Satan - The Devil (Know your Enemy) Part 1

The sermon today is the first in a series of sermons on a very significant topic that is hardly talked about, and mostly ignored. The topic is: ‘Satan - the Devil (Know Your Enemy)’. We know through a well known hadith that the shayateen (devils) are chained during the month of Ramadan. The sudden enthusiasm in worshipping and doing charitable deeds in the month of Ramadan and the subsequent decline in the same outside Ramadan goes well to explain the veracity of this hadith. After Ramadan, the shayateen get unchained and become active once again. They start persuading us to stay away from those activities in which we were so fervently and willingly engaged during the month of Ramadan.

Interestingly, there is a poem entitled ‘Sympathy for the Devil’ that is popular with, and sung by pop musicians. In a way, it is an introduction to Iblees (Satan - may the curse of Allah be upon him). The words of the lyrics are: “Please allow me to introduce myself; I am a man of wealth and taste. I have been around for a long year; sold many a man’s soul and faith. Pleased to meet you; hope you guessed my name. But what’s puzzling you is the nature of my game.” This poem says it all.

After Ramadan, even Muslims seem to be ensnared by Satan. Allah (SWT) has warned again and again that Satan is our arch enemy. “When We said to the angels, Prostrate yourselves to Adam, they prostrated with the exception of Iblis. He was one of the jin and wantonly deviated from his Lord’s command. Do you take him and his offspring as protectors apart from Me when they are your enemy? How evil is the exchange the wrongdoers make!” (al-Kahf, 18:50). Elsewhere in Surat Fatir, Allah (SWT) says, “Satan is your enemy; so treat him as an enemy; he invites his followers only to enter the blazing fire”(35:6).

Unless we treat Satan and his progeny as enemies, we’ll continue to be in a state of misery, distress and grief, and we’ll continue to be misled by him. The struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil dates back to the time of Adam (AS) and this struggle will continue. As a matter of fact, it is evil that has reigned supreme most of the times, whereas the triumph of good has mainly been sporadic and short lived. Whenever the forces of evil are subdued, they lie low for a while, and strike back again with all their might. Our situation inside and outside Ramadan is a glaring example of this. Iblees has resolved to defeat man. The fight against him must continue as he declared war against man when he vowed to Allah (SWT) and said, “Now that You have sent me astray, I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along Your straight path.”(al-'A'raf, 7:16). We just cannot afford to make compromises with him or befriend him.

The Prophet (SAW) brought about a total and unprecedented revolution in the history of mankind. He established total justice at all levels—the individual and collective, the private and the public. The forces of good or Hizbullah (party of Allah, the Prophet (SAW) and his companions) were supremely successful over the forces of evil or Hizb-u-Shaytan (party of Shaytan, the Mushriks of Arabia). Indeed, truth triumphs over falsehood. “And say, the truth has come, and falsehood has perished: falsehood is bound to perish” (al-Isra’, 17:81). However, soon after the demise of the Prophet (SAW), Muslims gradually drifted from the pure prophetic traditions. Distorted thoughts and innovation made their way into the pure deen that was preached and practiced by the Prophet (SAW) and his followers.

Although Muslims do not worship idols, as such, yet Satan has made quite a few of them worship other deities, such as their undesirable lusts and gross materialism. Satan and his followers from both jinn and mankind have become a part and parcel of every household and community. He is a financial advisor, a family counselor, a psychologist, and the like. He plays many roles and wears many hats. The rich and the famous from the celebrities, business people, and singers adore him, patronize him, and even die for him. Satan is a master of deception and masquerades most skillfully. It is crucial, therefore, to know and recognize him as our enemy.

It is said that if you know your enemy and know yourself, you can fight a hundred battles without disaster. This wise quote is attributed to Sun Tzu, a high ranking Chinese military general and strategist of the 6th century BC. So we must know the plots and ploys of Satan. Our best guide in this regard is the Qur’an, which gives us an insight into his deceptive ways of enticing people toward evil. He does not have the power to compel anyone to do wrong, but he certainly is skilful in persuading and alluring people to do
Who is Iblis (Satan)? There are narrations galore and only Allah (SWT) knows best regarding their authenticity. We learn from one of the Jewish traditions (Israiliyat) mentioned in the exegesis (tafsir) of Ibn Kathir that Iblees was originally called Azazeel. He was of the jinns. Allah (SWT) created jinns before He created men. The jinns inhabited the earth, believed in God and worshipped Him. Iblees was the most devout of the jinns. On account of his extraordinary piety, and on the request made by the angels, Allah (SWT) raised him first to the first heaven, and later on to the seventh heaven. Allah (SWT) had in His grand plans to create another creation—man, who would become the successor (khalifah) on earth. When Allah (SWT) informed the angels about the creation of man, Iblees became jealous lest someone from the progeny of Adam (AS) takes his exalted status.

Another narration attributed to Hassan al-Basari says that Iblees, while in the seventh heaven, worshipped Allah (SWT) for more than seventy thousand years until he was raised to the station of Ridwan (guardian of paradise) for one thousand years. Once he read an inscription on the gates of paradise saying, “There is a servant among the most favored servants of the Almighty Lord, and for a long time he will be obedient and serve His lord well. There will come a day, however, when he will oppose his Lord and disobey Him, and he will be driven out from His holy nearness.” Seeing this, Iblees sought Allah’s permission to curse that rebellious one who he was. He was permitted to do so and Iblees began to curse that future sinner for one thousand years, knowing not that it was to be himself.

The Qur’an is the primary and most authentic source to comprehend the nature of Iblees. We learn from the Qur’an that he was from the jinns. He is also called Shaytan, a term that is used in the singular or plural, and often interchangeably with Iblees, who is the chief of the Shayateen. While the term Shaytan is derived from the root letters sha-ta-na, which means to turn away in opposition to someone, and indeed Shaytan did turn away from Allah (SWT). Iblees derived from ablasa means the most frustrated and miserable one. According to a hadith narrated from Ayesha (RA), the angels were created out of light (nur), the Shaytan out of smokeless scorching fire (nar), and Adam (AS) from that which Allah (SWT) has described, meaning clay (teen).

The Christian tradition talks of Lucifer (Satan) as the fallen angel. This is in contravention to the Qur’anic position, which states that angels can never disobey Allah (SWT). “Believers, guard yourselves and your families against a Fire fuelled by people and stones, over which stand angels, stern and strong; angels who never disobey God’s commands to them, but do as they are ordered” (al-Tahrin, 66:6). Since Iblees disobeyed Allah’s command by not prostrating to Adam (AS) when told to do so, he can in no way be of the angels. Further, Iblees rationalized his stand by arguing that he was superior to Adam (AS). “God said, what prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you to? He replied, I am better than him. You created me from fire and You created him from clay” (al-A’raf, 7:12).

The jinns have certain qualities not found in men; for instance, they can travel at unimaginably fast speeds, penetrate barriers, and change forms. But like humans, they marry and procreate, and among them are those who are righteous and others who are rebellious. “Some of us submit to Him and others go the wrong way: those who submit to God have found wise guidance” (al-Jinn, 72:14). Also, both jinn and men, unlike angels, possess free will to make choices to do good or evil. To achieve success and salvation in the hereafter, we have to know Satan, who is and will remain our enemy till the end of times, because Allah (SWT) has granted him respite till the Day of Judgment. “But Iblis said, My Lord, grant me respite until the Day when they are raised from the dead; so He said, You have respite” (Saaed, 38:79-80).

The subsequent sermons on this topic will cover the stories of Adam (AS) and Iblees, which occur at seven places in the Qur’an, the first one appearing in Surat al-Baqarah. “When your Lord said to the angels, ‘I am putting a successor on the earth,’ they said, ‘Why put on it one who will cause corruption on it and shed blood when we glorify You with praise and proclaim Your purity?’ He said, ‘I know what you do not know’” (al-Baqarah, 2:30).

May Allah (SWT) guide us to know and understand the nature of Satan, our greatest enemy, and keep us protected from him and his progeny.

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