Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on August 17, 2012

The Mosque - An Islamic Institution

It appears that we had just greeted Ramadan and now we are bidding farewell to it. We are fortunate that Allah (SWT) made us reach this Ramadan to enable us to benefit from its rigorous month long program of fasting, praying, spending in charity, reinforcing brotherhood and sisterhood, and congregating in His house to glorify Him and remember Him day and night. Indeed, we have to praise Allah (SWT) for giving us this great opportunity, and for guiding us. The Qur’an mentions how the people of paradise will praise Allah (SWT) while entering paradise.

"Praise be to Allah who has guided us to this! We would not have been guided, had Allah not guided us" (al-A’raf, 7:43).

Here in this world, we praise and thank Allah (SWT) for guiding us to Islam. Had it not been for His guidance, we would never have been guided. What could be a better place to collectively glorify Him, praise Him, thank Him, and remember Him other than in His houses—the mosques (masajid). "In houses which Allah has permitted to be built and in which His name is remembered, there are men who proclaim His glory morning and evening" (al-Nur, 24:36). It is only with the express permission of Allah (SWT) that any mosque is built.

The mosque plays a crucial role in the lives of Muslims, so much so that it may be said to be the heartbeat of the Muslim society. Without the mosque, the Muslim society is as good as dead. The mosque in reality is an institution that produces God conscious Muslims who lead their lives in compliance with the teachings of the Qur’an and the Sunnah.

A mosque has to be built on the basis of piety (taqwa), solely for the purpose of worshipping and obeying Allah (SWT) and for serving humanity. There may be hypocrites among the Muslims who build the mosque with the intention to create mischief and harm the true believers. One such mosque called ‘al-Masjid al-Dhirar’ (The Mischief Mosque) was built by the hypocrites (munafiqun) at the time of the Prophet (SAW) with the sole intention of damaging the cause of Islam and causing harm to the Muslims. Allah (SWT) informed the Prophet (SAW) about their covert operation and evil designs.

"Then there are those who built a mosque—in an attempt to cause harm, disbelief, and disunity among the believers—as an outpost for those who fought God and His Messenger before: they swear, ‘Our intentions were nothing but good,’ but God bears witness that they are liars” (al-Taubah, 9:107). At the same time, Allah (SWT) forbade the Prophet (SAW) to pray in that mosque.

"Do not ever stand in it. A mosque founded on taqwa from the first day has a greater right for you to stand in it. In it there are men who love to purify themselves. Allah loves those who purify themselves” (al-Taubah, 9:108). It should be known that a mosque where one does not find peace and tranquility rather finds mischief, dissen- tion, and wickedness is not a mosque built on taqwa.

We are constantly exposed to so many polluting thoughts and ideas that corrupt the minds and hearts of people—atheism, agnosticism, secularism, communism, capitalism, socialism, and the list goes on. All these man-made ideologies do affect the psyche, thinking, attitude, and behavior of people. A mosque is a place where Muslims purify their thoughts and ideas through praying, reciting the Book of Allah, and participating in various
programs tailored to meet the religious, intellectual, ethical, and moral needs of Muslims. The Prophet’s Mosque at Medina was established as a masjid cum Islamic Center, and catered to the worshipping as well as the learning needs of the believers. Many great companions of the Prophet (SAW) including the four righteous caliphs were graduates of this school. They shaped the world. The Prophet (SAW) not only led them in prayers but was their mentor (murabbi) in the true sense of the word, purifying their thoughts and actions and imparting wisdom to them; not only of the metaphysical world and the spiritual realm, but also of the temporal life. While imparting divine legislation, he explained to them why we are Muslims, and why we do the things we do. “It is He who raised a messenger, among the lettered people, to recite His revelations to them, to make them grow spiritually and teach them the Book, and earlier they had indeed been in manifest error” (al-Jumu’ah, 62:2).

Indeed, to have such an institution in the shape of a masjid is a favor (fadl) from Allah (SWT). “Such is God’s favor. He grants it to whoever He will. God has endless bounty and knowledge” (al-Ma’idah, 5:54). It is in the masjid where believers engage themselves in numerous activities just to seek the pleasure of Allah (SWT). They offer their five daily prayers; purify their souls; break their fast and offer their tarawih prayers during Ramadan; collect zakah and sadqah; establish brotherhood, run schools for children to teach them Qur’an, hadith, Arabic, Islamic morals and manners (akhlaq); hold classes for adults to reinforce their learning of the deen; assemble together to initiate and encourage volunteer community services, plan and engage in da’wah activities, participate in interfaith dialogues, build bridges with people of other faith traditions, educate non-Muslims about Islam and cooperate with them on issues of social justice. It is the masjid where complete social equality is practiced. There is no difference between the ruler and the ruled, the rich and the poor or the scholar and the illiterate. All are equal when standing before Allah (SWT). We have to turn our masjid into centers of learning as the Prophet (SAW) had done. The Prophet’s Mosque should be the template for all masajid in the world.

Just as the Qur’an lays down the condition that a masjid can only be built on the basis of taqwa, so also it lays out the criteria for people who can frequent them. “The mosques of Allah should only be frequented by those who have iman in Allah and the Last Day and establish salat and pay zakat, and fear no one but Allah. They are the ones most likely to be guided” (al-Taubah, 9:18). Atheists, non-Muslims, or ‘People of the Book (Ahl al-Kitab), for example, cannot build mosques or frequent them for the simple reason that they do not believe in the fundamental articles of Islam. Even those Muslims who build masajid should be among those who follow Islam in letter and spirit, and who fear none but Allah (SWT). They are not intimidated by anyone; not even the government or its agencies, when it comes to spreading the truth—the undiluted truth of the Qur’an and the Sunnah. In His Majestic style, Allah (SWT) says that they are the ones most likely to be guided, meaning that they will be the ones who will actually be guided.

We at IONA beg Allah (SWT), and hope that we are among those who qualify to be guided. Our tawfiq is only from Allah (SWT). This is what the prophets used to tell their people. “I cannot succeed without God’s help: I trust in Him, and always turn to Him” (Hud, 11:88). —At IONA Center, we try to work on the methodology and spirit of repelling evil with good. This is evidenced by the fact that our one time opponents, who were vehemently opposed to the establishment of our Center, here in Warren, have become our dear friends. Now they know who we are. We have mutual respect for each other. By the grace of Allah (SWT), working with other clergy in the city among other community leaders, we were able to influence the Mayor and city officials to put an end to discrimination and prejudice. Ultimately, the City Council of Warren passed a unanimous resolution upholding the American core values of freedom, equality, and justice—those universal qualities, which do not discriminate on the basis of religion, race, nationality, language and gender. These qualities are in fact integral to Islam’s teachings and values.

Alhamdulillah, by Allah (SWT)’s blessing, from day one, the IONA Masjid was founded on taqwa, and Allah (SWT) is witness to it. With about 250 congregants attending the Friday prayers when the masjid was founded in 2007, the number has increased four-folds to about 1000 as of now. As one congregational prayer cannot accommodate this number because of paucity of space, two separate congregations have to be held. This, besides other pressing needs has necessitated an urgent need for expansion of our masjid cum learning center.
With the generous contributions of the community, and other benefactors, we were able to purchase two adjacent buildings, the loan of which now stands at about US Dollars 450 K. We are managing to service the debt through the rentals we receive from the properties that we now own.

However, we need to do more. We have to think seriously about the future of our children. We had plans to establish an Islamic School, but as of now, we lack the human and financial resources to start this project. Meanwhile, we have been connected with a charter school management organization. Charter schools are geared to serve the international community. They have all the resources available at their disposal and are equipped with the best of teachers and facilities. While our children can be taught the national curriculum, they may after school hours even attend to special classes teaching Islam. Moreover, they will not be bullied and treated with contempt as they sometimes are in public schools. Somehow, most of the Islamic schools lack the desired infrastructure, the required tools and facilities, and above all the trained and qualified teachers. This becomes an impediment to the all-round education and growth of our children who end up being shy individuals, lacking confidence about their Islamic faith and identity.

With the above in mind, the next stage of our expansion is to turn the building adjacent to the IONA Center into a charter school equipped with a gymnasium that will cater not only to the physical fitness needs of the school students but also to other youth of the community who will hopefully come within the fold of friendship of other Islamically oriented youth. The total outlay of the project is 6100 K. By God’s grace, one brother has very kindly given us a *qard hasan* (interest-free loan/good loan) of 300 K. We need to raise another 300 K. Our community despite not being among the up-scale communities always goes out of its way to help the cause of Islam and Muslims.

May Allah (SWT) help us to open our hearts and bless us with the *tawfiq* to contribute once again toward a pressing need of the community. May He make us among those who will be in the company of the prophets, the truthful ones, the martyrs, and the righteous ones. Allahumma Ameen.

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