Al-Siratul Mustaqeem (The Straight Path)

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Sunday, October 30, 2011

Excerpt:
In his talk, the Maulana explains that the straight path is one which leads to God. He further elaborates that there are two ways of leading life – Satanic and Divine. Any action which is based on negation is an example of following the Satanic pattern and that which stands on acceptance demonstrates the Divine pattern.

The present-day Muslims unfortunately have only complaints to cite. They do not realise that while Prophet Moses’ staff overcame every magic; the present-day Muslims, on the other hand, are being overshadowed by negative emotions!

Concluding the talk, he says that the present-day Muslims must re-read the Quran and re-discover the Divine plan and realise that only by doing dawah work will they be able to salvage their lives – both in this world and in the life hereafter!
Introduction

The term *Al Siratul Mustaqeem* is used in the very first chapter of the Quran and otherwise, it has been used more than 20 times. Through this prayer, a believer invokes God to guide him to the straight path. This prayer is read in every prayer and according to a Hadith

**Surah Fateha ko padhe baghair namaz, namaaz nahin (Al Bukhari)**

*Without reading the Surah Fateha, namaz is incomplete*

While Ulema engaged themselves in umpteen debates pertaining to the “form” of reciting the *Surah Fateha*, none focussed on the meaning of *Sirat-e-mustaqeem* (or the straight path). A believer while praying must bear in mind the meaning of *Sirat-e-mustaqeem*. The Hadith does not refer to a namaaz with *alfaz –e fateha* (mere recital) but a *namaaz* with *shaoor-e-fateha* (conscious understanding).

The irony is that the number of those who pray (*namaaz*) today is greater than any other time in history. There are more than one billion Muslims throughout the world today but according to a Hadith

**Baad ke zamane mein, unki masjid abaad hongi par hidayat se khali hongi (Al Baihaqi)**

*In later times, mosques will flourish but they will be devoid of guidance*

In every unit of prayer, a believer prays for guidance or *hidayat*. Now the question arises why will the namaz be devoid of guidance? It means that people will give more importance to the words and will not pay heed to the meaning of those words. Principally, one verse of the Quran clarifies the meaning of another verse. This principle led me to a better understanding of the above. A verse in the Quran reads,

**Whoever refuses to be led by Satan and believes in God has grasped the strong handhold that will never break. (2:256)**

The above verse clarifies a very important aspect of man’s existence; it conveys what is sought of him by God. Further, it made me understand that in actual fact, there are two kinds of life patterns in this world: *Taghooti* (Satanic) life pattern and *Divine* life pattern. He who treads the *taghooti* life pattern is devastated. An example of these life patterns was established by God in the beginning of this world.
Life patterns

Taghooti life pattern is the way of Satan and Divine life pattern is the way of angels. When God created Adam, there existed two more creations (other than material world) – Angels and Jinns. God asked the Jinns and Angels to bow before Adam; while Angels did as God willed, Satan, the head of Jinns refused to do so. It must be understood that “bowing” here does not refer to “prostration;” it refers to acknowledgment or aetaraf.

Any movement that arises on negation is following the Satanic pattern and any movement which arises on acceptance is following the Divine pattern. Some people tried to interpret Taghoot as the “rule of man” and tried politicising it, but this is clearly wrong. Literally, Taghoot refers to one who transgresses the most (sabse bada sarkash) and is the name given to Satan.

Muslims in present world

Since the last two hundred years, Muslims have been vehemently associated with movements that arose on negation. This was equivalent to following the Satan because none of these movements were based on acknowledgement.

An Arab writer wrote a book entitled, Teen Azdahe (Three Pythons). In this book, the author describes that in the modern world, the Western nations have set out three pythons, which are swallowing the Eastern world, particularly, Muslims. According to him, these three “pythons” are:

1. Al-Istishraq (Orientalism)
2. Al-Isteymar (Colonialism)
3. Al-Tanseer (Missionary activities)

As I thought more about it, I was struck by a painful realisation. According to the Quran, Israeli Prophet Moses was sent to Egypt where the Coptic community lived. Coptics practiced polytheism and were ruled by Pharaoh. Prophet Moses went to the Court of Pharaoh where in front of his Coptic courtiers; he gave the message of God. This was akin to giving the message of God to the entire Coptic community. Pharaoh asked for a proof and so Moses cast his staff, which turned into a python.

Then Moses threw down his staff and suddenly, unmistakably, it appeared as a serpent (7:107)

So, he threw it down, and all of a sudden, it turned into a fast-moving serpent. (20:20)
This sight scared everyone and the courtiers devised a plan to counter Moses. In those days, magic was much prevalent and therefore a competition was organised where all renowned magicians of Egypt were called and hordes of people gathered.

On the decided day, Prophet Moses came with Prophet Aaron to the assigned place. He asked the magicians who would cast first. It was decided that magicians would throw their ropes and staffs first. Their doing so created an illusion and it appeared that several snakes are running around. The sight was such that even Prophet Moses was taken aback. God told Moses to not be afraid and throw his staff.

When Moses cast his staff, it turned into a big python and swallowed all that the magicians had casted.

And it immediately swallowed up their false devices. (7:117)

I was agonised to think that the Ummat-e-Muslima which prides on being the Khair-e-ummat are being swallowed by others! This was a realisation which weighed very heavily on my heart! I was devastated to think that Prophet Moses’ staff swallowed everything else and today, Muslims are being swallowed by everyone else. This is a severe and painful comparison and forces us to think and reflect. We must think and arrive at the root cause of the problem.

**The biggest mistake of present-day Muslims**

According to a Hadith

**Pichli ummaton ko maujze diye gaye the, mujhko jo mauzja diya gaya woh Quran hai**

*The earlier generations were given miracles, the miracle given to me is Quran* (Sahih Bukhari)

It means that just like Prophet Moses’ staff had swallowed everything else which was crawling there, the Quran will swallow everything else till the end of this world. In other words, it means that Quran is the **substitute** of miracles! But this will happen only when the ummat uses this miracle. When Prophet Moses had not used the staff, he was scared and the staff did not become a python on its own, till it was in his hand. The condition was that free of fear and keeping all his faith in God, he throws down his staff. Neither could he runaway nor complain; he was required to cast the staff without any protest and then the staff would get into action.
The biggest mistake of present-day Muslims is that they made the Quran an “abandoned” book; they no longer use the Quran. Using the Quran implies that the Quran is interpreted in the modern-day idiom and spread to mankind. But Muslims are not doing this. Instead of acquainting others with the Quran and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, they are busy alienating them – calling them as enemies and engaging with them violently.

Uswa-e-kamela (Complete model)

The Muslims worldwide propagate that the model of Prophet Muhammad is a complete model. But this is only so in words and not in action. I will explain this through example because if you consider the model of the Prophet as the final model then when these three problems emerged, did even one Muslim in the world try to find the solution of these three key issues from the life of the Prophet Muhammad. The answer is no.

The life of Prophet Muhammad has examples addressing all these three issues. His life was spent in Mecca (13 years) and Medina (10 years) and all these three issues were prevalent there; only the nomenclature was different. We must therefore evaluate that when these three issues existed, what did the Prophet do; and follow it. But people only give provocative speeches and organise fiery seminars; they care for nothing else.

Isteymaar (Colonialism)

This existed even at the time of Prophet Muhammad. On the outskirts of the Arab peninsula, there existed two great empires – Roman and Persian. The intentions of the Roman Empire become clear from Abrahā’s incident. A Governor of the Roman Empire, Abrahā attacked Mecca in order to destroy the Kaaba. While he was not successful (Surah Fil), this incident and even the Battle of Moota clarify the intentions of his Empire.

On the other hand, was the Iranian empire. Once the Prophet Muhammad visited a fair in Mecca and presented the mission of Tauheed to a tribe. The chief of the tribe agreed to the mission but when the Prophet asked for their support, the chief declined saying that they cannot do it because they are situated at the border of the Iranian empire, and as per their agreement with Persians, they are required to maintain the status quo and not accept anything new. Under such circumstances, if they accept the message of Prophet Muhammad and take it to their city, they would inevitably invite the wrath of the Iranian King.
Likewise, after the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, Prophet Muhammad sent dawah letters to chieftains and kings across borders and lands. One such letter was sent to the Iranian king, Yazdgurd. When the letter of Prophet Muhammad was given to him, he tore it apart and said,

“He [Prophet Muhammad] has the audacity to write a letter to me, though he is my slave!”

**Tanseer (Missionary activity)**

A person named, Waraqa bin Naufel, lived in Mecca. He had accepted Christianity during the dark ages. Another example is of those who migrated to Abyssinia. One of these, a companion named Abdullah ibn Jahash was influenced by missionaries and he adopted Christianity. While the details of how Christianity reached ancient Mecca are not available, such instances depict that missionary activities were prevalent during the time of Prophet Muhammad.

**Istishraq (Orientalism)**

This was also present during the time of Prophet Muhammad. I do not agree with the present-day definition of *Istishraq*, according to which it is an act of distorting the message of Islam and presenting a different picture altogether. It must be noted that the Jewish scholars of Medina used to do this work on a big scale. They used to incite people against Islam by proffering the argument that the coming of a Prophet in the lineage of Banu Ismael is against Divine practice (*Sunnah* of God) because all the previous prophets including Prophet Jesus were sent in the lineage of Banu Israel. By doing so, they used to incite doubt in the minds of people.

**Prophetic way**

All the three issues – colonialism, missionary activism and orientalism – existed at the time of Prophet Muhammad but did he speak the language of they being “three pythons?” No, he did not.

Instead, Prophet Muhammad followed the Quranic teachings and adopted the path of doing dawah work. This was the only solution that he adopted. Neither did he protest, nor did he make any plans to counter any of these three issues. He never cursed anyone.

The dawah approach was so effective that in 23 years, not only Mecca and Medina but the entire Arabia came within the fold of Islam. This was the miracle of Quran! Within the next 50 years, Islam spread to all the Middle East countries.
For example, the spread of Islam in Egypt has been explained by an English orientalist, Sir Arthur Keith in the following words,

_Egyptians were conquered not by sword, but by the Quran!_

Just like the staff of Moses had shown a miracle in the court of Pharaoh; the Quran has been showing a miracle for almost 1000 years in history. It is unfortunate that the present-day Muslims forgot the miracle of Quran and became entrenched in these three issues.

**What is the Quran?**

Quran – both by way of its meaning and _usloob_ (style) - is a miracle (or _mujzaa_). Many of those who embraced Islam said that it was the Quran which influenced them. I read about the British pop singer, Yusuf Islam (or Cat Stevens). He once fell so ill that he had to be hospitalised. He was then ignorant of Islam. In those days, his brother visited Egypt and got him a copy of the Quran from there. Since the days in hospital did not keep him very busy, Yusuf started reading the Quran. He says that he became so influenced by the Quran that he embraced Islam. When asked what influenced him the most, Yusuf said, _I have read other sacred books but it is only Quran where God directly addresses man!_ Bible for instance, appears to be a historical record when read and does not address man directly. I gave you the example of both – an individual (Yusuf Islam) and a community (Egyptians) – both of which were influenced by the meaning of the Quran.

Let me now give the example, by way of _usloob_ (style of the Quran). An orientalist has written that sound art in the Quran, is par excellence. I saw a demonstration of this, myself. In 1976, a dialogue took place between Muslims and Christian in the Libyan city, Tarabulus. The Christian delegation was representing Vatican and Muslims were called on behalf of the Libyan government; I was also invited. The dialogue went for a week with no conclusion. Muslims argued that Christians must agree that Prophet Muhammad was the prophet of God and Christians countered saying that Muslims must believe that by way of resurrection, Christ died with the sins of mankind. As a makeshift arrangement, it was decided that atleast the end should be on a good note and verses from both the Quran and the Bible should be recited. As a goodwill gesture, a Christian Father (from Lebanon) was selected to recite a part from the New Testament (Arabic translation) and a _ruku_ from the Quran. He first read the Bible and then recited the Quran. Even today, that scene flashes before my eyes. There were about 500 people present and the hall was equipped with excellent sound system. When the priest recited the Quran, I remembered the incident of Prophet Moses because Quran’s voice swallowed the voice of the New Testament. Both Muslims and Christians were spellbound!
I have heard several sacred books being recited in various conferences but none has a sound art as compelling as the Quran! When we left that place and went for tea, I was sharing the table with Dr. Shulickal (belonged to Vatican) who was bewitched by the Quranic sound art even then! I asked him, if he thought Quran is the book of God and under the influence of Quranic sound art, he admitted that yes, it was! The same man who until one week ago was not in agreement with this belief, accepted that Quran is the book of God! However, after a while when he realised what he had said, he rectified his statement and said that it was the book of God, but only for the Arabs!

**Conclusion**

Those, who complain that “pythons” of tanseer, isteymaar, istishraq are swallowing Muslims, are people who do not use their mind. These so called “superior” people do not realise that while Moses’ staff swallowed every one’s magic; the present-day Muslims, who claim to be followers of the Prophet Muhammad (Khair-e-ummat), are being swallowed by others!

The entire present-day Muslim community must seek mass forgiveness (Ijtimai tauba) from God for being disillusioned for the last two hundred years and not recognising the miracle of the Quran!

They must re-read the Quran and re-discover the Divine plan so as to understand the power of divine religion otherwise they will continue to live in dark ages and will die as such.

I pray that God may guide us to the straight path!
Question- Answers

Question 1: Do you think ideas shape the material environment or does the material environment shape the ideas? What is the true essence of their relationship?

Answer: Karl Marx said that material environment shapes the ideas of man. But this supposition of Marx has been proved wrong and I have given the details of this in my book, “Marxism: Tarikh jis ko radh kar chuki hai.” I had published this book when USSR was at its hilt and people criticised me for writing this book but very soon people recognised that the idea of Marx was romantic. It has been researched and proven that it is the human mind which shapes the world.

Question 2: How can Quran be used in the contemporary world with atheistic philosophy all around?

Answer: This is a supposition because atheism was never a dominant philosophy. Man’s nature has always been dominant. The real problem is that Muslims never “presented” the Quran. Presenting does not mean that you merely recite the Quran; presenting entails a pre-requisite or a “pre-Quran condition” whereby the mind of the addressee must be understood.

During my travel to Europe, I met a man who quoting from my Quranic commentary said that the Quranic principle applicable in the case of deciding a witness – either one man or two women - is against the concept of gender-equality. I told him that the Quranic teaching was as per the law of nature and this has been established by modern scientific research, which has shown that man’s mind is single-focused as against the multi-focused mind of a woman. When an instance happens, a man will singularly focus on it but a lady will not singularly focus so two ladies are assigned so that if one forgets, the other one can remind her. Upon hearing this explanation, my acquaintance agreed.

People therefore did not present Quran in the right manner. And when Quran was not presented, how can we say that people did not accept. It is imperative that before presenting the Quran, the modern-day mind is understood so that it can be addressed. A companion said,  

Say it such that the mind of the listener gets addressed.
**Question 3:** Is a guide required to re-discover Quran or will it happen without a guide as well?

**Answer:** The guide for understanding the Quran is its author itself. Quran is the only book whose author is available all the time for consultation. It is said for Ibn Taimiyyah that when he did not understand a verse in the Quran, he prayed to God,

O! Teacher of Abraham, give me knowledge as well!

In order to understand the meaning of the Quran, the reader must free himself of all biases and prejudices. This, along with the prayer to God that He may help understand the right meaning, serve as a guide to re-discover the Quran.

**Question 4:** What is the reason that Al-Risala criticises the Nadwi thinkers and not Deobandi thinkers?

**Answer:** I never criticise. This is a wrongly held belief about me. “Criticising” is a negative word and am a completely positive person. Whatever I say is fact and argument-based. None of my books give a general or sweeping, personal statement without stating facts. So, you must evaluate the facts or arguments stated by me. There is no other yardstick for evaluating my writings.

**Question 5:** The Quran says, “Mankind! We have created you from a male and female, and made you into people and tribes, so that you might come to know each other.” (49:13) Another Hadith says that Prophet said that his people will be divided into 73 sects. What is this “sect”?

**Answer:** The Quran refers to creation in the physical sense (and not in the ideological sense), that is, it explains that the composition of man and woman is the same. As for the Hadith, “test” is for everyone – both Muslims and non-Muslims – in other words, Muslims are “not exempted” from the test. Some transgress in secular field and others do so in the religious field.

**Question 6:** What is “sirat-e-mustaqeem”?

**Answer:** According to a Hadith, Prophet drew a straight line and then lines on either sides of the straight line. He pointed to the one in the middle and said it is the straight path and others are paths that lead to transgression.

God-oriented life is the right path. For example, in the context of Surah Fateha, the debate was only on words and not on the spirit. This is how derailment takes place. The only way to save one from succumbing to such derailment is to enhance one’s thinking. The more one thinks, the more will one be able to realise, which path leads to God and which does not.
Question 7: As a dayee, what is the ideal role of a Muslim, when other ideologies are being more forcefully propagated?

Answer: I don’t think ideologies are being forcefully propagated. Each individual has a choice in this matter. I will explain this with my own example. Whatever I read so far was filled with confusion; only the Quranic teaching of sirat-ul-mustaqeem provided clarity to my mind. In other words, only truth is able to provide consistency and clarity; rest renders us confused.

The Muslim ulema propagated traditional aspects but the modern world stands on reason; unfortunately, no one presents reason-based Islam. It is the responsibility of the ulema that neither they did it themselves, nor they appreciated what was done by others.

Question 8: Through the 200 years, ummah left dawah work. Was it left completely?

Answer: One is spread of religion on its own, which no human being can intervene in. Purely because of its own strength of being the final preserved word of God, Quran and Islam kept spreading but those who had to discharge this responsibility did not do it and kept running after the “three pythons.”

Question 9: One person said that instead of giving the entire Quran we must recite some verses to the addressee. Just like a doctor gives prescriptive medicine and not the entire book.

Answer: This is a wrong metaphor. The entire Quran should be given and in the modern world, other helpful literature should be given to explain the meaning better. Man reaches the verses and its meaning himself. Also, you do not know which verse will strike to a person. For instance, I had never thought about the point that struck Cat Stevens’! Likewise, we cannot know in advance what will strike or appeal an individual’s mind.

Question 10: What is the importance of Al Risala mission for ulema and those with Arabic background and how can ulema benefit from it the most?

Answer: Ulema can understand this mission better because the background required to understand the terminology of this mission is with the ulema and not with non-ulema. They would have more grasp as compared to others who do not have the background.

Question 11: According to your knowledge, which sect is closer to Quran and Hadith?

Answer: It is never the sect but the individual who is close. You must always think in terms of the individual. And it is not your responsibility to determine which sect, that is God’s domain. You only need to focus on your own realisation and discovery of truth.
Question 12: In the present times, what is the role of Quran’s sound art in dawah work?

Answer: I did not mean that people should be made to hear the qirat [Quranic recitation]. An Englishman, Arboury was once staying put in a Hotel during his visit to Morocco. In a nearby room, an Arab was staying who played the tape of Quran. Arboury like the voice so much that he got restless to know what it was. When he got to know that it was the Quran, he learnt Arabic himself, read the Quran and then translated it. Likewise for Maurice Bucaille whose language was French. He studied Arabic, read the Quran and then wrote a spectacular book!

Question 13: People often say do not read this or that. I find this very strange. No one says that God is alive and so you can read anything and if you do dua, you can be saved from everything.

Answer: People do not know that God and believer are in contact. When I lived in Azamgarh, I once visited the library of Shibli National College where an entire set of the writings of the famous atheist, Bertrand Russell had just arrived. I got all the books and started reading. My wife felt I would be misled. And today, I can say that in his book I got the biggest supporting point for monotheism. I read those books after praying and by entering into atheism, I got monotheism. You read the namaaz each day but do not have conviction that God will help you. Those who say so are underestimating God and are totally unaware of the capacity of human mind and power of divine guidance. They are a case of ignorance.

Question 14: You said that if nature and universe are silent guides then Quran is verbal guide. Universe and Quran I understand but what about nature? How is that a guide?

Answer: Nature refers to “intuition.” Those who have conducted research on the human mind agree that nature and mind are not different from one another. In our language, we use different words to connote mind and nature. Our mind is full of information and scholars agree that whatever we discover is actually unfolding of the information present in mind.
Question 15: I am confused about the meaning of the word “Islam”. Please explain this word and whether it has any relation with the word “Muslim”?

Answer: Islam literally means “submission,” which actually means that you acknowledge your Creator. Everything else emanates from this acknowledgement. When you realise that God created me and gave me an entire life support system - you will begin with acknowledgement and reach worship. Then you will love and fear God. No one is Muslim by birth. Muslim is one who discovers Islam and makes Islam his way of life.

Question 16: What is the art of questioning and what are its etiquettes?

Answer: Question begins with “you.” First you must think, study and when you have brought your efforts to this level, then you should question. Questioning is therefore 50 percent about the one who questions and 50 percent about the one who answers. If you have not done pre-questioning, you will not even understand the answer. Pre-questioning is that you read and understand and fulfil the requirements, which may allow you to reach the result of the question.

Question 17: In tajdeed-e-deen, you have cited a Hadith that in later times there would no longer by any ulema. What does this mean?

Answer: An alim is used to mean a person who has religious information. But an alim is actually the one who possesses religious wisdom. The above Hadith means that information-ulema [competent in oratory] will be aplenty but the ulema, who possess religious wisdom [and the ability to understand the spirit and wisdom] will no longer be found.

Question 18: I have realised today that the solution of problems of Muslims is dawah work. But they are so engrossed in milli work that they do not understand this.

Answer: I consider mill work (Muslim empowerment) to be against the law of nature. It is against the scheme of God because on one hand God has imbued man with immense potential and on the other he has filled the world with opportunities to actualise the potential. What is required is hard-work. Getting easy money kills the potential within and ironically people contribute large sums of money to such “empowering” endeavours. It is not God’s scheme that you get it the easy way and so I am strictly against this approach. The real empowerment is to make man such that he is able to realise his potential into actual.
Question 19: Every year, Muslims sacrifice animals. Is it not “animal killing”?
Answer: Animal sacrifice is not the read aspect; it is symbolic. What is sought in reality is self-sacrifice, which no one is ready to offer. Prophet Abraham inhabited his infant son in the desert. Who is it that can do this with his child today? Man spends all his energy so that he can get the best for his children but Prophet Abraham did not think twice so that a generation can come into being for striving in the cause of God. This act symbolises selflessness and dedication to the cause of God – dedicating self and all available resources.

Question 20: Whenever I read books like “God Delusion,” I feel frustrated. What should I do? Should I stop reading such books?
Answer: I read it too and the Book is a delusion itself. For instance, it refers to “thought crime” which is not a part of Islam but has been inferred as a result of the actions of Muslims. Despite this being an inference and not a direct derivation from the Islamic text, the author unfoundedly condemns the Islamic ideology. This is because he has not been able to differentiate the Islamic ideology from Muslim practice. He has not been able to understand that Muslims must be judged in the light of Islamic teachings and not vice versa. Islam has an authentic text and opinion should be formulated on the basis of instances pertaining to misuse of freedom is incorrect.

Question 21: Most often people read Al Risala only once, does such reading suffice in terms of understanding?
Answer: No. I have often experienced that people who tell me that they have read Al Risala (once) are not able to understand and explain the context. A reader is one who is able to explain the context in entirety once he has read the text. I once wrote that he who reads Al Risala once or twice has not read it but only one who reads it several times, has read it.