Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on March 01, 2013

Follow the Straight Path

In continuation of the previous khutbas related to the construction of Islam, let us understand that 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 representing complete and sincere servitude to Allah (‘ubudiyyatu lillahi ta’ala). The four walls may be thought to be denoting Islam, taqwa (God-consciousness), ita’ah (obedience), and ‘ibadah (worship). The wall representing Islam needs an entrance, and that entrance can be no other than Islam itself. “O you who believe! enter Islam (silm) totally and do not follow the footsteps of Satan for he is your avowed enemy” (al-Baqarah, 2:208).

It is to be noted that in this ayah, the word used for ‘Islam’ is not Islam (إسلام) but silm (سلام) peace), alluding to the fact that to live by the tenets of Islam is to live in peace, the most desired condition any human being could aspire for. On the other hand, the third ayah of Surat al-Ma’idah actually uses the word Islam to refer to Islam as a way of life or deen. “Today I have perfected your deen for you and completed My blessing upon you and I am pleased with Islam as a deen for you” (al-Ma’idah, 5:3). If they (the believers) honored their treaty of peace with Allah by being on the path of Islam, they would be at peace.

It is clear that Muslims are being commanded to enter Islam in its entirety. Modes of worship in themselves do not constitute Islam in its totality. One has to submit and surrender to all of God’s commands, and to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). “This is My Path and it is straight, so follow it” (al-An’am, 6:153). We are told not to follow other paths lest we are cut off from the true path. “Do not follow other paths or you will become cut off from His path” (al-An’am, 6:153). Following the footsteps of the Prophet (SAW) is following the straight path, which leads to achieving taqwa (God-consciousness; righteousness; piety). “That is what He instructs you to do, so that hopefully you will have taqwa” (al-An’am, 6:153).

We know that there are two paths—the one leading to good and the other to evil, and Allah has shown us both paths. “Have We not made for him two eyes, and a tongue and two lips, and shown him the two paths (of good and evil)?” (al-Balad, 90:10). There is a hadith through which we learn that one day Prophet Muhammad (SAW) drew a line in the sand and said, “This is Allah’s path.” He then drew several lines to the right and to the left and said, “These are the paths of misguidance on each of which is a devil inviting people to follow it.” Then, pointing to the middle line, he is reported to have recited ayah 153 of Surat al-An’am. "And verily, this is my straight path, so follow it, and follow not other paths, for they will separate you away from His path."

Satan is always busy through various means to take people away from the straight path, and put them on the crooked path, whereby they are ruined and destroyed eternally. The means he employs to do this are many. He allures people to indulge in all sorts of prohibited (haram) activities by disobeying Allah’s commands and violating sacred laws. A few of these activities are consuming all sorts of drugs, alcohol, and other intoxicants, and engaging in gambling and sex related vices. Needless to say, all these evils are rampant. Unfortunately, not even Muslims are immune from all this. Sadly enough, reliable survey statistics show that there are a few Muslim countries that are high on the list of countries visiting pornographic websites most frequently.
Satan is not shy to promote his evil designs and products. While browsing through web pages, it is not uncommon to see sexually charged pop-ups, often times displayed in the margins, inviting people to indulge in promiscuous sex, not to speak of other violent and lewd activities openly displayed on the internet and television. Satan uses all sorts of tools and tricks to invite people to his evil ways. The latest electronic social networking services including facebook, facetime, twitter, and others that are used for communicating through the internet, ipad, iphone, and more are often abused. And Satan is successful in dragging people from the path that leads to Allah and putting them on the path that leads to their perdition and hell. As things stand, there is more evil than good on this earth.

Through different ‘isms’ (doctrine, theory, system, or practice such as) advocated by thinkers, elites, and intellectuals, Satan has been successful to instill in peoples’ minds that such ‘isms’ are superior to Islam. He persuades us to respond to the base desires of our bodies and to starve our souls. He lures us to the charm and luxuries of this temporary world and makes us oblivious of the eternal world. We have to be wary of Satan. He makes us worship materialism and distracts us from worshipping Allah, our Creator, who has clearly and repeatedly warned us in unequivocal terms that Satan is our sworn enemy. “Surely Satan is your enemy: so treat him as an enemy: he calls on his followers only so that they should become inmates of the burning Fire” (Fatir, 35:6). Allah calls us to follow His path so that we are directed to the home of peace (Dar al-Salam/ Jannah). “Allah calls to the home of peace and He guides whom He wills to a straight path” (Yunus, 10:25). There is only one path that can be chosen; either the path that leads to success and salvation or the path that leads to doom and eternal destruction.

Treading the straight path is not quite easy. There are obstacles and challenges on the way. Satan waits in ambush and pounces upon anyone who resolves to walk on the straight path so that he or she is misled and misguided. “And then Satan said, ‘Because You have led me astray, I will lie in wait for them all on Your straight path. Then I will come at them- from their front and their back, from their right and their left- and You will find that most of them are ungrateful.’” (al-A’raf, 7:16-17).

The good news is that Allah’s sincere devoted servants will be protected from Satan’s devious plots and snares. “He (Satan) said, My Lord, since You have led me astray. I shall make the path of error seem alluring to them on the earth and shall mislead them all except Your devoted servants” (al-Hijr, 15:39-40). Sincere devotion is the straight path that leads to Allah. “He (Allah) said, ‘This is the path which leads straight to Me. Surely, you shall have no power over My true servants, except those misguided ones who choose to follow you’” (al-Hijr, 15:41,42). Satan shall have no power over Allah’s true servants.

Referring to the Prophet’s hadith, it is to be appreciated that the Prophet (SAW), in order to graphically explain to the people as to what the straight path was, drew lines on the sand, thus employing a visual method that was then in vogue. It is only to be imagined what methods he would have employed if he were living among us today. He would utilize the latest technological tools to call people to the straight path and to save them from the path of hell. We have to ask ourselves if we are doing this with all the modern tools of science and technology at our disposal.

The path of Islam is the path of tauhid (la ilaha illallah); not the mere uttering of it but the implementation of it in our lives. What is to be done to remain on the straight path?

Firstly, this is possible by having real faith in Allah. This is because He only guides the faithful to the straight path. “Allah will surely guide the faithful to a straight path” (al-Hajj, 22:54).

Secondly, we have to cling on to Allah. “He who holds fast to Allah is indeed guided to the straight path” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:101). How do we cling on to Him? We cling on to Him by clinging on to His rope (the Qur’an). “Hold on firmly together to the rope of Allah, and be not divided among yourselves” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:103). This entails reading, understanding, and practicing the Qur’an. To be able to really understand the
Qur’an, we must make an effort to learn the language of the Qur’an. If one can spare a good many years of one’s life toward becoming a doctor, an engineer, a lawyer, or any other professional, why can’t one devote even a fraction of that time (say, a year or so) to learning Arabic for the purpose of understanding the Qur’an. Understanding the Qur’an directly in its language will hopefully help us to cling on to it. After all, the rewards are immense and incalculable. “As for those who believe in God and hold fast to Him, He will admit them to His mercy and His grace; He will guide them towards Him on a straight path” (al-Nisa’, 4:175). The Qur’an is a clear Book of guidance through which Allah guides those who seek His pleasure. “A light has now come to you from Allah and a clear Book. By it, Allah guides to the ways of peace those who follow what pleases Him, bringing them from darkness out into light, by His will, and guiding them to a straight path” (al-Ma’idah, 5:15,16).

Thirdly, we have to obey Allah, worship Him alone, and acknowledge Him as our Lord and Master. “Truly, Allah is my Lord and your Lord so worship (and obey) Him. That is a straight path” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:51). At the same time we are not to worship Satan by falling in his traps. “Did I not enjoin on you, sons of Adam, not to worship Satan for he is your sworn enemy?” (Ya Sin, 36:60).

Fourthly, we should have an unshakable belief (yaqeen) in the hereafter (akhirah). Satan and his agents try to sow seeds in peoples’ minds about there being no hereafter at all. The realities about the Hour (Day of Judgment) and all other articles of faith based on the unseen can only be found in the Qur’an and the teachings of Muhammad (SAW) and abiding by those teachings alone is the way to the straight path. There is no doubt about it. “It (The Qur’an) gives knowledge of the Hour. Have no doubt about it. Follow me for this is the straight path” (al-Zukhruf, 43:61). Last but not least, we have to continue to be cautious of Satan and his ploys. “And do not let Satan hinder you, for he is your sworn enemy” (al-Zukhruf, 43:62).

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