Synopsis of Friday Sermon
Ameer Mustapha Elturk

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on Feb 22, 2013

Faith and Steadfastness

There was a discussion in last Friday’s sermon on the structure of Islam based on the hadith, “Islam is built on five (things): testifying that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, establishing the salah (prayer), paying the zakah (obligatory charity), making the hajj (pilgrimage) to the House, and fasting in Ramadan.”

Today’s sermon will focus on the crucial and urgent need to get involved in constructing the edifice of Islam—layer by layer, wall by wall, and brick by brick. This work of construction of Islam is our primary objective. The rituals or modes of worship such as salah, zakah, sawm, and hajj are in reality the means of achieving this objective. To remain self-satisfied with rituals alone is to remain excluded from the work of constructing Islam—an obligation that has been entrusted upon Muslims by Allah (SWT).

This task of construction has to be done by both believing men and believing women. They are supporters of each other. “The believers, both men and women, support each other; they order what is right and forbid what is wrong; they keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; they obey God and His Messenger. God will give His mercy to such people: God is almighty and wise.” (al-Taubah, 9:71). Indeed, the first person to accept Islam was a woman—Khadija (RA), and the first person to be martyred in the cause of upholding Islam was a woman—Sumaiyya (RA), and there are numerous other women who have contributed in building the structure of Islam.

It is sad but true that Islam, in its totality, cannot be found anywhere in the world. Living in America, we have the freedom to begin the construction of Islam. Rather than wasting time by indulging in procrastination, we have to roll up our sleeves and get started immediately. As mentioned in the last sermon, the three levels on which Islam is to be built are basically our duties toward the deen of Allah (SWT). “O you who believe, bow and prostrate and worship (make ‘ibadah to) your Lord, and do good, so you may be successful. And strive hard for (the cause of) Allah as is His due” (al-Hajj, 22:77-78). Faith (iman) as we know has to do with attestation by the tongue and its manifestation or confirmation through action.

The first of the three levels of the structure of Islam consists of the roof and four walls. The roof may be said to be the ubudiyyah or complete and sincere servitude to Allah (SWT). The four walls may be thought to be denoting (1) Islam, (2) taqwa, (3) ita’ah, and (4) ‘ibadah. The second level is da’wah, and the third level is establishing the deen of Allah.

To begin with, we need to understand what needs to be done when undertaking the arduous journey of constructing Islam. The best way to begin this journey is to repent sincerely to Allah, to have firm faith in Him, and to take to the straight path.

It is reported that a man by the name of Abu `Amr—also known as Abu `Amrah, Sufyan ibn Abdullah Al-Thaqafi (RA) said to the Prophet (SAW), “O Messenger of Allah, tell me something about Islam which I can ask of no one but you.” He (SAW) replied, “Say, ‘I believe in Allah, and then be Steadfast.’” Prophet Muham-
mad (SAW) even though unlettered, was blessed with the most concise and meaningful speech (jawami’ul kalim). Brevity and profundity were the hallmarks of our beloved Prophet’s speech. What he uttered were no more than few simple words, but the meanings behind them were very profound, and the benefits and blessings that can be derived from them are numerous.

The two statements mentioned in the hadith explain in the simplest of terms what one needs to know about Islam. The first verbal statement or declaration, “I believe in Allah” implies that this declaration is embedded in the heart at the level of firm conviction. This necessitates one to be purified of all types of false belief (aqidah al-fasidah) and live by the true aqidah of Islam. Linguistically, iman means ‘to confirm something’ (al-tasdeeq) or to believe in something that is true. To say ‘I believe in Allah’ (amantu billah), therefore, refers to al-Iman al-Mujmal, or the generalized form of iman, which implies believing in Allah (SWT) as He is in His names and His attributes, and in accepting all His commands and teachings mentioned in the Qur’an and the hadith of the Prophet (SAW).

Iman is the very foundation on which the edifice of Islam stands. It is only through strong iman having deep roots that the tree of Islam blossoms and bears excellent fruits. It took the Prophet (SAW) 13 long years to extricate his followers from the superstitious beliefs of the period of ignorance (jahiliyyah) and to simultaneously instill in them the correct aqidah of Islam—belief in One God, Angels, Books, Prophets, Resurrection, Judgment Day, Heaven, Hell, the Divine Decree (al-Qadar), and all that he said, did or approve to guide mankind.

To believe in Allah is to reject any notion or belief that contradicts this true aqidah. False notions would include all ‘isms’ (social orders) contrived by man and all other theories based on speculative thought that keep changing. The notion that facts verifiable by the characteristic inductive methods of the natural sciences are the only source of genuine factual knowledge is also a false notion, because the reality about the ‘unseen’ (ghayb) which constitutes part of our creed (aqidah) is not verifiable by empirical means. False but popular notions such as Darwin’s ‘Theory of Evolution’ do influence people, especially the students in higher institutions of learning. As true believers, we must believe in everything that is contained in the final Divine Revelation—the Qur’an. “This is the Book; there is no doubt in it. It is a guide for those who are mindful of God” (al-Baqarah, 2:2).

Despite being persecuted, exiled, and even tortured at times, the sahaba, once they affirmed their faith in Allah never wavered from their position and never compromised on their faith. They did all they could to proclaim the greatness of Allah (SWT). “And proclaim the greatness of your Lord” (al-Muddathir, 74:3). Describing them the Qur’an says, “They are those who have been driven out of their homes unjustly, only because they said, Our Lord is God” (al-Hajj, 22:40).

The second part of the hadith under discussion says, “And then be steadfast (thummastaqim).” This implies remaining steadfast in action and embracing Islam totally and whole-heartedly. “O you who believe! Enter Islam totally” (al-Baqarah, 2:208). This also means to be conscious and mindful of Allah till one’s last breath. “O you who believe, be conscious of Allah as is His due, and do not die except as Muslims” (al-Baqarah, 2:132). This also means to hold fast to God. “Whoever holds fast to God will be guided to the straight path” (Aal ’Imran, 3:101).

Allah (SWT) commands the believers to obey Him and His Messenger so that they are rightly guided. “Obey God and obey the Messenger. If you turn away, then he is responsible for what he is charged with and you are responsible for what you are charged with. If you obey him, you will be rightly guided. The Messenger is responsible only for delivering the message clearly” (al-Nur, 24:54). Since the Messenger of Allah delivered the message and showed the way, the onus of responsibility is now on the believers to keep the edifice of Islam so arduously constructed by him and his sahaba intact, lest they be charged on the Day of Judgment for not discharging their obligation. Their attitude should not be to rely on the Prophet’s intercession on the Day of Judgment in the manner Christians rely on ‘Isa (AS) as being their savior. The Prophet’s intercession will be granted only after due process of justice on the Day of Judgment. Even the thought of being in hell-fire for a moment should be enough to send shudder down the spine of any believer. We have to obey Allah and become His humble slaves (‘ibad). “God is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him. That is the straight path” (Aal
It is noteworthy that the advice given to Sufyan ibn Abdullah Al-Thaqafi (RA) was in reality the very command that Muhammad (SAW) received from his Lord. “So be steadfast as you have been commanded, together with those who have turned to God with you. Do not overstep the limits, for He sees everything you do” (Hud, 11:112). Surat al-Shura spells out this command in yet another profound way, “So call people to that faith and be steadfast as you are commanded, and do not follow their desires” (al-Shura, 42:15). We learn from the sirah that when the followers of the new deen started to grow, the elders of Quraish started to persuade the Prophet with offers of kingship over them, with abundant wealth and with marriage to the most beautiful women of Arabia if he renounced his mission of calling people to Islam. The Prophet (SAW) did not succumb to their desires. The messenger of Allah told his trusted uncle Abu Talib, who was mediating between Quraish and him, “O my uncle, by Allah, even if they put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left hand on the condition that I abandon this matter, I will never abandon it until either Allah has made me victorious or I perish therein.”

Muhammad (SAW) stuck tenaciously to what he was commanded by Allah (SWT). “So call people to that faith and be steadfast as you are commanded, and do not follow their desires, but say, I believe in the Book which God has sent down, and I am commanded to do justice between you” (al-Shura, 42:15). The process of construction of Islam involves taking out people out of darkness into light and bringing justice to them by eliminating oppression and closing the gap between the ‘Haves and the Have Nots.’

There is peace for those who believe in Allah as their Lord and at the same time remain on the straight path. “For those who say, ‘Our Lord is Allah,’ and then follow the straight path there is no fear, nor shall they grieve.” (al-Ahqaf, 46:13). There is another narration by the same companion in which the Prophet (SAW) is reported to have told him, “Say, ‘My Lord is Allah and then be steadfast (follow the straight path).’” The two narrations allude to the majesties of uluhiyyah and rububiyyah of Allah (SWT).

We are also informed in surat Fussilat, “As for those who say, ‘Our Lord is God,’ and then steadfastly pursue the right way, the angels come down to them and say, ‘Have no fear or grief, but rejoice in the good news of Paradise, which you have been promised. We are your allies in this world and in the world to come. There you will have everything you desire and ask for, a welcoming gift from the Most Forgiving, Most Merciful One.’” (Fussilat, 41:30-32). The bounties of paradise are indescribable. References have been made toward them only to get a glimpse of what could be expected or to imagine what paradise would be like. According to a hadith qudsi, “I have prepared for My slaves what no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no human heart can imagine. Recite if you wish, “No person knows what is kept hidden for them of joy as a reward for what they used to do.” This is not to say that those who say, “Our Lord is Allah” and are steadfast will not be tested. “Do people think that once they say, We believe, they will be left alone and not be put to the test?” (al-’Ankabut, 29:2).

“And who speaks better than someone who calls people to God, does what is right, and says, ‘Verily, I am of those who have surrendered themselves to God?’” (Fussilat, 41:33). This ayah outlines the task ahead of those who assert their faith in Allah and are steadfast. Calling people unto Allah is the next phase in the construction of Islam. It does not matter whether people respond to them positively or turn away from them. They will always have God’s help and protection. “But if they turn away, know that God is your Protector; the Best of Protectors and the Best of Helpers!” (al-Anfal, 8:40).

Edited by Dr. Munawar Haque
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