Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on Oct 03, 2008

The Ten Commandments (Part 1)

The Qur’anic version of the Ten Commandments that were earlier revealed to Musa (AS) is contained in the Qur’an in Surat al-Isra’. Briefly they are: (1) Not to ascribe partners with God; (2) To show respect and kindness towards one’s parents; (3) To maintain the ties of kith and kin; (4) Not to kill one’s children for fear of poverty; (5) Not to engage in any illicit sexual relationship; (6) Not to commit murder; (7) To protect the property of orphans; (8) To exercise justice in using weights and measures; (9) Not to pursue (follow blindly) what we have no knowledge of; and (10) To maintain modesty, humility, and humbleness.

Just as the Ten Commandments in the Taurat (Old Testament / Hebrew Bible) begin with the emphasis on tawhid (oneness of God), so do their Qur’anic version begins with the same injunction: “Your Lord has decreed that you should worship none but Him…” (al-Isra’, 17:23). We are informed in the Qur’an that the very purpose of our creation is to worship Allah (SWT). “And remind, for the reminder benefits the believers; I only created jinn and man to worship Me” (al-Dhariyat, 51:55-56). The term ‘worship’ in the English language falls short of conveying the actual meaning of the Arabic term ‘ibadah and its derivatives used in the Qur’an. Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyah, the famous disciple of Ibn Taymiyyah explains ‘ibadah to mean the extreme love of Allah (SWT) coupled with extreme submission and absolute humility to Him. All of God’s prophets and messengers were sent to remind people about the purpose of their existence and to guide them towards fulfilling that purpose. “We sent no Messenger before you without revealing to him: There is no god but Me, so worship Me” (al-Anbiya’, 21:25).

We have just exited the noble month of Ramadan in which we submitted ourselves to Allah (SWT) by assiduously engaging ourselves in various obligatory and voluntary acts of worship. Our objective after Ramadan should be to monitor ourselves and maintain the relationship we established with Allah (SWT) through various forms of ‘ibadah. In this way insha’Allah, we can be hopeful that our ‘ibadah including fasting, praying, and supplications done during Ramadan will be accepted by Allah (SWT). But, if a person were to go back after Ramadan to his old ways of disobeying Allah (SWT), then Ramadan was no more than a tradition for him and he would get nothing out of it except hunger. This assumption is corroborated by a hadith which says, “How often you find individuals getting nothing out of their fasts except hunger.”

What are the indications that may make a person satisfied that whatever he or she is doing in terms of fulfilling his or her purpose to obey Allah (SWT) gains His acceptance. These are basically five: (1) Obedience to Allah (SWT) alone; (2) Love of Allah (SWT) to exceed the love of anyone or anything; (3) Calling on Allah (SWT) alone; (4) Honoring the sha’air (signs, symbols and emblems) of Allah (SWT); and (5) Being sincere in one’s words and deeds.

Obedience to Allah (SWT) Alone

The whole concept of ‘ibadah is to obey our Creator and Master alone. Islam as a deen or way of life dictates us what to do and what not to do. It informs us of the lawful (halal) and the unlawful (haram). Those who remain within the boundaries set by Allah (SWT) are His true submissive servants while those who transgress these prescribed limits are obviously obeying others besides Allah (SWT). They are either obeying them-
selves or obeying someone or something else. The fact that an individual may obey himself, meaning that he may become a slave to his whims and desires is indicated in fatwah such as, “Have you seen him who has taken his whims and desires to be his god...?” (al-Furqan, 25:43) and “Have you seen him who takes his whims and desires to be his god—whom Allah has misguided despite his knowledge, sealing up his hearing and his heart and placing a blindfold over his eyes? Who then will guide him after Allah? So will you not pay heed?” (al-Jathiyyah, 45:23). Unfortunately there are even some among the believers whose attitude towards the hereafter (al-akhirah) is very casual if not of total denial. It is reflective of those about whom Allah (SWT) says, “They say, ‘There is only our life in this world: we die, we live, nothing but time destroys us’” (al-Jathiyyah, 45:24).

Obedience to others is allowed only when it is within the parameters of the Sharia (Islamic law and guidance) and subordinated to the obedience of Allah (SWT). This is well explained in a hadith which says, “There can be no obedience to anyone that results in disobedience to Allah (SWT).” Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is our model and guide and has therefore to be obeyed, because Allah (SWT) Himself has asked us to obey him. “Obey Allah and obey the Messenger...” (al-Ma’idah, 5:92). In fact, obeying the Messenger is nothing but obeying Allah (SWT). “Whoever obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah...” (al-Nisa’, 4:80).

Love of Allah (SWT)

The love of Allah (SWT) must exceed the love of any person or anything. There is no denying that the love for worldly possessions is implanted in man. The Qur’an alludes to this: “The love of desirable things is made alluring for people—women, children, gold and silver treasures piled up high, horses with fine markings, livestock, and farmland—these may be the joys of this life, but God has the best place to return to” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:14). However, the love of anything has to be less than or subordinated to the love of Allah (SWT), the love of His messenger (SAW), and the love of struggling in the path of Allah (SWT). “Say, ‘If your fathers, sons, brothers, wives, tribes, the wealth you have acquired, the trade which you fear will decline, and the dwellings you love are dearer to you than Allah and His Messenger and the struggle in His cause, then wait until Allah brings about His punishment.’ Allah does not guide the wicked people” (al-Taubah, 9:24).

We know that Muslims do not worship idols as polytheists do; yet many Muslims adore wealth and materialism to the point that these worldly things become objects of worship for them. The Prophet (SAW) had expressed this phenomenon by saying, “Woe to such people who are slaves of Dinar and Dirham.” But there are always true, honest and sincere believers whose love for Allah (SWT) is intense and greater than their love for anything else. “And from among the people are some who take other than Allah as equals to Him, they love them as they love God; but those who believe Have greater love for Allah...” (al-Baqarah, 2:165).

Calling unto Allah Alone

It is Allah (SWT) alone from whom we should seek help. Surat al-Fatiha, the opening surah of the Qur’an, which is recited by us in every salah, contains the invocation: “You alone we worship and You alone we ask for help” (al-Fatiha, 1:5). The Qur’an also reminds us: “…Do not call on anyone else besides Allah” (al-Jinn, 72:18). The Prophet (SAW) used to teach his companions to ask for Allah’s help even if they had lost their shoe-laces. Although someone is in a position to help us, yet help should first be sought from Allah (SWT) as it is He alone who sustains us and provides for our needs. Moreover, seeking help from others should only be within the realm of this world and not within the domain of the unseen (al-ghayb). The Prophet (SAW) himself had no knowledge of the unseen except for what Allah (SWT) revealed to him. The unseen is only known to Allah (SWT). “Say: ‘I do not say to you that I possess the treasuries of Allah, nor do I know the Unseen, nor do I say to you that I am an angel. I only follow what has been revealed to me...’” (al-An’am, 6:50).

“Say: ‘I possess no power to help or harm myself, except as Allah wills. If I had had knowledge of the Unseen, I would have sought to gain much good and no evil would have touched me...’” (al-A’raf, 7:188). Despite such clear teachings of the Qur’an, we often find people standing on the Prophet’s grave in Medina beseeching him for help. There are many other ignorant Muslims who stand on the graves of venerated saints and seek their help. There are others who invoke the names of the Prophet (SAW) and his noble companions in a gesture of seeking help from them. They cry out words like: Ya Muhammad! Ya Ali! Ya Hussain! There are still some others who seek help from jinns. These are absolutely unacceptable and non-Islamic practices and should be avoided. We are reminded again and again in the Qur’an that it is Allah (SWT) alone whom we should call for any help. “Your Lord says, ‘Call on Me and I will answer you. Those who are too proud to worship Me will...”
enter Hell humiliated.’” (Ghafir, 40:60).

Honoring the signs and symbols of Allah (SWT)

One of the sha’air (signs, symbols and emblems) of Allah (SWT) is Sajda al-Ta’zeem or prostrating to acknowledge gratefulness. No Muslim is allowed to bow or prostrate before any individual or anything after the advent of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). There was a tradition in previous nations (ummahs) to do this. We are told in the Qur’an that Prophet Yusuf’s parents and brothers prostrated to him when they were brought forth in his royal audience in Egypt. “And he raised his parents on the throne, and they fell in prostration to Him....: (Yusuf, 12:100).

Another act of honoring the signs of Allah (SWT) is to exalt His name while slaughtering animals. “We have appointed a rite of sacrifice for every nation so that they may invoke Allah’s name over the livestock He has given them. Your God is One God so submit to Him. Give good news to the humble hearted” (al-Hajj, 22:34). Any vow (nazar) that is made should also be exclusively for Allah (SWT). This is the right of Allah alone and not of any other person dead or alive. “Whatever amount you spend or vow you make, Allah knows it. The wrongdoers have no helpers” (al-Baqarah, 2:270). We learn from the Qur’an that honoring the signs and symbols of Allah (SWT) comes from taqwa (God-consciousness) in the hearts of the believers. “… As for those who honor Allah’s sacred rites, that comes from the taqwa in their hearts” (al-Hajj, 22:32).

Being Sincere in One’s Words and Deeds

One must be sincere in one’s ‘ibadah to Allah (SWT); otherwise whatever is said and done without sincerity (ikhlas) will be of no avail; rather it will be a source of disappointment for that person on the Day of Judgment. According to the meaning of a hadith, whoever prays, fasts, or gives charity to show off has committed shirk (associated others with Allah (SWT). Allah (SWT) is all-knowing and knows the intention behind every person’s action. In fact, a very profound hadith, which is the opening hadith of all the books of hadith, is “Actions are (judged) by motives (niyyat)...”

May Allah (SWT) give us a deeper understanding of ‘ibadah and help us to perfect the same.

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