Shari’ah – Part 8 (Farewell Sermon of the Prophet)

There was a discussion in a previous Friday sermon on the issue of human rights and freedom in Islam. This among others included the right to life, right to safety of life, right to respect of chastity of women, right to basic standard of life, right to freedom, right to justice, and right to the principle of equality of human beings. The right to cooperate and not to cooperate is also among the basic human rights in Islam. In this regard, the Qur’an lays down a general principle of paramount importance and universal application. “…Help one another to do what is right and good; do not help one another towards sin and hostility…” (al-Ma’idah, 5:2). This means that it is obligatory upon believers to cooperate with anyone, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, in all his pursuits of good values and works. Similarly, it is obligatory upon believers not to cooperate with anyone, even if he is a Muslim or someone close in terms of considerations of race, country, nationality, language etc., if that person were to promote wickedness and aggression.

In continuation of the earlier khutbas on the subject of Shari’ah, today’s sermon will conclude the discourse on Shari’ah by trying to understand the meaning and spirit of the Prophet’s (SAW) farewell sermon delivered by him to an audience of 120 to 140 thousand companions on the occasion of his last hajj. The Prophet (SAW) concluded his 23 years of unflinching, backbreaking effort of propagating and establishing the deen of Allah (SWT) with a sermon replete with gems of wisdom that deserve to be constantly reflected upon.

After praising, and thanking Allah, the Prophet (SAW) said, “O People, lend me an attentive ear, for I know not whether after this year, I shall ever be amongst you again. Therefore listen to what I am saying to you very carefully and take these words to those who could not be present here today.”

The Prophet (SAW) had realized that his mission had been accomplished in Arabia. “ Today I have perfected your deen for you and completed My blessing upon you and I am pleased with Islam as a deen for you…” (al-Ma’idah, 5:3). Thus, he urged his audience to listen to him attentively as he realized that he may not live long, and that the global message of Islam had to be spread far and wide beyond the boundaries of the Arabian Peninsula. Speaking about the sanctity of the life and property of human beings, the Prophet (SAW) went on to say, “O People, just as you regard this month, this day, this city as Sacred, so regard the life and property of every Muslim as a sacred trust. Return the goods entrusted to you to their rightful owners. Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you. Remember that you will indeed meet your Lord, and that He will indeed reckon your deeds.” The life and property of human beings are sacred trusts that are to be honored. The Qur’an describes true believers as “those who honor their trusts and their contracts” (al-Mu’minun, 23:8). It is reported that whenever the Prophet (SAW) preached his companions, he used to say: “The person who does not keep trust has no faith and the person who does not respect his covenant (and promise) has no religion.”

The Prophet (SAW) then touched upon the protection of wealth and warned against the unjust, oppressive, and exploitive economic system based on usury, which went towards widening the gap between the rich and the poor. He set an example by announcing that henceforth, all interest obligations due to his uncle, Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib had been waived. Riba (usury) was rampant in Arabia during the pre-Islamic era, and Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib was one of those who were in the business of usury. The Qur’anic injunctions regarding prohibition of interest or usury are many, such as, “Those who practice usury will not rise from the grave except as someone driven mad by Satan’s touch. That is because they say, ‘Trade is the same as usury.’ But Allah has permitted trade and He has forbidden usury. Whoever is given a warning by his Lord and then desists, may keep what he received in the past and his a nihilism.”

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The Prophet (SAW) was well aware of the ploys and plots of Satan; so he continued to say, “Beware of Satan, for the safety of your
religion. He has lost all hope that he will ever be able to lead you astray in big things, so beware of following him in small things.” Some Muslims even though they do not worship idols or other deities fall into Satan’s trap by making their lustful desires their god. Allah (SWT) describes their condition by stating, “Have you seen him who takes his whims and desires to be his god…” (al-Jathiya, 45:23). Remember the fight against Satan must continue as he will continue to lead people astray until judgment day. He declared war against us when he told Allah (SWT), “Now that You have sent me astray, I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along Your straight path”(al-`Araf, 7:16).

The Prophet (SAW) then discussed the rights of women. He made sure that their rights are protected; that they are honored, and that they are given the right to decent living. In the pre-Islamic era, women were mistreated and enjoyed no rights. They were looked upon as chattel and sex objects. The birth of a female was undesirable. A female child was even buried alive. The Qur’an refers to this inhuman abhorrent practice. “When the baby girl buried alive will be asked; for what sin was she killed (al-Takwir, 81:8-9). The Prophet (SAW) abolished the practice of infanticide and allowed women to maintain their maiden name and lineage, to own property and business, and to enjoy the right of inheritance as per the divine law. His sermon spelt out his advice as regards treatment of women: “O People, it is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women, but they also have rights over you. Remember that you have taken them as your wives only under Allah’s trust and with His permission. If they abide by your right then to them belongs the right to be fed and clothed in kindness. Do treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers. And it is your right that they do not make friends with any one of whom you do not approve, as well as never to be unchaste.” There are numerous ahadith that advise men to be nice and kind to women.

Speaking about the importance of protecting one’s religion, which is also the first and foremost objective of Shari`ah, the Prophet (SAW) went on to say, “O People, listen to me in earnest, worship Allah, say your five daily prayers, fast during the month of Ramadan, and give your wealth in Zakah. Perform Hajj if you can afford to.” We know through an authentic hadith that Islam is based on the shahadah (testimony of faith), salah, zakah, siyam, and hajj. While other faiths have changed their doctrines and modes of worship to accommodate people’s changing ways of life, the Muslims (as a community), however weak they may be, have held on to their faith even after fourteen centuries, and have not allowed their desire (hawa) to interfere with the way ordained by Allah (SWT) and His Messenger (SAW). This indeed is the greatest blessing for Muslims.

Next the Prophet (SAW) advised about the equality of human beings and said, “All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor does a black have any superiority over white except by piety and good action. Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood. Nothing shall be legitimate to a Muslim which belongs to a fellow Muslim unless it was given freely and willingly. Do not, therefore, do injustice to yourselves.” Allah says, “And hold fast all together to the rope of Allah and His Messenger (SAW) as one single community of the same faith, and I am your Lord; so worship Me alone” (21:92).

The Prophet (SAW) then reminded the audience about the accountability of one’s deeds on the Day of Judgment, and said, “Remember, one day you will appear before Allah and answer your deeds. So beware, do not stray from the path of righteousness after I am gone.” Through this message, the Prophet (SAW) asked us not to get lost in the life of this world and to stay on course, being mindful all the time of the reality, that our destination is the hereafter (al-Akhirah), and that we will be held responsible and accountable for whatever we do in this worldly life. “O you who believe; you are only responsible for yourselves. The misguided cannot harm you as long as you are guided. All of you will return to Allah and He will inform you about what you were doing” (al-Ma`idah, 5:105).

The Prophet (SAW) concluded by saying, “O People, no prophet or apostle will come after me and no new faith will be born. Reason well, therefore, O People, and understand words which I convey to you. I leave behind me two things, the Qur’an and my example, the Sunnah, and if you follow these you will never go astray. All those who listen to me shall pass on my words to others and those to others again; and may the last ones understand my words better than those who listen to me directly. Be my witness, O Allah, that I have conveyed your message to your people.”

The message of Islam has to be conveyed until the end of times. It is our duty as Muslims to convey the message, which can be summarized in one statement: La ilaha illallah (there is no god but God). This is the work of da’wah that has to be practiced and preached for all times to come.

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