Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on June 30, 2017:

Synopsis - Taqwa Beyond Ramadan

Ramadan has concluded with a well-deserved celebration. After a month long of abstention from food and drink, enduring long hours of fasting and staying up in prayers past midnight, we pray that Allah (SWT) accepts our fasts, prayers, righteous deeds and answers our supplications. O Allah! You are the Pardoner, You love to pardon, so, pardon us.

It is from Allah’s mercy that He enjoined upon the believers various types of worship in Ramadan, from fasting to prayers, charity, joining ties of kinship, etc. for an entire month. The essence of Ramadan is taqwa. “O you who believe! Fasting is ordained for you as it was ordained for those who came before you, so you may attain taqwa.” (al-Baqarah, 2:183) The objective behind Ramadan is to become closer and closer to Allah (SWT) and to be conscious of Him.

What happens to our taqwa after Ramadan? Why does the masjid suddenly become desolate? Why do we stop paying zakat? Why do we hastily return to worldly activities that prevent us from remembering Allah like we did during Ramadan? What happened to our taqwa? Why has it suddenly weakened and in some cases entirely diminished? Let us not be Ramadaniyyun (those who worship Ramadan), and let us be Rabaniyyun (those who worship the Lord, God almighty.) For this, we need to understand the very essence of Ramadan and that is taqwa.

We typically understand taqwa to mean Godliness, piety, righteousness, God consciousness, and fear of God among other meanings. It is important, however, to understand the meaning of the root of taqwa to fully understand the concept of taqwa and thus appreciate Ramadan as the month of taqwa.

The root of taqwa is, Waw-Qaf-Ya, ‘waqaa‘ from which the word wiqayat is derived. Linguistically, according to Imam al-Raghib al-Asfahani’s ‘Mu’jam Mufradat Al-Faz al-Quran, the Lexicon, words and phrases, of the Qur’an,’ it means, ‘to preserve something from that which would injure and harm it.’ According to Meriam-Webster dictionary the word ‘preserve’ means, ‘to keep safe from injury, harm, or destruction, to keep alive, intact, or free from decay.’ As a term used in jurisprudence, wiqayat means, ‘to protect oneself from sinful acts by leaving the forbidden.’ The old adage, ‘prevention is better than cure’ holds true.

Therefore, if one desires to become a muttaqi (one who has taqwa), he or she must first, preserve his/her body from any unlawful food or substances that may cause harm and injury to the body. Smoking, drugs and intoxicants among other substances are scientifically proven to harm and injure the body. The physical taqwa is to protect and preserve one’s body from all injurious and harmful consumptions.

Additionally, to preserve the soul is to abstain from all unlawful and sinful acts, such as lying, cheating, slandering, backbiting, riba (interest and usury), disobedience to parents, and the list continues. This is the spiritual taqwa. It is to become aware of all God’s do’s and don’ts (awamir and nawahi), and doing our utmost to honor God’s injunctions thus saving ourselves from the wrath of Allah and doom on the Day of Judgment. For this reason, in a plea to humanity, Allah (SWT) reminds us of our purpose, “O mankind! Worship (and obey) your Lord, who created you and those before you, so that you may be saved (tattaqun).” (al-Baqarah, 2:21)

Omar (RAA) once asked a very prominent companion and one of the scribes of the Prophet, Ubai Ibn Ka’b (RAA), whom he (SAW) acknowledged to be among those who had a deep understanding of the Qur’an, about taqwa. In response to Omar’s
The following three benefits are sufficient to motivate us into becoming more conscious of Allah (SWT).

To have taqwa is to struggle and protect oneself from the thorny paths of life – the temptations and attractions that lure man toward satisfying his base desires through forbidden means. It is a constant struggle against one’s own soul, satan and the wrong trends of society. Ali bin Abi Talib (RAA), defines taqwa as, “Fear of Allah, to adhere to His commandments, be content with what Allah provides one with and to get ready for the Day of Judgment.” Taqwa is to have a healthy balance between fear of Allah and hope for His mercy. Allah (SWT) prepared Paradise for the God-conscious people (al-Muttaqun). “And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a garden as vast as the heavens and the earth prepared for the God-conscious.” (Aal Imran, 3:133)

Although at times taqwa and iman are considered synonymous, they are not. Taqwa in essence is the driving force that moves one’s faith from one level to another. This phenomenon is explained in surat al-Ma’idah. While addressing the concern of the companions of the Prophet (SAW) regarding the consumption of wine during the period between the final decree of its prohibition and the time the news reached the companions, Allah (SWT) reveals, “Those who believe and do good deeds will not be blamed for what they have consumed (in the past), so long as they have taqwa (are mindful of God), believe and do good deeds (state of Islam), then they have (more) taqwa (awareness of God) and believe (state of Iman), then they have (even more) taqwa and devoted themselves to excellence (in worship-Ihsan). And God loves al-Muhsineen (those who reach the state of spiritual excellence-Ihsan).” (al-Ma’idah, 5:93)

Thus, God-consciousness (taqwa) is the only driving force that can help us endure the struggles in this world and draw us close to Allah (SWT). The last and highest level of faith after Islam and Iman that one may attain is Ihsan. It is, according to the Prophet (SAW), “To worship God as though you see Him, and while you don’t see Him, then indeed He sees you.”

While Islam denotes one’s outward manifestation of faith, iman has to do with one’s inward state of faith. The Prophet (SAW) once said, “Islam is publicized and Iman, faith, is in the heart.” He would then point toward his heart and say, “Taqwa is here, taqwa is here.” Only Allah knows what is in the heart of a person. “Surely, He is All Aware of what lies in the hearts” (Hud, 11:5)

In other words, if one’s motive and intention is to remain conscious of Allah, both the inner drive and outer action are required. The inner desire to revere, worship and obey Allah is the taqwa the prophet mentioned while pointing to his heart. This innate desire to love and adore God (fitra) must be nurtured and raised to the level of the most beautiful worship of Allah, i.e. Ihsan.

At this level of Ihsan, Allah is constantly on the mind of the believers. They are mindful of Him at every place and at all times, not only in the masjid or during Ramadan. We are commanded by the Prophet (SAW) to be cognizant of Allah wherever we may be. He instructed, “Have taqwa (be conscious) of Allah wherever you may be; follow a bad deed with a good deed, it will wipe it out and behave well toward the people.”

One must always be conscious of Allah and do what pleases Him, whether one is alone or in public, dealing with one’s spouse or children, a ruler or ruled, an employer or employee, etc. It is obvious that we, as humans, are bound to commit sins or mistakes. A conscious believer who inadvertently sins is quick to atone his sin by seeking forgiveness from Allah and following it up with a good deed. Similarly, having good manners and behaving well toward people regardless of who they may be is a sign of God-consciousness or taqwa.

Keep in mind that a son is not equal or above his father, an employee is not above or equal to his/her employer, a student is not equal or above his/her teacher, and a servant is not equal or above his/her master. Each have certain rights and responsibilities, yet all deserve the best behavior and treatment, ‘and behave well toward the people.’

Lack of taqwa weakens one’s faith, reduces one’s self esteem, hardens one’s heart, makes one suspicious, divides people and destroys communities. Indeed, lack of taqwa is detrimental to the spiritual and moral aspects of our lives. Is it any wonder Allah (SWT) commanded that we remain conscious of Him? “O you who believe, have taqwa of Allah as is His due and die not except as (true) Muslims.” (Aal Imran, 3:103)

As mentioned earlier, Allah (SWT) has prepared Paradise only for those who are conscious of Him, i.e. those who
have taqwa.

To have taqwa is to have Allah (SWT) on your side at all times, day and night, alone and in public, at work and at home, wherever you may be. “Indeed, Allah is with those who are conscious of Him and do good.” (al-Nahl, 16:128) Who would not want the most powerful, the most kind, the most generous, the most forgiving, the most compassionate be on his or her side? We must first make an effort to get close to Him and He will run toward us, for “Verily, those who are on God’s side there is no fear, nor shall they grieve. (They are) those who believe and are (always) conscious of Him (yattaqun).” (Yunus, 10:62,63)

Conscious believers know that Allah fulfills His promises. They know that when they are distressed it is He who will relieve them from their distress, it is He who will make their difficult matters easy and when they are in a financial bind, it is He who will provide for them. “Allah will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him, and will provide for him from where he could not imagine (and expect); for God is sufficient for those who put their trust in Him...And whoever is mindful of Allah (has taqwa), He will make his matters easy. That is the Decree Allah has sent down to you. Allah will (certainly) expiate the sinful deeds of anyone who is mindful of Him and reward him greatly.” (al-Talaq, 65:2-5)

As humans, full of sins, we have only one way out, and that is to increase our awareness of our Creator and Master, Allah (SWT). The prophet (SAW), in the beginning of his sermons, would often say, “I enjoin upon myself and you the taqwa of Allah.”

Al-'Ibad Bin Sariyah in a hadith says, “The Messenger of Allah delivered a very eloquent sermon, it made our hearts tremble and brought tears to our eyes. We said, ‘as though it was a farewell sermon, so advise us.’ He (SAW) said, ‘I enjoin upon you the taqwa of Allah...’”

Allah (SWT) created us to serve and be mindful of Him at all times. He, however, does not expect us to go beyond our means. He made it clear, considering our limitations, “Have taqwa (be mindful of Allah) as much as you can.” (al-Taghabun, 64:16) Allah alone knows our capabilities. He knows what is in ourselves. He knows what we are capable of accomplishing. Let us push ourselves to the maximum, let us leverage on the energy we stored up during Ramadan and keep the battery of taqwa charged up. Always remember that taqwa is the driving force to reaching the highest level of faith, i.e. Ihsan and that Allah loves al-Muhsinun, those who reach the state of spiritual excellence.

May Allah (SWT) help us attain taqwa proportionate to our capabilities in a manner pleasing to Him, ameen.

End.