making where people can benefit from greed and exploiting the talents and knowledge of others, or by misusing their resources and their needs for self aggrandizement.

Corruption manifest in society in a myriad of ways: as taking bribes, or making money on the suffering of others, or taking unfair advantage, or favoring a particular group over others. These types of corruption may feel far away from us and our daily lives, but corruption is always a story of self-serving, of choosing one's own needs and desires above the needs of another person, of society, even of one's own family; of saying to one's self, "That rule, that kind of justice doesn't apply to me..." Let me share with you a story to illustrate this point:

Jabala bin Aibam was a Ghassanid prince. He became a convert to Islam and came to Medina. At Medina, Jabala stayed as the personal guest of Hazrat Umar (radiya-Llaab'anhu). A few days later, Umar (radiya-Llaab'anhu) and Jabala travelled to Mecca for the purposes of pilgrimage. In Mecca too, Jabala was a State guest.

As Jabala was circumambulating the Holy Kaaba, a poor Arab of the Banu Fazara accidentally trod on his pilgrim scarf. That aroused the wrath of Jabala. Without waiting to listen to any explanation, Jabala buffeted the Arab in the face bruising him severely in the nose.

The Arab lodged a complaint with Hazrat Umar (radiya-Llaab'anhu) who sent for Jabala and asked him whether the charge levied against him by the Arab was true.

Jabala answered haughtily, "This rascal trod on my reverence for the Kaaba and, but for the prohibition to shed blood within the sacred premises, I would have slain the man on the spot, instead of merely thrashing him."

Umar asked the Arab for explanation, and he said on oath that due to extraordinary rush, he trod on the scarf of Jabala accidentally.

Turning to Jabala, Umar said, "Do you agree that what happened was accidental, or did this man deliberately offend you?"

Jabala said, "I am not concerned with that. It might have been accidental, but the fact remained that he trod on my scarf thereby uncovering me. It must be borne in mind that I am a prince while he is a commoner."

Umar said, "In Islam there is no distinction between a prince and a commoner. You could not take the law in your own hands merely on the ground that you are a prince, and he is a commoner."

Jabala felt annoyed and said, "I had thought that Islam would add to my dignity and prestige, and here Islam is becoming an instrument for my humiliation."

Umar said, "Law must have its own course, and I am obliged to do justice. There are two alternatives. Either patch up with the man and satisfy him, or be prepared to face my verdict."

When Jabala saw that Umar was serious in invoking the penal provisions of law he said, "Give me one day to ponder over the matter."

Hazrat Umar deferred his judgment for one day. That very night, Jabala left for Syria secretly along with his retinue. From there he proceeded to Constantinople. In Constantinople he became a Christian.

He said, "I denounce Islam because it does not discriminate between a prince and a commoner."

When Hazrat Umar (radiya-Llaab 'anhu) learned on the following day that Jabala had slipped away, he allowed the poor Arab adequate compensation from the Bait-ul-Mal.

This story illustrates that the core and basis for goodness, blessings and virtue within a society (or even a family) is the just leader; a leader who does not put themselves above others; a compassionate, merciful, equalizing guide, teacher, leader, father, mother, the one who has goodness in their heart. These people are a blessing that lift up and add virtue to a society.

It was narrated by Abdullah ibn Umar that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said:

Behold! The dispensers of Justice will be seated on the pulpits of light beside Allah, on the right side of the Merciful, Exalted and Glorious. Either side of the Being is the right side, both being equally meritorious. [The dispensers of Justice are] those who do justice in their rules, in matters relating to their families, and in all that they undertake to do.

Note that "the dispensers of Justice" in this *hadith* are not just people appointed as judges, but they are "those who do justice in matters relating to their families and all that they undertake to do." This is a very important point—all of us have the opportunity in our lives to be "dispensers of Justice," to be leaders in our family, our community, our workplace.

ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN JUSTICE

A person in a position of leadership cannot lack these qualities of *'adl*, *qist*, and *meezaan*. They have to have them. It would be wonderful if they were so easily definable that a person who doesn't have them would not be eligible for those positions. That was the way at the time of the Prophet, but not today. Today, we have words and concepts of justice as individuals and collectively, but the words lack enforcement capability. These terms have been politicized and personalized to such a degree that people don't understand the relationship between leadership and administration, and the organic development of the community and society.

Abu Hurayrah narrated a *hadith* of the Prophet (peace be upon him) on the responsibility and importance of the leader as a judge:

If anyone seeks the office of judge among Muslims till he gets it and his justice prevails over his tyranny, he will go to Paradise; but the man whose tyranny prevails over his justice will go to hell. (Sahih Al-Bukhari Hadith - 6.189)

If one has a truthful and just leader, then that person can save a company, solve a major problem in the family, save a community of believers from the darkness of corruption or injustice.

Imam Ali said, "*Good men are delivered and saved by a just leader; but the corrupt perish with their corrupt leader.*"

And Iman Jafar as-Sadiq (ra) said, “*Truth is obliterated in the governing of the unjust ruler, and falsehood is brought to life; likewise, oppression, lies and corruption appear.*”

We have seen that, and much worse, in our country, in our world. Social justice is integrally tied to leadership. If leadership is bad, we see there is no justice in society. When we don’t see people as equal before man’s law, let alone Divine law, people fall out of the influence of the principles of justice, and instead live under the influence of their emotions, and under the influence of their reactions. Out of that there can be no peace and reconciliation. Out of that there can be no fairness and balance, no justice, no equity, no equality. There is no probity and no honesty. There is no attempt to equalize. In other words, there is little justice.

We may ask ourselves, “Is it really *my* responsibility if there is injustice in the world? What does it matter to me, personally, if someone on the other side of the world or the other side of the country doesn’t get justice? What can I do about it?” It should matter to all of us. It should matter a lot, on the material level of our day-to-day life and on the spiritual level for the health of our soul.

It matters, because the type of people who trade in their sense of what is just, right and equitable, equal, fair, good, and balancing and who have lost their sense of where things are balanced, they have ceased to be of the people of the middle, *ummata wasata*. If justice does not exist in the hearts of people, then you have an unjust society. And it is not the hearts of the downtrodden or the poorest people that we have to worry about; it is the hearts of the affluent, those with ease in their lives; it is our hearts that we should worry about. Allah tells us in Sura al-‘Isra:

Wa’idhaa aradnaa an nublika qaryatan amarnaa mutrafeehaa fa-fasaquu feehaa. Fa-haqqa ‘alayhaa-l-qawlu fa-dammarnaahaa tadmeeraa.

When We decide to destroy a population, We order those who live in affluent ease [to obey Our Commands], but instead they act unlawfully within it. Then the Word [of destruction] comes true against it and We annihilate it completely. (17:16)

This also falls under the rubric of justice. Allah commands us to be just and be good. He makes clear the principles and foundations for transactions between people, and gives clear indications is right.

Qul amara Rabbee bi-l-qisti. Wa aqeemuu wujuubakum ‘iinda kulli masjidin-wa-d’uubu mukbli-seena lahu-d-deena kamaa badaakum ta’uuduun.

Say, “My Lord has ordered justice. Set your faces [toward Him] in every place of prostration and call to Him, making your *deen* sincere for Him [alone].” (7:29)

CONCLUSION: BEING A JUST AND BALANCED PERSON

What does it mean to follow the Command of Allah and to act with justice in all our transactions? First, it is to recognize that without Allah we are destitute. We come before Allah as a powerless, destitute individual with our *nafs*, hopefully, in our hands. It means to accept Allah's proscriptions and prohibitions and act with sincere intentions toward other human beings, even if it is contrary to our *nafs ammaarah*—especially if it is contrary to our *nafs ammaarah*. It is to give others the goodness from our heart in the way we speak to them, in the way we act toward them, in the way we deal with them. It is to look past the shortcomings of others, no matter what state you find them in, and be merciful to them. Finally and most importantly, it is to act with equity and a sense of care, so we are not placing our burden on someone else's shoulders. It is to do this every day, to remember it in every transaction and in every moment; this is the struggle of the believer.

Umm Salama reported that: “God’s Messenger (peace be upon him) never went out of my house without raising his eyes to the sky and saying, ‘O Lord! I seek refuge in You lest I stray or be led astray, or slip or be made to slip, or cause injustice or suffer injustice, or do wrong or have wrong done to me.’”

Thus, the place of justice is in the mind and heart of the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*). We should bring that same *du'aa* and intention into our lives.

I would like to conclude today by sharing with you a beautiful description of Hazrat Abu Bakr (*radiya-Llaahu ‘anhu*) given by Hazrat Ali (*radiya-Llaahu ‘anhu*), who described Abu Bakr (*radiya-Llaahu ‘anhu*) as a model of justice and character:

You redressed the grievances of those who asked for justice; hence, they turned to you for guidance and were therefore successful, and got through you what they had never dreamt of. For infidels, you were a source of terrible punishment and a burning fire; and for the believers, a source of kindness, affection and protection.

You flew in the atmosphere of piety, attained its noble reward and won in superiority. Your argument was never weak, and your judgment was never faulty. You were never guilty of cowardice, and your heart was never crooked or misdirected. You were like a rock, which stands firm in the face of hard blows and dashing winds.

You were, as the Prophet of Allah has said, the most generous of men in friendship and in giving money. Again, as he says, you were weak in body, but strong in enforcing the commands of Allah. You were humble in your manners, but dignified in the estimation of Allah, great in the eyes of men, commanding respect with them. No one could even as much as wink at you, nor could anyone taunt you. You were not in a position to excite temptation and you were not partial to anybody.

The weak and the humble were strong with you, as you secured their rights; and the strong were weak and humble with you, as you made them surrender the rights of others. In this matter, those who were far from you were all equal. Those who obeyed and feared Allah most were nearest to you.

Your dignity lay in righteousness, truth, and benevolence; your word was imperative and definite, your command mild and cautious, and your judgment wise and firm. Thus you extirpated evil and made the way for the Truth clear; difficulties were solved, and fires of evil and discord extinguished.

I say it on oath that you made a great advance in [the doing of good works] and placed in great difficulty those who came after you. Evidently, you attained a high position in doing good.

I hope, from this beautiful description of Hazrat Abu Bakr (*radiya-Llaab 'anbu*), we are in a position where we can understand more what justice is; who a just person is, and we are inspired to bring his model into our own lives. Certainly, Ali (*radiya-Llaab 'anbu*) spoke truly when he said that the high standard of Abu Bakr's example "placed in great difficulty those who came after."

When we look at our leadership today in comparison to the noble and gentle leadership of the *Sabaabah* that I have described, we recognize that we are in a very critical state of loss of the value of honesty, truth, and justice, and how to treat one another.

But, I hope that in my talk today I have shown that if we look from the point of view of systems, we are reminded that justice is a dynamic process, a process in which we cannot see the whole picture. Instead, we must have faith in the balance that Allah has set forth, and remember that the very foundation of creation is in justice, love, mercy, equanimity and balance. The responsibility to restore the balance and the *fitrah* of creation, to restore the model of justice given us by the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) and the *Sabaabah*, who lived the model of the Qur'an, must begin with us, with our hearts, our words, our actions, our lives, our families and our communities. *Inshaa'a-Llaah*, we will at least be able to "maintain the balance."

CLOSING DU^CAA

*Bismi-Llaabi-r-Rahmaani-r-Raheem
Shahida-Llaabu annahu laa ilaaha illaa Huwa
wa-l-malaa'ikatu wa awluu al-ilmii*

Qaa'iman bi-l-qisti. Laa ilaaha illaa Huwa al-azeezu-l-hakeem. Inna-l-ladheena 'inda-Llaabi al-islamu. Wa anaa-l-abdu-d-d'ee fu-l-mudhnibu-l-aasee al-mubtaaju-l-haqeeru.

Ash-hadu li-mun'imee wa kbaaliqee wa raaziqee wa mukrimee kamaa shahida li-dbaatihi wa shahidat labu-l-malaa'ikatu wa awluu al-ilmii min 'ibaadihi bi-annahu laa ilaaha illaa Huwa dbuu-n-ni'ami wa-l-ihsaani wa-l-karami wa-l-imtinaani qaadirun azaliyyun.

*'aalimun abadiyyun, Hayyun Ahadiyyun, manjuudun sarmadiyyun,
Samee'un Baseerun, mureedun kaarihun, mudrikun, samadiyyun.*

(The Supplication for Saving from Deviation.)

In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful.

**Allah bears witness that there is no god but He,
and (so do) the angels and those possessed of knowledge,
maintaining His creation with justice;**

there is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise.

Surely, the (true) religion with Allah is Islam.”

**I am the slave—feeble, sinful,
disobedient, needy, and ignoble—**

I testify to my Benefactor, Creator,

Provider of me with my sustenance, and my Honorer,

as same as He has testified to Himself

and the angels have testified to Him

so have those possessed with knowledge amongst His servants

that there is no god save Him

the Lord of bounties, favors,

generosity, and kindness.

He is Omnipotent, Eternal,

All-knowing, Everlasting,

Ever-living, One and Only,

Self-existent, Endless,

All-hearing, All-Seeing,

Willing, Discriminating,

O Allah, we feel uneasy about and are disturbed by the departure of our Prophet, Thy blessings be on him and on his family, the absence of our guardian-friend, too many enemies, our numerical scarcity, widespread disorder, and the vicissitudes of time.

So send blessings on Muhammad and on his family, and help us to overcome this state of affairs at once.

Disperse the ominous clouds hanging over our heads; lend a helping hand to achieve success; bring in the rule of justice and fair play; make us bright, free from grief; and take care of us. Through Thy mercy, O most Merciful.

Allaahumma inna nashkuku ilayka faqad nabiiyyinaa salawatuka alayhi wa aalibi, wa ghaybatan waliyyinaa wa kasrata adumminaa wa qillata adadinaa wa shiddatal firani bina wa tazahura-z-zamani alayna fa-salli 'alaa Muḥammadin wa aalibi wa a'inna alaa dhalika bi fat-bin minka tu'ajjilubu wa bi dhurri takshifubuu wa nasrin tu'izzubuu wa sultani haqqin tudbirubuu wa rahmatin minka tujallilnaba wa aafiyatin minka tulbisunaba bi rahmatika yaa Arḥama-r-rahemeen.

Allaahumma ṣalla 'alaa Muḥammadin wa aali Muḥammad. Aameen