

Friday 13<sup>th</sup> July 2007

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

إِنَّ الْحَمْدَ لِلَّهِ ، نَحْمَدُهُ وَنَسْتَعِينُهُ وَنَسْتَغْفِرُهُ ، وَنَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ شُرُورِ أَنْفُسِنَا  
وَمِنْ سَيِّئَاتِ أَعْمَالِنَا. مَنْ يَهْدِهِ اللَّهُ فَلَا مُضِلَّ لَهُ، وَمَنْ يَضِلَّ فَلَا هَادِيَ لَهُ.  
وَأَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ ، وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ.

All Praise be to **اللَّهِ**.

We praise him and ask him for help and forgiveness. We ask him for protection from the evilness in ourselves and from our own bad deeds. Whom-so-ever God guides to the truth no one will lead astray, and whom-so-ever He leads astray, no one will ever guide.

I testify that there is no God but **اللَّهِ** to whom there is no partner

and I testify that Muhammad **ﷺ** is his servant and messenger

يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ  
لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقْوَاهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٣﴾

*“O you people! We created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (the one who is) the most righteous. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)” (S49, A13)*



Brothers and sisters, ASA. The topic for today's khutbah relates to some of the aspects concerning the conduct of the Muslim. I know that we have had a number of khutbahs in the past covering this topic, but ISA, we will look at some of these aspects in relation to recent events and discussions in our community.

I think it is safe to say that the majority, if not all of us have enjoyed the visit of Professor Jeffrey Lang last weekend. I was fortunate to attend three of his sessions. As is common with such an experience, you have some of your niggling questions answered, but unfortunately, this leads to even more questions posed. Professor Lang spoke about the conflict that gripped him during his early life. What determines whether one is a good or a bad person? Do we have a choice in the matter? As you probably have guessed by now, one of the questions that came to me was: "is good or bad conduct in a person something that Allah(SWT) ordains in that person, or is it that the person has the choice and ability to alter their conduct?"

I think the classic question is that "is it born or bread, and do I have a choice?" This question has managed to get its way into debates relating to certain criminal behaviour as well as debates relating to sexual orientation. For me, I will stick to conduct today.

The question of whether conduct is something that Allah(SWT) ordains or is something that a person can control may seem pedantic but the background to this question comes from the following two pieces of information:

Firstly, we have the following hadeeth.

This hadeeth is narrated by Zare' (RAA) in Sunan of Abi Dawood: "Zare' said that as we were in the delegation of Abdul-Quaiss entering Medina, we all rushed straight to the Prophet(SAAWS)." You can imagine the excitement of these early Muslims coming to Medina and meeting the Prophet(SAAWS) for the first time after all that they have heard about him. They were all rushing to see him, to embrace him and to declare their Islam. They have just endured travelling for miles, but in their excitement, they most probably did not realise the state they were in, and did not take the time to clean up before presenting themselves to the Prophet(SAAWS). Zare' said "Amongst us was Al-Munzir Al-Ashjij. He waited until he got his luggage, he changed his clothes and then went to Prophet(SAAWS)" to meet him for the first time. Even in his excitement, Al-Munzir Al-Ashjij was patient and deliberate. His first meeting with the Prophet(SAAWS) is something very special, and he wanted to be well dressed and well presented. The excitement of the moment did not affect him, and the Prophet(SAAWS) noticed that. The Prophet(SAAWS) greeted him and told him "in you there are two characteristics that are loved by Allah:

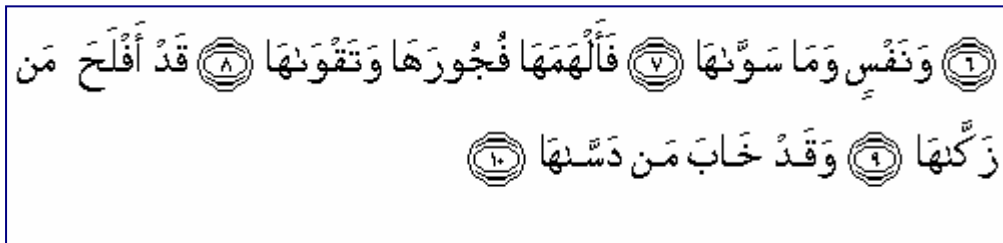
الحلم والأناة , you are patient and thoughtful (or measured)".

This was one of the amazing qualities of the Prophet(SAAWS), in that he always highlighted the good deeds and good characters of his companions. Firstly, to commend the person for his good conduct, and secondly, and probably more importantly, to set an example and a lesson for all of us to contemplate, as we are doing now, 1400 years later.

The response from Al-Munzir was very interesting. “He asked the Prophet(SAAWS): did I develop these characters, or did Allah bless me with them. The Prophet(SAAWS) replied: Allah indeed has blessed you with them. And Al-Munzir praised Allah for this blessing”.

This incident seems to tell us that good characters are a blessing from Allah, and some may come to the conclusion that there is little one can do. You are what Allah(SWT) has made you. You are either blessed or not so blessed.

Yet, in Surat Ash-Shamss, we read the following:



***“By the soul and Him Who made it perfect. Then He inspired it to understand what is right and what is wrong for it. He is indeed successful who makes it grow in purity. And he will indeed fail who corrupts it” (S91, A7-10)***

These ayas are also very clear, The Human soul has been inspired to understand what is right and what is wrong, and with this understanding, we are asked to choose our path. So where do we go from here? Are we blessed with our character, or do we have a choice?

This is an interesting but very important concept to understand. I believe that understanding the concept of developing our character and conduct will help our general development in our understanding of Islam.

Posing such questions and trying to answer them for ourselves is not a futile exercise. Muslims must understand Islam in the correct way. We cannot let others dictate to us what Islam is about, and even more important, we cannot let ourselves propagate a false image of Islam. I think those of us who were here last Saturday would remember Professor Lang words when he said that by far the biggest misrepresentation of Islam in America was by the Muslims themselves and not by the non-Muslims or the media.

In our study circle, we tried to address the issue of why can a seemingly normal young Muslim be indoctrinated into a web of hatred and terrorism. We know that the basic information given to our brothers and sisters to indoctrinate them comes from the Quran

the Sunnah and hadeeth. However, what is sinister and devastating is that the information is taken out of context and presented in a plausible, seemingly authenticated manner to promote a political standpoint. The critical point, and that is where it is tragic, is that our brothers and sisters did not have the knowledge to know better, and probably they never will. For those of us in responsibility, especially parents, it is our responsibility to understand Islam and teach our children. Otherwise, our children, our normal children, will get their answers from someone else. Can we afford this? Ask yourself, who do I want to teach my child about Islam?

Going back to the question: “is good or bad conduct in a person something that Allah(SWT) ordains in that person, or is it that the person has the choice and ability to alter their conduct?”

To me the answer probably lies in the following two things.

Firstly, in the advice of the Prophet(SAAWS): In case you are worried that you may forget these narrations, the khutbah, ISA, will be posted on the AMA website.

The Prophet(SAAWS) said:

إنما العلم بالتعلم، وإنما الحلم بالتحلم

*“You gain knowledge through education, and you gain patience by practicing patience”*

A man expressed his concern to the Prophet(SAAWS) that he was cold hearted, and the prophet(SAAWS) replied:

إن أردت تلين قلبك، فأطعم المسكين، وامسح رأس اليتيم

*“If you want to soften your heart, feed the poor and wipe the head of the orphan”.*

If one wants to soften their hearts, they need to do something that will achieve that. A soft heart does not just happen. We have to work at it. We have to be actively involved.

These two narrations clearly state that if we want to change, we have to be active in doing so. We cannot gain patience and we cannot gain kindness except by practicing patience and by practicing kindness.

However, Islam teaches us something else. This is what we learn from the Dua’ of the Prophet(SAAWS)

S-Ali(RAA) said the Prophet(SAAWS) used to say in his Dua’ as he stood to salat:

واهدنى لأحسن الأخلاق لا يهدى لأحسنها إلا أنت ، واصرف  
عنى سيئها لا يصرف عنى سيئها إلا أنت

*“And guide me to the best of conduct, for no one guides to its best except you, and repel away from me the worse of conduct, for no one can repel away its worse except you”.*

In another Dua’:

اللهم جنبني منكرات الأعمال والأخلاق والأهواء والأدواء

*“O Allah, Guide me away from the most repulsive of deeds, of conducts and of desires”*

And in another Dua’:

اللهم أحسنت خلقتي فأحسب خلقتي

*“O Allah, You have perfected my creation, I ask You to perfect my conduct”.*

In these three examples, we learn that if we want to improve ourselves and our conduct, we also need to ask the guidance and the blessing of Allah(SWT), and this is where probably we have gone a full circle. Is it born or bread, and the answer in Islam is BOTH.

This, to me, is one of the most amazing things about Islam. Islam guides us to an amazing relationship with our creator.

- It is a relationship of understanding our creation
- It is a relationship of understanding our responsibilities
- It is a relationship of practicing and preaching what we understood
- It is a relationship of asking Allah(SWT) to help us in the process
- It is a relationship of submitting to the fact that our success or failure is by the will of Allah and not by us.

This relationship is absolutely amazing, and most likely it covers everything about us as humans, and not just our conduct. But do you not realise that this relationship demands knowledge and action.

أقول قولي هذا وأستغفرُ الله لي ولكم

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Khutbah:

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ثُمَّ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ . الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ نَسْتَعِينُهُ وَنَسْتَغْفِرُهُ ، وَنَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ شَرِّهِ  
أَنْفُسِنَا وَسَيِّئَاتِ أَعْمَالِنَا . أَمَا بَعْدُ :

Having said that, we should now start looking at how we can improve our conduct.

We all know that improving our conduct is not simple, and if anything, it can prove to be very difficult indeed. People ask frequently, I know I get angry easily, I know I cannot keep my mouth shut, I know this person gets on my nerve, and so on, but I cannot help it. I know I need to change, but it is just too difficult.

The answer to that is by no means easy, but in Islam we do have some strategies to help curb our poor conduct and help develop our better qualities. However, whatever the strategy may be, it takes practice, it takes patience and it takes endurance. Islam knows that. Islam does not say improve your conduct, and then leaves you on your own. To be able to improve ourselves, Islam gives us many avenues and ways to promote a positive change in our character. Let us look at some of them.

One of the first and most important methods of improving our character is by strengthening our Iman and our belief in the eternal watchfulness of Allah(SWT). We have stated in previous khutbahs that one of the signs of a good Iman, a good faith, is good conduct. A person who is poor in conduct, is poor in Iman, even if he is witnessed to pray and to fast. In Islam, the foundation of good conduct is good Iman. It our Iman that directs us to what is considered as a good character.

The strength of Iman can be developed to be greater and stronger than the strength of basic desires. As a Muslim, it is probably Iman that is the last barrier between us and alcohol, us and “zena”, us and “haram” income, us and anger, us and envy, us and hatred. If we think about it, there is probably no one system of self-reformation that is stronger and more encompassing than the concept of Iman in Islam. A strong Iman also teaches us patience to endure during the process of reform.

ISA a strong Iman should dispel you from transgressing. If you carry on transgressing, then ask yourself a serious question, how strong is my Iman? *S-Umar(RAA) said: the one who fears Allah does not quench their anger, and does not do as they please. If it wasn't for the day of judgement, life will not be as it is.*

The second avenue to improve conduct is persistence in seeking help and knowledge. Part of what one should seek is an honest opinion from his brothers and sisters. We have great difficulty accepting criticism, and equally so giving criticism. We need to be open

hearted to constructive criticism. S-Umar(RAA) used to say “may Allah bless the person who gifts me my defects”. Isn’t that amazing. S-Umar(RAA) equated criticism as a gift.

The following is an interesting event for us to take a lesson from: S-Umar(RAA) was delivering a khutbah when a man stopped him and said: “O leader of the believers, fear Allah”.

This reminds me of the elderly gentleman who heckled the past PM during a speech, and probably we remember how the stewards were heavy handed with him and threw him out.

The incident with S-Umar(RAA) is similar. He was being heckled. Some of those present said: “Do you really say to the leader of the believers, fear Allah?”. Let us now see how S-Umar(RAA) replied. He said: “let him say it to me, indeed it is good what he said. There is no goodness in you if you do not say it, and there is no goodness in us if we do not accept it”.

When someone heckled S-Umar(RAA), this is how he responded:

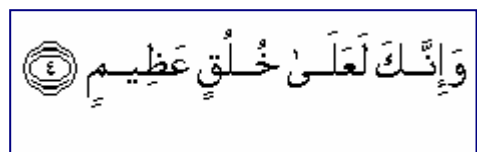
**“Let him say it to me, indeed it is good what he said. There is no goodness in you if you do not say it, and there is no goodness in us if we do not accept it”.**

Islam is telling us that we as a community should be able to heckle our leaders, and we as leaders in our community should be able to accept it. It is this process of reminding, and the process of tolerance that promotes unity in our community, it promotes inclusion, it promotes progress and it promotes reformation of character.

Next aspect of character reform is to increase our acts of worship. The example in this is plenty and has been covered by previous khutbahs. We all know of the importance of purifying ourselves through salat, fasting and zakat. If you feel that you are having difficulty in reforming yourself, increase your “Ibadatt” and get closer to Allah.

Next aspect of reform is to choose good friends. How many times have we seen good young Muslims involved in the wrong crowd only to become part of them? As parents, it is our responsibility to promote good friendships to our children. The Prophet(SAAWS) said: “ do not befriend except the believer”.

Next is a difficult one. This part of reforming ones character relates to setting yourself an example to follow. We all now that the prophet(SAAWS) is the best of examples, and we know that Allah(SWT) has testified in the Holy Quran:



***“And most surely you are of an exalted standard of character“ (S68, A4)***

However, this aya does not mean that we do not try to set examples ourselves. People need living, breathing, acting examples to set targets for themselves. How can you find out if a certain character is achievable if no one that you know has such a character. We must set the examples for those around us. We have a duty to set an example, otherwise, our young will either go down the road of Dunia, seeking to emulate POP stars and football stars. More sinister, they might want to emulate those who seek destruction. We have a responsibility to set the example ourselves.

Brothers and sisters. The khutbah was about conduct and character. The emphasis is now changing. We do not want to improve our conduct and character simply for our own benefit, but we have a much more serious ambition. We need to change our conduct and behaviour for the benefit of our future generations.

Let us remember these dua's

واهدنى لأحسن الأخلاق لا يهدى لأحسنها إلا أنت ، واصرف  
عنى سيئها لا يصرف عنى سيئها إلا أنت

*“And guide me to the best of conduct, for no one guides to its best except you, and repel away from me the worse of conduct, for no one can repel away its worse except you”.*

اللهم جنبني منكرات الأعمال والأخلاق والأهواء والأدواء

*“O Allah, Guide me away from the most repulsive of deeds, of conducts and of desires”*

اللهم أحسنت خلقتي فأحسِّنْ خلُوتي

*“O Allah, You have perfected my creation, I ask You to perfect my conduct”.*