Synopsis of Friday Sermon
Ameer Mustapha Elturk

保護真主的慈悲
In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Shari’ah – Part 4 (Protection of Posterity)

Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on June 24, 2011

Protection of life, which is the second objective of shari’ah, was the topic of discussion of the last Friday sermon. Human life is sacred. Islam places great emphasis on the sanctity of human life from the womb till the grave, and forbids the taking of life without due process of justice.

Protection of posterity (hifz al-nasl), which is the third objective of shari’ah is the topic of today’s sermon. Posterity, progeny, or lineage refers to all future generations collectively. The terms in Arabic for posterity are al-nasl and al-nasab, derived from the roots na-sa-la and na-sa-ba respectively. While the former means to procreate, the latter means to trace ancestry. In between the two words al-nasl and al-nasab, we find the concept of lineage, which by extension includes all succeeding generations in one’s family.

Islam recognizes the importance of protecting one’s lineage and posterity. The negative growth in population is a sign of destruction of posterity as is evident in some European countries. In the Czech Republic, for example, the average number of children born to women is 1.2, which is below the number of 2.1 that yields zero population growth. In Europe and Asian countries like Honk Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and Singapore, there are more old people than babies being born. In Russia, with the birth rates being low and death rates being high, a loss of one-third of the country’s population is expected in the next 40 years. The United States also shows a plummeting birth rate. The birth fell by 2.6% in 2009 even as the population grew. According to analysis of the 2010 census of USA Today, there are 43 million households that have more dogs than children.

While the concept of marriage is fading, the practice of cohabitation is on the rise. There are more people today who prefer to cohabit or live together as husband and wife without being married, and without any sense of responsibility or obligation. According to US Census Bureau, the number of unmarried couples cohabiting hiked from 6.7 million in 2009 to 7.5 million in 2010 registering an increase of 13% or 868,000 couples. The US Justice Department found that women are 62 times more likely to be assaulted by a cohabitant boy friend than by a husband. A study shows that kids born out of such unstable relationships suffer the brunt of the consequences that lead to adverse effects on their physical and psychological development. As against 8% of American couples, there are 28% of Swedish couples who cohabit. In the absence of religion, moral and cultural taboos against partners living together seem to have disappeared altogether. This is attributed to the essentially atheistic society of Sweden, which also has one of the highest suicide rates in the world.

The Prophet (SAW) said, “Nikah (marriage) is of my tradition. He, who shuns my Sunnah (way), is not of me.” Intimate relationship outside the bond of marriage is forbidden in Islam. Marriage is the only legitimate means or way to satisfy one’s sexual desires. It is only through marriage that lineage is protected and maintained. It is alarming to learn that nearly 40% of babies born in the United States in 2007 were delivered by unwed mothers, according to data released by the National Center for Health statistics. The 1.7 million illegitimate births out of 4.3 million total births marked a more than 25% jump from five years before. One can only wonder how deprived these children would be of tracing and determining their roots, not to speak of their journey toward becoming drug addicts, criminals, and a burden to the society. Islam wants sound and happy families to construct a good and effective society that eradicates evil and promotes good. Marriage is the foundation of a fam-
ily and the family is the nucleus of society. Having a sound family structure would result in a good and successful society. Marriage, therefore, is the essential component in building and maintaining lineage. Islam encourages marriage as soon as a mature man is able to support his wife. It is also encouraged to marry at a young age. It is narrated by Abdullah ibn Mas’ud (RA) who said, “We went out with the Messenger of Allah while we were youth, and we had no means. The Messenger of Allah said, “O young people! Whoever among you can marry should marry, because it helps one to lower one’s gaze and guard one’s modesty, and whoever is not able to marry should fast as fasting diminishes the sexual urge.”

Marriage in Islam, while protecting the rights of the husband and the wife also preserves the lineage and progeny. Islam allows polygamy, whereby a man may have up to four wives at a time. This provision, however, is subject to the man treating all his wives equitably, and Allah (SWT) Himself states how difficult it is for man to do so. You will not be able to be completely fair between your wives, however hard you try. But do not be completely partial so as to leave a wife, as it were, suspended in mid-air. And if you make amends and have taqwa, Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Most Merciful (al-Nisa; 4:129). This indicates that having only one wife is the norm while plurality of wives is an exception. There may be instances, for example when the wife is sterile or there may be a shortage of men as a consequence of war or other special circumstances when polygamy may be practiced.

If you are afraid of not behaving justly towards orphans, then marry other permissible women, two, three or four. But if you are afraid of not treating them equally, then only one, or those you own as slaves. That makes it more likely that you will not be unfair (al-Nisa’, 4:3). Islam forbids polyandry, the practice of having more than one husband at one time; an obvious reason, among others being, that the lineage in this case cannot be preserved and protected, as it can be in the case of polygamy.

Zina (adultery and fornication) is among the practices that threaten posterity; hence the prohibition and punishment of zina in Islam. It is categorized as one of the major sins in Islam. And do not come near adultery, for it is a sin and an evil path (al-Isra’, 17:32). There are strict rules in Islam regarding the intermingling between the two genders. Both men and women are instructed to lower their gazes and guard their private parts. Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and to guard their private parts. That is more decent for them. Allah is indeed well aware of what they do. Say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their private parts and not display their adornments…(al-Nur, 24:30-31). According to a Hadith, “Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day must never be in privacy with a woman without there being a mahram (of hers) with her, for otherwise Satan will be the third person with them.” The reason for this is not a lack of trust in one or both of them; it is rather to protect them from wrong thoughts and sexual feelings which naturally arise within a man and a woman when they are alone together without the fear of intrusion by a third person. Most of the moral depravity and vitiated state of the modern society is the result of disregarding these safeguards.

The rights of women are granted under shari’ah. Among other rights, they are entitled to decent living, inheritance, owning business, keeping their maiden names, acquiring education, and good treatment. In Islam, the significance of preserving lineage is so crucial that the Prophet (SAW) said, “Whoever knowingly claims to belong to anyone other than his father, paradise will be denied to him.” In another Hadith, he said, “Whoever calls himself by other than his father’s name will be cursed by Allah (SWT), the angels, and all people.” The Qur’an when referring to orphans, clearly states, Call them after their fathers. That is more just with Allah. And if you do not know their fathers, then they are your brethren in the faith and your kinsmen (al-Ahzaab, 33:5). While sponsoring an orphan is a highly encouraged and virtuous act in Islam, adoption of a child is categorically forbidden as it may lead to confusion of lineage. Even a person who converts to Islam and changes his/her name has to keep the original family or last name to indicate the lineage of that person with his/her father. We learn from the Sirah that Ikrama ibn Abi Jahl was called by the same name even after he embraced Islam. Although Abu Jahl was the staunchest enemy of Islam, yet Ikrama’s name was always associated with his father’s name.

An exception to this general rule is in cases where names are changed to eliminate their anti-Islamic character. The name Abd al-Shams (slave of the sun), for example, may be modified to an Islamic name, such as Abdullah (slave of Allah).

As had been mentioned in the previous sermon, shari’ah demands total respect of all creation including the fetus. To abort one’s child is in essence tantamount to eliminating one’s own lineage. Abortion or termination of the fetus is only legitimate if the mother has a health condition that makes the continuation of pregnancy a danger to her life. Fear of poverty is not a reason to kill or abort a fetus. Do not kill your children for fear of poverty; it is We Who provide for them as well as for you. Killing them is surely a grave sin (al-Isra’, 17:31).
Preserving the lineage also has to do with recognizing and honoring one’s parents. Children are commanded to take good care of their parents and treat them nicely and kindly. The rights of parents follow immediately after the rights of Allah (SWT). Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him alone, and treat parents with the best of kindness. Should one of them, or both, attain old age in your lifetime, do not say “Ugh!” to them (as an indication of complaint or impatience), nor be harsh with them, and always address them in gracious words. Lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy, and say: “My Lord, have mercy on them even as they cared for me in childhood.” (al-Isra’ 17:23-24). Paying the parents back some of what they deserve in return when they are old is a very significant issue in the Islamic heritage. The Prophet (SAW) said, “May he be disgraced! May he be disgraced! May be he is disgraced, who finds his parents, one or both, approaching old age and does not enter paradise by rendering due service to them.” It is sad and disappointing that there is an increasing failure and shortcoming in this regard. There are many cases in the Muslim World where kids become less tolerant with their parents as they grow up older and therefore less due respect is paid to them.

Keeping the ties of kith and kin is just as important and is part of the preservation of posterity. Allah (SWT) reminds this by saying, 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 watches over you continually (al-Nisa’ 4:1).

Shari’ah regulates the life of a Muslim in all matters including marriage, divorce, inheritance, parenting, upbringing of children, rights of orphans, and ties of kith and kin. The aim is to keep the family line unambiguously defined. Thus, anything that upsets this is discouraged or prohibited.

May Allah (SWT) preserve and protect our lineage and posterity, keep us on the straight path, help us to understand our faith better and make us practice it in a manner pleasing to Him.

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