

Friday Sermon: Self-Reformation: Resolve, Faith & Rehabilitation

17 January 2014

Last Friday sermon was a discourse on the impediments in reformation of practices that repeatedly pull us backwards and the need to remove these impediments. It was mentioned that if strength of resolve, knowledge and capacity to implement matters is instilled, then bad practices can be reformed. This is because impairment occurs in the absence of strength of resolve and lack of knowledge as to which practices are good and which are bad and how should the good ones be attained and the bad ones shunned and when the capacity to implement matters is weak and cannot contend with badness. Thus, it is very important to fortify strength of resolve, remove lack of knowledge and instil capacity to implement matters. Capacity to implement matters can be inculcated through personal effort but if the person is very weak then external help is required. These were the aspects mentioned last week and today the matter was further elucidated.

As we have established, the first thing needed for reformation of practices is strength of resolve. What is strength of resolve? Many will say strength of resolve is self-explanatory, it is obviously the strength to resolve and conclude something, then why the question! Let it be clear, as Hazrat Musleh Maud (may Allah be pleased with him) has beautifully explained, that the connotation of strength of resolve alters in accordance with the action it is about. With this basic point in mind, we can appreciate that in religious matters strength of resolve is iman (belief). When seen with this angle, we will understand that the capacity to implement matters is enhanced with iman and every difficulty is eased with the help and support of God and troubled situations are diminished due to iman.

These are not mere words; we see practical examples of this. The difference between the lifestyle of the Companions at the time of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) before and after they believed is astonishing. What was the lifestyle of those who believed in the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him)? Among them were thieves, robbers, wicked men who married their own mothers or bequeathed their mothers away, who killed their daughters, who gambled and who drank excessively and considered it an honour that none could compete with them in drinking! Poets would express their pride and greatness in terms of repeatedly awaken during the night to drink alcohol and gamblers would boast that they lost all their property in gambling and as soon as they acquired more property, they would lose it again! And then, after they believed in the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) they instilled an incredible revolutionary change and inculcated an astonishing strength of resolve. As soon as they believed they decided that they were going to strengthen their hearts to put every commandment of faith in practice, they decided that they were not going to do anything contrary to the commandment of God, they decided that each instruction of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) would be the last word. Their determination was so strong and so robust that weakness of practices became a non-issue! Their strength of resolve demolished their weakness of practices just as strong surge of gushing water washes away a piece of straw!

The Companions used to drink alcohol and we know what alcohol does to people. Those living in these [Western] countries often see drunks out and about. There is a drunk who roams the streets around our Fazl Mosque. He carries nothing but cans of alcoholic drinks and his clothes are filthy. Huzoor came to know that he is an educated man who perhaps once was an engineer. He does not work now, is perhaps of pensionable age. Whatever benefits he is given from the state he uses to get alcohol and spends his life on the streets. The situation has made him mentally unstable and the poor thing is disabled now. Huzoor has observed many times that when he is inebriated he looks frightening. He stops women on the street and even women living in this environment appear scared when faced by him. It is common to find drunks here. Some become very angry when inebriated and are verbally abusive to their parents.

Hazrat Khalifatul Masih recalled the times when he lived in Ghana in a town called Dambai where the Jama'at ran an agricultural project in those days. The house where Huzoor lived did not have any wall or boundary as houses are built this way over there. So, there was no internal or external yard in Huzoor's house, there was no gate etc. just a small area where the car used to be parked. Ghana was going through bad

economic period and thefts were widespread. Anything left outside the house would be stolen. Huzoor said nowadays burglary has also started taking place here, in fact people smash doors and burgle. In Ghana Huzoor had employed a night watchman who was specifically told to guard the pickup vehicle which would be parked out in the open and its [spare] tyre, as due to some modification the tyre could not be put inside the vehicle. Often the night watchman would arrive in a state of intoxication and before he could properly take the tyre out he would be flat on the ground himself. One day he was particularly intoxicated and Huzoor found him flat on his face, what watching could he have in such a state! He was also muttering nonsense. Huzoor left him alone at the time as he would have probably stated being verbally abusive. Next day when he was a little sober, Huzoor told him he was dismissed. He pleaded to be kept on. He could not give up drinking, however, he was sensible enough to perhaps drink less before coming to work. Drunks cannot control themselves, later he reverted to his old ways. The object of relating this is that when inebriated a drunk is not aware what he is doing. Hazrat Musleh Maud (may Allah be pleased with him) also related that he once faced a drunk person on a train journey who belonged to a noble family and was the son of a minister from Pooch in India. He was uttering things during the train journey which any sensible person cannot say when sober. Hazrat Musleh Maud (may Allah be pleased with him) said that a person is not in his senses when inebriated and drink turns a person insane. On the other hand we see the power of such a revolution of strength of resolve that non-Muslims have trouble believing, which was of course the revolutionary change the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) brought about in his Companions.

A Tradition relates that once before the commandment regarding prohibition of alcohol was revealed, Companions were drinking in a house. They had emptied one pitcher of alcohol and were about to open the second when a voice came from the street that the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) had said that God had commanded him that consumption of alcohol was prohibited for Muslims from that day onwards. One inebriated Companion suggested that someone should go out and find the reality about the announcement. Just as another person stood up to do so, yet another person who was completely inebriated took a stick and broke the pitcher of alcohol. Others asked him why he had done that, he should have first found out what the instruction meant! He replied that first the pitcher had to be broken and later the reality of the instruction could be found out. He said that after hearing the instruction of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) he first obeyed and would later find out what the limitation and specifications of the instructions were. This is the amazing difference between the Companions of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) and others. Ordinarily, a drunk will get extremely violent if his glass is removed while he is drinking. Often such incidents take place in clubs and bars. Recently it was in the news that one drunk killed another in a bar or a club. In fact they get murderous even if something is said to them which they find irksome. Inebriated people are out of their senses and have no control over what they say, they do not care about their parents, their limbs move about unintendedly. They neither care for the law nor are they afraid of punishment. Yet, the strength of resolve of the Companions overcame their intoxication. They first broke the pitcher of alcohol and later ask the person making the announcement for details. There were many houses in Medina at the time where alcohol was being consumed that day and pitchers broke with such speed that alcohol flowed like water in the streets of Medina.

Such strength of resolve is all-encompassing and such people are the champions of the spiritual world. Satan is left surrendering to them. Troubles as high as mountains are cut apart like pieces of cheese for them and with such strength of resolve, no other method is required! The revolutionary change of 1400 years ago is unparalleled in the world but we see somewhat similar incidents among the followers of the true and ardent devotee of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him). Use of tobacco is not forbidden, although the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) once said that if it had been around in the time of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) he would have probably advised against it and the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) said it was not good. It has intoxicating effect. Once the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) expressed his dislike of tobacco during a journey. Upon hearing this, his companions broke their hookah and then did not even touch it again. There are also examples of his companions who gave up all their previous bad habits after accepting Ahmadiyyat, there is even example of those who were embroiled in drinking alcohol who gave it up after accepting Ahmadiyyat.

These bad practices should not be abandoned out of fear of any law or fear of society. The underpinning thought should be that God and His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) have prohibited them or in this age the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) has advised against them. If alcohol is not openly available in Muslim countries, as it is not in Pakistan, local alcohol is brewed which people drink and it is intensely intoxicating. The well-off arrange through pretexts to have finer alcohol available for them. Hazrat Khalifatul Masih said he has observed that here university students tend to use cough syrups etc. that contain alcohol for intoxication which is harmful. Ahmadis need to employ their strength of resolve to avoid such things. These days aside from other intoxicants, something called shisha is available in particular in Muslim restaurants. In USA it is called hookah – it is some kind of specific hookah or whatever it is called! Huzoor has come to know that some of our young boys and girls use shisha and they say that it is not intoxicating and its occasional use is not harmful. Huzoor said they should remember that this occasional use would lead them to be embroiled in bigger intoxicants. They should use their strength of resolve at this stage and watch over their faith. Intensity of faith instils strength of resolve which determines important decisions. Otherwise law cannot impede matters as we see in Pakistan, in spite of prohibition alcohol is consumed.

There was a time when effort was made to prohibit public consumption of alcohol in USA. It turned people to consume spirits which is harmful and people started dying. Hazrat Musleh Maud (may Allah be pleased with him) wrote that because there was lack of faith the worldly law did not work. The government then passed a law which made alcohol available on doctor's permission justifying its use. As a result thousands of doctors started writing bogus certificates to boost their income until the law had to capitulate. Gradually alcohol began being available everywhere with age restrictions. In places the legal age is 21 years and in others it is 18 years and there are also places where when accompanied by an adult a 15 or 16 year old can drink certain kinds of alcohol. These are just pretexts to cover the helplessness of law. Just as the world is advancing, laws in favour of bad practices are being passed. As they cannot stop bad practices, they make their laws flexible. However, what is deemed bad in God's law is deemed bad at all times. In order to reform our practices we have to abide by laws of God and we can carry on such abidance when the state of our faith is good. The people whom the advanced world called ignorant overcame their intoxication with the intensity of their faith, they reformed their practices and then convinced the world of their higher practices and made the world follow them.

It should be noted that as regards religion strength of resolve is strength of faith which makes one firm on good deeds and frees one from badness. Along with this, as mentioned before, is strength of knowledge which removes any weakness in deeds which are done due to lack of knowledge. There are many examples in this regard in worldly terms, for example a young girl used to pull at her hair while sleeping and used to injure herself. As she is growing, gradually she is realising the situation and is making efforts to give up the habit. Thus habits can be given up through knowledge. Similarly, one can be saved from sin if made to realise fear of God, sin of practice and God's displeasure. The third thing which causes weakness in practices is lack of capacity to implement matters. Some people may think that here matters are being repeated. No doubt, in one way there is repetition, however things are being mentioned with different perspectives so that they may be understood.

Let it be clear that there are some reasons for weakness in capacity to implement matters. For example, habit. A person may have strength of resolve and also knowledge but owing to his habit, he shows weakness in his practice. A person knows that God's nearness and love can be attained, but his love for material things or fear of material loss is overpowering and he is thus deprived of God's love and nearness. For such people external rather than internal remedy is required and it alone can bring betterment to their capacity to implement matters. For them there is need to find a correct and apposite support. If a person has the required knowledge then telling him the same thing will not bring about reformation in him. Such a person has strength of resolve but it is not complete, he has knowledge but love and fear of God do not affect him due to corrosion on his heart. Here, something else is required. He does not fear God because he cannot see God. Such people have fear of certain people. Therefore, influence of another person or other material influence can reform them, providing that 'influence' is not prone to capitulate/withdraw on political grounds like worldly people and the worldly laws of these days!

In any case there are three types of people in this world and there are [spiritual] ailments. There are people whose practices are weak because their faith is not complete. There are people whose practices are weak because their knowledge is not complete and then there are people who have faith and knowledge but their hearts are so corroded that both these aspects are not sufficient and they need support. Just as broken bones need plaster to mend or metal plates are inserted in the bones through operation to mend them. Over time, once healing takes place, these supports are removed. Similarly, some people need temporary support. Gradually, the support generates enough strength in them to be active and weaknesses of their practice are removed.

As mentioned in last Friday sermon, our Nizam e Jama'at (administrative system of the Jama'at), our office-holders, our auxiliary organisations should become sources of removing these weaknesses of practices. Yet, if these people are themselves weak in their strength of resolve, the office-holders and others, are lacking in knowledge and have weaknesses in their own practices, then how can they support others! Every section of the Nizam, in fact every Ahmadi should self-reflect and see where reformation is needed and should also try and become a support to friends and dear ones who have weaknesses, so that every member of the Jama'at attains high levels of reformation of practices and in this regard achieves nearness to God. May God enable us to do so!

Next Huzoor gave the sad news of martyrdom in Rawalpindi, Pakistan and said he would lead the funeral Prayer in absentia of Arsalan Sarwar. Dear Arsalan Sarwar was martyred on 14 January. He was 17 years old and an FSc pre-engineering student in Islamabad. On the night between 13 and 14 January Arsalan was busy with two non-Ahmadi friends in his street preparing for illuminations with regards to 12 Rabi ul Awal. A car and a motor bike came and stopped at the end of the street. Two men emerged from the car and picked up a white carrier bag from the rubbish heap in the street. Arsalan and the two boys noticed these people and found them suspicious and decided to awaken their elders. Arsalan shouted to draw attention. A man came out of the car and at first fired two or three shots in the air. The boys ran to the other direction shouting. The man followed them and fired three or four times. Arsalan was in the middle of both boys as they ran. The bullet marks in the street show that the two non-Ahmadi boys were also fired at. Arsalan looked back as he ran and sustained a bullet in his head and fell to the ground. The other boys also dropped to the ground behind parked cars. The assailants fled. Arsalan was taken to a close by hospital and the doctors made efforts to save him although they had said that it was difficult for him to survive as he had sustained a bullet in his brain. Three hours after been shot at, Arsalan was martyred. Inna lillahe wa inna illahe raji'oon.

Arsalan Sarwar was loved by all. Many non-Ahmadis came to pay condolence. With the grace of God, he was a Moosi, joining the Wasiyyat scheme at the age of 14 and was currently serving Khuddam. He was also active when a member of Atfal. His brothers are also serving the Jama'at. Qaid Sahib Rawalpindi district writes that Arsalan and his brothers were active members of Jama'at. They gave security duty as well as served in other organisational capacity. Murrabi Sahib Rawalpindi writes that Arsalan often came to his office to read books of the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace), he was regular in observance of Salat which he offered with pathos and with the grace of God was also regular in his chanda. He is survived by his father, mother and three brothers. May God elevate his station and grant steadfastness and fortitude to the bereaved.