

Religious OCD Khutbah for Imams

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As-Salaamun Alaykum,

JazakAllah Khayr for supporting Inspired Minds.

We are a mental health charity that provides faith-based and culturally-sensitive safe spaces for those who are struggling with their mental health.

One of our aims is to raise awareness of mental health and help to de-stigmatise this topic within our collective communities. Therefore, we would like to say JazakAllah Khayr for assisting us in spreading awareness within your community.

You may use this Khutbah as a whole, or as a template to pick from to guide your Khutbah on Religious OCD and mental health. This Khutbah is meant to be 30-45 minutes in length, but you may edit it for shorter timeframes.

We would love to receive feedback from you as to how your use of this Khutbah within your mosque/community centre was received. Please reach out to us at communications@inspiredminds.org.uk with images and/or written feedback.

**BarakAllahu Feekum,
The Inspired Minds Team**

In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful

All praise is due to Allah. We praise him, we seek His help, we seek His forgiveness, and we seek refuge in Allah from the vices within ourselves. Whoever Allah guides, there is none to misguide him. Whoever Allah leads astray, there is none to guide him. I testify there is no God but Allah alone, without any partners, and that Muhammad (ﷺ) is His messenger.

As-Salaamun Alaykum Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As Muslims, how do we view Allah? When we think of Allah, how do our hearts feel? Our perspective of Allah will directly impact how we view ourselves and the world around us.

We should have a healthy balance of fear and hope in Allah (ﷻ) Or are we so fearful that anxiety overcomes us and takes control of our thoughts and feelings? Has our ability to be hopeful and resilient weakened? When our anxieties and fears lead our actions, they govern us to the point where we behave irrationally and in excess.

Logic, reason and the mercy of Allah (ﷻ) are then overtaken by fear, anxiety, and stress.

Some things affect us at a subconscious level that we may not even be aware of, such as our emotions, strengths, weaknesses, hopes, fears, anxieties, and thoughts (both positive and negative). They all serve a role in shaping how we interpret and feel about everything. They determine how we feel about our successes, failures, relationships, acts of worship and relationship with our Most Merciful Lord. These thoughts, emotions and interpretations we have about ourselves and the world around us are also the driving forces behind our actions, behaviour, and the habits we develop. Simply knowing this is crucial in our strategy for managing and counteracting it, as it also affects our thoughts and behaviour.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Ihsan is that you should serve Allah as though you could see Him, for though you cannot see Him yet, (know that) He sees you."

[Muslim]

Having a healthy and balanced fear of Allah ﷻ keeps us on our toes and brings us back on track when we fall into error. Fear in itself plays the role of mobilising us into taking action to survive and reach safety. When avoiding a car accident, for example, our brain is activated to respond quickly and urgently before we can even think anything through. The stress hormone cortisol is released into the body, and adrenaline gives us a boost of energy to do what we need to do to survive.

However, when this fear grows out of balance, it can cause us to fixate on intrusive, irrational or anxious thoughts. These thoughts can plague our minds, causing us unnecessarily high levels of stress and overthinking. For example, worrying excessively about whether you have locked the house upon leaving. When these negative, overwhelming thoughts compel us to act, we can begin to engage in compulsive behaviour. In this case, the person who has left home worrying about their house being locked may go back repeatedly to check doors and windows.

This is called OCD. Someone suffering from OCD may wash their hands or clean excessively, arrange and order their belongings, and repetitive behaviour, amongst other things. Daily life can be very mentally and physically challenging, and can often make even the simplest of tasks very very difficult, stressful, time-consuming and exhausting. Anxiety is the driving force behind this compulsive behaviour, and it determines how a person may respond to events and experiences in their life.

When these kinds of thoughts and behaviour spill into a Muslim's religious practices, regardless of their level of Imaan, then it is known as 'Religious OCD,' or 'Scrupulosity.' We know that Waswasa from Shaytan exists, which are the doubts that originate from Shaytan's whisperings. Not a single one of us are immune to the whispers of Shaytan.

"Say, I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind, the Master of mankind, the God of mankind, from the evil of the lurking whisperer - who whispers into the hearts of mankind - from among jinn and mankind."

[Qur'an 114]

When a person struggles mentally with their thoughts and emotions, worries, fears and anxieties can unrealistically become magnified. This is then followed by a vicious cycle of anxiety and unhealthy coping mechanisms that a person engages in to relieve their anxiety.

A person suffering from Religious OCD will struggle with their challenging thoughts. Their self-talk is likely to be framed negatively and they are likely to consider themselves unworthy or 'not good enough to be a Muslim and worship Allah (ﷻ)'. These kinds of thoughts can be quite overwhelming, and can lead to a number of 'what if' type of questions, such as:

- "What if my Salah isn't accepted because I am not sure if I have wudu"
- "I'm not sure if my wudu is valid because I don't think I did it properly"
- "I can't remember how many Tawafs I did, I'll have to start from the beginning again"
- "What if my fasts are not valid because I keep thinking bad thoughts/going to places that have music in the background"

A person will fixate on these kinds of thoughts, until they take excessive action which they believe will solve the problem. This can, unfortunately, feed into that **cycle of negative thoughts and repetitive behaviour**. It is time-consuming, and very exhausting for a person.

For example:

- *Repeating Wudu, Salah, fasts, or other acts of worship to ensure 'perfection'*
- *Excessive ruminating due to self-doubt about one's spiritual performance*
- *Debilitating fears of sinning, of Allah's anger, or of going to hellfire*

There are times where repetition and correction are needed, but when it is done in excess, it is no longer healthy. When in excess, it may even cause us to stray from the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), leading to bid'ah in worship.

Imam Ash-Shaafi said that:

"A Bid'ah is anything that has no basis in the Qur'an, Sunnah or sayings of any of the companions."

These thoughts and behaviour, however, should not be mistaken for having a weakened Imaan. A person can have a very high level of Imaan, yet still be tested with these kinds of struggles - **simply because they are trying to do everything they can to please Allah (ﷻ)** and complete practices in the way they understand and feel to be their best.

When someone is suffering with Religious OCD, they are likely to have an excessive and unrealistic amount of fear, just as a person with OCD may fear their inability to attain 'perfection' and the fears concerning it. We are all tested in different ways, and for some, this comes in the form of our mental health. Allah (ﷻ) even tells us in the Qur'an;

"Do the people think that they will be left to say, "We believe" and they will not be tried? But we have certainly tried those before them, and Allah will surely make evident those who are truthful, and He will surely make evident those who are false."

[Qur'an 29:2-3]

Therefore, let us be mindful about making judgements about others, when we know that truly Allah (ﷻ) alone knows the depths of every heart and the challenges we all face. It is not for any of us to simply assess ourselves or others as having weak Imaan, but rather to recognise that it may actually be a test.

Mental health conditions such as Religious OCD, do NOT indicate spiritual weakness or low Imaan. Know that every test a person faces is from Allah (ﷻ).

"When Allah loves a servant, He tests him."

[Tirmidhi]

Let us also remind ourselves, that although we are always going to be tested in life:

"Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear."

[Qur'an 2:286]

Let this therefore reassure us of Allah's (ﷻ) infinite mercy towards mankind.

For those of us who were raised as Muslims, many of us will have been taught how to pray, how to read Qur'an, etc... Along with everything else we are taught as children, it is not 'what' is being taught that develops our thoughts about what we do, but it is 'how' we are taught. This is the voice that children grow up with as their 'truth' about themselves and the world around them, including their deen, and it guides them throughout their lives. We have to be very careful, therefore, in the way we teach Islam to our children.

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) never encouraged children with fears or thoughts of punishment of hellfire and he didn't shame people. He corrected behaviour calmly, with simple instructions.

Anas (RA) said,

"I served the Prophet (ﷺ), peace and blessings be upon him, for ten years. By Allah, he never said to me, "Uff! He never said harshly for anything, "Why did you do that?" Or, Why did you not do that?"

[Bukhari, Muslim]

The beautiful example of Prophet Luqman tells us a lot about how to address our children, and how to guide them gently and beautifully:

"O my dear son! Establish prayer, encourage what is good and forbid what is evil, and endure patiently whatever befalls you. Surely this is a resolve to aspire to."

[Qur'an 31:17]

People respected the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) as a leader, and we have to ask ourselves why? Even his enemies respected and trusted him. When someone is respected and loved, they automatically become a role model for others, whom we can learn from easily.

Although it's important to teach children right from wrong, we should not tell them excessively about hellfire and punishments as that will cause their fear to become more than their hope and love in Allah (ﷻ) and His creation. Rather, we should guide them positively so that they develop a strong bond and love for Allah (ﷻ).

"My servants, you who have transgressed against yourselves, do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Truly Allah forgives all wrong actions. He is the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Merciful."

[Qur'an 39:53]

It's a blessing children are not held accountable until they reach the age of puberty, and this is a mercy from Allah (ﷻ). It gives us plenty of time to nurture and guide them to develop hope in Allah (ﷻ) and strive to do good and please Him by taking the moderate approach in all situations.

It gives us time to build a **healthy self-esteem, self-worth, self-confidence and resilience.**

"Whoever loves to meet Allah, Allah loves to meet him..."

[Hadith Qudsi, Bukhari]

While striving to do our best, we will naturally doubt ourselves from time to time. We cannot completely avoid self-doubt and Waswasa. It's important that we have self-doubt occasionally so that we are able to keep ourselves in check. The good news is: how to respond to our doubts is already embedded within our deen. **Allah (ﷻ) created us and He knows us best.** He knows that some of us will be affected by self-doubt and waswasa more than others.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said,

"Leave that which makes you doubt for that which does not make you doubt. The truth brings tranquillity while falsehood sows doubt."

[Tirmidhi]

So from this we understand a very beautiful principle: **having a doubt cannot take priority over having certainty.** It is not a strong enough reason for us to act upon. **We can liberate ourselves from excessive and unnecessary worry.** If we haven't got enough evidence to support our doubts, then they are merely doubts which we are to ignore. If we are unsure whether we have broken our wudu for example, do we have enough clear evidence for this doubt?

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said that,

"He should not leave his prayers unless he hears a sound or smells something."

[Bukhari]

And so we learn that our evidence must have certainty in order for it to be acted upon. It is not only the doubts that stir feelings of guilt. Intrusive or irrational thoughts about Allah (ﷻ), sinful thoughts such as shirk, evil suggestions or other similar thoughts can leave a person feeling debilitated and extremely fearful of punishment and hellfire.

We are taught to anticipate this in Surah-an-Naas, which is also a protection for the 'Waswasa' of the Shaytan. We cannot control all thoughts that pass through us.

Even the Sahabah struggled with extremely concerning thoughts. Know that if you struggle with this, you are not alone.

Abu Huraira (RA) said that:

"Some of the companions of the messenger of Allah (SAWS) came to him and said 'We find in our hearts things that none of us dares utter.' He said, 'Do you really find that?' They said, 'Yes,' he said, 'That is clear faith'"

[Sahih Muslim]

On another occasion, Ibn Abbas narrates that a companion asked the Prophet (ﷺ):

"Sometimes I experience such thoughts that I would rather be reduced to charcoal than get them on my lips."

Once again, we are reassured by the beautiful words of the Prophet (ﷺ), who said,

"All praise is to Allah who restricted the devil's designs to mere evil promptings."

[Sunan Abu Dawud]

Our mere discomfort, dislike and guilt for thoughts which displease Allah, is enough for our Most Merciful Lord. The very fact that we feel concerned about our thoughts is a demonstration of our sincerity and a sign of our Imaan. We must recognise such thoughts are the whisperings of the Shaytan, and nothing more than that.

Allah (ﷻ) wants ease for us, not difficulty - burdening ourselves is not a sustainable way to practice our deen. Our beloved messenger (ﷺ) would even shorten the congregational prayer if he heard a baby crying so that a mother could attend to her baby:

"I will shorten the prayer as I know his crying will distress his mother."

[Bukhari]

When we can't find water to perform wudu, we can simply perform Tayammum, and we shorten our prayers as travellers. There are countless other examples like these, and we need to ponder on why we are recommended to perform easier acts over difficult ones.

Aisha (RA) narrated that,

"Whenever Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) was given the choice of one of two matters, he would choose the easier of the two, as long as it was not sinful to do so."

[Bukhari]

Allah (ﷻ) tells us clear as day in Surah Al-Imran:

“Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship.”

[Qur'an 2:185]

We are reminded of Allah's mercy again, and our Prophet (ﷺ) also said,

“Religion is very easy and whoever overburdens himself in his religion will not be able to continue in that way. So you should not be extremists, but try to be near to perfection and receive the good tidings that you will be rewarded.”

[Bukhari]

So if Allah (ﷻ) wants ease for us, let us not overwhelm our own selves, our children, our family members and people around us, with unnecessary and unrealistic burdens and pressure. Let our children know that the best they can do, will always be good enough and nothing sincere will go unrewarded. Let them grow up striving, hopeful and confident in the mercy of our Lord.

We must also remember that Allah (ﷻ) loves us 70 times more than our own mothers, and with His infinite mercy and wisdom He has given us time to constantly improve ourselves. We only need to open our hearts to His message. Allah (ﷻ) tells us that *“I am as my servant thinks I am,”* [Bukhari, Hadith Qudsi] and so we should think positively of Him.

In another hadith, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) also said,

“Verily, none of you will enter Paradise by his deeds alone...not even me, unless Allah grants me His mercy...”

[Bukhari]

That should reassure us that perfection is unattainable and also unrealistic. And that perhaps it can ease our minds that as long as we do the best we can, we can rely on Allah's mercy for where we fall short. *Shaytan feeds us with fear, Allah gives us hope.*

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said that,

“Shaytan threatens you with poverty and commands evil, but Allah promises you forgiveness and grace from Him.”

[Qur'an 2:268]

Allah (ﷻ) promises forgiveness and grace! When we understand the role Shaytan plays, we must also recognise that Allah (ﷻ) has made promises to us. And so we call out to Him for help and guidance, and we ask Him to forgive us. In His infinite mercy, the doors to Allah's (ﷻ) mercy are always open.

“Our Lord, grant us from Yourself mercy and prepare for us from our affair right guidance.”

[Qur'an 18:10]

By developing a deeper spiritual connection with Allah, and being aware of Shaytan's plotting and planning, we can respond better to our thoughts, self-doubt, anxiety, guilt and fear. Du'a and regular practice of Istighfar can only bring us closer to Allah (ﷻ).

“When Allah decreed the creation, He pledged Himself by writing in His Book which is laid down with Him: My Mercy prevails over My Wrath.”

[Qur'an 7:156]

We cannot avoid sinning, as we are human and cannot attain perfection.

“Every son of Adam makes mistakes, and the best of those who make mistakes are those who repent.”

[Tirmidhi]

Allah keeps reassuring us so that we don't lose hope in Him,

“For Allah does blot out sins and forgive again and again.”

[Qur'an 4:43]

Our opinion of Allah (ﷻ) should be balanced correctly, using the way Allah (ﷻ) has described Himself to us. Ibn Qayyim Al Jawziyyah explains how to balance fear and hope:

“The heart in its journey to Allah is like a bird. Love is its head, and fear and hope are its two wings. When the head is healthy, then the two wings will fly well. When the head is cut off, the bird will die. When either of the two wings is damaged, the bird becomes vulnerable to every hunter or predator.”

This balance keeps us firm and gives our hearts strength, confidence and resilience.

Ibn Qayyim teaches us that having hope in Allah (ﷻ) is actually a necessity. And between sins and forgiveness, shortcomings and rectifications, righteous deeds and acceptance, steadfastness and attainment of steadfastness, **we cannot afford to lose sight in the hope of Allah (ﷻ) as we struggle and strive throughout our lives.** Therefore, thinking positively about Allah (Husn Zaan) is paramount to our resilience and well being.

As a Muslim Ummah, let us be aware of the very real mental health struggles we face. We cannot go through life without being tested. But we can learn how to help ourselves, or support those around us who may be struggling. Sometimes, support can come in the form of counselling or therapy, and **there is no shame in wanting to overcome a mental health struggle and learn the skills to heal.** In Islam we are given the concept of doing our very best with all the means we can access, as well as trusting Allah (ﷻ), and we should not feel ashamed in doing that.

You may also wish **to consult an Imam who has knowledge about ROCD**, to discuss religious issues and advise on rulings which are more lenient for you, to be reassured that you are still within the guidelines of Islam. Knowing which actions are obligatory and optional can help manage time and stress in a healthier way.

This Khutbah was brought to you by **Inspired Minds**, who is a Muslim mental health charity that can provide counselling support from an Islamic perspective.

- *They have plenty of resources available on their website, some of which are available for free, such as [A Muslim's Factsheet on Religious OCD \(2 parts\)](#) and the [Mindful Muslim Podcast](#) (on Youtube, Spotify, Apple/Google podcasts)*
- *They also run [regular masterclasses](#) throughout the year, including one on ROCD*

IM also worked with the Khalil Center (USA), who have produced a Religious OCD Workbook by Dr. Hooman Keshavarzi which can be used in conjunction with seeking therapy.

We leave you today with the best guidance from our deen, and that is to be moderate.

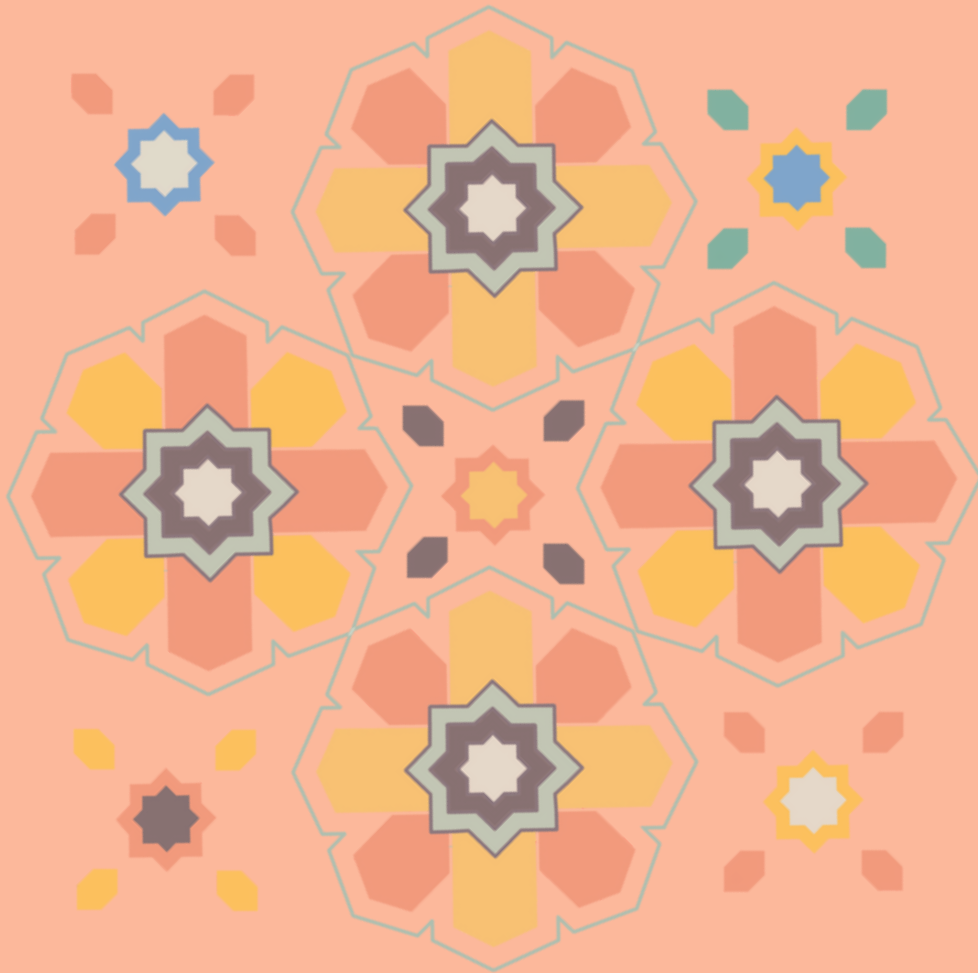
"Do good deeds properly, sincerely, and moderately. Always adopt a middle, moderate, regular course, whereby you will reach your target (of paradise)."

[Bukhari]

Was-Salaamun Alaykum Wa Rahmatullahi Wa Barakatuh

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