Synopsis of Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on Feb 03, 2012

In the Footsteps of the Prophet

It was on the 12th day of Rabi al-Awwal in the year 570 CE that the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was born. When he reached the age of forty, Allah (SWT) raised him as His final Prophet and Messenger in order to save humanity from all types of darkness it was engulfed in. Muhammad (SAW) not only showed the divinely lit path to success and salvation, but also fulfilled his mission by establishing a system and polity wherein the rule of Allah (SWT) reigned supreme. He also left behind a legacy that true believers hold dear and live with—to lead their lives in the footsteps of the Prophet. Among the many honorific titles attributed to Prophet Muhammad (SAW), there are five of them that are mentioned in Surat al-Ahzab. “O Prophet! We have sent you as a witness, a bearer of good news, a warner, a caller to Allah by His permission, and a lamp spreading light” (al-Ahzab, 33:45-46).

While earlier Prophets and Messengers were sent by Allah (SWT) to guide and serve their own people, Muhammad (SAW) was sent as the final Messenger for all people for all times to come. “And We have sent you to all people as a bearer of good news, as well as a warner; but most people do not know” (Saba’, 34:28). This makes it very clear that after the Prophet’s demise, the responsibility of continuing his prophetic mission transfers to the Muslim ummah. According to a hadith, the Prophet (SAW) said, “I am the last in the line of Prophets and you are the last community of believers.” This Prophetic statement is confirmed by the ayah of the Qur’an in which Allah (SWT) praises the ummah of Muhammad (SAW). “You (believers) are the best community raised for (the benefit) of mankind. You enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in Allah” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:110).

Allah (SWT) had blessed the former Muslim ummah of Bani Israel by honoring it with the role of leadership over other nations. However, because of its utter disregard and blatant transgression of Allah’s laws and other serious omissions and commissions in matters of deen, Allah (SWT) deposed this ummah and instituted the Muslim ummah of Muhammad (SAW) in its place. The children of Israel (Bani Israel) incurred the wrath of Allah (SWT) for their crimes and for straying from the straight path. “They are stricken with humiliation wherever they are found, except when under a covenant (of protection) from Allah and from the people. They drew the wrath of Allah and are stricken with misery; that is because they rejected the signs of Allah and killing the prophets without just cause; that is because they disobeyed and transgressed (beyond bounds)” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:112). Although this ayah tells us about the reasons why the ummah of Bani Israel invited Allah’s anger upon itself, yet it also provokes us to think that the Muslim ummah would undergo the same fate if it follows the footsteps of Bani Israel and does not carry on the duties that were entrusted to it after the demise of the Prophet (SAW).

Abdullah Ibn Mas’ud (RA) narrated: Allah’s Messenger said to me: “Recite for me.” I said, “Shall I recite it to you although it had been revealed to you?” He said, “I like to hear (the Qur’an) from others.” So I recited Surat al-Nisa’ until I reached, “How (will it be) then when We bring from each nation a witness and We bring you (O Muhammad) as a witness against these people?” (al-Nisa’, 4:41). Then he said, “Stop!” Behold, his eyes were shedding tears. This Prophetic tradition highlights to us the emotional trauma the Prophet (SAW) underwent on realizing that on the Day of Judgment, he would have to be a witness over his own people including his kith and kin who had not followed him. Allah (SWT) praises the Muslim ummah by saying, “And thus, We have made you a justly balanced community (ummah) so that you be a witness over the people, and that the messenger be a witness over you” (al-Baqarah, 2:143). After reflecting upon this situation one may ask: Do we find within us even a fraction of the concern the Prophet (SAW) had toward humanity? Does it dawn upon us that just as the Prophet (SAW) is going to be a witness over those of his people who did not follow him; likewise we as an ummah are going to be a witness for and against the people who did or did not respond to our call when we invited them to Islam. But the flip side of the situation is that people will witness against us for not conveying the message.

As mentioned in ayah 45 of Surat al-Ahzab, along with being a witness over people, the Prophet (SAW) was also a giver of glad tidings and a warner. All prophets and messengers of Allah (SWT) were sent to give good news of paradise to those who follow the path of truth and warn those who reject and transgress Allah’s deen with the punishment of hellfire so that people may have no case against...
Allah (SWT) on the Day of Judgment. “Messengers bringing good news and giving warning, so that people will have no argument against Allah after the coming of the Messengers” (al-Nisa’, 4:165). Such good news (tabshir) and warning (inzar) will become a criterion (hujjah) whereby no one on the Day of Judgment will be able to offer an excuse for ‘not knowing’ about the consequences of their actions in the hereafter.

The Prophet (SAW) was also sent as a da’ee (caller to Allah), and he accomplished this task in its entirety because he knew that any negligence on his part would mean that he had not conveyed the message. “O Messenger, deliver what was sent down to you from your Lord, and if you do not then you have not delivered His message” (al-Ma’idah, 5:67). And he and those who followed him called people to the way of Allah (SWT) with full insight and conviction. “Say: This is my way. I call to Allah with insight, I and all who follow me” (Yusuf, 12:108).

Allah (SWT) has made it clear to us who to give da’wah to and how. “Call to the path of your Lord with ‘the Wisdom’ and good preaching. Argue with them in the most courteous way, for your Lord knows best who has strayed from His way and who is rightly guided” (al-Nahl, 16:125). Any given community or society is usually made up of two groups of people—the majority comprising the lay people and the minority constituting the elite class. It is invariably the elite—the intellectuals and those wielding political and economic power who set the direction and priorities of any given society. It may be enough to invite the lay people with good preaching as long as the callers themselves are a reflection of what they teach and preach. To call the elite toward Islamic ideology and practice needs a totally different strategy. It is of extreme importance that a revolutionary transformation is brought about in the thinking and viewpoint of those who belong to this minority. One way to do this is to educate and train young Muslim individuals in modern disciplines of social sciences, philosophy, psychology, etc., while acquainting them simultaneously with the knowledge and wisdom of the noble Qur’an. Such individuals who would dedicate their lives to learning are best positioned to convey the message of Islam with wisdom to the intellectual elite who are unaware or misinformed about Islam. We should know that it is not the physical or natural sciences like Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Botany, Medicine, Engineering, etc., that turn away people towards atheism, secularism, humanism, and other man made philosophies; rather it is the human sciences that work towards corrupting people’s minds into believing that the cosmos is void of ‘Divine’ intervention; that the world is eternal and came into being by chance, that there is no life after death, and that anything outside the ken of experiment and observation is not based on knowledge, and hence not knowable. There is, however, a third group of people who endeavor to make others subscribe to their ideologies. We have to be conversant of their thoughts and ideologies in order to argue with them in the most effective and best possible manner, “Argue with them in the most courteous way” (al-Nahl, 16:125).

The Prophet (SAW) was also given the honorific title of al-Siraj al-Munir (lamp emitting light). He is a light to the entire world. According to a tradition, once when the Prophet (SAW) was asked to tell about himself replied that he was the prayer of his father Ibrahim (AS) (2:129) and the glad tidings proclaimed by ‘Isa (AS) to his people (61:6) and the vision of his mother who when pregnant with (the Prophet) saw a light emanating from her womb that illuminated the castles of Busra in the lands of Sham (Greater Syria). Allah (SWT) had determined to make His beloved Prophet (SAW) a lamp, the light of which would take out people from the darkness of shirk (polytheism) and kufr (disbelief) to the light of Islam (monotheism).

On the occasion of his last Hajj, the Prophet (SAW) concluded his 23 years of unflinching effort of propagating and establishing the deen of Allah (SWT) with a farewell 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 among 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.” On the basis of divine revelation, the Prophet (SAW) had realized that his mission had been accomplished in Arabia. Allah (SWT) signaled His pleasure to the Prophet (SAW) and to the community of believers by revealing what is believed to be the last revealed ayah of the Qur’an: “Today I have perfected for you your faith, and have completed My favor upon you, and am well-pleased with Islam as your deen (system of life)” (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.

Among many other gems of advice, exhortations, and admonitions, the Prophet (SAW) is reported to have said, “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.” It is believed that out of about 150 thousand companions of the Prophet (SAW), only about 10 thousand remained and died in the Arabian Peninsula. All others had migrated to foreign lands to disseminate the teachings of Islam and were laid to rest outside their native land. The message of Islam has to be conveyed until the end of times. This is the work of da’wah that has to be practiced and propagated. It is our duty as Muslims to convey this message in the footsteps of the Prophet (SAW).

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