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

Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on November 20, 2015:

Synopsis Dawah with insight - Part 11-A

Adam in the Garden – Part1

In continuation with the “Dawah with Insight,” theme or “the Islamic Worldview” based on the ayah, ‘Say (O Prophet), ‘This is my path, I and those who follow me call unto (the path) of Allah with insight’” (Yusuf, 12:108), this part discusses “Adam in the Garden.”

The nature of man, his role on earth, and the relationship between Iblis and Adam, among other subjects were discussed under the heading, “The Souls’ Journey from Inception to Eternity.” It was the divine will for Adam to assume the role of Khilafa or vicegerency on earth. Adam, after being honored while recognizing that Iblis is his archenemy, is now ready to receive his training before he assumes the mantle and becomes the supreme leader of the world and universe.

Allah (SWT) sends Adam and his wife to a magnificent place surrounded by beautiful trees and scenery. It was the “Jannah.” Surat al-Baqarah presents a quick synopsis of the events that took place in the “Jannah.” “And We said, ‘O Adam! Dwell you and your wife in the Jannah and both of you eat from it as you wish, but do not go near this tree, lest you be among the wrong doers.’ But Satan made them slip, and removed them from the state they were in. We said, ‘Get out, (all of you) as enemies to one another. And you shall have your abode on earth and your livelihood for a while!’ Then Adam received some words from his Lord and He accepted his repentance, He is the Accepter of Repentance, the Most Merciful. And so We said, ‘Descend from it all of you, and when guidance comes to you from Me, then there shall be no fear upon those who follow My guidance nor shall they grieve’” (al-Baqarah, 2:35-38). The details of this event are mentioned in Surat al-Araf and Ta Ha.

The account begins with, “O Adam! Dwell you and your wife in the Jannah.” One may ask, what was it? Some scholars refer to the “Jannah” as the Paradise while some exegetes of the Qur’an say it was a garden located on earth. Before deciphering which of the two it was, the word “Jannah” appears in the Qur’an in numerous places and refers to both, Paradise and simply a garden on earth.

The ayat that contain the statement “Gardens (Jannat) beneath which rivers flow” describe the reward believers, who have performed righteous deeds, receive in the hereafter. It is the abode of reward (Dar Al-Jaza’) or simply Paradise. Ayah 111 of Surat al-Tawbah avows, “Verily Allah purchased from the believers their souls and possessions in exchange for Jannah.” The Jannah that is promised is the Jannah of reward or Paradise. The counterpart to that is the same word, “Jannah” that is used in the Qur’an to describe a garden on earth. For example, “Indeed! We have tried them as We tried the owners of the Jannah (garden) when they vowed that they would pluck its fruit the next morning” (al-Qalam, 68:17). One may find many ayat of such nature. Therefore, gardens full of trees bearing fruits are in paradise and also on earth.
The Jannah Adam and Eve were made to dwell in could not have been the Jannah of reward, or Paradise for the following reasons. One, Allah (SWT) informed us that Adam and Eve, in the “Jannah,” were instructed to eat from it as they wish and were warned to not approach a particular tree. In other words, they received commands (Awamir) and prohibitions (Nawahi). In this instance only one prohibition was mentioned. It is common knowledge that in the garden of reward or Paradise nothing is forbidden for a believer. Everything is permissible and believers will have whatever they may desire (41:30-31). Therefore, one may posit that the Jannah Adam and Eve resided in could not have been Paradise.

Secondly, in Paradise there is no accountability or takleef. In the story of “Adam in the Garden” we find that Adam and Eve were held accountable for their actions when they tasted from the tree as we shall soon study. Third, as we delve into the story, we learn that it was Iblis who tempted them to eat from the tree. Again, it is common knowledge that Iblis was condemned to hell and is forever deprived from smelling the scent of Paradise what to speak of residing therein.

Finally, it makes perfect sense that Adam be trained in the place where he is to assume his duty. Allah (SWT) made it very clear when He informed the angels, “I am making a vicegerent on Earth” (al-Baqarah, 2:30). Therefore, it is safe to conclude that Adam’s field of training was on earth.

The site of the garden, according to classical interpretations, was on the Mount of Arafat. Other interpretations claim that the place was on an elevated place somewhere on earth. Adam and his wife resided in a garden that was surrounded with trees, a green belt and thick foliage.

Regarding the tree, there have been attempts by people of knowledge among others, out of curiosity, to uncover the mystery of the tree. It is absolutely irrelevant to the moral of the story to identify exactly what type of tree it was. Was it a fig tree? Was it an apple tree? Was it an orange tree? Only Allah (SWT) knows. Had it been important for us to know what kind of tree it was, Allah (SWT) in His infinite Wisdom would have informed us. What is important is that Adam and Eve were given a choice. The training was purely on resisting the choices that contravene divine laws. But the choice is ours. There is no compulsion in making choices.

It was obvious that Adam and Eve were both aware of the kind of tree they were prohibited to approach. When Allah (SWT) addressed both of them, He said, “Don’t come near this tree” as if Allah (SWT) was pointing at the forbidden tree. Had the command been, “Don’t come near that tree,” such ambiguity may have misled Adam and Eve. They however knew precisely which tree they were prohibited from approaching, thus both were given a choice. And both chose to violate Allah’s command.

Another point worth considering is, Allah (SWT) did not say, “Do not eat from this tree,” rather the command is quite clear, “Do not come near this tree.” There is a world of difference between the two. The directive, “Do not come near this tree” is at a higher level of prohibition, than just simply commanding, “Do not eat from this tree.” The following two examples illustrate this point.

The first example is the prohibition of intoxicants and gambling. Allah (SWT), in His infinite Wisdom, informed us that their harm is greater than their benefit (2:219). In His final judgment, He (SWT) commanded, “O you who believe, intoxicants and gambling, idolatrous practices, and [divining with] arrows are abominable acts of Satan’s handiwork. Avoid them so that you may prosper” (al-Ma’idah, 5:90).

The command “avoid” which linguistically means to keep away from, declares that not only is it forbidden to drink or gamble but one must also stay away from the places where such practices are observed. Had Allah (SWT) declared such practices to be plain forbidden (haram), then one may argue that they can work in a bar serving alcohol, or in a casino. As long as they are not drinking or gambling one may justify such actions.

It’s no secret that in 1920 there was a nationwide constitutional ban on the sale, production, importation and
transportation of alcoholic beverages in the United States. Sadly, thirteen years later in 1933, the 21st Amendment repealed the prohibition that was ratified by the 18th Amendment.

It is common knowledge that excessive and habitual use of intoxicants can lead to violence, aggression, overt sexuality, and the loss of the cognitive ability to judge, among other things. Many souls have been lost due to driving under the influence of drugs and intoxicants. Human life is sacred and too precious to waste. Saving one soul is like saving the entire human kind. It is for this reason, Allah (SWT) instructed us to avoid them and to keep away from such acts.

The same goes for fornication and adultery, Allah (SWT) in His command, “Do not come near zina (fornication/adultery)” (al-Isra’, 17:32), clearly means that one should stay away from lustful attractions to the opposite gender. The Prophet (SAW) considers gazing at the opposite sex with lustful eyes as zina, what to speak of committing the act.

President Jimmy Carter, a righteous man, confessed to this fact. He was quoted as saying, “Christ said, ‘I tell you that anyone who looks on a woman with lust has in his heart already committed adultery.’ I’ve looked on a lot of women with lust. I’ve committed adultery in my heart many times.” This is very candid statement that many men can identify with. It is for this reason the Islamic dress code for both men and women and injunctions relating to the mixing of the sexes were initiated in the Qur’an and Sunnah – to reduce the possibility of one committing such immoral acts.

It was not long ago when the Sexual Revolution of the 1970’s ripped into the sanctity of human decency, modesty and morality. The sexual perversion is in fact an attempt to send us back to the stone age. One may then appreciate the command, “Do not come near zina.”

Allah (SWT), our Maker, who created us with such desires and urges knows what is best for us and so He (SWT) commands us to avoid intoxicants and gambling and to not come near indecent and immoral acts such as zina. All humans including the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, feel the irresistible temptation toward committing prohibited acts in order to satisfy the overpowering urges and desires. Simply put, human beings cannot control their baser urges in spite of climbing the ladder of civilization and evolution. Because of our so-called “freedoms” in the modern Western society, we are not taught how to control our baser urges (mostly in relation to sexual acts), which can be extremely harmful if not controlled.

Allah (SWT) the All-Wise tells us how to control such potent urges. He says, “avoid them,” “don’t come near them.” The idiom, “out of sight, out of mind” holds true. Allah (SWT) instructed Adam and Eve, “Do not come near this tree.” in other words, stay as far away from it as you can because if you come near it you will be tempted to taste it and if you two do, which they did, you are then sinners – you have crossed the limits and boundaries of Allah (SWT) and will have to face the consequences for breaking a divine law. Allah (SWT) in a couple of places instructs, “These are the limits set by God, so do not go near them,” and, “These are the limits set by God, so do not overstep them” (al-Baqarah, 2:187, 229).

Sad al-Zarai’ (سد الذرائع) Blocking the means or prevention of evil before it materializes, is a jurisprudent axiom in Islamic law that implies, “All means that lead to haram is haram.” Thus the wise prohibition, “avoid” or “do not come near,” which is at a much higher level of prohibition.

The divine guidance that started with one prohibition continued to expand. The restrictions increased proportionally over time to meet the people’s intellect as we experienced the intellectual and social evolutions. The divine guidance reached its apex in the final book, the Qur’an – meant to guide humanity for all time to come. “This day I have perfected your religion, completed my favor upon you and am pleased with Islam as your way of life” (al-Ma’idah, 5:3).

One lesson we learn from the story of “Adam in the Garden” is, whenever Allah (SWT) orders His servants,
“Do not come near” (whatever the command may be), we must understand that it is not sufficient that we do not commit the act but rather to avoid and stay as far away from it as possible. The aim is to be protected from evil actions and their consequences. As a vicegerent of God I must not go against Allah’s wishes and commands. If I fail, then I am among the wrongdoers.

As the story goes, Adam and Eve were tempted by satan and did taste from the tree and were among the wrongdoers. They recognized their mistake and were in search for words to say to show their remorse. Allah (SWT), out of His mercy, taught them what to say. In repentance they together in unison repeated what they were taught to say, “Our Lord we wronged ourselves. If you don’t forgive us and be merciful to us we will be among the losers.” And so Their Lord accepted their repentance.

May Allah (SWT) protect us from the temptations of satan and help us to be among the righteous and obedient servants of His.