Synopsis of Friday Sermon
Ameer Mustapha Elturk

Ramadan – The Month of Giving and Receiving

The month of Ramadan is the best month in the Islamic Calendar, because of the blessings one receives in it, if it is observed correctly. The fasting (siyam) in Ramadan is complemented with prayers (salah). The Qur’an that was revealed in Ramadan is meant to transform us from within into becoming God conscious humble slaves of Allah who are guided to paradise—the peaceful and safe eternal abode of unending bliss.

Fasting in these hot humid summer days for over 17 hours calls for utmost patience (sabr). This is our test from Allah, but as believers, we have to be patient on obedience (sabr ‘ala ta’ah). As is well known, reward is proportionate to the level of hardship. Allah says in Surat al-Ra’d, “And those who are steadfast in seeking the favor of their Lord, and pray regularly and spend secretly and openly out of what We have provided them with, and ward off evil with good. Theirs shall be the final abode” (al-Ra’d, 13:22). May Allah make us of the dwellers of paradise and save us from the fire of hell (Ameen).

Ramadan is not only the best time to offer our supererogatory prayers (nawafil), but also the best time to give voluntary charity (sadaqah), which is over and above the obligatory charity (zakah). This is because the rewards for the acts of charity during the month of Ramadan are multiplied manifold. The love for wealth is inherent in man. The Qur’an alludes to this, “And you have an insatiable love of wealth” (al-Fajr, 89:20). At another place, the Qur’an says, “Alluring unto man is the enjoyment of worldly desires through women, and children, and heaped-up treasures of gold and silver...” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:14).

Ramadan comes to help us purify our souls from greed. Believers know and understand that the wealth they possess does not belong to them. It is a trust from Allah and a test to see how best they fulfill the trust they have been entrusted with. Ramadan encourages us to give despite our love and attachment for wealth. According to Ibn ‘Abbas (RA), the Prophet (SAW) was the most generous of people, and he was more so during Ramadan. Among the ten great sahaba who were promised the good news of paradise, here in this world (al-ashara al-lmubashshara), all except Ali ibn Talib (RA), were very wealthy individuals. They were very generous, always giving for the sake of Allah, and they all passed the test.

Spending in the way of Allah can be done either at the legal level or at the spiritual level. There is a difference between the two. At the legal level, zakah, which is one of the five pillars of Islam, has to be paid by anyone who is entitled to pay it. It is to give away 2.5% of one’s total savings after meeting one’s own and one’s family’s necessary expenses of food, clothing, housing, transport etc. It is calculated for a year (haul) and paid either in parts over the year or in lump sum.

The institution of zakah keeps wealth from stagnating. Money is put in the market and made to work. The recipients of zakah benefit from it. In this way, while the basic needs of the poor and needy are met, more jobs are created, and the community flourishes. The economic condition of the larger society becomes more vibrant. This divine system of distribution of wealth needs to be institutionalized and implemented. It is unfortunate and sad that there are people among Muslims who say that the income tax paid by them is a substitute for the zakah that they are obliged to pay. A true believer understands that zakah is Allah’s right over a stipulated share of his or her wealth.

At the spiritual level, charity is given over and above the zakah. It is not an obligatory duty, but a voluntary action. Just as we offer the Sunnah prayers in addition to the five daily compulsory prayers, likewise, we should of our own will and volition give charity in addition to the zakah. Giving in charity is explained in ayah 215 of Surat al-Baqarah, which says, “They will ask you what they should spend on others. “Say, whatever you give should be for parents, close relatives, orphans, the needy, and travelers. Allah is well aware of whatever good you do” (al-Baqarah, 2:215). According to this ayah, our parents and relatives have more right on us than others. While our parents, wife, and children are not entitled for zakah money because we are responsible for them, our relatives are eligible for the same. However, the wife can give zakah to her husband if he is poor. Allah is well aware of any act of charity that we
do. **Ayah 219 of Surat al-Baqarah** explains charity at the spiritual level. “They will ask you what they should give away. Say, ‘Whatever is surplus to your needs’” (al-Baqarah, 2:219). Living in North America, there is great opportunity for da’wah work. This needs investment of resources—human as well as financial. To invest one’s resources in calling people to Allah is to engage in charity at the spiritual level.

We learn from the **Sirah** that Tabuk was the last expedition of the Prophet (SAW). He asked the people to help the expedition with whatever they could. It is reported that Abu Bakr (RA) took all his money and household articles and heaped them at the Prophet’s feet. “Have you left anything for your children?” asked the Prophet (SAW). Abu Bakr then responded by saying, “Allah and his Messenger are enough for them.” Companions including Umar ibn Khattab (RA) who had given half his wealth for the expedition were stunned as they realized that whatever they did, they could not outdo Abu Bakr in the field of service to Islam.

Muslims understand that the poor and the needy have a share in their wealth, which can be claimed by the latter by way of right. The Quran says, “And those in whose wealth is a recognized right” (al-Ma’rij, 70:24), and in another place, it says, “And there was a share in their wealth for the beggar and the deprived” (al-Dhariyat, 51:19). We are reminded in **ayah** 177 of Surat al-Baqarah (ayat al-birr) that righteousness and piety (taqwa) are directly linked with good deeds that include giving to others. “Righteousness is not only that you turn your faces (in prayer) towards east or west; but (true) righteousness is to believe in Allah and the Last Day, the Angels, the Book, and the Messengers; to, despite their love for it, give away their wealth to their relatives and to orphans and the poor, and to travelers and beggars and to set slaves free…” (al-Baqarah, 2:177). We can see from this **ayah** that our relatives have a priority over others when it comes to giving in charity, and we should act accordingly.

Spending in the way of Allah, especially during Ramadan, is a highly meritorious act and a lucrative investment. “Those who recite the Book of Allah and establish salah and give of what We have provided for them, secretly and openly, hope for a transaction that never fail” (Fatir, 35:29). Ramadan is the month when we offer the nightly prayers (tarawih). We listen and follow the recitation of the Book of Allah. Allah is thankful and appreciative of this investment made with Him and compensates the investor profusely with His blessings and bounties in both worlds. “He will give them their full rewards and give them more out of His bounty. He is forgiving and appreciative” (Fatir, 35:30).

**Ayah 64 of Surat al-Taghabun** tells us, “If you make a goodly loan to Allah He, will multiply it for you and forgive you. Allah is All-Thankful, Most Forbearing.” This means that whatever is spent in the way of Allah should be from lawful (halal) means for according to a hadith, “Allah is pure and accepts only pure.” Even though the Qur’an, by way of parable, mentions the rewards of good deeds to be up to seven hundred times, yet the compensation given by Allah for spending in His cause is incalculable. Allah (SWT) does not restrict His reward. The reward could be manifold over depending upon a person’s intention (niyyah). “Those who spend their wealth for Allah’s cause may be compared to a grain of corn which sprouts into seven ears, with a hundred grains in each ear: for God grants manifold increase to whom He wills; God is infinite and all knowing” (al-Baqarah, 2:261). Intention and sincerity are very important. All acts of charity should be done only to seek the pleasure of Allah (SWT). The Qur’an makes mention of such people who while feeding the poor people say, “We feed you for the sake of Allah alone, we seek neither recompense nor thanks from you” (al-Insan, 76:9).

We are also informed that spending is a source of inner peace and contentment and freedom from fear, sorrow, and grief. “Those who spend their wealth night and day, both privately and publicly, will receive their reward from their Lord. They shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve” (al-Baqarah, 2:274). However, promise of such reward is only for those who are sincere in their charity and do not taunt, insult, or humiliate the recipients of the charity. “Those who spend their wealth for Allah’s cause and do not follow their charity with taunts and insults shall be rewarded by their Lord; they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve” (al-Baqarah, 2:262).

Since spending in the way of Allah is linked with taqwa, it also becomes an expiation and atonement for sins. “Race each other to forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden as wide as the heavens and the earth, prepared for the people who have taqwa” (Aat’ Imran, 3:133). A true believer understands that even if he does not have enough to give and is going through hardship, the way out for him is to spend in the way of Allah. This may sound illogical but there is nothing illogical about the infinite wisdom of Allah. The Prophet (SAW) has asserted that one’s wealth will not be diminished by giving in charity. We are reminded again and again in the Qur’an that Allah (SWT) repays in full whatever one spends in His way. We have in Surat al-Anfal, “Anything you spend in the way of God will be repaid to you in full. You will not be wronged” (al-Anfal, 8:60). And we have in Surat Saba’, “Whatever you spend, He will recompense you for it. He is the best of providers” (Saba’, 34:39). Allah’s bounties and blessings are repaid to those who spend in His way, not necessarily through any form of tangible wealth but in many different ways. A great blessing is to be saved from accidents, calamities and hardships. Another blessing is to be blessed with good health and wellbeing. Having peace, tranquility, and contentment in one’s life are other forms of divine blessings.

The virtue of giving, especially during Ramadan, can hardly be overemphasized. It is self-evident from numerous **ayah** of the Qur’an and traditions of the Prophet (SAW). One such tradition says, “Save yourself from Hell-fire even by giving half a date.” Another one says, “Verily, Allah is generous and He loves generosity. He loves nobility of character and He detests vanity.”
Indeed, the month of Ramadan is the month of giving and receiving. Righteous believers are steadfast in seeking the favor of their Lord. They pray regularly and spend secretly and openly out of what they have been provided with. They ward off evil with good. While they do all this on a regular basis, they do so more consciously during the month of Ramadan. And in return, they are promised the eternal abode of paradise. “And those who exercise patience to gain the pleasure of Allah, who are steadfast in prayer, who spend for the cause of Allah privately and in public, and who keep away evil with good will have the eternal abode” (al-Ra’d, 13:22).

May Allah make us of the dwellers of paradise and save us from the fire of hell (Ameen).

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