Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on Sept 20, 2013

The Hajj and the Legacy of Ibrahim (AS)

Every season of Hajj reminds us the legacy of Ibrahim (AS), who along with his son, Ismail (AS) raised the Ancient House (al-Bayt al-Ateeq) or Ka’bah from its foundations to restore the worship of One God. “And We located the position of the House for Ibrahim: ’Do not associate anything with Me and purify My House for those who circle it, and those who stand and bow and prostrate” (al-Hajj, 22:26).

Ibrahim (AS)’s search of truth began when he was a teenager living in the household of Azar—his father, who was engaged in the making and worshipping of idols. Guided by his pure nature, sound intellect and rationalist mind, Ibrahim (AS) questioned his father about idol-worship pointing out to him that he and his people were in clear error. “Remember when Ibrahim said to his father, Azar, “Do you take idols as gods? I see that you and your people are clearly misguided” (al-An’am, 6:74).

Testifying to Ibrahim (AS)’s firm belief in tawhid, Allah likens him to an entire nation or community (ummah), and affirms more than once that he was not from among the polytheists (mushrikeen). “Ibrahim was a community in himself devoted to Allah and true in faith, He was not one of the polytheists” (al-Nahl, 16:120). Another ayah says, “Then We revealed to you: ’Follow the religion of Ibrahim, a man of pure natural belief. He was not one of the polytheists” (al-Nahl, 16:123). Ibrahim (AS)’s firm stand led him eventually to distance himself from his household and his people. “When Ibrahim said to his father and his people, ’I am free of everything you worship, except for Him who brought me into being. He will certainly guide me” (al-Zukhruf, 43:26-27).

Allah (SWT) had blessed Ibrahim (AS) with a discerning mind. He clearly distinguished between the Creator and His creation. Observing keenly the heavenly bodies, especially the stars, the moon, and the sun, and using his intellect, Ibrahim (AS) reinforced his faith in the Creator of everything, who alone should be worshipped. This story of Ibrahim (AS)’s search is beautifully depicted in Surat al-An’am. “When night descended on him, he saw a star. He said, ‘This is my Lord!’ Then when it set he said, ’I do not love things that set.’ When he saw the moon rise and spread its light, he said, ’This is my Lord.’ But when it set, he said, ’If my Lord does not guide me, I will be one of the misguided people.’ Then, when he saw the sun shining, he said, ‘This is my Lord! This is the greatest of all!’ Then when it set, he said, ’My people, I disown all that you worship besides Allah’” (al-An’am, 6:76-78).

Possessing an intuitive and unflinching faith in Allah, Ibrahim (AS) now discovers God even through his rational faculty, and cannot help but cry out, “I have set my face with sincere devotion, towards Him who has created the heavens and the earth, and I am not one of the polytheists” (al-An’am, 6:79). He rebuts those who
argue with him, “Are you arguing with me about Allah, while He has guided me?” (al-An’am, 6:79).

As evident from the Qur’an, Ibrahim (AS) was put to severe trials and tribulations along his journey in search of truth. He succeeded in all the tests he was subjected to. As a result, Allah (SWT) made him the leader of humanity (Imam un-Nas). “And remember when Ibrahim was tested by his Lord with certain commandments which he carried out completely. He said, ‘I will make you a leader for mankind.’ (al-Baqarah, 2:124). Being concerned about his progeny, Ibrahim (AS) implored Allah, “And what of my descendants?” (al-Baqarah, 2:124), and Allah replied him by saying, “My contract does not include the wrongdoers” (al-Baqarah, 2:124). This reply implied that as long as Ibrahim (AS)’s children would be on the path shown by him, they would be leaders of mankind, but when they indulge in wrongdoing and injustice, they would be deprived of their leadership role.

Being disgusted with idols and idol-worship, and in his anxiousness to teach a lesson to the people that their false deities were absolutely powerless, Ibrahim (AS) smashed them. This story is described graphically in Surat al-Baqarah, “He broke them all into pieces, except for the biggest one of them, so that they might return to it. They said, ‘Who has done this to our gods? He is surely an evil-doer.’ Some said, ‘We heard a young man, called Ibrahim, talking about them.’ Others said, ‘Bring him before the people’s eyes so they may witness (against him).’ They said, ‘Did you do this to our gods O Ibrahim.’ He answered, ‘Rather this biggest one of them did it. Ask them, if they can speak.’ They turned to one another and said, ‘You yourselves are the wrongdoers.’ But then they lapsed again and said, ‘(O Ibrahim!) You know very well that they cannot speak.’ He said, ‘Do you then worship, instead of Allah, what cannot help or harm you in any way? Shame on you and what you worship besides Allah! Will you not use your intellect?’” (al-Anbiya’, 21:58-67). We too have to be concerned if we have enslaved ourselves to modern-day idolatry—consumerism and materialism, in all their different ramifications. Our salvation lies in extricating ourselves from the grip of these and other modern-day idols, and become true, humble, and obedient slaves of Allah (SWT) alone.

The story goes on that Ibrahim (AS) was thrown into a blazing fire. “They said, Burn him and help your gods, if you are resolved to do something. But We said, ‘Fire! Be cool and safe for Ibrahim’” (al-Anbiya’, 21:58-69). Allah (SWT) in His infinite mercy ordered the fire to become cool and safe for Ibrahim, and hence he miraculously remained unscathed.

This story about remaining safe in the face of extreme danger is reminiscent of the story of Musa (AS) and his people when they were caught between Firaun’s army and the sea—visible danger from both sides. Hearing his people cry out, Musa (AS) simply said, “No, my Lord is with me and He will guide me” (al-Shura, 26:62). It also brings to memory the incident of the hijrah of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) along with Abu Bakr (RA). While hiding themselves in the cave, Abu Bakr (RA) saw that the enemy was just to get a glimpse of them to be able to pounce upon them. He was aggrieved about the safety of Muhammad (SAW). At that moment Muhammad (SAW) in his usual calm and composure said to him not to worry, for Allah was with them. “When they were both in the cave, he (Muhammad – SAW) told his companion (Abu Bakr – RA), Do not worry; for Allah is with us” (al-Taubah, 9:40). These real stories of the prophets are meant to reinforce our faith in and strengthen our reliance on the One whose power is limitless. Allah (SWT) will always support those who are on Haq.

In his youth, Ibrahim (AS) used his power of logical reasoning when confronting Nimrod, the king, in an argument. The Qur’an depicts this incident as follows: “Have you not (O prophet) thought about the one who argued with Ibrahim about his Lord, on the basis that Allah had given him sovereignty? Ibrahim said, ‘My Lord is He who gives life and causes to die.’ He said, ‘I too give life and cause to die.’ Ibrahim said, ‘Allah brings the sun from the East, so bring it come from the West.’ And the one who denied faith (Nimrod) was dumbfounded. Allah does not guide those who are unjust” (al-Baqarah, 2:258). Islam makes sense. There is no dispute between reason and revelation. There are occasions when we have to use our logical reasoning more than our intuition. This story also tells us about confronting falsehood (Batil) with truth (Haq).
Despite his firm conviction in Allah’s powers (qudrah), Ibrahim (AS) expressed his desire to Allah to show him how He brought the dead to life. Ibrahim (AS)’s curiosity and Allah’s response thereto is mentioned in Surat al-Baqarah. “When Ibrahim said, ‘My Lord, show me how You bring the dead to life.’ He asked, ‘Do you not then have faith?’ He replied, ‘Indeed I do! But so that my heart may be at peace.’ He said, ‘Take four birds and train them to come back to you, cut their bodies to pieces, scatter them over mountain-tops, then call them back, they will swiftly come to you. And know that Allah is Mighty, Wise’” (al-Baqarah, 2:260).

In compliance of Allah’s orders, another severe trial for Ibrahim (AS) was to leave his wife Hagar and their infant son Ismail in the harsh, desolate, and desert land of Mecca, where there was no water, no cultivation, and no humans. He knew exactly what he was doing. His human side made him cry out, “O Lord! I have settled some of my offspring in an uncultivable valley near Your Sacred House, Lord, so that they may say their prayers regularly. So, make people’s hearts incline towards them and provide them with fruits so that they may be grateful” (Ibrahim, 14:37). Again in His infinite mercy, Allah (SWT) saved both mother and child by making the spring of zamzam gush forth from that desert land. The seven rounds (al-Sai’) between the hillocks of Safa and Marwa that Hagar took to search for water for her baby son has become one of the important rituals (manasik) that pilgrims have to perform at Hajj.

Finally, Ibrahim (AS) was tested all the more severely by having to sacrifice his young son Ismail at Allah’s command. “When he (Ismail) was old enough to work with him (Ibrahim), he said, ‘My son, I saw myself sacrificing you in a dream. What do you think?’ He said, ‘Father, do as you are commanded. You shall, In sha Allah (God-willing) find me among those who are patient (and steadfast)” (al-Saffat, 37:102). Both father and son displaying submissive obedience and steadfastness willingly complied with Allah’s command. Again miraculously, Allah replaced the person of Ismail with a lamb which was slain instead, making henceforth the offering of a sacrificial animal an important ritual of Hajj.

In reality, the Hajj season traces back the legacy of Ibrahim (AS) and his quest for truth. He established the center of tawhid that remains till this day the Qiblah for all Muslims in every nook and corner of the world.

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