Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on July 26, 2013

Calling on Allah and Responding to Him

The objective, wisdom, and rulings of fasting during the month of Ramadan are mentioned in ayat 183 to 189 of Surat al-Baqarah. Ayah 183 says, “O you who believe, fasting has been prescribed for you just as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may have taqwa” (al-Baqarah, 2:183). And ayah 189 says, “They ask you about the phases of the moon...” (al-Baqarah, 2:189).

Incidentally, ayah 186 that lies just in the middle of these ayat broaches a subject that may not appear relevant to the topic or ruling of fasting (siyam), but in fact it is. The ayah states, “When My servants ask you about Me, say that I am near. I respond to the call of one who calls, whenever he calls to Me: let them, then, respond to Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be rightly guided” (al-Baqarah, 2:186). Ramadan, as we know, is a very blessed month. It is not only the month of fasting. It is also the month of the Qur’an, the month of charity, the month of kindness and compassion, the month of patience, and the month of supplication (du’a). This is the month when we consciously supplicate to Allah more than any other time. During the nights of Laylat ul-Qadr, we beseech Him to pardon us. A Prophetic supplication for this occasion is, “O Allah You are the One who pardons greatly, and loves to pardon, so pardon me” (Allahumma innaka ‘afuwwun; tuhibbul ‘afwa; fa’fu ‘annee).

It is narrated that the Prophet (SAW) on being asked by a Bedouin about the whereabouts of Allah, replied that Allah was in the Heavens on His throne, and then the Prophet (SAW) is reported to have recited the ayah, “The All-Merciful, established firmly upon the Throne” (Ta Ha, 20:5). It is said that it was on this occasion that ayah 186 of Surat al-Baqarah was revealed. There is another scholarly opinion that ayah 186 was revealed when the Prophet (SAW) was asked if one had to scream one’s lungs out to make Allah hear as He was very far off from the caller. And the ayah came down, “When My servants ask you about Me, say that I am near” (al-Baqarah, 2:186). Indeed, Allah is close by. We have in Surat al-Hadid, “He is with you wherever you are; He sees all that you do” (al-Hadid, 57:4).

Supplication (du’a) means to invoke Allah for any help or need, whether it is for something of this world or the next. It is quite normal and justified in this worldly life to ask someone for something that one may need, but it is important that before we ask people, our first stop should be Allah. Based on our sincerity and intention, and His knowledge and wisdom, Allah will make things easy for us with or without a medium. According to a hadith, “Man should call upon Allah alone to provide for all his needs, so much so that even if a shoe-lace is broken, he should pray to Allah to provide him a shoe-lace, and if he needs salt, he should beseech Allah to send it to him.” Care should be taken however not to ask anyone about anything that has to do with things of the unseen (ghaybiyat) such as one’s future or fortune; otherwise one will fall into the grave sin of committing shirk with Allah.
It is to Allah alone that we should supplicate for anything that has to do with the unseen, and this we are taught to do through Salat ul-Istikharah. Istikharah means to seek goodness from Allah. The one who does the Istikharah is asking Allah, the Knower of the unseen to guide him toward what is better for him in respect of any undertaking or important task that he intends to do. The meaning of the supplication is: “O Allah! I seek goodness from Your Knowledge and with Your Power (and Might) I seek strength and I ask from You Your Great Blessings, because You have the Power and I do not have the power. You know everything and I do not know, and You have knowledge of the unseen…”

As far as supplicating Allah for goodness in the hereafter is concerned, one may ask for Jannat ul-Firdaus. We learn through a Prophetic tradition that says, ‘When you ask from Allah, ask Him for al-Firdaus…” One may also ask, for example, for being united with one’s loved ones in paradise, or for being blessed with the company of Muhammad (SAW) and so on.

Du’a is a form of ‘ibadah. As a matter of fact, there is a hadith which says, “Du’a is ‘ibadah.” It is reported that the Prophet (SAW) after uttering these words, recited ayah 60 of Surat Ghafir, which says, “Your Lord has said, Call on Me, and I will answer your prayers. But those who are too arrogant to worship Me (‘ibadati) will certainly enter Hell, in disgrace” (Ghafir, 40:60).

A hadith tells us that Allah responds to a believer’s du’a in three ways, “No Muslim who supplicates a supplication, that does not contain any sin or cutting of relations, Allah will grant him one of three things: either Allah will immediately respond to his supplication, or He may keep or store the answer for the Hereafter, or He will turn away from him an equivalent amount of evil or harm.”

The latter part of ayah 186 of Surat al-Baqarah under discussion says, “let them, then, respond to Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be rightly guided” (al-Baqarah, 2:186). This means that calling on Allah and responding to Him go hand in hand. Responding to Allah means to help His cause. Some of the companions of the Prophet (SAW) and few exegetes such as Mujahid interpret the meaning of ‘let them then respond to me’ (fastajibuli) to mean ‘let them then obey me’ (falyouti’uli). This also implies that obedience to anyone should in no way result in the disobedience of Allah and His messenger.

To find out what Allah needs from us, one has to read the entire Qur’an. In case, one is unable to do so because of constraint of time or otherwise, one should at least pay heed to all those ayat that begin with ‘O people!…” or “O you who believe!…” Abdullah ibn Mas’ud (RA) is reported to have said that special attention should be paid to the ayat that begin with “O people” or “O you who believe” because Allah is addressing us directly in these ayat, and therefore, we better listen.

Ayat 102 to 104 of Surat Aal ‘Imran tell us, “O you who believe, be conscious of Allah as is His due and die not except as Muslims (ones who have surrendered completely to Allah). And holdfast, all together, to the rope of Allah and be not divided. And Remember Allah’s favor on you when you were (once) enemies and He joined your hearts and became brothers by His grace. You were on the brink of the pit of fire and He saved you from it. Thus Allah makes His signs clear to you so you may be guided. And let there be a group from among you that calls to goodness, and ordain what is right and forbid what is wrong. And those are the successful ones” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:102-104).

The first thing that needs to be done individually is to carry out the modes of worship such as salah, zakah, siyam, hajj etc. Beyond that, there has to be total obedience of Allah and His messenger, unless there are obstacles in the way that are beyond one’s control. Yet, there has to be total conviction while saying, “You alone we worship, and to You alone we turn for help” (al-Fatiha, 1:5). This way, God willing, things will work out eventually.

Once a believer worships and obeys Allah and is conscious of Him in all his actions and dealings, then he is commanded to hold on fast to the rope of Allah and not be divided. Muslims may be of different races,
tribes, and different ethnic backgrounds, but they are all connected together as members of one community or nation (ummah).

It we continue to be divided and if our Masajid and other institutions continue to be built on the basis of our ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, then we are bound to perish. We have the example of the two rival tribes of Medina—the Aus and the Khazraj who were engaged in constant blood feud in the days of ignorance (jahiliyyah). Allah says that they were on the brink of an abyss of fire. He rescued them from it; guided them, and made them brothers. We too have to remain united if we want to be guided. Getting trapped by our mentality of prejudices and tribalism (‘asabiyyah) is only going to disunite and weaken us at a time when we need to be absolutely united and strong, especially in the face of the ever-growing challenges the Muslim ummah is facing everywhere.

It is only through unity that we can perform the ‘real task’ for which this ummah has been raised, which according to ayah 104 of Surat Aal ‘Imran is to call others to good; to enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong. Those who do this shall be successful. With the month of Ramadan coming to an end, we shall be graduating from a spiritual boot camp and going into the real world. With our batteries charged, and our taqwa raised, we have to move ahead to fulfill our duties and responsibilities. Our Ramadan should not end up being an exercise in futility.

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