 Synopsis of Friday Sermon
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Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on Oct 5, 2012
The Ten Commandments (Part 9)

Today’s khutba is the continuation of a series of khutbas delivered earlier on the Qur’anic version of the Ten Commandments that were revealed to Musa (AS) and are contained in the Qur’an in Surat al-Isra’ (Surat Bani Israel). Eight of the Ten Commandments have been discussed before. Briefly the Ten Commandments are: (1) Not to ascribe partners with God; (2) To show respect and kindness towards one’s parents; (3) To maintain the ties of kith and kin; (4) Not to kill one’s children for fear of poverty; (5) Not to engage in any illicit sexual relationship; (6) Not to commit murder; (7) To protect the property of orphans, and to fulfill covenants and contracts; (8) To exercise justice in using weights and measures; (9) Not to pursue what we have no knowledge of; and (10) To maintain modesty, humility, and humbleness. The topic of today’s khutbah will focus on the ninth commandment.

The ninth commandment has to do with not following or pursuing, what we have no knowledge of. “Do not pursue what you have no knowledge of. Hearing, sight and hearts will all be questioned” (al-Isra’, 17:36). The ‘people of knowledge’ (Ahl ul-’Ilm) hold different opinions about the interpretations of this ayah. Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) among others interprets this to imply not to speak without knowledge. Still others including Al-‘Awfi interpret this to mean not to accuse anyone of something about which one has no knowledge. Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah said that it meant bearing false witness, while the traditional scholar Qatadah interprets this to imply that one should not say that one has seen or heard anything when one actually has not, or to say that one knows when one does not know, for Allah (SWT) will question you on that. Those who are passionate about their faith should be cautious not to go about speaking on matters of religion without having proper knowledge about it lest they fall into the category of people who speak without knowledge. Anything said has to be based on knowledge and truth. While relating something from somebody, the source of information must be mentioned. In a nutshell, Allah (SWT) forbids us to speak without knowledge or on the basis of mere conjecture or suspicion.

Addressing the believers, the Qur’an says, “O you who believe, avoid suspicion as much (as possible), for some suspicions are sinful” (al-Hujurat, 49:12). To harbor suspicion against someone leads to evils like spying, and backbiting. “And do not spy and do not backbite one another” (al-Hujurat, 49:12). Rather than relying on any false premise or unfounded suspicion, it is better to settle matters directly with the individual against whom there may be bad thoughts or ill-feelings lingering in one’s mind. We learn from a hadith in Sahih al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood, and Al-Tirmidhi, which states, “Be careful of suspicion, for it is the most mistaken of all speech. Do not spy on others, compete among yourselves, envy one another, or despise one another. Rather, be servants of Allah and be brothers!” If we avoid the things that the Prophet (SAW) prohibited us from, we would be brothers to one another as we ought to be. Even the Qur’an tells us that “The believers are brothers, so make peace between your brothers and have taqwa of Allah so that hopefully you will gain mercy” (al-Hujurat, 49:10).

Evils such as suspicion, spying, jealousy, and backbiting are highly detrimental to the growth of healthy...
relationships between people and to the society at large, and may even lead to violence at times. The Prophet (SAW) has likened suspicion (al-zann) with lying, and lying is a sin. As a matter of fact, according to the hadith, suspicion is the greatest of lies (akhzab ul-hadith). And the sin of the heart is no less than the lying of the tongue. It is for this reason that Allah (SWT) says, “Hearing, sight and hearts will all be questioned” (al-Isra’, 17:36). We are responsible for each of these faculties on the Day of Judgment. Certainly, we should not have doubt, suspicion, or negative thoughts about the Supreme Being—Allah (SWT). Even though, He is transcendent and cannot be seen, yet we have certainty of faith (yaqeen) in Him and in all other articles of faith that include the unseen (ghaybiyat) known only to Allah (SWT).

It is for this reason that we are forbidden to seek or pursue soothsayers, fortune-tellers, or those who practice witchcraft, and claim to know the ghayb or have knowledge of the unseen, whereas the same is known only to Allah (SWT). It is reported on the authority of Abu Hurairah (RA) that the Prophet (SAW) said: “Whoever goes to a fortune-teller and believes in what he says, has disbelieved in what was revealed to Muhammad.” The Prophet (SAW) informs us in this hadith, that whoever visits a fortune-teller and asks him about the unseen and believes in his words, has committed an act of disbelief in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Only Allah (SWT) has knowledge of the unseen. Muslim has narrated, on the authority of one of the wives of the Prophet (Hafsah – RA) that Allah’s Prophet (SAW) said: “Whoever goes to a fortune-teller and asks him about some matter (of the unseen) and believes him, will have his prayer rejected for forty days.” It can be derived from this hadith that not only fortune-telling is prohibited, but believing in the prophecies of fortune-tellers and soothsayers is also forbidden. Loss of reward of prayers for forty days is a punishment for committing this major sin.

It is unfortunate that there are even Muslims who, in order to know what the future holds for them; take recourse to fortune-tellers and soothsayers. Any Muslim who has fallen into such matters must repent to Allah (SWT) immediately, regret his action, and resolve never ever to fall prey to such individuals. Pursuing persons who attempt to tell the future is unlawful (haram) according to Sharia rulings. What such people do is to make general statements that seem to take place ordinarily in any person’s life—things that have to do with tests, trials, prosperity, adversity, life, death etc. Allah (SWT) has made it very clear to us that He would test us in various ways: “We will test you with a certain amount of fear and hunger and loss of wealth and life and fruits. But give good news to the steadfast”(al-Baqarah, 2:155).

It may happen sometimes that the fortuneteller predicts something that comes out to be true. It should be known that this is because soothsayers, fortune-tellers, clairvoyants, palm-readers, psychics, astrologers, and others like them are disciples and agents of Satan. Once in a while Satan steals information from the heavens and passes it on to them. ‘Aishah (RA) said: “Some people asked the Messenger of Allah (SAW) about soothsayers. He said, ‘They are nothing.’ Upon this they said to him, ‘O Messenger of Allah! But they sometimes make true predictions.’ Thereupon the Messenger of Allah (SAW) said, ‘That is a word pertaining to truth which a jinn snatches (from the angels) and whispers into the ears of his friend (the soothsayers) who will then mix more than a hundred lies with it.’”

We believe in the existence of jinns and the fast speed with which they travel to the heavens. Allah (SWT) has sealed the heavens from the jinns but sometimes they may penetrate and snatch some information from angels who are supposedly commanded and commissioned to carry out the will of Allah (SWT), and administer His kingdom, here on earth. There are several ahadith which inform us that among the jinns are some who eavesdrop on the angels in the lowest heaven. The jinns then convey the information they hear to fortune-tellers. If they narrated only what they heard it would be correct, but they add to it and mix it with lies. Allah (SWT) informs us in Surat al-Shu’ara’. “Shall I inform you on whom the devils descend? They descend on every evil liar, who lends an ear to them, and most of them are liars” (al-Shu’ara’, 26:221-223).

Fortune-telling is considered among the major sins because it implies acquisition of knowledge of the unseen. The knowledge of the unseen is only with Allah (SWT). “Say: ‘No one in the heavens and the earth knows the Unseen except Allah’ (al-Naml, 27:65). The best of all humanity—Muhammad (SAW) himself never claimed of having any knowledge of the unseen (ghaybiyat). In Surat al-’A’raf, Allah (SWT) instructs him: “Say: I possess no power to help or harm myself, except as Allah wills. If I had had knowledge of the Unseen, I would
have sought to gain much good and no evil would have touched me. I am only a warner and a bringer of good news to people who believe” (al-A’raf, 7:188).

Anyone who believes that he or she possesses such knowledge is claiming the acquisition of a divine attribute that befits Allah (SWT) alone. Fortune-telling involves using devils and holding fast to them. The fortune-teller perfects his art through rituals that involve complete submission to the damned species of Satan or Iblees, and this is a form of polytheism (shirk).

Fortune-telling has become a big business nowadays just because of people’s ignorance. Fortune-tellers only offer misguidance that can make believers go astray. If people follow something they have no knowledge of and do not use their faculties of hearing, sight, and intellect in the right earnest, then such people are guilty of being ungrateful to Allah (SWT) who blessed them with these faculties. It is these faculties that distinguish us from the other creation of Allah (SWT). They are an amanah (trust) with us, and have to be used wisely; in a manner acceptable to Allah (SWT); in a manner that help us grow together in love and brotherhood so that we may truly prosper in both worlds.

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