Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on September 19, 2014

Dawah with Wisdom and Good Preaching - Part 2

As mentioned in part one, we, Muslims, have not been created to enjoy this world. Rather, we have been created to serve the cause of Allah (SWT). We were produced to serve humanity and our divine project is to lead people to paradise.

It must also be emphasized that our call is a call of Tawheed (monotheism). It is the same call all prophets and messengers of Allah (SWT) preached. Nuh, among other prophets, cried out to the people, “O my people, worship Allah, you have no gods besides Allah, I fear for you a very dreadful day” (al-’Araf, 7:59).

Our feelings and attitudes toward the unbelievers and those who have gone astray should be that of sympathy, sorrow and concern just as prophets of Allah (SWT) felt toward their people. We should truly fear for them the grand day of accountability where success and failure are the only outcomes of one’s belief or disbelief. Those who have believed and done righteous deeds will be in paradise forever while those who disbelieved will face utter humiliation and punished in hell.

The culmination of all the prophets’ calls was preached by Muhammad (SAW). Unlike his predecessors who addressed their own respective people, he (SAW) summoned all human beings by saying, “O mankind, worship your Lord the one who created you and those who came before you, so you may be saved” (al-Baqarah, 2:21).

This profound message was responded to by some and rejected by others. It is clear that the objective of dawah is to help people save themselves from doom and enjoy paradise. Today, millions of Muslims profess the declaration of Islamic faith, tawheed, “There is no deity except Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.” Millions others, however, don’t. Allah (SWT) made it our individual and collective duty to reach out to the multitude of people who have gone astray, left the faith or are non-Muslims.

As mentioned in part one, the imperative, “Call unto the path of your Lord with the Wisdom and the good preaching,” commands us to reach out to every member of society. The ayah does not only suggest to us the method by which we need to make dawah, it indirectly informs us who we must reach out to.

Dawah with the Wisdom is reserved for the scholars, intellectuals, people of knowledge and the elite, while dawah with the good preaching is meant for the masses and common people. Therefore, the audience collectively includes everyone, the intellectuals, elite and those at the helm of affairs as well as the masses.

Making dawah to the elite and intellectuals with “the Wisdom,” has previously been discussed. It requires
special skills and is a lifetime endeavor. On the other hand, common people are more easily influenced by “good preaching” or good counsel. Any Muslim with basic knowledge and understanding of the Qur’an and Islam may share with their fellow non-Muslims the truth that attracted millions of people over the centuries. The Prophet (SAW) instructed, “Convey on my behalf even one ayah.”

Just as a distinction between dawah “with wisdom” versus “dawah with the Wisdom” was made, a similar distinction between dawah “with good preaching” versus dawah “with the good preaching” must be made.

Dawah “with good preaching” could be any sermon or any good talk, while dawah “with the good preaching” implies a specific type of preaching, the kind of sermons and admonitions that are of Qur’anic origin. After all, the Qur’an is a collection of sermons. It is a collection of beautiful preaching that is full of Wisdom. It has come from the One who knows everything and is all-Wise.

“This (Qur’an) is a declaration for mankind, a guidance and advice (maw’izah) for the God-conscious ones” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:138). The Qur’an is the good preaching. Preaching through the Qur’an is indeed the most effective way of making dawah.

It was the eloquence of the Qur’an, rather than the ‘do’s and don’ts’ that attracted the early converts to Islam. Aside from explaining the five pillars of Islam and six articles of faith, we tend to preach the do’s and don’ts, i.e., what is permissible (halal) and forbidden (haram). That is not the prophetic way. There is no harm in discussing such jurisprudential matters; however, the focus should be on issues that deal with the reality of man and his existence, i.e. matters of faith and beliefs.

The first thirteen years of the prophetic call revolved around three cardinal principles. They are faith in Allah (Iman bil-Lah); faith in the institution of prophethood (Iman bil-Risalah); and faith in the hereafter (Iman bil-Akhirah). Two thirds of the Qur’an was revealed in Makkah and the subject matter mainly dealt with faith issues. It was during the Medinan period that the modes of worship were instituted save the five daily prayers that were instituted in the tenth year of prophethood. We must adopt the same prophetic approach and start where the Prophet (SAW) started.

Indeed, the want of the day requires that we explain the barbaric actions of beheadings, forced conversions, extortion, etc., by the, “Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, ISIS,” the extremist group that claim to have established the so called, “Islamic State” or Khilafah. We must, however, always bring the discussion back to the three corollaries of tawheed or monotheism by way of good preaching and admonition (al-Maw’izah al-hasanah).

The root word of Maw’izah is W’az which generally means advice and the true meaning of w’az is to explain such things that would make one’s heart soft and receptive thus be inclined toward Allah (SWT). For the most part, people are genuinely interested in hearing what we identify to be the truth.

We must keep in mind that all humans are born on the pure intrinsic nature (fitrah) that recognizes and loves Allah (SWT) while inherently able to distinguish between good and evil and right from wrong. The Prophet (SAW) said in the authentic saying, “Every newborn child is born in a state of fitrah; it is his parents that make him a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian.” This is the natural disposition of man, i.e. the natural instinct to worship Allah (SWT) alone. We believe that every child is born a Muslim and in a state of absolute purity.

Secular education as well as the media at large plays a major role in shaping one’s worldview. Social utilities such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., are additional distractions that keep people away from reflecting on their creation and the purpose of their existence. It is the external influences that cause the human soul to drift from its potential to willfully submit to Allah (SWT) and worship Him alone.
It is these barriers of heedlessness that develop from excessive indulgence in worldly life that need to be removed before one can see the light. The agent by which one may remove these clouds of darkness is the Qur’an. “Alif, Lam, Ra; this is a scripture which We have sent down to you (O Prophet) so that, with their Lord’s permission, you may bring people from the depths of darkness into light, to the path of the Almighty, the Praiseworthy One” (Ibrahim, 14:1).

In other words, preach the truth (the Qur’an) and it is Allah (SWT) who by His leave may guide whom He wills to the straight path, the path that leads to Him. Those whose hearts have turned to stone and are bent on disbelieving such as Firawn, Qarun, Abu Jahl, Abu Lahab, etc., will never be guided, while those whose hearts are pure but polluted and have a desire to embrace the truth will certainly be guided. “Call to the path of your Lord with the Wisdom and the Good preaching and argue in a better way; Surely, your Lord know those who have strayed away from the path and know those who are guided” (al-Nahl, 16:125).

It is clear that our duty is to convey (tabligh) and invite people to Islam; not to convert them. In matter of faith, “Let there be no compulsion in religion” (al-Baqarah, 2:256); Similarly, “Say (O Prophet); ‘this truth (the Qur’an) is from Your Lord,’ so let those who want to believe (in it) do so, and let those who want to disbelieve (in it) do so (also)” (al-Kahf, 18:29). Guidance rests in the hands of Allah (SWT) alone.

As much as the Prophet (SAW) wanted his beloved uncle Abu Talib to embrace Islam or at least utter the profession of faith while he was on his deathbed, Abu Talib resisted. We learn a great lesson from this incident, “You don’t guide whom you like (O Prophet), on the other hand, it is Allah who guides whom He wills” (28:56).

It may be frustrating for some people who give dawah and yield no tangible results. As mentioned above, guidance is the prerogative of Allah (SWT). Our assignment and duty is to share what we know about Allah (SWT) and Islam with others on behalf of the Prophet (SAW) and leave the rest to Allah (SWT). Our intention must not be to convert people; rather to convey to them the beauty of Islam.

Humanity is plagued with many diseases. The Qur’an calls them diseases of the heart. They are greed, materialism, instant sensual gratification, jealousy and hatred to name a few. What is the cure for such diseases? The Qur’an is the Cure, (Shifa’un lima fil-Sudoor).

“O people, advice (maw’izah) has come to you from your Lord, a healing for what is in (your) hearts and guidance and mercy for the believers. Tell them (O Prophet!): ‘Rejoice in Allah’s grace and mercy through which this (Book) has come to you. It is better than all the riches that they accumulate’” (Yunus, 10:57-58). The Qur’an has the answers. The Qur’an is the healing and cure. The Qur’an guides to true happiness, self contentment and success in the next life.

Another aspect regarding dawah is for one to know his or her audience and address them in a way that they may understand. The objective is to convey the message in the most clear and comprehensive way so they may understand. “We have never sent a messenger except in the tongue of his people so he may make (the message) clear for them. But Allah misguides whom He wills, and He guides whom He wills. And He is the Almighty, the All Wise” (Ibrahim, 14:4). The Prophet (SAW) insisted, “Make things easy (for the people), not difficult and give glad tidings, do not drive them away.”

Regardless of whom one is making dawah to, be he an intellectual or a common person, one may only resort to a civil debate if and when the situation presents itself. “Call to the path of your Lord with the Wisdom and the Good preaching and argue in a better way” (al-Nahl, 16:125). There is no harm in accepting defeat under such circumstances until one is able to research the subject and debate again.
Keep in mind however, that we must be confident enough to know that we have the answers. We must also keep in mind that there isn’t a subject in which our great scholars didn’t deliberate and provide insight on over the past fourteen centuries. We simply need to do our homework and not give up. We must remember it is a duty and an amanah.

It must be noted that Muslims are not the only ones in the arena of dawah. There are others with different ideologies, worldviews and agendas. There are those who are promoting secularism, socialism, communism, and capitalism to name a few and of course the missionaries and evangelists who work tirelessly with the aim of converting people to Christianity.

Because of the superiority of the Qur’an over all other ideologies and religions, Allah (SWT) commands us to pay attention to and debate with them. The Qur’an and sirah are rich in references to the prophetic way of debating and arguing, particularly with the Jews and Christians. This task requires not only depth of knowledge of our deen; but also knowledge and understanding of the other worldviews and ideologies as well as other dogmas and beliefs in order to defeat our opponents in debate.

The duty of dawah requires dedication and commitment. “Call to the path of your Lord with the Wisdom and the Good preaching and argue in a better way; Surely, your Lord know those who have strayed away from the path and know those who are guided (al-Nahl, 16:125).”