Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on Sept 09, 2011

Maintaining the Spirit of Ramadan

Ramadan came to discipline our bodies and lift our souls. It empowered us by providing physical and spiritual strength that helped us to control the appetite of our bodies and overcome the evil of our souls. It saw our mutual values of mercy, compassion, and love being manifested in our conduct. We became more conscious of Allah (SWT), and felt closer the Him. The very objective of fasting during Ramadan is to attain taqwa (God-consciousness) that helps to achieve piety, righteousness, and self-restraint. “O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may be conscious of God” (al-Baqarah, 2:183). By taqwa is meant a consciousness of Allah; a sense of presence of Allah; an awareness that Allah is watching us; a state of mindfulness of Allah that would make one a better individual. Taqwa comes from the Arabic root word waqa, which means to save and protect something from that which could harm it. From the same root, we have wiqayah, which as a shari’ah term means to protect oneself from acts that are sinful by leaving that which is forbidden. “O you who believe, save yourselves and your families from the Fire.” (At-Tahrim, 66:6)

As we exit Ramadan, we find ourselves vulnerable to the very same struggles that plagued us before Ramadan: being overwhelmingly immersed in this world (duniya), and becoming completely oblivious of the hereafter (akhirah). The materialistic and hedonistic approach to life has once again come to haunt us and distract us from the real purpose of life and our ultimate destination. We should be on our guard and not get carried away by those who assert and believe that it is the materialistic world alone that counts, and that there is nothing beyond it.

After being liberated from becoming slaves to our own desires, after regularly frequenting the mosques for congregational prayers, after reciting the Qur’an for a whole month with great zeal, after enthusiastically offering the tarawih prayers, the tahajjud prayers, and other supererogatory (nawafil) prayers, after spending in the way of Allah, and after doing other acts of devotion and charity, let us not allow the fruits of Ramadan to be lost. Ramadan kept us connected with Allah (SWT). Now that Ramadan has gone, why turn our backs on Him. “O you who believe, be aware of God, and let every soul examine what it has put forth for tomorrow. And be aware of God; God is fully aware of everything you do. And do not be like those who forgot God, so He made them forget themselves. These are the wicked” (al-Hashr, 59:18-19). ‘Tomorrow’, in this ayah refers to the hereafter, and ‘forget themselves’ means to forget their own spiritual existence and purpose of life, which is to recognize their Creator and Sustainer, and submit to Him. What we sow here, we reap in the hereafter. How can we forsake God, particularly after exiting this great month of blessing and mercy? If we forsake God, God will forsake us.

How can one maintain the spirit of Ramadan? This is not too difficult if one has achieved the objective of Ramadan, which as mentioned before, is taqwa or preventing oneself from that which is harmful. The adage “an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure,” further explains the concept of taqwa. It is a shield that not
only protects one from the diseases of the soul but also from the rampant immoral and unethical values that are promoted in our society and that ruin one’s spiritual life. Some of the ways and tips to keep maintaining the spirit of Ramadan are as follows:

1. Since fasting increases one’s *iman* (faith) and *taqwa*, one may consider fasting the supererogatory fasts such as the six days of Shawwal (the lunar month following Ramadan). According to a hadith, “Whoever fasts Ramadan, and follows it with six days of Shawwal will be rewarded as if one had fasted the entire year.” Other recommended days to fast as per the practice of the Prophet (SAW) are Mondays and Thursdays. Here at IONA, there is a weekly program called “Fast and Learn,” in which people from the community, especially the youth, get together every Thursday and share their meals by breaking their fasts together. They also study the Qur’an in congregation. This is highly conducive to help members of the community to maintain the spirit of Ramadan. Other days of fasting may include the first ten days of Zul-Hijjah, the tenth day of Muharram (*Ashura*) followed by another day preceding or following it, and the three white days (*ayyam al-beedh*) corresponding to the 13th, 14th, and 15th of every lunar month.

2. Nightly prayers during Ramadan helped uplift one’s spiritual being just as fasting helped purify one’s body. *Nawafil* prayers are recommended to keep one’s level of *taqwa* high. One has to make sure to keep praying the twelve daily units (*rak’ahs*) of the Sunnah *Muakkadah*. Such prayers help one to compensate for the shortcomings in one’s compulsory prayers. The three units of Salat al-*Witr* must also not be missed. There are other recommended prayers that include the Salat al-*Duha* or *Ishraq*, offered after ten or fifteen minutes after sunrise, and the Salat al-Tahajjud, the late night prayers, which are generally offered by the righteous Muslims as a matter of practice. “The slaves of the All-Merciful are those who walk lightly on the earth and, who, when the ignorant speak to them, say, ‘Peace’; and those who pass the night prostrating and standing before their Lord” (al-Furqan, 25:63-64).

3. To be immersed in the *zikr* (remembrance) of Allah (SWT) is another way to maintain our levels of *iman* and *taqwa*. While *zikr* may take the form of praising and glorifying Allah (SWT), which can be done at any time, regardless if one is in a state of ablution or not, the best form of *zikr*, according to Imam al-Shafi’i is recitation of the Qur’an. The words of God provide the soul its nourishment from the divine source. “True believers are those whose hearts tremble with awe when God is mentioned, whose faith increases when His revelations are recited to them, and who put their trust in their Lord” (al-Anfal, 8:2). The true believers are “those who have faith and whose hearts find peace in the remembrance of God– truly it is in the remembrance of God that hearts find peace” (al-Ra’d, 13:28).

4. Continuing to spend in the way of Allah (SWT) after Ramadan is yet another way to maintain the spirit of Ramadan. The poor and the destitute have a claim over a portion of our wealth. Zakah and *Sadaqah* are means to purify our wealth, and seek the pleasure of Allah (SWT).

We have to be weary of Shaytan, our arch enemy. He is bent upon taking one and all with him to hell. We have to make concerted efforts to maintain the spirit of Ramadan, the fruits of which are *iman* and *taqwa* that lead to paradise. “Whoever is kept away from the Fire and admitted to the Garden will have triumphed. The present world is only an illusory pleasure” (*Aal ‘Imran*, 3:185).