Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on Oct 31, 2008

The Ten Commandments (Part 3)

Our Creator, Allah (SWT) knows what is best for us and how we should conduct our lives and daily affairs in this world so that we may live in a healthy and happy society that He desires for us. The commandments regarding rendering the rights of Allah (SWT) followed by honoring the rights of parents have been discussed before. Following these two rights come the rights of the relatives, the poor and the needy including travelers. “Give relatives their due, and the needy, and travelers—do not squander your wealth wastefully” (al-Isra’, 17:26). This is more elaborately explained in Surat al-Nisa’, wherein the commandment to worship Allah (SWT) alone, and fulfilling the rights of other categories of people such as orphans, neighbors, and slaves have been included. “Worship Allah; join nothing with Him. Be good to your parents, to relatives, to orphans, to the needy, to neighbors near and far, to travelers in need, and to your slaves. God does not like arrogant, boastful people” (al-Nisa’, 4:36).

What are the rights of relatives and others mentioned in the above ayat? These rights are of the order and nature of imperatives, and hence unavoidable obligations or requirements. We are told to be mindful of our obligations in respect of ties of kinship. “O mankind! Have taqwa of your Lord who created you from a single self and created its mate from it and then disseminated many men and women from the two of them. Have taqwa of Allah in whose name you make demands on one another and also in respect of your families. Allah is always watching over you” (al-Nisa’, 4:1). Imam Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani (d. 852 CE) in his work Fath al-Bari (Victory of the Creator), an explanation of Sahih al-Bukhari, mentions a hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA): The Prophet (SAW) said, "Allah created the creations, and when He finished from His creations, the rahm (womb) said, ‘(O Allah) at this place I seek refuge with You from all those who sever me (i.e. sever the ties of Kith and kin).’ Allah said, ‘Yes, won’t you be pleased that I will keep good relations with the one who will keep good relations with you, and I will sever the relation with the one who will sever the relations with you?’ It said, ‘Yes, O my Lord.’ Allah said, ‘Then that is for you.’” Allah’s Apostle added, "Read (in the Qur’an) if you wish, the Statement of Allah: “Would you then, if you were given the authority, do mischief in the land and sever your ties of kinship? These are the ones whom Allah has cursed, so He made them deaf, and blinded their sight” (Muhammad, 47.22-23).

In describing the transgressors and rebellious ones (al-fussaq), Allah (SWT) tells us that they are those who cut what He commanded them to join. This refers to the cutting of the ties of kith and kin. “...Through it He makes many go astray and leads many to the right path. But it is only the rebels He makes go astray. Those who break Allah’s contract after it has been agreed, and sever what Allah has commanded to be joined, and cause corruption on the earth; it is they who are the lost” (al-Baqarah, 2:26-27).

The Qur’an also tells us that those who do various good deeds to seek the pleasure of Allah (SWT) and join what Allah has commanded them to join, i.e. the ties of relationship, will be rewarded with the ultimate abode while those who sever what Allah (SWT) has commanded to be joined will be cursed and doomed to the evil
In a hadith, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) clearly said, "Whoever violates the rights of relatives shall not go to Paradise." This hadith, alone, should be enough to make us realize the importance of joining the ties of relationship and the dire consequence of not doing so. In another hadith narrated by Anas (R A), the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said, "Whoever wants an increase in his sustenance and that the marks of his feet remain for a long time in the world (i.e. to live long)—he should be kind and helpful to his relatives." Basically, there are two ways of being kind and considerate to relatives. One is by giving them monetary assistance, when needed, and the other is by devoting a part of one's time and energy at their service.

Not heeding to Allah’s and His Prophet’s exhortations is nothing but acting in defiance of them and leads to disruption of family values. On the other hand, paying heed to their teachings promotes understanding, love, and harmony among families, the building blocks of societies. The emphasis placed on keeping ties of relationship intact is accentuated through another hadith which states, “The man who fulfils his duties towards his relatives is not the real protector of blood relationship but he is one who joins it after it is severed.”

Taking care of the poor, destitute, and needy is also incumbent upon us, especially upon the rich among us. Islam has ordered the rich to give a portion of their wealth to assist such people. Zakah by way of 2.5% of the annual savings is payable by them for this purpose, not to speak of other voluntary acts of charity and kindness which are strongly recommended. The Qur’an teaches us that spending in the way of Allah (SWT) from things that one holds dear is a condition for attaining piety. “You will not reach piety until you spend from what you love; and whatever you spend, Allah is aware of it” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:92). The general carelessness of the rich towards the poor is an impending danger looming large on the society and heading to destroy it. Needless to add, the rich would be the first victims of such catastrophe.

It is important to understand that Allah (SWT) is the real owner of whatever we have in terms of worldly possessions. In His wisdom, He gives what He wills; to whom He wills. Everyone is being tested in the possessions; he or she has in this world, whether it is abundant, scarce, or moderate. “Know that your wealth and children are a trial and that there is an immense reward with Allah” (al-Anfal, 8:28). Elsewhere almost in similar words, we have, “Your wealth and your children are only a test for you. But with Allah there is an immense reward” (al-Taghabun, 64:15). Believers are reminded again and again that there is a recognized right and portion in their wealth for the needy in the society. We have Qur’anic ayat such as “…And give them some of the wealth Allah has given you” (al-Nur, 24:33). “And in their money was a portion for the beggar and the needy” (al-Dhariyat, 51:19). “And in whose wealth there is a known right” (al-Ma’arij, 70:24).

As explained above, it is only Allah’s prerogative how He decides to distribute His bounties among people. Possession of huge amounts of wealth or other worldly possessions is not necessarily a measure of success. The truly successful ones are those who seek the pleasure of Allah (SWT) through righteous and charitable deeds. “Do they not see that Allah expands provision for whoever He wills and also restricts it? There are certainly Signs in that for people who have iman. Give relatives their due, and the poor and travelers. That is best for those who seek the pleasure of Allah. They are the ones who are successful.” (al-Rum, 30:37-38).

People are generally reluctant in spending on deserving relatives, the poor, and the needy and are more inclined to hoard their money and earn interest on it through interest. They think that their spending in causes ordained
by Allah (SWT) will reduce their wealth while it is exactly the opposite which is true. Allah (SWT) explains this by saying, “What you give with usurious intent, aiming to get back a greater amount from people’s wealth, does not become greater with Allah. But anything you give as zakat, seeking the Face of Allah — all who do that will be given a manifold increase” (al-Rum, 30:39).

We are also admonished not to squander wealth. Doing so is making alliance with the Shaytan. “Squanderers are brothers to the shaytans, and Shaytan was ungrateful to his Lord” (al-Isra’, 17:27). Neither should we be tight-fisted nor extravagant; rather we should be moderate in our spending habits. The slaves of the Most Merciful (‘ibad al-Rahman) are described as those who “… are neither wasteful nor niggardly when they spend, but keep to a just balance” (al-Furqan, 25:67). We are also reminded that Allah (SWT) does not like those who are extravagant in their habits. “O children of Adam, dress well whenever you are at worship, and eat and drink but do not be extravagant: God does not like extravagant people” (al-A’raf, 7:31). People who manifest extravagance in their lifestyles are usually those who show off.

There may be a situation when we may not be able to fulfill the right of giving something to our relatives or some other needy persons, perhaps because of not having enough resources ourselves or for any other reason. This calls for sympathizing with those persons and speaking kindly to them rather than being rude to them or refusing them harshly. “But if you do turn away from them, seeking the mercy you hope for from your Lord, then speak to them with words that bring them ease” (al-Isra’, 17:28). Islam teaches us to lead a balanced life.

Even in matters of spending, it is advised not to spend (even in worthy causes) to the extent that one starts blaming oneself for having nothing to fall upon in difficult times. “Do not keep your hand chained to your neck but do not extend it either to its full extent so that you sit there blamed and destitute” (al-Isra’, 17:29).

When the Prophet (SAW) was asked by his companions as to how much should they spend and on whom, he was told to say, “…’Whatever is surplus to your needs” (al-Baqarah, 2:219) and “…Whatever you give should be for parents, close relatives, orphans, the needy, and travelers. God is well aware of whatever good you do” (al-Baqarah, 2:215).

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