Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on March 21, 2014

“The Spirit of Islam and the Means to Live the Faith”

The imperatives, “O you who believe, bow and prostrate and worship (make ‘ibadah to) your Lord, and do good, so you may prosper. And strive hard for (the cause of) Allah as is His due…” (al-Hajj, 22:77-78), describe our duties toward Allah (SWT). Islam and Iman are two essential terms of our faith that define our belief system as well as religious practices.

The higher goals of our collective mission as outlined above are to do good by calling people unto Allah (SWT), share the universal message of Islam with others and promote the divine principles of an ideal social system while struggling to institute them.

In order to achieve these goals we must create amongst ourselves a peaceful and harmonious environment and be unified, particularly because we were selected by Allah (SWT) of all humanity for these higher goals, “…He selected you and has not imposed any hardship on you” (al-Hajj, 22:78). Unless we come together as one united community where we honor, respect, love and help one another, we will not be able to rise above the mere rituals and fulfill these higher objectives.

In the Prophet (SAW)’s beautiful and concise speech during his farewell sermon, he informed us about the spirit of Islam and the means to live the faith. He explained four important terms; Islam, Iman, Hijrah and Jihad in a non-traditional way. The traditional understanding of these terms are the pillars of Islam; the articles of faith; leaving one’s home to migrate to another land; and fighting, respectively.

The Prophet (SAW) has different explanations. Beginning with a question, the Prophet (SAW) asked, “Shall I not tell who a Muslim is?” He then continued, “(A Muslim is) one from whose tongue and hand Muslims are safe; a believer is one whom people trust with their wealth and lives; a muhajir (an emigrant) is one who migrates from sins and vices; and a mujahid is one who strives against his own soul in order to obey Allah, the Mighty and Majestic.”

Who is a Muslim? The common answer is, “A Muslim is one who attests that there is no god except Allah and that Muhammad (SAW) is His slave and Messenger.” Although the answer is correct, the Prophet (SAW) answered differently, “A Muslim is one from whose tongue and hands Muslims are safe.” This added dimension will help us improve ourselves toward achieving a good and healthy community.

Tongues are mainly used to express one’s feelings, emotions, and thoughts; whereas, limbs and hands are used for actions. Preserving the tongue from lying, backbiting, cursing, etc. will naturally make others feel safe. The psychological and emotional trauma and damage that can occur due to slander or using the tongue in the wrong way is enormous. Allah (SWT) forbade us from using our tongue in this manner when He commanded, “O you who believe let not a group mock at another group, it may be that the latter are better than the
former. Nor let (some) women scoff at other women, it may be that the latter are better than the former. Nor defame yourselves, nor insult one another by nicknames. Evil is the name of wickedness after faith. And whoever does not repent, then such are indeed wrongdoers” (al-Hujurat, 49:11).

As Allah (SWT) indicated, some women have a tendency to scoff at others through backbiting, slander, gossip, ridicule and belittlement of others. These heinous acts are now commonplace in our society as television shows, magazines and blogs are created specifically to gossip, slander and belittle others. Unfortunately, it is women who are the main consumers of this so-called “entertainment.”

With the advent of technology, it is even easier to use the tongue in wicked ways as we are masked behind the anonymity of a phone or computer screen. Words exchanged over e-mail, text, blogs, facebook, twitter and other outlets are still words we will be held accountable for. Oftentimes, one garners the courage to say things over technology that one would not ordinarily say in person.

Another sad reality in our society is the tendency to stereotype, mock and belittle others of different ethnic backgrounds. The diversity of mankind is a blessing from Allah (SWT). Our ummah consists of every different ethnic background, skin color and race. The intention behind this diversity is to honor and live with one another in peace and harmony. Without this peace and love between one another, we will fail in carrying out our collective duties of commanding good and forbidding evil.

The Prophet (SAW) said, “Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak a good word or remain silent” This relates to the common adage, “Silence is golden.”

The Prophet (SAW) also warned against using the hands in unlawful ways. We use our hands to physically harm others, to pull the triggers of guns and to steal, among other things. Muslims and people in general should be safe from our hands.

True Muslims are those whom others are indeed safe from our tongues and hands. We should do our best to create a fraternal community. “Surely believers are brothers” (al-Hujurat, 49:10). The Prophet (SAW) insisted, “A Muslim is the brother of a Muslim, he does not wrong him nor does he forsake him.” The spirit should be as the Prophet (SAW) described, “The example of the believers in their kindness, mercy and compassion they have for each other is like the body; when an organ of it aches, the rest of the body reacts with fever and wakefulness.” Believers are supporters of one another. They bond like a brick structure, “A believer to another believer is like a building, each brick enforces the other.”

Next, the Prophet (SAW) describes who a believer or mu’min is. A believer according to the common understanding is one who believes in Allah, His angels, Scriptures, Prophets, the Last Day and the Divine Decree. According to the hadith, a mu’min is one who is trustworthy and can be trusted by all people with their wealth and persons. The Prophet (SAW) was the trustworthy. Even before he was honored with prophethood his surrounding community knew him as Al-Amin, the truthful.

How many Muslims have betrayed the trusts of other people or have fallen victim to betrayal of trusts? Are we a community that can be trusted with others’ wealth, property and persons? A real mu’min according to the Qur’an are those, “who are faithful to their trusts and pledges” (al-Mu’minoon, 23:10). The Prophet (SAW) categorically said, “There can be no iman to one who cannot be trusted.”

Next, the Prophet (SAW) described who a muhajir or emigrant is. The traditional understanding of an emigrant is one who leaves his country for another land as the early converts of Islam emigrated to Ethiopia. The Prophet (SAW), however, described a muhajir as one who migrates from sins and vices. Indeed, this is the supreme hijrah.
Similarly, our understanding of *jihad* is commonly fighting, when in fact, the *supreme jihad*, according to the hadith is to strive against our own soul in order to obey Allah (SWT). Therefore, one has to migrate from vices and sins while simultaneously struggling to obey the commands of Allah (SWT). This process is called *jihad al-nafs*, the struggle of the soul.

This process of self-purification is not easy, rather, very difficult. It requires *real jihad*. Hence, a *mujahid* is one who struggles against his id, ego, and lower self. The powerful urges and desires are blind in nature and demand total satisfaction by any means possible be it lawful or unlawful. This is one level of the struggle of the soul. Another level is to struggle against the wrong trends of the society and finally one must struggle against satan and his whisperings and temptations.

At the first level, one must strive hard against his evil inclinations and lusts be it illicit sex, drugs, drinking, gambling, lying or cheating. One must struggle against the soul that commands evil, “*al-Nafs Al-Ammarah bil-Su*’,” according to the Qur’anic terminology, and lean toward the reproaching soul or, “*al-nafs allawwamah*,” another term of the Qur’an.

The two souls may be represented by the satanic and angelic voices. The satanic voice will entice one to commit vices and whisper in one’s heart insisting on how merciful and forgiving Allah is; while the angelic voice admonishes the person and reminds of the devastating consequences of evil actions. Therefore, one finds himself in this tug of war between the two souls, “*al-Nafs Al-Ammarah bil-Su*,” and “*al-nafs allawwamah*.”

We must exert all of our efforts and spiritual strength to pull ourselves toward Allah’s side migrating away from sins and vices. It is not an easy process as one might imagine but we must try our hardest. If there is a will there is a way, or according to the Qur’an, “Allah makes things easy for those who are mindful of Him” (al-Talaq, 65:4).

At the second level, a genuine believer has no choice but to struggle against the wrong trends of the society. It is in the best interest of corporations and industries to promote gambling, drinking, pornography, unlawful entertainment etc. to endorse evil and encourage members of society to consume such vices in order to profit from it. They aren’t concerned with people’s well and spiritual beings. They neither believe in Allah nor in the last day, but we do. Those external forces are extremely potent and harmful.

Naturally, one needs to be strong enough to walk away from such environments, reject the evil temptations and choose the company of good and righteous people. Keeping company of Allah (SWT) and His Messenger Muhammad (SAW) through the Qur’an and the sunnah will definitely increase one’s motivation toward battling the evil of the soul and the society.

Finally, at the third level, one must struggle against satan and his ploys. We must always be reminded that Iblis, the accursed and avowed enemy who recognizes our weak spots, is hard at work with his agents from jinn and men devising plans to trap us into becoming subservient to our lusts and eventually to himself, rather than being submissive to Allah (SWT). We must keep in mind that satan and his army can in no way harm the true believers. “Verily, the evil plans of satan are truly weak” (al-Nisa’, 4:76). We must have real faith in Allah (SWT), the Protector and Guardian.

The hadith clearly explains that Islam and Iman are two inseparable entities; one cannot have Islam without Iman, nor can one have Iman without Islam. Similarly, Hijrah and Jihad are two inseparable entities. One will not be able to struggle in the path of Allah (SWT) without migrating from sins and vices and the opposite is true. One cannot migrate from sins and vices without struggling against his own soul for the purpose of obeying Allah.

This is the real jihad, without this basic jihad and groundwork we will not be able to succeed in achieving our higher goals and mission. If we are sincere and committed to the cause, Allah (SWT) will certainly
help us in every step we take toward Him. Allah (SWT) promised, “And those who strive hard in our cause, We shall surely guide them our ways. Verily, Allah is with the Muhsineen (those who strive to perfect their faith)” (al-‘Ankabout, 29:69).