Synopsis of Friday Sermon

Ameer Mustapha Elturk

"Goodness (virtue/piety) does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travelers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God” (al-Baqarah, 2:177).

This blessed ayah gives us the most comprehensive concept of real virtue, and piety (al-Birr) that combines beliefs and all acts of righteousness and obedience, both inward and outward. Whoever has these qualities is indeed the righteous believer who will succeed with Allah (SWT). The ayah deals with leading a balanced life and outlines the practical manifestation of belief in Allah (SWT), belief in the hereafter, belief in the angels, belief in the scriptures, and belief in the prophets. The last three can be lumped together in what we call the institution of prophethood. Such belief is demonstrated through acts of kindness and sympathy toward fellow human beings, observing Allah’s rights of salah and zakah, honoring and fulfilling all human relations, and being steadfast in times of hardships and conflicts.

Basically, it is the belief in Allah (SWT) and the hereafter that motivates a person to be righteous and virtuous. The prophets and messengers of Allah (SWT) were the most virtuous and balanced of all people. Hence, they are our models.

Salah and zakah are two of the most important rights of Allah (SWT). It is obligatory upon all believers to pray five times a day and give the obligatory charity regularly. Both these acts of worship connect one with one’s Creator and have been mentioned in the ayah right after acts of charity. This is to inform and remind the believers that acts of charity without fulfilling the rights of Allah (SWT) is no righteousness at all with Him. Both salah and zakah are mandatory. It is not sufficient that one performs salah but does not give zakah or gives zakah but does not perform salah regularly. While salah is the means to gain spiritual strength, zakah purifies and increases one’s wealth.

Today’s khutba while recapitulating the Qur’anic concept of virtue as discussed in the previous khutba on the same topic, will focus more on ablution (wudu) and salah, and some of the common errors made while practicing these rituals, and how to avoid them.

Performing salah is like taking a break from the hustle and bustle hours of the day. The Prophet (SAW) used to ask Bilal (RA), the companion first assigned to give the call for prayers: “O Bilal! Comfort us by calling to stand for the prayer.” So it is all about finding peace and tranquility during the time of salah. One should approach it in the state of wudu bearing in mind that during salah, one is in conversation with Allah (SWT). Salah without proper wudu is not acceptable. It is important, therefore, to be aware of the common mistakes people often make during wudu and salah.

The acts that constitute the fard (obligatory) in wudu are known through the ayah: “O you who believe,
when you get up to do salat, wash your faces and your hands and your arms to the elbows, and wipe over your heads, and wash your feet to the ankles” (al-Ma’idah, 5:6). It is sufficient to carry out each of these acts once only. However, we learn through the Prophetic practice (Sunnah) to wash the hands three times, rinse them out, wash the nose, and then the face, wash the arms up to the elbows, wipe over the head, the inside and outside of the ears, and wash the feet up to the ankles. Some of the common mistakes made while performing wudu are as follows:

1. Forgetting to say “Bismillah”: The Prophet (SAW) said, “There can be no wudu for those who don’t invoke the name of Allah (SWT).” The first thing we must remember and do is to say “Bismillah” and then start performing wudu.

2. Washing only part of the face: Washing of face includes the whole face, from top where the hair grows to the chin and from one side of the ear to the other side of the ear.

3. Not washing the arms up to the elbows: To ensure that this is done properly, scholars suggest the arms to be washed up to three fingers space above the elbows.

4. Not washing the feet properly: While washing the feet, some people just put their feet under the water without actually washing them or running their fingers between the toes. Also, the feet should be washed up to the ankles.

5. Forgetting to make the dua after wudu: We should make the dua after wudu, and that is to utter the tashahhud (‘I bear witness that none has the right to be worshipped except Allah, alone, without partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger.’), preferably followed by the optional dua: ‘O Allah, make me of those who return to You often in repentance and make me of those who remain clean and pure.’

Some of the common mistakes made in the observance of salah are:

1. Delaying the salah intentionally: The truly righteous believers are those who offer their salah on time and are well aware of the divine injunctions: “The salat is prescribed for the mu’minun at specific times” (al-Nisa’, 4:103) and “Safeguard the salat — especially the middle one. Stand in obedience to Allah” (al-Baqarah, 2:238).

2. Not saying the takbeer al-Ihram (opening takbeer) or delaying it when joining a congregational prayer: Many of those who come late to the mosque and join in prayer which is already in progress, rush to take the same posture, while people are in ruku’ and say takbeer al-Ihram or opening takbeer of prayer while bowing for fear of missing that ruku’. Takbeer al-Ihram, which is the first rukn after making the intention (niyyah) for the salah is to be pronounced when one is standing upright only; otherwise the salah becomes void.

3. Preceding or moving before the Imam in congregational prayers: No actions during the salah, such as saying the takbeer al-Ihram or making the ruku’ or sujood should be done before the Imam himself does it. The Imam is to be followed in all cases. The Prophet (SAW) said, “Does not the one who raises his head before the Imam himself fear that Allah will transfer his head into a donkey’s head?”

4. Hasty performance of prayer: This does not allow calmness in ruku’ (bowing) or sujood (prostrations). The Messenger of Allah (SAW) saw a man who did not complete his ruku’ and made a very short prostration; he (SAW) said: “If this man dies while praying in this manner, he would die upholding a religion other than the religion of Muhammad.” Abu Hurairah (RA) said: “My beloved friend Muhammad (SAW) forbade me to perform postures of prayer copying the picking of a rooster; (signifying fast performance of prayer), moving eyes around like a fox and the sitting like monkeys (sitting on one’s thighs). The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: “The worst thief is the one who steals from his own prayer.” People asked, “O Messenger of Allah! How could one steal from his own prayer? He said: “By not completing its ruku’ sujood.” To complete ruku’ is to stay in that posture long enough to recite ‘Subhana Rabbi al-Azeem’ three times, slowly, and to complete sujood is to stay in that position long enough to recite ‘Subhana Rabbi al-A’la’ three times slowly. He also announced: “He who does not complete his ruku’ and sujood, his prayer is void.” Salah has to be performed with utmost humbleness (khushu’). “It is the believers who are successful: those who humble themselves in their prayer” (al-Mu’minun, 23:2).

5. Wandering and drifting off during salah: It is absolutely essential that we are mindful of our salah
and try our level best not to stray while praying; otherwise we may forget the surah we are reciting, and sometimes even the number of raka’s (cycles) performed. One has to make a conscious and deliberate effort to remain focused while praying.

6. Gazing upward or looking right or left during prayer: This may cause loss of concentration. We are commanded to lower our gaze and look at the point at which the head rests during sujood. The Prophet (SAW) warned: “Let those who raise their gaze up during prayer stop doing so, or else their sights would not return to them.”

7. Making improper ruku’ and sujood: The Prophet said, "Perform the bowing and the prostrations properly. By Allah, I see you from behind me (or from behind my back) when you bow or prostrate." Ibn 'Abbas (RA) reported: The Messenger of Allah (SAW) had been commanded that he should prostrate on the seven (bones) and he was forbidden to fold back the hair and clothing. According to Abul-Rabi' (the seven bones are): The hands, the knees, and the (extremities) of the feet and the forehead. In another hadith, the Prophet (SAW) said, “Let not any of you support himself on his forearm in sujood like the dog. Let him rest on his palms, and keep his elbows away from his body.” From another hadith we find that the Prophet (SAW) kept his arms away from the body during ruku’ and sujood, and that the whiteness of his armpits could be seen.

8. Crossing in front of a praying person: According to the dominant opinion among scholars, it is forbidden to pass in front of one who is performing his or her salah, whether there is a sutra or not. The Prophet (SAW) said, “Were the one who crosses in front of a praying person to know the consequences of doing so, he would have waited for forty rather than cross in front of him.” The forty in the tradition may refer to number of days months or even years, and Allah knows best.

9. Missing a congregational prayer: It is compulsory upon Muslim males to perform their salah in congregation whenever possible, particularly for those who live near a mosque. The Prophet (SAW) said, “There can be no salah of the one who is neighboring a masjid except in the masjid.” Once the Prophet (SAW) is reported to have said, “I intend to tell the muazzin (person who calls the Azan) to call the iqamah and ask someone to lead the prayer and I myself set the house of that person on fire who did not attend the congregational prayer.” In another hadith, the Prophet (SAW) said, “If a person despite hearing the Azan does not go to the masjid and prefers to pray at home without a strong excuse, then his salah will not be acceptable.” A strong excuse is illness or fear. Other impediments such as natural calamities or extreme or abnormal weather conditions may also constitute excuse for not attending the congregational prayers. He (SAW) also said, “The prayer of a man in congregation is 25 times more superior (in reward) to his prayer in his house or market - and this is because he makes the wudu and perfects it and goes to the mosque with the sole purpose of performing the salah. He does not take a step without being raised a degree and having one of his sins erased. When he prays, as long as he does not lose his wudu, the angels keep on praying [for him] 'O Allah, bless him. O Allah, have mercy on him.' And he is considered in salah as long as he is waiting for the salah.” In another hadith, the superiority for praying in congregation is 27 times.

10. Not performing prayers because of illness or while travelling: Prayers have to be performed in all conditions including when one is ill, or while travelling, and even when engaged in war. The Prophet (SAW) never missed his salah even when he was taken ill during his last days or during combats. A sick person is allowed to perform dry ablution (tayammum) in case performing wudu is harmful. Also, one may pray sitting or lying down if one is unable to pray in the normal standing position. Concessions for the traveler were given by Muhammad (SAW). While traveling, a person is allowed to combine two salahs—zuhr and 'asr or maghrib and 'isha. These prayers can be combined taqdeeman (the former with the latter ) or ta'kkeeran (the latter with the former). We are also allowed to do Qasr, which means shortening the four raka’s of zuhr, 'asr, and 'isha to two raka’s.

11. Consuming food of bad smell such as garlic or onion before coming to prayer: Angels and the praying people are bothered by offensive smell. On the contrary, one should wear perfume, if available,
before coming into mosques. The Prophet (SAW) said: “He who eats from the smelly plant (garlic or onion), let him not come near our mosque; the angels are bothered by that which bothers men.”

12. Performing salah when needing to relieve oneself: If someone has the urge to relieve himself, he should first relieve himself and then pray. Thauban (RA) reports that the Messenger of Allah said: "There are three acts which are not allowed: For a person to lead a people in prayer and then make supplications for himself without including them, for then he would be dishonest to them; to look inside a house without obtaining permission, for if he does so (it is as if) he has already entered it (without permission); and to offer prayer while he needs to answer the call of nature until he relieves himself."

These are some of the common mistakes people make during their wudu and salah. We should pray to Allah (SWT) to help us perfect them.

Edited by Dr. Munawar Haque
IONA Research & Publications
publications@ionaonline.org
www.ionaonline.org