Synopsis of Friday Sermon
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In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on February 05, 2016:

Dawah with Insight, Part 14
Death the Inescapable Reality

This synopsis will briefly cover the last two stages of “The Soul’s Journey from Inception to Eternity” with emphasis on the fourth stage, “Death, the Inescapable Reality.”

The five periods of our existence start with the spirits that were originated by the command of Allah (SWT) and the heavenly covenant of “Alast” He took from them. The second period is the spirits’ first experience with death. Thereafter, Allah (SWT) creates the universe and all living things including humans whose bodies are joined with their assigned spirits that are dormant.

The third period is the first life on earth. A lengthy discourse was presented on Adam, his creation, role and mission as well as his descendants and the struggle between good and evil. We also learned about the three types of souls, the inciting soul (al-nafs al-ammarah), the self-accusing soul (al-Nafs al-lawwamah) and finally the contented soul (al-nafs al-mutma’innah).

The fourth period is the second death or the earthly death, the undeniable reality. And finally, the last period is the second experience of life that is yet to come, the life of the hereafter. Allah (SWT) informs, ‘Every soul shall taste death, then to Us you will be returned.’ (al-‘Ankaboot, 29:57) If anything is certain in this life, it is death. It is inevitable and unavoidable. Every second of every day a person dies somewhere in the world. No soul can deny Death, the inescapable reality.

Death is a subject people often avoid, much less remember. The Qur’an confirms in many places, “Each soul shall taste death.” This repetition is used to remind the believers of this reality allowing them to reflect on their present lives and the life to come. Conscious believers who are firm on their belief in the hereafter will take heed of these reminders and prepare themselves for that moment of truth.

Every living soul shall go through this phase and there is no way out, ‘Say (O Prophet), ‘the death you are running away from will come to meet you and you will be returned to the One who knows the unseen as well as the seen and He will then inform you of what you used to do.’” (al-Jumu’ah, 62:8) More emphasis is made in the following ayah, “Wherever you may be, death will overtake you, even if you are inside lofty towers.” (al-Nisa’, 4:78)

The Messenger of Allah (SAW) in his first public speech reminded his people of this fact. He (SAW) stressed, “By Allah! You will die just as you sleep, and you will be resurrected just as you wake up from sleep. You will be recompensed on account of what you do, earning good for good and evil for evil. Verily, it is either Paradise for eternity or the Fire for eternity.”
The process of death begins with the angel who is assigned this duty. Along with archangels Jibril, Mika’il and Israfil, the archangel of death is ‘Izra’il according to Islamic traditions. The Qur’an refers to him as “The Angel of Death” or “Malak al-Mawt.” “Say (O Prophet), ‘The Angel of Death put in charge of you will reclaim you, and then you will be brought back to your Lord.’” (al-Sajdah, 32:11)

Some die suddenly while others undergo pain and suffering. According to prophetic traditions, sickness is a source of mercy and a chance for forgiveness. In one saying Prophet Muhammad (SAW) says, “For every misfortune, illness, anxiety, grief or hurt that afflicts a believer – even the hurt caused by the pricking of a thorn – God wipes off his sins and his sins fall away from him as leaves fall from a tree.” This is God’s gift to the believer.

Unfortunately, many people are heedless of death. The attraction of this world keeps them busy making money, competing for fame and seeking earthly pleasures. This tragedy leaves the soul hopeless and helpless. This weakness was profoundly expressed by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in a hadith when he warned the Muslims of a time when Allah (SWT) would cast “wahn” in their hearts. When he was asked about the “wahn,” the Prophet replied, “Love of the present world (dunya) and hatred of death.” Unfortunately, most people are deceived by the present life as Allah (SWT) recounts, “But you prefer the life of this world. While the hereafter is better and everlasting.” (al-‘Ala, 87:16,17)

But what is life? Philosophers and thinkers have grappled this question since the beginning of time. Rather than discussing their speculative thoughts, it is best to know what God Himself says about life. “Know (O people) that the life of this world is (nothing but) play and amusement, an adornment and boasting among you, and an increase in wealth and children...” This is generally, the reality of man’s perception about this worldly life, whether that person is a Muslim, a follower of another faith tradition, an agnostic, or even an atheist. This life, Allah (SWT) describes, “Is like plants that grow after rain; (their growth) delights the tillers, but then you see them wither away, turn yellow and become stubble...”

Indeed, Allah (SWT) spoke the truth. We are born into this world as babies wanting only to play and have fun, compete with our peers in our teenage years, reach the prime of our youth, obtain a career or establish a business and spend the rest of our lives making money and children until we become old, frail, sick and eventually die. What has one done for the next life, the real eternal abode? In continuation of the ayah above, Allah (SWT) then stresses, ‘There is terrible punishment in the next life as well as forgiveness and pleasure from God...’ And finally, He (SWT) declares, ‘The life of this world is only an illusory pleasure.’ (al-Hadid, 57:20) If only people understand.

Allah (SWT) gives people chance after chance. ‘If God were to take people to task for the evil they do, He would not leave one living creature on earth, but He defers them to an appointed time: when their time comes they cannot delay it for a moment nor can they advance it.’ (al-Nahl, 16:61).

Although death is certain and inevitable, people tend to live as if they will exist forever. Death knows no age. Often times it comes suddenly. Scores die in the prime of their youth. The term of one’s life is predetermined before birth and is known solely by Allah (SWT). Only He (SWT) knows when and where each person will expire.

The mystery of life and death is not without purpose. The life of this world is a test from God. Humans are tested on the basis of the heavenly covenant Allah (SWT) took from them in the world of spirits. ‘Blessed is He in Whose hand is the dominion (of the universe), and He has power over all things. The One who created Death and Life that He may test you (to see) which of you is best in deed: and He is the Almighty, the Forgiving.’ (al-Mulk, 87:1,2) People are constantly put to all types of tests. “Every soul is certain to taste death. We test you all through the bad and the good, and to Us you will all return.” (al-Anbiya’, 21:35)

Believers are urged to be patient while facing trials and tribulations. ‘O you who believe! Seek help through
patience and prayer, for God is with the patient.” (al-Baqarah, 2:153) Believers throughout their entire lives anticipate hardships and difficulties. They are aware of Allah’s promise, “We shall certainly test you with fear, hunger, loss of property, lives, and crops. But, give good news to those who are patient.” (al-Baqarah, 2:155)

Believers do not complain but resign themselves to God’s will. They remain patient in the face of adversity knowing that they belong to God and to Him they will return. ‘Those who, when inflicted with a calamity say, ‘We belong to God and to Him we will return.’ Those are the people who will have blessings and mercy from their Lord; they are the ones who are guided.’” (al-Baqarah, 2:156,157) Believers are not afraid of death.

What is the reality of death? When it occurs, the spirit (ruh) leaves the body. We learn through prophetic traditions that a good soul comes out of the body with ease, while an evil soul, which resists leaving the body is taken out harshly by the angel of death. The two types of souls are accordingly honored and dishonored in their respective journeys to the heavenly dimensions and back to the grave when they are questioned.

Good souls will make their journey to their Lord receiving the good news of Paradise. While the wicked souls, “To those who reject Our signs and treat them with arrogance, the gates of Heaven will not open for them, nor will they enter Paradise until the camel passes through the eye of a needle. Such is Our reward for the criminals.” (al-Araf, 7:40)

The souls will return to the grave for the final exam. A good soul will have no problem answering simple questions such as who is your Lord? Who is your Prophet? What is your Book? As simple as they may sound, a wicked soul that lived in rebellion against Allah (SWT) will have a terrible time in the grave and will not be able to answer the posed questions. May Allah (SWT) bestow His Mercy upon all of us, ameen.

We must recognize that people take nothing with them to their graves. We learn through a prophetic saying, “When a man dies, his deeds come to an end except for three things, perpetual charity (Sadaqah Jariyah); knowledge which is beneficial; or a righteous descendant who prays for him (the deceased).”

Such admonitions remind us that we should hasten in performing good deeds lest our time expire and our book of deeds be closed forever. The Prophet (SAW) in a hadith said, “An intelligent wise person is one who controls his desires (nafs) and works for that which come after death.” The following admonition speaks volumes, “O you who believe! Be mindful of God, and let every soul look to what it sends for tomorrow (Day of Judgment) and fear God, for God is well aware of everything you do.” (al-Hasr, 59:18)

Indeed, “Every soul shall taste death and you will be paid in full (but) only on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever is kept away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise will have triumphed. The present world is only an illusory pleasure.” (Aal Imran, 3:185)

Death is an inescapable reality that everyone must acknowledge. What are we to do about it? How are we going to prepare for it? We should be ready for what is to come after death i.e. the akhirah, resurrection, and Judgment Day. May Allah (SWT) make our good deeds heavy on the Day of Judgment and bestow His Grace and Mercy on us all, ameen.