Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on November 23, 2012:

Death

Death is a subject that people often avoid to talk about, much less remember it. The Qur’an alludes to death at various places. For instance, in Surat Aal ‘Imran, we have, “Every soul will taste death and you will be paid in full only on the Day of Resurrection. 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).

What is life? Philosophers and thinkers have always been grappling with this question. Rather than discussing their speculative thoughts, it is best to know what Allah (SWT) Himself says about life. “Bear in mind that the present life is just a game, a diversion, an attraction, a cause of boasting among you, of rivalry in wealth and children” (al-Hadid, 57:20). This is generally, the reality of man’s perception about this worldly life, whether that person is a Muslim, a follower of another faith tradition, an agnostic, or even an atheist.

Even though death is something certain and inevitable, yet people tend to live as if they are going to live forever and not die. Death knows no age. Very often people die in the prime of their youth. It happens that sometimes the father has to bury his son. I had to do this a couple of days ago when my son died at the young age of 33. Besides other things that are predetermined for the child, while still in the mother’s womb, the term of its life or appointed time (ajal) is also one of them, and this is known only to Allah (SWT). “If God took people to task for the evil they do, He would not leave one living creature on earth, but He gives them latitude until an appointed time: when their time comes they cannot delay it for a moment nor can they bring it forward” (al-Nahl, 16:61). This mystery of life and death is not without purpose. Life of this world is a test from Allah (SWT). “Every soul is certain to taste death: We test you all through the bad and the good, and to us you will all return” (al-Anbiya’, 21:35). One’s ultimate fate as regards whether one is forever a dweller of hell or paradise will be known only on the Day of Judgment.

In this worldly life, people will be constantly put to all types of test. Believers are urged to be patient while facing trials and tribulations. “O you who believe, seek help through patience and prayer, for God is with the patient’(al-Baqarah, 2:153). “We shall certainly test you with fear and hunger, and loss of property, lives, and crops. But, give good news to those who are patient” (al-Baqarah, 2:155). Believers do not complain but resign themselves to God’s will, remaining patient in face of adversities, and knowing that they belong to God and to Him they will return. “Those who, when disaster strikes them, say, ‘We belong to God and to Him we will return’” (al-Baqarah, 2:156). They are the ones who receive blessings and mercy from their Lord, and they are the ones who are guided. “Those are the people who will have blessings and mercy from their Lord; they are the ones who are guided” (al-Baqarah, 2:157).

We are indeed blessed in as much as Allah (SWT) gave us whatever we need for sustaining ourselves in this worldly life. Everything we see around us has been made subservient to man. Allah’s bounties and blessings are countless; but the multitude of humankind is unjust and unthankful to Allah (SWT). “He has given you everything you have asked Him for. If you tried to number Allah’s blessings, you could never count them. Man is in-
There is no escape from death. The Qur’an states, “Death will overtake you wherever you be, even in the mightiest of towers” (al-Nisa’, 4:78). This being the case, are we ready and prepared for death which is looming upon each one of us. Generally, people get so enchanted by the glamour of this materialistic world and high standards of living it offers that very often they become oblivious of death and their own declining faith because of over indulgence in gratification of their desires.

What is the reality of death? When it occurs, the spirit (ruh) leaves the body. We learn through prophetic traditions that a good soul comes out of the body with ease, while an evil soul, which resists leaving the body is taken out harshly by the angel of death. The two types of souls are accordingly honored and dishonored in their respective journeys to the heavenly dimensions and back, when they are questioned in the graves. “Say: ‘The Angel of Death, who has been given charge of you, will take you back and then you will be sent back to your Lord’” (al-Sajdah, 32:11).

Man takes nothing with him in his grave. We learn through a hadith which says, “When a man dies, his deeds come to an end except for three things: perpetual charity (Sadaqah Jariyah), knowledge which is beneficial; or a virtuous descendant who prays for him (the deceased).” Such admonitions remind us that we should hasten in doing good deeds lest our time is up and our book of deeds gets closed forever. We should not be among those hypocrites who will lament to Allah (SWT) to give them more time to spend in His way and to be one of the righteous. “Give from what We have provided for you before death comes to one of you and he says, ‘My Lord, if only you would give me a little more time so that I can give sadaqah and be one of the righteous!’” (al-Munaﬁqun, 63:10). We should strive to be among those about whom Allah (SWT) says, “We shall lodge forever those who believe and do good works in the mansions of Paradise beside which rivers flow. How excellent is the reward of those who labor; and who are steadfast and put their trust in their Lord.” (al-‘Ankabut, 29:58-59).

Deeds are very important, but the intentions behind those deeds are still more important. A good deed with ill intention (niyyah) carries no reward with Allah (SWT). An example of this is to do an act with the intention of riya or showing off. We have to be very clear about our niyyah and take extra care to see that nothing is done with an intent to cheat, deceive or show off; rather any act should be done to seek the pleasure of Allah (SWT). Man gets the reward of what he intends. This is very clearly explained through hadith that says, “Actions are according to intentions, and every one will get what they intended. So whoever migrates for the sake of Allah and His messenger, the migration will be counted truly for Allah and His messenger. And whoever migrates for the sake of worldly increase or to marry someone, then the migration will count for whatever it was for.” This hadith also makes it clear that our migration (hijrah) should be for the sake of Allah and toward His path. This involves struggling in His path and doing everything that makes Him and His laws supreme, here in this world.

Pursuing lawful (halal) means of livelihood is fine but we should not get entangled and enmeshed in duniya to the extent that we cannot extricate ourselves from it to expend some of our time, energy, money and capabilities in the way of Allah (SWT). There is good news for those who make hijrah for the sake of Allah (SWT). “And if anyone leaves home as a migrant towards God and His Messenger and is then overtaken by death, his reward from God is sure. God is most forgiving and most merciful” (al-Nisa’, 4:100). Purity of intention also attracts the mercy of Allah (SWT). After all, it is Allah’s mercy alone through which one can enter paradise. This is confirmed through a hadith that says, “Be moderate in worship, draw near to Allah, and give glad tidings, for indeed, none of you will enter Paradise because of his deeds alone.” They said, “Not even you, O Messenger of Allah?” He said, “Not even me unless Allah grants me mercy from Himself; and know that the most beloved deed to Allah is that which is done regularly even if it is small.”

The condition of the heart is also to be kept in mind. Hearts get rusted. We learn from a hadith which says, “The hearts get rusted as does iron with water. When someone asked, ‘What could cleanse hearts again?’ The Prophet (SAW) replied, ‘Frequent remembrance of death and recitation of the Qur’an.’” In another hadith, we are told, “When a person commits a sin, a black dot is dotted on his heart. Then if that person gives up that sin,
begs Allah to forgive him, and repents, then his heart is cleared; but if he repeats the evil deed, then that covering is increased till his heart is completely covered with it. And this is al-Ran that Allah mentioned in the Qur’an.” “No! but that which they used to commit has covered their hearts with rust” (al-Mutaffifin, 83:14). The Qur’an shows the way and hence helps one to stay away from sinful activities.

We also learn through a hadith that there is goodness in every matter of a true believer (mu’min). The Prophet (SAW) said, “Wondrous is the affair of the mu’min for there is good in every matter of his and this is not the case with anyone except the mu’min; if he is happy, then he thanks Allah and thus there is good for him; and if he is inflicted with a calamity, then he shows patience and thus there is good for him.”

Edited by Dr. Munawar Haque

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