

## 4 Lessons from the Qur'anic Reference to the Jumu'ah Prayer

Spahic Omer

In the last three verses (9-11) of the Qur'anic *surah*, or chapter, *al-Jumu'ah* (Friday), the Qur'an mentions the obligation of the Jumu'ah Prayer (Friday Prayer). It presents several educational and ethical considerations on the subject. Obviously, the *surah* is called thus because of those three verses and their content.

The following are four lessons extracted therefrom.

### **The Prophet's Sunnah as a source of legislation**

There are people who believe that the Qur'an is the only source of legislation. The Sunnah of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) does not enjoy that prerogative. Those who subscribe to this view are sometimes called Qur'aniyyun (those who rely only on the Qur'an).

However, this belief is utterly un-Islamic. It may yet take a person out of the fold of Islam. So categorical is the Qur'an about the role of the Sunnah as its interpreter and explainer, and as an independent source of legislation, that negating it as such means negating and rejecting the Qur'an itself.

The last three verses of *al-Jumu'ah* chapter represent perhaps the strongest evidence on the position and role of the Sunnah.

In verse 9, Allah says: "O you who have believed, when (the *adhan*) is called for the prayer on the day of Jumu'ah (Friday), then proceed to

the remembrance of Allah and leave trade. That is better for you, if you only knew" (al-Jumu'ah, 9).

When those verses were revealed, both the Jumu'ah Prayer and the *adhan* (call to prayer) were for quite some time established as religious observances. Here the Qur'an legislates neither of them. It only confirms what was already there, providing a further educational and ethical guidance about them.

Both the Jumu'ah Prayer and the *adhan* were legislated by the Prophet soon after his migration to Madinah. He did so independently from the Qur'an, albeit in full conformity with it and with the heavenly will and support.

The Qur'an says about this norm: "Take only what the Messenger gives to you and desist from what he forbids you" (al-Hashr, 7).

"And We revealed to you the message that you may make clear to the people what was sent down to them and that they might give thought" (al-Nahl, 44).

All that was possible because the Prophet did not speak from his own inclination; it was but revelation sent down to him (al-Najm, 3-4).

### **"Hasten to the remembrance of Allah and leave trade"**

Islam as a way of life strikes a balance between the needs of the body and soul, matter and spirit, and between this world and the Hereafter. Everything is to be given its due, but spirituality takes precedence over everything else.

Moreover, matter is no more than a means for attaining a spiritual wellbeing. Almighty Allah's pleasure and His Jannah (Paradise) are the goals of a believer's struggle. They are the end of all other ends.

This philosophy is summed up in those three verses of *al-Jumu'ah* chapter. Allah says that when the *adhan* is given for the Jumu'ah Prayer - as one of the most fundamental obligations in Islam - people should not just react. Rather, they should hasten to the prayer and leave trade.

However, this should not be understood literally, for approaching prayer in a state of running is not recommended. One should approach it walking and with calmness - as advised by the Prophet.

That means that when the *adhan* is given, one should be quick in ending all his engagements in worldly matters, and should proceed immediately with his preparations for and joining the congregation. Trade is mentioned as a symbol of association with this world. Leaving it is reminiscent of leaving the world and all its potential hindrances. It means emancipation from the fetters of matter and vanity.

The word "hasten" indicates the seriousness and profundity of the matter. It stands for the best ways one is to balance the extremities of life. It embodies the ways life is to be lived and the earthly vicegerency mission accomplished.

One therefore should come to the congregation to perform the prayer emptied as much as possible of worldly concerns and obsessions, and focused solely on spiritual interests. That one should hasten to "the remembrance of Allah" suggests the inclusivity of the instruction, even though the notion of prayer is thereby meant first and foremost.

One must not try to join the spiritual realm while still trapped in matter. His performances will not be adequate. Hearing the *adhan* and leaving trade imply one's gradual abandonment of worldly preoccupations in favour of the call of the spiritual realm.

That furthermore denotes one's gradual entering into the state of prayer, which is corresponding to remembering and worshipping Allah alone to the detriment of all other prospective alternatives. Finally,

it means that one is in control of the world, and is not controlled by it. In downright devout milieus, people are expected to hone their skills and capacities so as to take on the temptations of the world. This world is to be used for the benefits of a higher metaphysical order.

If a person comes to the congregation unprepared, not only that his acts will not be up to the mark, but also will he be vulnerable throughout to the persistent impulses of his materialistic fascinations. If he is not safe from them in the pure spiritual domains, outside them, it will be much worse. He will be completely left to their mercy. He will be a plaything of matter's lures.

This is exactly what happened to some individuals during the Prophet's time, when the people were still receiving spiritual and education training. The Qur'an alludes to it by saying: "But when they saw a transaction or a diversion, (O Muhammad), they rushed to it and left you standing (on the *minbar*, or pulpit, in the mosque delivering the sermon of the Jumu'ah Prayer). Say: 'What is with Allah is better than diversion and transaction, and Allah is the best of providers'" (al-Jumu'ah, 11).

Though they were in the mosque performing the Jumu'ah Prayer, those individuals permitted certain undesirable external influences to infiltrate their spiritual condition and to overwhelm them so much that they even abandoned the prayer and the Prophet. The message hereby is as much about physically non-performing and under-performing the Jumu'ah Prayer, as about doing so in spiritual and mental terms while physically being in attendance and ostensibly performing the prayer.

This principle applies to all religious procedures. The Jumu'ah Prayer accounts for their epitome. Hence, sincerity, submissiveness and God-fearing are main conditions for the acceptance of worship.

## **"Disperse in the land and seek of Allah's bounty"**

When the Jumu'ah Prayer is over, the following are the instructions of Allah: "And when the prayer is finished, then disperse in the land and seek of Allah's bounty, and remember Allah much, that you may be successful" (al-Jumu'ah, 10).

This verse continues educating about the relationship between matter and spirit, and between worldly and spiritual involvements.

It is noteworthy that while the word used for inviting people to the prayer was "hasten", the word used for the prayer's aftermath is just "disperse in the land". Which means that while one needs to ever accelerate his drawing closer to the spiritual world, one only needs to go or walk to the ephemeral advantages of this world. One furthermore needs to do so only when things get natural, reasonable and necessary for the fulfilment of other more consequential pursuits.

Even then, however, one should not cease imbuing his thought and actions with an abundance of the remembrance of Allah. Positively, Islam does not fully endorse an action which is totally devoid of spiritual monotheistic disposition, and more so if it is in opposition to it. Only such deeds as feature, one way or another, the remembrance of Allah are good deeds.

This state of mind and soul will help people realize that - as a fundamental thing in the Islamic worldview - everything belongs to Allah, the Creator and Sustainer of life. Dealing with the phenomena and resources of life means dealing with Allah's possessions and His infinite bounty. Acquiring anything thereof is nothing but a sign of Allah's favour and grace. Hence, man's possessions are Allah's possessions. For him, they are at once an existential gift and a trial, obliging man to be ever grateful and humble.

When Allah equates prayer with His remembrance, and when He asks from people to remember Him much when dispersed in land seeking of His bounty, He projects the true meaning of both Islam and life. The two are not to be separated at any level. Islam is life, and life, in turn, is Islam.

Accordingly, centres of worship are to be rendered "places of life" as well - that is, community centres - just as foci of life are to be made into places of worship. Islam draws no distinction between the spiritual and worldly realms along the ideological lines. All the private and institutional missions of man are to be both religious and worldly.

Without the world and matter, religion and the Hereafter will be unfeasible and unattainable; and without religion and the Hereafter, the world and matter will be meaningless and useless. They are active and equal parts of a whole.

Success lies only in integration. It lies in the spiritualization of life, and in the pragmatization of religion.

**"That is better for you, if you only knew"**

Allah affirms that the life paradigm entailed in the messages surrounding the Jumu'ah Prayer is the best option for people. All other alternatives pale in comparison with it. The Islamic paradigm is the only one that guarantees success in both worlds, as it has been proven time and again through history. That is so because its source is Allah with whom is the best provision and who is the best of providers (al-Jumu'ah, 11).

But the problem is that many people do not know - nor accept - that reality (al-Jumu'ah, 9) and so, live in ignorance and heedlessness. They prefer darkness over light, falsehood over truth, and uncertainty over enlightenment. For them, knowledge has lost its true meaning, standing for its direct opposites.

How is that possible? It is true that every individual intrinsically craves for and seeks knowledge, regarding it as the most valuable asset. Ignorance, on the other hand, is the most repugnant state.

However, many people fall victims to their vested interests, pretence, arrogance, greed, selfishness and blind following. If a person incapacitates his senses and mind, and if he darkens his heart and soul, his discerning powers, as a consequence, depart from him. He then becomes weak and vulnerable, and his faculties start malfunctioning. Instead of progressing he regresses, and instead of ascertaining he misperceives and muddles. And it is in this spiritual and mental turmoil that knowledge is easily bartered for ignorance, and genuine education and guidance for illiteracy and deceit.

The Qur'an reiterates the unfortunate scenario according to which many people do not know and do not understand the obvious things in life as regards the truth and the meaning and purpose of existence. This then begs the question of what people actually learn in educational institutions, and what exactly is preached in the name of knowledge, education and science.

It can also be asked why and how people live their lives as their only opportunity. It goes without saying, therefore, that combining the conventional knowledge with the revealed knowledge - and validating thereby the integrative nature of life - is the only way forward.

Indeed, the most unprofitable thing is when a person marches headlong towards the wrath of God and His Hell, yet he is not aware of the predicament. What is even more agonizing is the situation when everything a person is up to contributes to his ultimate downfall.

Allah warns: "And We have certainly created for Hell many of the jinn and mankind. They have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear. Those are like livestock; rather, they are more astray. It is they who are the heedless" (al-A'raf, 179).

"So have they not travelled through the earth and have hearts by which to reason and ears by which to hear? For indeed, it is not eyes that are blinded, but blinded are the hearts which are within the breasts" (al-Hajj, 46).