

Friday 9th March 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 يُضِلِّ 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

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَقُولُوا قَوْلًا سَدِيداً ☆ يُصْلِحْ لَكُمْ أَعْمَالَكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ
لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ ، وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ فَازَ فَوْزاً عَظِيماً ﴾ (الأحزاب، 1-70)

"O you who believe, fear Allah, and say what is the truth. That He may make your conduct whole and sound and forgive your sins. He that obeys Allah and His messenger has attained the great victory" (S33, A70-1)



Brothers and sisters, ASA.

Dear brothers and sisters, the topic for today's khutbah was prompted by the recent TV program "retreat". Probably many of you have seen it. There have already been two episodes, and the third is ISA this Monday. As with most programs on Islam, one starts watching in anticipation as to what such a program has to say about Islam. Once the program was in full swing, emotions start to run high as we see and hear things that do not "conform" to our understanding of Islam. My personal reaction to this program was so overwhelming that the khutbah today is not just about what the program had to say, but also about my reaction to the program as a Muslim. I have learned so much over the past two weeks, and I want to share this process with you.

For those who have not seen the program, I can only apologize, but it would serve you well to try and get it on U-tube, or ask someone who may have recorded it. My understanding was that the program followed the journey of a group of Britons on a quest of spirituality. This quest is centered on an Islamic retreat in Spain with links to Morocco. The focus of the program was in part on the participants and in part on the methodology of those who organized the retreat. There was a strong North African Sufi influence.

For those who have seen the first episode, you may, or probably may not, appreciate when I say that my reaction was that of absolute outrage. I could not contain myself. How can Muslims portray Islam in such a way on national TV. Women gathering to do Zikr, and chanting in a manner that depicts what I can only describe as "ecstasy". In the second episode, we witness men also performing Zikr and going through similar rituals with groups standing and jumping until they get a "buzz". I thought, is this the Islam I know? No, this is not the Islam I know. The Prophet (SAAWS) and the Sahabah and the Tabi'een did not do that. Where did this come from? This is not what I know of Islam. What on earth is going on? Even though it was fascinating to see the different reactions of the participants, I still felt that the most frustrating thing was that I could do nothing about what I was witnessing.

Brothers and sisters, is this a feeling that we came across before. Islam seemingly being misrepresented. We watch in disbelief. We feel angry. We feel helpless and threatened. Our voices not heard. Well, where did I hear this before?

The fact remains, this is now commonplace. We come across this sort of misrepresentation on a regular basis, both from Muslims and non-Muslims. The question for me was, do I simply get angry, blow off some steam, cool down, and then get on with it, or do I learn from this experience.

Many Muslims tend to react in anger to such events, but their reaction does not go beyond anger and rage. Their reaction reinforces their dogmas and entrenches them in their secluded position. It drives them away more angry and more frustrated. The usual

claim is that “they do not understand Islam, and they do not understand me as a Muslim”. All the anger and all the reactions are usually outward, and hardly ever inward. We hardly ever look inwards when dealing with such reactions, and for me this is a grave mistake.

Because of this fact, I wanted to personally understand three points:

1. I wanted to understand how I felt about how Islam is being portrayed and why
2. Secondly, I wanted to understand how I reacted to what I felt and why
3. And finally, I wanted to understand whether I benefited from the experience and how.

I am a strong believer that the first point of debate in these situations, once the anger has filtered away, should always start with you, it should start from within. If we get one point out of this khutbah, it should be that we should always look inward before we look outward. We should go through a process of self-examination, “Muhassabah”.

Umar(RAA) used to say, “hassibu anfussaqum qabla an tuhassabou. Wa zeenou a’ malaqum qabla an tuzana aleiqum”. Examine yourselves before you are examined, and weigh your deeds before they are weighed upon you.

The process of self-examination is an essential part of Islam. Keep on looking inward. Keep on examining your heart and your intentions. Keep on examining your thoughts and your actions. And always keep on examining the outcome of your thoughts, the outcome of your words and the outcome of your actions. People in general, Muslims and non-Muslims are afflicted by the outcome of their words and actions. We all know from experience when a word is said without due care the result can be devastating. Once a word has been spoken, it can never be taken back. Some people go through a lifetime paying for a word or an action in anger. The ability to look inward and to go through a process of self-examination must be a daily process for Muslims.

Allah has given us five daily prayers to get stock of our senses, to reflect and to self examine.

Do we remember the Dua’ of the Prophet(SAAWS) after his visit to Ta’if. After our beloved prophet was ridiculed, stoned and driven out of Ta’if, his first attention was not how to deal with the people of Ta’if, but it was inwards. In doing so, his reaction was phenomenal. It was so phenomenal, we still bring it up as an example today, and it will be an example for us till eternity. It was a reaction that depicted a heart connected with its creator. It was a reaction that was full of mercy. It was a reaction that had tremendous foresight. That is how beautiful Islam is.

"O Allah, I ask you alone to consider my helplessness, the paucity of my means, and the little esteem that people have of me. You are the most Merciful of mercifuls. You are the Lord of the oppressed, and You are my Lord. To whom would You leave my fate? To a

*stranger who insults me? Or to an enemy who has been given control over my affairs? If You have no wrath against me, then I have no worries! **Your pleasure alone is my objective**. I seek refuge in the light of Your countenance, which illuminates all darkness and which controls the affairs of this world and the Hereafter that **I may not incur Your wrath or anger**. To You alone belongs the right to reproach and ask for forgiveness until You are pleased, and there is no will and there is no power except in You."*

In that moment of despair, the Prophet(SAAWS) teaches us not to get angry, not to lose our senses, but to reach inwards and in doing so we reach to Allah. When we get angry do we ever think *"O Allah, your pleasure alone is my objective"*. When we face a conflict, whether this relates to Islam, to a dispute in marriage, to a dispute in business or whatever, is our first reaction *"O Allah, your pleasure alone is my objective"*. This is where we gain our strength. This is where we gain our inner peace. This is where we truly start to feel spiritual. It is when we self examine and reach out to Allah. This was the example of our beloved Prophet(SAAWS).

With this in mind, I thought that for me to simply fly off the handle with outrage was a total waste of time. Unfortunately, brothers and sisters, when we come across such events, our reactions do not go beyond anger and frustration. The problem with such an impulsive outward reaction is that it does not only make us look like the typical aggressive hardened mob, but it also makes us Muslims more insular, more introspect and more insecure. To me, that was an unacceptable option. **Imagine the paradox. By looking inwards I stand to gain a much better outlook.**

The first thing that I realized was that my knowledge was lacking. I knew very little about methodology of the Muslims running the "retreat". Brothers and sisters, this is the second important point of this khutbah. Do we ever confront ourselves in total honesty and claim that **we lack knowledge**. Our response to what we witness about Islam, and to that matter, about everything else, is based on our level of knowledge. The less knowledge, the more the frustration, the more the anger. With regards to the "retreat", the faith of these Muslims was clear to me, their practice of "Fards" was clear to me but their methodology in spirituality was not at all clear, and I had no knowledge.

The sad thing is that within our Eastern culture, we tend to feel that when someone is angry we think he or she must have a sound reason. The more angry and the louder one is, the more likely others will think he or she knows what they are on about. An outward expression of anger is more rewarding in our society than an inward reflection. In the Western society however, we know that when one lashes out in anger, it is a clear sign of ignorance.

Brothers and sisters, we need to ask ourselves, how should we deal with our lack of knowledge, for we cannot go beyond this point if we do not commit ourselves to furthering our knowledge.

إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ

“Truly those who fear Allah, among His Servants, are those who have knowledge”(S35, A28)

This is an important aya. It tells us that those who have knowledge are more fearing of Allah, and not less. So, probably, the reverse may also hold true. The less knowledgeable we are, the less fearing of Allah we become.

Isn't that interesting. The two important points so far, reaching inwards and gaining knowledge are both linked to a closer relationship with Allah. Does it therefore make sense that self-examination and gaining knowledge are important for our spiritual well-being. Does it also make sense that impulsive outward emotions and ignorance are detrimental to our spiritual well being.

If we take this point further, let us consider the millions of non-Muslims out there who are aware that they exist in a spiritual vacuum. We the Muslims have a duty to fill that vacuum for them. Does it make sense that a Muslim who reflects and a Muslim with knowledge is more able to uplift the spirituality of non-Muslims, while an angry and ignorant Muslim can at best only join them in their spiritual vacuum.

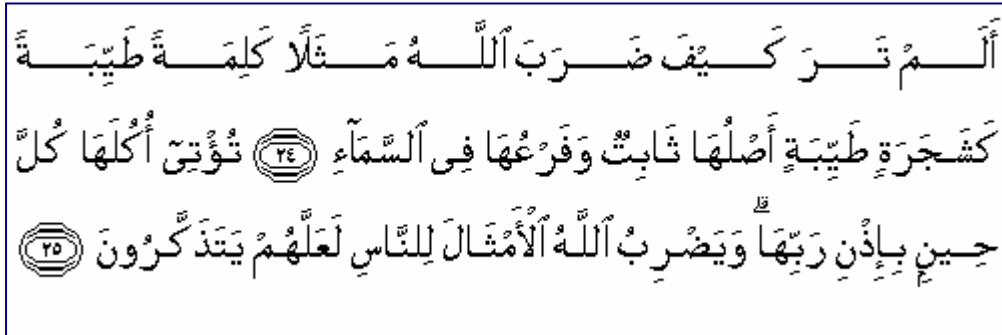
Praise be to Allah, in this community the majority of us are literate and educated. We have a number of study circles, classes and lectures. We have wonderful people among us with the aim of improving our knowledge in Islam. I would therefore encourage you, if not actually demand of you, to be more proactive in seeking knowledge. Remember that your spiritual well being is at risk if you turn off the fountain of knowledge.

AHL, the program I am talking about was discussed within our Wednesday study circle, and many positive views were expressed through genuine debate. The anger that was raging within me started to dampen down. I started to recognize that even within a small community, we share different views, and these views helped me to look inwards at myself.

Brothers and sisters, this is the third important point of this khutbah. If we want to look inwards and if we want to improve our knowledge of Islam, this cannot happen in isolation. We need to team up. We need to help each other in a positive and tolerant manner. But to do so we need to put some effort. Most programs run in the evenings and on weekends, and it can be a drag to get off the sofa and attend, especially when Liverpool is playing Barcelona. I know how difficult it is for me. By attending these circles you realize your Muslim brothers and sisters are on the same journey, but are at different stations. You realize that even within such a small community, we actually share different views. Muslims are not an assimilation of the same prototype. Once you

let yourself see through various layers of fog you quickly realize that we are all on the same journey. We Muslims, just like everyone else, **we are also seeking spirituality.**

The defining moment for me over the past two weeks is the realization that what I lacked was not conformity as a Muslim, and what I lacked was not morality. No, what I lacked was spirituality. I always thought that I can guide others into Islam through my conformity and my moral stance. However, when I know that the problem facing our world today is a spiritual vacuum, how can I seriously offer any help if I myself lack spirituality? Praise be to Allah, I started to understand the process more through the following ayas from surat Ibrahim:



”Have you not considered how Allah sets forth a parable of a good word is like a good tree, whose root is set firm and whose branches reaching into heaven. It brings forth its fruit at all times, by the leave of its Lord. So Allah sets forth parables for people, in order that they may reflect” (S14, A24-5).

In these ayas, Muslims understand the term **“good word”** as a reference to faith. Faith is our starting point. Brother Munir has been taking us through understanding of Islam and Iman. The starting point of the Muslim is the declaration of faith and the conformity to the pillars of Islam. The pillars of Islam are the foundations on which Islam is built, and as these ayas tell us, a faith whose roots are set firm. But the aya does not stop there. Islam is not just a foundation, and it is not just a root. Some Muslims feel that by fulfilling the “fards”, and by conforming to a certain appearance and behavior, they have accomplished Islam.

A scholar once asked this question: Does it make sense that Allah’s ultimate concern is with our ability to conform to a complex set of rules. Is this what Islam is about. Is it just about the foundations and the roots and no more?

When we read the rest of the ayas, we realize that this is not the case. We read ***”whose branches reaching into heaven. It brings forth its fruit at all times, by the leave of its Lord”***.

Allah(SWT) is telling us that there is an outcome to this foundation and to these roots. This outcome is branches reaching into heaven and a perpetual yield of fruits. This aya is telling us that there need to be a palpable benefit of the religious life. The fact that we

pray, the fact that we fast, the fact that we do Zikr, the fact that we read the Quran is all part of establishing the foundations and setting the roots. This process is “input” and not “outcome”. The beauty of this aya is that it tells us that if we want to check whether our roots are now set firm, that is, if our input is sound, we need to look at the outcome measures. We need to ask ourselves as Muslims, are there any palpable benefits from our Islam.

These beautiful ayas tell us that intellectual, moral and spiritual achievement can only be nourished through firm roots. If these achievements are not palpable, then the soundness of the roots must be questioned. When Muslims exhibit an outward display of Islam but there is no palpable benefit, those Muslims must question their methodology. When Muslims exhibit outbursts of anger, hate and aggression, in the name of Allah, in the name of the Prophet(SAAWS) and in the name of Islam, those Muslims must question their methodology. When Muslims have no mercy to all of Allah’s creations, those Muslims must question their methodology. If the roots are not nourishing the tree, then there must be something wrong with the roots. Has Iman entered our hearts, have we connected with our creator, is our spirituality uplifted.

We know of the aya:

﴿ قَالَتِ الْأَعْرَابُ ءَامَنَّا قُلْ لَمْ تُؤْمِنُوا وَلَكِنْ قُولُوا أَسْلَمْنَا وَلَمَّا يَدْخُلِ
الْإِيمَانُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ ﴾

“And the Arabs said we have believed. Say you have have not believed, but say you have submitted, and the belief has not entered your hearts” (S49, A14)

أَقُولُ قَوْلِي هَذَا وَأَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ لِي وَ لَكُمْ

2nd Khutbah:

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

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y Quran explains to us our make up:

وَبَدَأَ خَلْقَ الْإِنْسَانِ مِن طِينٍ ﴿٧﴾

"And He began the creation of mankind from clay" (S2, A7)

فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِن رُّوحِي

"When I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My spirit" (S15, A29)

Mankind has been created from earth, and then Allah tells us in that creation is a breath of Spirit. From these ayas, scholars suggest that mankind has two tendencies related to his dual creation. We are either drawn downwards when we promote our earthly desires and needs, or lifted upwards when we promote our spirit. We know from the materialistic world that we live in, that fulfilling our earthly desires does not achieve spiritual fulfillment, and amazingly in Islam, we have had this answer for hundreds of years.

We are told that our knowledge of the “Ruh” is little:

“And they ask you about the “ruh”; say the “ruh” is of the command of my Lord. And you have been given of knowledge only little”.

All we know is that the “ruh”, the spirit, is the underlying essence of the human individual that survives death. It is hard to comprehend rationally, being part of Divine inspiration.

In a well-known hadeeth about the heart, the Prophet(SAAWS) says:

“Verily in the body there is a piece of flesh. If it is sound, the body is all sound. If it is corrupt, the body is all corrupt. Verily, it is the heart”

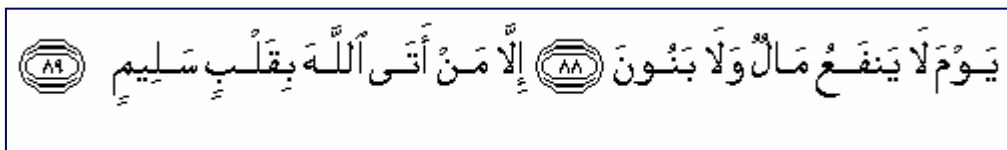
When we are born, Islam tells us that we are pure in “ruh” and “heart”. As we are initiated through the distractions of this world, our heart starts to be covered with the “rust” described in the Quran:

كَأَلَّا بَلٌّ رَّانَ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

"Nay, but on their hearts is the stain of the (ill) which they have earned" (S83, A14)

This rust is made up of our sins and our distractions. The earthly endeavors are outweighing the spiritual ones. We cannot uplift our spirituality if our hearts are laden with rust. This is where the process of spiritual uplifting needs to start.

We need to clean our hearts.



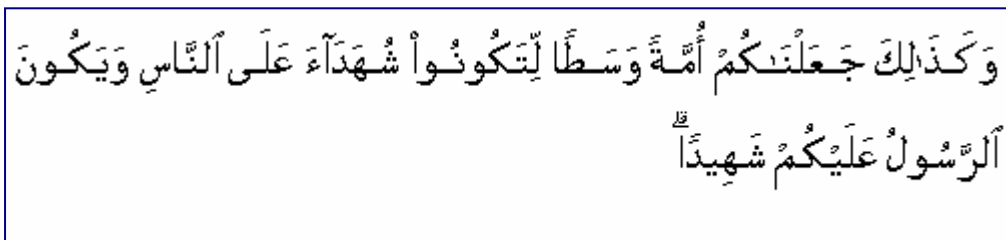
"The Day whereon neither wealth nor children will avail, but only he that brings to Allah a sound heart (free from evil)" (S26, A88-9)

In the past, we concentrated on the moral achievements of cleansing our hearts, but today, it is crucial for us to recognize that this is not enough. The achievement of cleansing the heart should not stop at a moral victory, but it should progress to a spiritual level.

This is probably when we truly connect with Allah(SWT). This is where we can define the journey or the process of going from Islam, to Iman to Ihssan.

This is the spiritual journey. It is a very hard journey, but immensely rewarding. It is a journey that has a firm set roots, that has branches reaching into the heavens and that has an eternal yield by the grace of Allah.

This is brothers and sisters the knowledge that I have gained. The journey does not stop at Iman. It definitely does not stop with Islam. No, it has to progress towards Ihssan. If we cannot get spiritual fulfillment by being Muslims, then what chance does anyone has. As Muslims, we have a duty that is stamped in the Quran, and we cannot ignore our duty.



"Thus, We have made of you a nation justly balanced, that you may bear witness over the nations, and the Messenger bears witness over you" (S2, A143)

In conclusion, the points from this khutbah are:

Look inwards.

Seek knowledge.

Get involved.

Islam is not just roots.

If there is no output, then question your input.

Chose the heart you want to meet Allah with.

If you cannot connect with your spirituality, you cannot be part of the solution.