In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on December 26, 2014

“Dawah with Insight Part 3”

The Soul’s Journey from Inception to Eternity

As mentioned before, in order for people to function well in this world, they must know the true reality of their existence. People need to know how they were created, what they were created out of, who created them and why they were created.

Any knowledge without this basic foundation is incomplete knowledge that misguides and leads astray. The Metaphysical Truths are accessible only through revelation. Scientific research and presumptions about the first creation will not give one the real truth about ourselves.

The only book available today that informs us of the first creation most accurately among other truths is the Qur'an, the final uncorrupted and unaltered Book. Unfortunately, we cannot trust the previous scriptures because they underwent changes, additions and deletions. There is no way to determine which part of it is God’s speech and which part is man's invention.

As we know, deliberate attempts were made to change the previous scripture, “Woe, then, unto those who write down, with their own hands, [something which they claim to be] the scripture, and then say, ‘This is from God,’” (al-Baqarah, 2:79).

All heavenly scriptures are meant to guide people toward the truth. “We sent down the Torah, therein was guidance and light. The prophets who submitted (to God) used it to judge the Jews, as did the rabbis and scholars by that with which they were entrusted the protection of God’s Book and they were witnesses to it” (al-Ma'idah, 5:44).

Due to the utter failure to protect and preserve the scriptures, Allah (SWT) has taken it upon Himself to preserve the text of the final Book (the Qur'an) meant to guide all of humanity for all time to come. “Indeed it is We who sent down the Reminder (Qur'an), and indeed it is We who will preserve it” (al-Hijr, 15:9).

The origin of the text is deeply rooted in an oral tradition. Countless people memorize and recite the Qur'an in its entirety. In fact, it is the most recited text on the planet. Perhaps this explains the process by which Allah (SWT) employs to preserve the text.

“And We sent to you (O Prophet) the Book in truth, confirming the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations and with final authority over them"(al-Ma'idah, 5:48). It is confirmed that, “The Truth is from your Lord; so do not be of those who doubt” (al-Baqarah, 2:147). Not only is the Qur'an authentic, it is the last and final living miracle of Allah (SWT).

Therefore, understanding the Islamic worldview and thought can only help us enhance our relationship with our
Concerning the first creation, thus far, we learned that the spirits were created by the command of Allah (SWT) “Kun, Be” in the unseen world, the world of command. We also learned about the great heavenly covenant Allah (SWT) took from all the spirits. Those conscious beings possessing their own free will chose to accept Allah (SWT) as their Lord and Master.

**The Soul’s Journey from its Inception to Eternity**

In this journey the spirit goes through four distinct cycles before it returns back to its Creator. The first cycle is the experience of the first death. All spirits are put to sleep awaiting their first encounter with the human body on earth. The second cycle is the earthly life. The third cycle is the second death or the world of the grave; the Qur’an calls it the *barzakh*. And finally, the fourth cycle is resurrection and eternal life.

These cycles are clearly mentioned in the Qur’an. “How could you refuse (to acknowledge) God, when you were dead and He gave you life? Then He will cause you to die and then will bring you again to life, and then you will return to Him” (al-Baqarah, 2:28). All souls will eventually return to where they came from. Ironically, when Muslims experience a tragedy in life, especially upon hearing news that someone has died they recite the ayah, “We belong to God and to Him we shall return” (al-Baqarah, 2:156). Our journey ends with Him.

The last three cycles, life on earth, death and resurrection are beautifully mentioned in the Qur’an, with emphasis on the creation of the human embryo. “And indeed, We created man from an extract of clay. Then We placed him as a Nutfah (sperm) in a firm resting place. We then made the Nutfah into an Alaqah, (a leech-like structure). Then of that Alaqah, We made a Mudghah (a chewed-like lump). Then We made out of the Mudghah bones and clothed the bones with flesh. Then We developed him into another creation. So blessed be Allah, the best of creators. Then after that you will die. And then, on the Day of Resurrection, you will be raised up again (al-Mu’minoon, 23:12-16).

It must be noted that prior to creating Adam and the human species, Allah (SWT) created the universe with planet earth being the most perfect and suitable place for Adam and his progeny to inhabit. It is from the compounds and elements of the earth that the human body is created. When the animal being of man unites with the spirit it becomes a human soul or *nafs*.

We tend to use the word *ruh*, (spirit) and *nafs*, (soul), as interchangeable. However, there is a fundamental difference between the two. *Ruh* is a subtle spirit which resides in the heavens having no body form or human shape. It is unknown to us. We have very little knowledge concerning the nature of the *ruh* or spirit. When the human body, the *jism* or *jasad* (as it is sometimes called) has the spirit blown into it, it then becomes *nafs* or soul.

Both terms *jism* and *jasad* are mentioned in the Qur’an. Regarding the biblical figure Saul or Talut Allah (SWT) said, “God has chosen him over you, and has given him great powers in knowledge (mind) and body (jism)” (al-Baqarah, 2:247). In another place, “And when you see them (the hypocrites) (O Prophet), you are impressed by their physical stature (ajsamuhum)” (al-Munafiqun, 63:4).

Similarly, the word *jasad*, or body is used in the Qur’an. However, the term is used to describe a lifeless body. “And certainly We tried Sulaiman (Solomon), and We placed on his throne a body” (Sod, 38:34).

When a spirit is given a form it becomes a soul (human soul) or ‘*Nafs*.’ The Qur’an uses the word ‘*Nafs*’ in a number of ways, which confirm the meaning of a spirit with a body. “And (do) not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden” (al-An’am, 6:151). Also, “Every soul (human being) shall taste death” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:185). The soul refers to the spirit with a body.

In order for the progeny of Adam to exist, Adam needs a mate. Although not much detail is given in the Qur’an
regarding his wife, the Qur’an does mention that a ‘mate’ was created with Adam, from the same nature and soul. “It is He Who created you from a single soul (Adam), and made his mate of like nature, in order that he might dwell with her in tranquility” (al-“Araf, 7:189). Although her name is not mentioned in the Qur’an, according to the Islamic tradition she is known as Hawwa’ or Eve. Adam is the male partner and Eve is the female partner, indicative of the way Allah (SWT) creates; everything is created in pairs. “And of everything We have created pairs; perhaps you will take heed” (al-Zariyat, 51:49).

Out of the first human pair comes their offspring. “O People! Be mindful of (your duty to) your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and spread from both of them countless men and women” (al-Nisa’, 4:1). Both Adam, the father of all human beings, and Eve, the mother of all human beings, are responsible for the spread of countless men and women in the world. Of course, the offspring of Adam comes into being through the process of reproduction; the sexual activity of conceiving and bearing biological offspring. The soul begins its journey in the womb of the mother after conception.

The development and stages of the human embryo is quite spectacular. People were always intrigued by how we were developed in the womb of our mothers. For centuries, people’s understanding of the prenatal human was based on speculations and superstition.

The earliest work on embryology may be attributed to Aristotle in the 4th century BC. He incorrectly posited that the human embryo developed from a formless mass that resulted from the union of semen with menstrual blood. Aristotle was proved wrong when the early stages of human development were examined after the discovery of the microscope near the end of the 17th century.

There are numerous accurate accounts regarding the biological creation of the human being relayed in the Qur’an. Dr. Keith L. Moore, a Professor of Anatomy and Cell Biology at the University of Toronto in Canada is a world renowned scientist and a distinguished researcher in the fields of anatomy and embryology. His opinion on the scientific statements in the Qur’an regarding embryology: “At first I was astonished by the accuracy of the statements that were recorded in the seventh century AD, before the science of embryology was established. Although I was aware of the glorious history of Muslim scientists in the 10th century AD, and of some of their contributions to Medicine, I knew nothing about the religious facts and beliefs contained in the Qur’an and Sunnah. It is important for Islamic and other students to understand the meaning of these Qur’anic statements about human development, based on current scientific knowledge.” The Qur’an is indeed a living miracle.

Accurate details and information about the development and stages of the human embryo from a mere sperm drop to a fully formed human being were communicated to Prophet Muhammad (SAW) through revelation centuries before the discovery of the microscope or any technological tools that would reveal the amazing world inside the womb of a mother after conception. Today, amazing moments of creation can be observed through advanced tools of technology. “So let man observe from what he was created” (al-Tariq, 86:5).

Through modern scientific advances, we can now appreciate and better understand the ayat that deal with embryological development. Allah (SWT) for instance informed us, “He makes you in the wombs of your mothers in stages, one after another, in three veils of darkness” (al-Zummar, 39:6). The realization that the human embryo develops in stages was not discussed and illustrated until the 15th century. Furthermore, the staging of human embryos was not described until the 20th century. The “three veils of darkness” may refer to: (1) the anterior abdominal wall; (2) the uterine wall; and (3) the amniochorionic membrane.

Reflecting on the ayah quoted above, “And indeed We created man from an extract of clay,” indicates that our very origin is from clay, water and dirt. As mentioned elsewhere in the Qur’an, “From it (earth) we created you, into it We shall return you, and from it We shall raise you once again” (Ta Ha, 20:55).

“Then We placed him as a Nutfah in a firm resting place.” The nutfah has been interpreted as the sperm or spermatozoon, but a more meaningful interpretation would be the zygote which is implanted in the uterus or “a
place of rest.” It is both the fluid of the male and the female that commence the creation of man. The Qur’an explains, “We created man from a drop of mingled fluid (Amshaj)” (al-Insan, 76:2). Amshaj is a mixed drop or zygote. The zygote forms from the union of a mixture of the sperm and the ovum. Once fertilized the remaining stages occur.

**“Then We made the drop into an alaqah (leech-like structure).”** The word “alaqah” refers to a leech or blood-sucker. This is an accurate description of the human embryo from days 7-24 when it clings unto the uterus, in the same way that a leech clings to the skin. Just as the leech sucks blood from the host, the human embryo gets its nutrients from the uterus. It is amazing how much the embryo of 23-24 days resembles a leech when viewed under a microscope.

**“Then of that leech-like structure, We made a mudghah (chewed-like lump).”** The Arabic word “mudghah” means “chewed substance or chewed lump.” Toward the end of the fourth week, the human embryo looks somewhat like a chewed lump of flesh. The chewed appearance results from somites which resemble teeth marks. The somites represent the beginnings or primordia of the vertebral column.

In another ayah we are informed, “Then out of a piece of chewed-like flesh (mudghah), partly formed and partly unformed, in order that We may manifest (Our power) to you, and We cause whom We will to rest in the wombs for an appointed term” (al-Hajj, 22:5). The partly formed and partly unformed flesh seem to indicate that the embryo is composed of both differentiated and undifferentiated tissues. For example, when the cartilage bones are differentiated, the embryonic connective tissue around them is undifferentiated. It later differentiates into the muscles and ligaments attached to the bones.

With regards to, “We cause whom We will to rest in the wombs for an appointed term,” it implies that Allah (SWT) determines which embryos will remain in the uterus for a full term. It is well known that many embryos abort during the first month of development, and that only about 30% of zygotes that form develop into fetuses that survive until birth. It has also been interpreted to mean that Allah (SWT) determines whether the embryo will develop into a male or female.

It is common knowledge that the male is responsible for gender determination of the fetus. Remarkably, the Qur’an informed us of this fact 1,400 years ago. “Was he not a drop of ejaculated semen, and thereafter became a clinging form (alaqah), which God shaped in due proportion, Then He made from him (the sperm of the male) the pair (the two sexes), the male and the female” (al-Qiyamah, 75:37-39).

This can be scientifically understood as; the man’s sperm contain one X and one Y chromosome while the woman’s egg (ovum) contain two X chromosomes. Therefore, if any of the woman’s two X chromosomes from the egg unite with man’s X-chromosome from the sperm cell, a female gender is the result. On the other hand, if the man’s Y-chromosome from the sperm cell unite with any of woman’s two X-chromosomes (from the egg) a male gender is the outcome. This is what’s meant by “Then He made from him (the sperm of the male) the pair (the two sexes), the male and the female.”

**“Then We made out of the chewed-like lump, bones, and clothed the bones in flesh.”** Bones and muscles are formed immediately after the chewed-like lump stage. This is in accordance with the scientific embryological development. First the bones form as cartilage models and then the muscles (flesh) develop around them from the somatic mesoderm.

**“Then We developed him into another creation.”** It is believed that this may refer to the human-like embryo that forms by the end of the eighth week. At this stage it has distinctive human characteristics and possesses the primordia of all the internal and external organs and parts. After the eighth week, the human embryo is called a fetus. This is the scientific explanation.

The early interpreters of the Qur’an like Ibn Abbas (RAA) among others gave a different interpretation. The statement, “Then We developed him into another creation,” refers to the blowing of the spirit into the fetus. In an
authentic narration, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said, “Verily, the creation of each one of you is brought together in his mother’s womb for forty days in the form of a drop of fluid. Then it is a clinging object for a similar (period). Thereafter, it is a chewed-like lump for a similar (period). The angel is then sent to him and he breathes into him the spirit” [al-Bukhari and Muslim].

Humans are the only creatures that are distinctly different from any other creation of Allah (SWT). What makes them different is the divine spark, the ruh or the spirit that is infused in humans. Only revelation gives us this understanding. Scientific tools are of great help to understand the world of matter. However, it is beyond the scope of science and technology to penetrate into the spiritual realm. The ayah ends with, “So blessed be Allah, the best of creators.” Indeed, blessed be HE, the best of creators.