

Friday Sermon: Religion, morality and material success

24th April 2015

A question which is raised these days perhaps more than ever before by the young, those who have not had proper guidance and those who do not follow religion is that since worldly education leads to good morals what is the point of abiding by religion? It is said that morals can be instilled without any religious education, in fact it is maintained that people who do not follow religion have better morals than religious people. In particular this allegation is levelled at followers of Islam. Adherents of other faith have distanced themselves from their beliefs but even non-practicing Muslims associate themselves to the faith they were born in, therefore in reality this allegation is aimed at Muslims.

Efforts are made to influence our youth against religion. A good aspect of Western education is that it emphasises research and exploration but this needs to be done methodically. Parents are not able to answer adolescents when they question them on these issues, either due to lack of time owing to societal or economic pressures or because they simply do not have the knowledge. Many a time rather than answer the adolescents parents suppress them. This leads the adolescents to assume that although Islam claims to be the true faith with all the resolutions to problems, it does not have the answers in practical terms and in keeping with the times.

Youngsters take all this in quietly but they have the freedom to do so, they distance themselves from religion. As a result in spite of Islam being a living faith we find people among Muslims who reject religion and existence of God. In light of this we all need to reflect as to how we should practice our faith and also inspire our youngsters to practice.

Most certainly Islam is a perfect religion and the Holy Qur'an is a complete Book and the blessed model of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him), an embodiment of the Qur'an, is before us. It was his blessed model that generated a revolutionary change in his Companions (may Allah be pleased with them), they understood faith, they understood morality and they also progressed in the material sense. They kept all three aspects within their context.

Youngsters should try, in fact so should adults, to understand correct morals, material success and spirituality and then put them all in practice. When youngsters will understand this point it will open up avenues of success for them and they will realise how beautiful the teaching of Islam is and they will recognise the lies of Islam's detractors. Questions that are raised today are not something new; this has been going on in the past because people do not try to understand religion in its correct form. So-called religious scholars present fictitious, erroneous solutions to people and plunge the educated people in further confusion about religion. At times people themselves make incorrect inferences about religion.

God sent the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) to address these problems and he imparted insight to us. Hazrat Musleh Maud (may Allah be pleased with him) delivered a Friday sermon on the correlation between morality, material gain and religion and the Islamic viewpoint on the matter and how the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) demonstrated this through his practices.

It is difficult to separate religion, morality and man's material needs. A religious person cannot separate morality from religion and he also does not abandon the thought of having material needs. Indeed, this would stop the cycle of material progress. However, although correlated these matters are also distinguishable. People

who do not follow religion maintain that man needs good morals and material success. However, a true Muslim will maintain that man is also in need of religion because it takes man to God.

Islam alone makes the correlation between spirituality, morality and material success. However, a vast majority of Muslims do not understand the reality of religion and connect morality and material gain to religion rather excessively, so much so that they drive people away from religion. Aside the essentials of Islam like Salat and fasting, some religious scholars insist that matters like conventions and rallies etc. are also part of Islam and those who do not participate in them are disbelievers or apostates. Even this stance is exceeded and each sect passes its fatwas against the others and conflicts carry on. All this leads to extremist groups formulating so-called religious laws and carrying out murder and mayhem. The situation in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan is borne of fictitious laws made in the name of religion! A French journalist who was released from ISIL captivity saw some practices there which seemed contrary to the knowledge of Islam he had. Upon his asking individuals from ISIL told him they did not know what Qur'an and Hadith said, what they followed was their own law.

The current situation in Yemen is also a manifestation of implementation of favoured fatwas in the guise of religion to kill innocent people through air strikes. It is correct that both the parties are in the wrong but this does not mean that one can kill the other! Every religious scholar and every Maulana seems to have made up their own religion and there is no semblance between true Islam and the Islam that they practice. This is the reason a vast majority of people have turned away from religion.

On the other hand the developed but non-religious Western world tries to make morality and spirituality a part of the material world. If they do reflect over the phenomenon of revelation they say it is an element of human dynamics and they look upon morality as something that is beneficial for the world. They ponder over religion and say that religion somewhat saves uneducated or less educated people from committing crime. And they say those who are already moral do not need religion.

Reflecting on morality, spirituality and material success tells us that they are so intertwined that not everyone realises where and how they are linked. We look at the blessed life of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) to understand the correlation. He was the world reformer for spiritual, moral and material aspects. His blessed life is a composite of them all. He said without prayer man's faith cannot be perfected. That is, while worship of God was essential he also stressed upon spiritual development. The link between prayer (dua) and man is like the link between mother and child. Dua means to call upon someone and one only calls when one is sure that help will be forthcoming. Three elements are necessary for calling out. Firstly, one must be certain that one's entreaty will be heard, secondly, one must have the assurance that whom one calls has the power to help and thirdly, one must have inherent love and devotion to whomsoever one calls out and is compelled to turn to that person and none else.

The first two are elements pertaining to the mind. If one is not sure that one's call will be heard and if one does not have the assurance that the person who is called out has the power to help it will be foolish to call out to that person! The third element, however, is inherent to human nature. It is inherent love and devotion which makes one disregard everyone else and make one turn to the object of one's love. Like the inherent love between mother and child. Even if a drowning child knows his mother cannot swim, if she is around it is her that the child will call out for help and no one else. This is borne of emotional connection about which the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) said faith cannot be perfected without prayer. He deemed the connection between God and man as the connection between mother and child, where a child runs to mother under all circumstances.

The second element is of morals. We see exquisite aspects of this in the blessed life of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him). We see his fine deportment and expression of love with his wives, something

essential to have a happy home life. His love and care for his wives was such that if a wife drank water from a utensil, when he wanted to drink he would put his mouth where his wife had placed her mouth to drink. On the face of it, this is something minor but it makes a very fine point. It signifies that love is not only expressed by great big gestures but is really evident from small gestures! The blessed life of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) is replete with amazing accounts of matters pertaining to morals so much so that it seems all his life he only studied and taught morals. He was exemplary and peerless as regards mutual connection of mankind, mutual connection of relatives, shunning falsehood, betrayal and mistrust. The third element that his teaching guides to is regarding material aspect. For example, keeping roads clear for civic life, water supply, cleanliness of roads, advice to make homes roomy and airy. He drew attention to matters of the world, be it governance, culture, trade or industry. However, contrary to the so-called religious leaders of today, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) did not deem everything part of religion.

For example, once the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) saw some farmers pollinating date trees by bringing the male parts of the tree into contact with the female parts. He suggested to them to not do that and let the pollination happen naturally through wind. The farmers abandoned the practice but that season they did not have good harvest. When the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) was informed of the reason of lesser yield, he said he had not commanded them to abandon the practice. He said their knowledge of these matters was more than his. Thus, here material aspect has been separated from religious matters. Here was the Prophet of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) telling people they knew more than him about worldly matters and we have Maulawis today who are ever ready to declare people disbelievers and apostates at the drop of a hat! And then there is the other side of the coin where Western world only emphasises material success.

Their philosophers say it is not a matter of how God created man, it is how man (God forbid) created God. They consider that man was in search of an excellent model and when this model was not found among mankind, thoughts went beyond the realms of humanity and gradually a perfect being was envisaged and this was deemed as concept of God. This is how these people have made the concept of God a material aspect. Gradually they turned away from religion and the current-day philosophers are inclined to atheism. Vast majority of people in the West do not believe in the existence of God and they consider morality and material success as everything. Whereas the current-day Maulawis are provocative and they make everything a religious matter.

We are fortunate as Ahmadis that the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) saved us from these issues and guided us to follow the blessed model of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) who of course taught moderation in everything. He taught that most certainly worship of God is most important, it is the objective of our creation; however, one's own self also has rights as does one's wife and neighbours. In order to fulfil these rights we have to employ three kinds of resources. Firstly, prayer and worship of God secondly control one's emotions and ponder over human psychology, thirdly to be honest in one's employment or profession and seek knowledge of world sciences.

If we ponder we realise that in order to fulfil our own rights prayer and connection with God avails as does controlling emotions. Honesty at work can lead to us enhance our moral, spiritual and material life. Similarly, in order to fulfil rights of family we pray, control our emotions and meet their material needs. Rights of neighbour/society will be fulfilled with prayers, paying their dues and trying to understand their mind-set so that the message of Islam may be taken to them appropriately. By working hard at work we become useful members of society and when everyone practices this society becomes a model of morality, spirituality and material success.

The dire strait of the Muslim world today is borne of the fact that they have discounted all of this and have given their selfish desires the name of religion. As a result rather than extol Islam's qualities to others they

follow their fictitious creed and are killing each other. They have lost both in worldly terms and spiritual terms and are reduced to begging others in every matter.

The Western world gave precedence to worldly matters over faith but at least they succeeded in attaining their worldly goals even if through wrong means. The Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) was sent for the reformation of both these extremes. It is at such times that God sends His people to the world who keep things in perspective and employ faith in faith's context, morality in its context and worldly matters are dealt with in their context. On the face of it God's people bring spiritual message but the three aspects are correlated. Excellence in spirituality definitely leads to reformation of morals, and good morals definitely lead to better material conditions. However, it is not necessary that a person who has material gains will also be moral or that one who has good morals will also be spiritual. God wishes to bring man closer to Him. For this He has made moral reformation and material success conditional to spirituality or being religious. God states a true believer is granted all kinds of success.

There are different ways to attain moral, spiritual and material success but there is also a mutual way and that is to forge perfect connection with God. Morality is attained by trying for it and material success is attained by trying for it but the results of both these efforts are limited within their own sphere. However, those who try to attain spirituality are granted everything. The Companions of the Holy Prophet did not take his Bai'at because they wanted to make wide streets or wanted to have cleanliness around. Rather they recited 'There is none worthy of worship save Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger' and this reformed their morals and also their worldly matters.

In the times of Hazrat Umer (may Allah be pleased with him) Muslims had to leave Syria because of the large Roman army. Syrian Christians wept when Muslims departed and stopped them from leaving saying they would help them if they stayed. They were Christians as were the Romans but their bond with the Muslims was owing to high morals of and excellent governance of Muslims. Although governance is a worldly attainment, Muslims of that time were granted it by virtue of their faith.

Hazrat Musleh Maud (may Allah be pleased with him) said that the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) used to narrate an account of a trader who was going away on travels and left a large sum of money as a trust with the town's qazi/qadi. On his return he asked the qazi for his money bag but the qazi simply denied ever been given any money to hold as trust. The trader was very perturbed and gave the qazi many clues to remind him of his money bag but the qazi said he never keeps others' things as trust. They were ruled by a very approachable king. The trader went to see him and explained his story. The king asked him for some proof that he had left his money. The trader said he had none. The king thought of a plan and asked the trader to stand next to the qazi on the day of the king's procession. The king said he would talk to the trader in a friendly informal manner and the trader should respond in kind. On the day of the procession both the king and the trader openly chatted in a friendly manner and the trader related the account of his money bag being left with someone as a trust and the difficulty he was having in retrieving it. The king said He would say to the trader if he continued to have difficulty in getting back his money he should come and see the king. The trader agreed and followed the plan on the day of the procession. Qazi saw everything. When the procession passed he said to the trader his memory was not very good and he had probably forgotten about the money bag. He asked for some clues and when he was given the clues he said 'why did you not tell me before? I will go and get your bag!' Now, if friendship with a worldly source of power can give a person so much kudos, how it could be that friendship with God would not bring one acclaim of the world. But belief is required for this, belief that attracts God's pleasure. A person with perfect belief can never abandon high morals. If he adopts all aspects of morals and practices them he will attain honesty, verity, trustworthiness, righteousness and purity. And this will certainly result in him gaining knowledge, skill, awareness, ability and diligence and he will attain the worldly success as well. A true believer should focus more on spiritual connection. Man is not rewarded unless he excels at something and excellence is also beneficial in religion and one must try and excel.

The Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) used to say that only those people benefit from him who have intense associations with him; either those who are intensely opposed, like Maulawi Sana Ullah Sahib and who are well known mainly for opposing him or those who are absolutely sincerely. Feeble association does not benefit. If man turns to God he will be treated as others were in earlier times. If man really tries for this he will attain it. What is needed is to bow down to God with perfect sincerity and this brings success. We should make effort to attain God, try and understand the religion sent by God and make love of God an intrinsic part of us. This will lead to high morals and we will also receive material success. If we try and partake of Divine light we will truly receive God's beneficence. If we try and partake of Divine light with earnestness it will dispel the darkness of falsehood, indolence, deception and other ills and high morals will be instilled in us. If we wish to save our next generation from the bad effects of materialism here we will have to explain to them the correlation between religion and morality. If we wish to make material success dependent upon spirituality/religion and connect it to spirituality/religion, we also need to try and forge a true connection with God for ourselves.