



Some Reflections from a Visit to Turkey

Part 2

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Allah Helps those who are Determined and have Concern

The story of how Sultān Muhammad Fātih was successful in his siege of Constantinople when so many others had failed is truly remarkable. The geographical features of the area along with the massive city walls and accompanying trenches combined to form a city that could comfortably withstand being besieged for long stretches of time. To the north of the city lay Bulgaria with whom Sultān Muhammad Fātih had agreed a peace treaty. The inhabitants of Constantinople were well stocked with provisions and had prepared themselves for being under siege for years, hoping that Bulgaria would eventually break its treaty with the Turks and come to their assistance. In the face of such odds the determination with which Sultān Muhammad Fātih continued in his mission is commendable.

On 22nd Rabī'ul Awwal 857AH (16th April 1453) the Sultān's army started laying siege to the city and his navy in the Sea of Marmara blockaded the inlet to the Golden Horn, the narrow channel which formed one side of the city's defences and in which the port was sited. A great iron chain across the mouth of the Golden Horn and enemy bombardment prevented entry, but the Sultan's fleet ensured assistance could not reach the city by sea. After some seven weeks of consistent endeavour, Allah ﷻ placed an amazing idea into the Sultān's mind: one that no one had thought of before. It was to prove a huge success and herald the end of the siege, and victory.

The lesson we need to take from this historical incident is that whatever our goal is, especially if it is related to Dīn, if we keep trying, keep thinking seriously of how to achieve success, Allah ﷻ will eventually reward us with the solution. Shaykhul Hadīth, Shaykh Muhammad Zakariyyā *rahimahullah* states that it is the custom of Allah ﷻ that the more a person has concern regarding a particular task, the more Allah ﷻ will assist him. When the question of how to call the faithful to salāh was deliberated by Rasūlullah ﷺ and the Sahābah ؓ and no solution was forthcoming, it was 'Abdullah ؓ that saw a dream in which the adhān was described, for he had gone home that night with the most concern over the matter. Thus it transpired that although it was to be Bilāl ؓ who would be the mu'adhin, the solution was given to 'Abdullah ؓ due to his concern.

On the night of 14th Jamādiul Awwal, under a full moon, Sultān Muhammad Fātih ordered his men to lay wooden boards oiled with fat along a ten mile stretch of land from the Muslim controlled Bosphorus overland to a point in the Golden Horn well away from the enemy fleet. The city walls along the Golden Horn were relatively low for no one expected an assault from that side. But that was exactly what Sultān Muhammad had in mind!

One by one, eighty Muslim ships were hauled over land - their sails unfurled and the wind in their favour - for a distance of ten miles. Before dawn the whole fleet was in the Golden Horn and the Sultān's army was ready to attack. This overnight mission seems all the more astounding when one has seen the terrain over which the ships must have been hauled: it is not flat but hilly. There is little doubt that the

conquest of Constantinople was a miracle of Rasūlullah ﷺ; his prophecy was a miracle and the amazing events that went into fulfilling the prophecy were part of that miracle.

The Potential of Youth

After reading of the determination and the resourcefulness of Sultān Muhammad Fātih, one could be forgiven for thinking that he was an experienced and distinguished veteran, old and wise. The truth of the matter is that when he became Sultān he was only 21-25 years old and the conquest of Constantinople came just two or three years into his reign. So the excellent Amīr and Fātih was in his mid to late twenties when he achieved one of the most important victories in world history.

Islām teaches us that after becoming bāligh, at the latest at fifteen years of age, a person is considered responsible. Salāh, zakāh, sawm, hajj all become compulsory and the parents are no longer obliged to provide for the bāligh child. In the environment we live, due to its trends and media brainwashing, we wrongly feel that even into our twenties we should not be burdened with any responsibilities; we are carefree. Allah's ﷻ system is not wrong: we all have the ability to shoulder responsibilities, even if we may not think so.

The World at your Feet

Turkey boasts many beautiful masājid. Entering one particularly grand masjid that was built by Sultān Bāyazid, my gaze fell upon a line of Arabic writing in beautiful calligraphic form. It read:

Whoever obeys Allah, everything obeys him.

Which reflects the hadīth:

Whoever becomes Allah's, Allah becomes his.

If we become as Allah wants us to be then He will make everything and anything as we want it to be. The reason that today the world looks at us as if we are something strange and alien is that we look at the commands of Allah as if they are strange. If we were to but embrace Allah's commands, the whole world would embrace us. It is the promise of Allah that He becomes the helper of whoever obeys Him:

O ye who believe! If ye will aid (the dīn of) Allah, He will aid you, and plant your feet firmly. (47:7)

Encouraging Good Deeds

Something else that we noticed in almost every masjid was the tasbīh mentioned in the final hadīth of Sahīh al-Bukhāri, emblazoned in large script:

Glory be to Allah, and praise; glory be to Allah the Great

In the hadīth this tasbīh is prefaced with the words, 'Two phrases, beloved to Rahmān, light on the tongue, heavy on the scales...' The commentators of hadīth, write that these words, being beloved to Allah, are not difficult or lengthy as may be expected but easy to recite. However, despite their ease and conciseness they do not bear an insignificant reward; they are very weighty on the scales on the Day of Judgement.

Seeing these words displayed in prominent places in the masājid, I thought to myself that maybe the 'ulamā, sultāns and mashā'ikh of the past reasoned that by doing so, everyone who entered would notice them and at least recite them once, and by so doing increase the weight of their good deeds.

True Wisdom

Another hadīth often to be seen displayed prominently in the masājid is:

The root of wisdom is the fear of Allah

With the fear of Allah ﷻ a person can do no wrong in this world. Knowledge is of no use without the fear of Allah ﷻ; after acquiring dīni knowledge and understanding what is harām and impermissible, a person can still commit sins if he does not have fear of Allah. Likewise with worldly knowledge: a qualified physician who does not fear Allah can, despite his training, harm his patients for financial gain. But the one who fears Allah will never commit such actions and because he always does the right thing people will consider him to be wise. The fear of Allah is the root, therefore, from which wisdom stems.

Love for Dīni Knowledge and Everything Associated with it

Shaykh ‘Abdullah Kapodrawi *hafizahullah* urged us not to miss visiting al-Maktabah al-Sulaymāniyyah in Istanbul. Al-Maktabah al-Sulaymāniyyah is a vast library which was designed by the famous architect Mi‘mar Sinān and contains 80,000 books and ancient manuscripts. The deputy director of the library kindly showed us around and allowed us to view some manuscripts too.

At one stage during our visit, whilst we were examining some works, the deputy director positioned himself in the doorway to the room and commented that the lintel was somewhat lower than his own height (around 5 foot 8”). He explained that in the days of the Sultāns, the building functioned as a madrasah and would have been populated by ‘ulamā and students of dīn; religious books would have abounded and the walls would have echoed to the sound of dīni lessons being imparted. He then questioned how an eminent and highly skilled architect such as Sinān could have made such a mistake as to design the doors too low for a person of average height to walk through without stooping.

After some thought, through the Grace Allah ﷻ, a thought crossed my mind, and voicing my thoughts I said, ‘These rooms contained dīni books and were home to ‘ulamā and students; therefore the architect wanted to ensure that whoever entered them did so with humility. Walking through the low doorways, even the proudest of men would have to adopt a humble posture as is befitting amongst people and books of knowledge.’

The deputy director affirmed what I had said and then went on to note that the Sultāns would ensure the doorways of their palaces – like the Topkapi Palace - were wide and tall so the public could come and go unhindered. But as a reflection of their love and respect for dīni knowledge, the Qur’ān, hadīth and the ‘ulamā they had the doorways of the madrasahs purposefully built low in order to encourage humility and reverence for dīni knowledge.

Building for the Hereafter

Perhaps the most striking realisation to come out of visiting the sights of Istanbul is the contrast between the architecture of the many masājid and that of the Topkapi Palace. The latter, although a vast complex, has none of the splendour of European palaces and compared to the masājid it is sober, almost austere in its design. The palace was a place to live and an administrative centre and was thus built for functionality. The masjid was the house of Allah and therefore exquisitely designed. When Sultān Ahmad had a masjid built opposite the Aya Sophia, then a masjid but originally the most important church of the Eastern Roman Empire, he instructed the architect to outdo the Aya Sophia in size and splendour so that in centuries to come, a Muslim made masjid would dominate the skyline of Istanbul.