



Synopsis of Friday Sermon

Ameer Mustapha Elturk



IONA
REPENTANCE
REVITALIZATION OF FAITH
RENEWAL OF COVENANT

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Synopsis of Friday Sermon

The Curse of Riba: A Grave Warning from the Qur'an and Sunnah

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَذَرُوا مَا بَقِيَ مِنَ الرِّبَا إِن كُنْتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ

O you who believe, fear Allah and give up what remains of Riba (interest/usury), if you are (true) believers.

One of the greatest dangers to an individual, a community, and an entire nation is the sin of Riba (usury and interest). It is not just a social evil—it is a grave sin that invites the curse and wrath of Allah (SWT).

The Severe Prohibition of Riba in the Qur'an

Allah (SWT) has declared war on those who deal in Riba. Consider the following terrifying ayah, “*O you who believe, fear Allah and give up what remains of Riba (interest/usury), if you are (true) believers. And if you do not, then be informed of a war from Allah and His Messenger.*” [al-Baqarah, 2:278-279]

This is the only sin in the entire Qur'an where Allah (SWT) explicitly declares war against those who persist in it! Imagine, who can survive a war against Allah and His Messenger?

Allah also informs, “*Those who consume Riba will not stand on the Day of Judgment except like the one who is beaten by satan into insanity...*” [al-Baqarah, 2:275]

Riba corrupts the soul, the economy, and society. It creates a system where the rich exploit the poor, and wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few.

The Prophet's Curse on Those Involved in Riba

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) strongly condemned Riba in many ahadith. Consider the following hadith narrated by Jabir (RAA), “Allah has cursed the one who consumes Riba, the one who gives it to others, the one who records it and the one who witnesses it (its transaction).” He added: “All of them are equal in sin.” [Muslim]

In another hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah (RAA), the Messenger of Allah (SAW) said, “Avoid the seven destructive sins” They said, “O Messenger of Allah, what are they?” He said, “Associating partners with Allah; magic (sorcery); killing a person whose killing Allah has prohibited except by legal right; consuming usury; devouring the property of an orphan; fleeing from the battlefield; and slandering chaste, innocent, and believing women.” (Bukhari and Muslim) The severity of Riba is such that it is placed alongside shirk, magic and murder.

Why Is Riba Forbidden?

There are several reasons as to why Riba is so severely condemned:

1. Exploitation of the Poor – Riba enables the wealthy to accumulate more wealth without risk, while the poor sink further into debt.

2. Economic Instability – Interest-based economies often lead to financial crises and inequality, as seen in modern economic recessions.
3. Moral Corruption – It encourages greed and discourages charity and fair business practices.

The Economic and Moral Consequences

Usury is not merely an economic issue but a moral one. Riba destroys the balance of society in many ways:

1. It exploits the weak and the vulnerable – The poor become trapped in endless cycles of debt unable to break free. People are living on borrowed money. Over 80% of Americans have at least one credit card. Credit card debt has now surpassed \$1.2 trillion. Many households carry monthly balances and cannot pay off what they owe, leading to a cycle of debt. Interest rates above 20–30% (in some cases) mean people may pay double or triple what they borrowed if they fall behind.

As for banks like Citibank, Chase, among others, they profit most from those least able to pay. Low-income individuals often don't qualify for low-interest loans and are pushed toward high-interest credit cards or payday-style loans. These financial products often include fees, penalties, and compounding interest, making it extremely hard to escape debt. Meanwhile, banks generate billions in profit each quarter, largely through interest income and fees.

So yes, from a moral, religious, or ethical perspective, many would argue that this system exploits the financially vulnerable. something Islam (as well as early Christianity and Judaism) strongly warns against.

2. Riba creates inequality – The rich become richer while the poor suffer. Riba widens inequality. Wealth becomes concentrated in the hands of a few, deepening social divides. Allah (SWT) warned, lest wealth be concentrated in the hands of a few, *“so that wealth does not circulate only among the rich among you.”* [al-Hashr, 59:7]

3. The goal of an interest-free Islamic economic model is not just to avoid personal sin, but to prevent a system where the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer — where wealth becomes a luxury of the few. It seeks to prevent wealth from becoming concentrated in the hands of a few elite, while the rest of society suffers economic deprivation.

3. Riba leads to corruption – It undermines ethical conduct. Greed and dishonesty flourish in environments where profit is valued above human dignity. In fact, greed and dishonesty dominate financial systems.

Consider the 2008 Financial Meltdown as a case study. The AIG (American International Group) was the ground zero of the 2008 financial meltdown, and its collapse reveals how greed, dishonesty, and reckless financial behavior can destabilize not only a company but the global economy.

The U.S. government had to step in with a \$182 billion bailout — not to save AIG itself, but to prevent the collapse of banks and institutions connected to it. \$182 billion of tax payers money. It was *greed* that drove AIG to chase profit without restraint. Dishonesty and lack of transparency hid the true risk. And disregard for ethics brought the global financial system to its knees.

The 2008 financial crisis was not just a failure of markets — it was a failure of morals. Greed, dishonesty, and arrogance caused a near-collapse of the world economy.

In Islam, interest (riba), deception, and unjust enrichment are all condemned for this very reason — because they lead to suffering, inequality, and collapse.

The story of AIG is a modern example of what happens when profit is prioritized over principle.

4. Riba invites divine punishment – Societies built on Riba experience economic collapse. Have we not seen financial crises, banking failures, and global recessions caused by Riba-based economies?

The Qur'an avows, *“Those who consume Riba will not stand on the Day of Judgment except as one who is beaten by satan into insanity.”* [al-Baqarah, 2:275]

These ayahs emphasize that usury corrupts the soul, leading to societal division, exploitation of the vulnerable, and ultimately, divine retribution.

The Devil's Counter Argument

Ayah 275 of Surat al-Baqarah is one of the central ayat that addresses riba (*usury/interest*) and draws a stark contrast between ethical economic behavior and exploitative practices.

“Those who consume riba will not stand [on the Day of Judgment] except like the standing of someone who has been driven to madness by the touch of satan. That is because they say, ‘Trade is just like riba.’ But Allah has permitted trade and forbidden riba. So, whoever receives a warning from his Lord and stops may keep what was previously taken, and their case is with Allah. But whoever returns [to riba]—those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide therein eternally.” [al-Baqarah, 2:275]

Below is a breakdown of the ayah:

1. *“Those who consume riba...”*

This refers to individuals who engage in interest-based financial transactions, either by charging or receiving it. The term “consume” metaphorically refers to profiting or thriving off riba.

2. *“...will not stand except like the one driven to madness by Satan's touch.”*

A powerful visual metaphor showing the spiritual and moral corruption caused by riba. On the Day of Judgment, those who consumed riba will rise in a disoriented, mad, or chaotic state — like someone possessed or deeply disturbed. Scholars interpret this as the psychological and societal disorder that usury causes.

“...will not stand except like the one driven to madness by Satan's touch,” is often understood in two ways:

- a. Spiritually and morally distorted minds: Just as an insane person cannot think clearly, those who engage in Riba develop a distorted sense of ethics and justice, normalizing financial exploitation.
- b. Actual punishment in the Hereafter: Some scholars interpret this as a literal state of torment in which those who profited from usury will suffer the consequences in the afterlife.

3. The Rationalization of Riba, *“They say, ‘Trade is just like riba.’”*

The ayah explains that people justify usury by equating it with trade, arguing that both involve profit-making. However, Allah refutes this false analogy by clearly stating that trade is permissible, whereas Riba is forbidden. Allah rejects this false equivalence — not all profit is just. Trade involves mutual benefit and risk-sharing; Riba exploits the vulnerable. The fundamental difference is that trade is based on mutual benefit, while Riba exploits the vulnerable, leading to economic injustice.

4. *“But Allah has permitted trade and forbidden riba.”*

A divine legal distinction is drawn. Trade (buying/selling) is lawful because it entails fair exchange. Riba is unlawful because it guarantees profit to the lender regardless of the borrower's outcome, placing all risk on the borrower.

5. *“So, whoever receives a warning from his Lord and stops may keep what was previously taken, and their case is with Allah.”*

Allah (SWT) reveals His mercy in this statement. Those who engaged in riba before learning of its prohibition and now stop are forgiven for past actions. Their previous transactions are not held against them. They may keep their profits as long as they repent and desist.

6. *“But whoever returns [to riba]...”*

Those who knowingly continue to engage in riba after being warned are condemned. Their punishment is described as eternal damnation — *“companions of the Fire.”*

In sum, this great ayah emphasizes that ethical finance matters in Islam and that economic justice is a spiritual issue, not just a worldly one. Riba is not just a financial matter — it dehumanizes, enslaves, and disrupts societies. Islam encourages commerce, entrepreneurship, and risk-sharing, but forbids exploitation through guaranteed profit without shared risk.

May Allah save us from this evil and grave sin, Riba and usury, and help us adhere to halal and permissible means of our livelihood.

The condemnation of usury is not unique to Islam. The same God who prohibited Muslims from dealing in usury and interest prohibited the people of the book from such dealings and is in their books, the bible - the old and New Testament.

In the Old Testament, several passages clearly denounce the practice, particularly among the Israelites. For example, Exodus 22:25 instructs, *“If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him.”*

Similarly, Leviticus 25:35-37 commands, *“If one of your brethren becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him... You shall not take interest or profit from him, but fear your God, so that your brother may live with you.”*

Deuteronomy 23:19-20 reiterates, *“You shall not charge interest on a loan to your brother, interest on money, interest on food, interest on anything that is lent for interest.”*

In the New Testament, while the direct prohibition of usury is less frequent, the spirit of the message remains clear. For instance, Luke 6:35 encourages believers to love their enemies and do good, suggesting that exploiting others for profit is antithetical to a life of compassion and service. Early Christian thinkers also denounced usury as an act that contributed to social injustice and the exploitation of the poor.

A Call to Action: Call to Justice and Reform

As we reflect on these timeless warnings, we must ask ourselves: What role do we play in ensuring that our economic systems uphold justice and dignity for all? The message from both Islamic and Biblical traditions is unequivocal—usury is destructive, and a society built on its foundations is doomed to imbalance and exploitation.

We must strive to reform our financial systems, advocate for ethical business practices, and support policies that protect the vulnerable. By doing so, we honor the universal values of justice, compassion, and accountability that have been passed down through the ages.

The Solution: A Riba-Free Economy

Islam promotes a just and ethical financial system grounded in fairness, compassion, and accountability. As stated in the Qur'an, *“Allah has permitted trade and prohibited Riba”* [al-Baqarah, 2:275], emphasizing the importance of honest commerce over exploitative lending. Islam encourages charitable giving and the redistribution of wealth through mechanisms like Zakat, ensuring that wealth does not remain concentrated among the rich. Interest-free loans (Qard Hasan) exemplify this spirit by benefiting the borrower without burdening them. Additionally, Islamic finance and investment models are built on ethical principles that avoid Riba, promote transparency, and prioritize social welfare.

Repentance from Riba

Are we engaged in Riba knowingly or unknowingly? If you have engaged in Riba, there is still hope! Allah (SWT) says, *“But if he repents, he may keep his past gains, and his affair rests with Allah.”* [al-Baqarah, 2:275] The doors of repentance (*tawbah*) are open, but we must act now before it is too late. Seek Allah's forgiveness. The Prophet (SAW) said, *“The one who sincerely repents from a sin is like one who never sinned at all.”* (*Ibn Majah*)

One last piece of advice. Avoid interest-based loans, mortgages, and credit cards and choose *halal* income sources and investments.

“O Allah, suffice us with what You have made halal so that we are not tempted by what You have made haram, and make us independent by Your grace so that we do not rely on anyone but You.” (Tirmidhi)

May Allah (SWT) purify our wealth, protect us from Riba, and grant us *halal rizq*. Ameen.

