

by Imam Zafrullah Domun

We are almost in mid Ramadan. With today's fast thirteen days of fasting would be completed. As usual once Ramadan gets started the days and nights go by very quickly and in a twinkling of an eye we will see ourselves celebrating Eid soon *incha* Allah. It is of utmost importance for each one amongst us to realize that we should not waste even one minute in the month of Ramadan. It is a fact that not everyone can realize this. The young ones especially have difficulty in bearing the hunger pangs and they are eager for the time of *iftar* to come. There is nothing wrong with such a sentiment. Allah has placed a great pleasure for the fasting person at the time of *iftar*. We would be really quite ungrateful if we do not avail ourselves of this pleasure that Allah has made legitimate for us. So we should show gratefulness by making the best use of our time.

I remember a hadith where the Holy Prophet (saw) is reported to have said when he was explaining a scale of good deeds. I am quoting from memory because it is a long time since I read it. He said that one of the best deeds that is very pleasing to Allah is the reading of the verses of the Holy Quran in the Namaz. Here we should understand that what he meant was reading when we are performing *sunnat* or *nawafil* prayers not the *Farz* ones. In the *Farz* prayers the imam has to take into consideration what may inconvenience those who are following him. When we pray alone there is no problem at all we may read as long as we like to our heart's satisfaction. But to be able to read long portion of the Holy Quran in our prayers we should memorize them in the first place. It is here that Ramadan offers a unique opportunity to try to memorize some verses everyday instead of following frivolous pursuits like playing Candy Crush on your smart phone or other similar useless activities. So fill the unique time that is available while you are fasting, to memorize some portions of the Holy Quran. It will be a treasure to cherish throughout your lifetime. I say it to you because I have experience in this matter and our mother was the person who encouraged us to memorize portions of the book in our student days when we were on holidays and also while we were fasting. I hope all young ones will take this advice to heart.

You will note that there are plenty of prayers in the Holy Quran. At one count there are between ninety and a hundred. They are most beautiful prayers to address to Allah. Some of these prayers qualify the believers or the "*oulil albab*", that group of people who have been endowed with pure intelligence untainted with worldly gains. Some of the prayers are the prayers of the prophets who came before the Holy Prophet Mohammad (saw). All these prayers are very beautiful especially when you understand the Arabic words used. So during Ramadan while we have plenty of time available it will be most appropriate that we learn these prayers by heart and read them regularly in our *witr Salaat* or in *Tahajjud* or whenever we feel like or whenever we are in situations where these prayers are most appropriate. Try it and you will see for yourself

what they can do to your own person. Time is going by swiftly but we should aim at fulfilling each minute with something worthy in the sight of Allah. I hope Allah will grant the young ones the opportunity to do so *incha* Allah.

Since we are speaking about making the best use of our time in the month of Ramadan let us recall the hadith where the Holy Prophet (saw) said that Ramadan is divided in three parts. Its first ten days manifest Allah's mercy, its second ten days manifest Allah's forgiveness and its last ten days offer protection from the Fire. Hence we understand that all its days are blessed even if some periods have been particularized for some especial manifestations from Allah. For us in this year we are at present in the period where Allah manifests His Forgiveness. So each one amongst us should do our best to seek as much forgiveness from Allah as is possible in the coming days. You will recall that the Holy Prophet(saw) said that we should recite two sentences very often during the month of Ramadan and they are "*Astaghfiroullah*"(I seek forgiveness from Allah and *laa ilaha illallah*(there is no God but Allah). So we should engage ourselves in repeating these words very often and we should strive to be fully conscious of what we are saying. It is only when we seek earnestly for forgiveness that it will be granted to us. Allah is very forgiving and He has told us that He will forgive all sins except Shirk or associating others with Him.

In fact Ramadan is the time for getting forgiveness for our past lapses. In a hadith we learn that the Holy Prophet is reported to have said: "unfortunate is that person who saw the month of Ramadan but did not get his sins forgiven". From this we understand that there is almost a guarantee from Allah that he who will ask forgiveness will get it for sure. The way to go about is to repeat *Astaghfiroullah* as much as one can during Ramadan and also to regret each misdeed that one might have committed during once lifetime. There is no one who can come forward and say that he or she has not committed any sin. It is in the nature of man to commit sins and to regret it as well. As long as we regret and ask to be forgiven we are safe. But if we commit sins and think that we are doing good deeds then there will be no one worse off than us. We should try to wash ourselves from our sins by shedding tears profusely in our prayers and also by trying to repair the sins that we have committed. If we do not try to repair the wrongs that we have done we will not be forgiven. You will recall the story about Shibli which I related two or three years ago. It is an interesting story and it gives us an idea of how real forgiveness takes place. I will repeat it and I hope you will remember it because there are plenty of lessons that we can take from it if we reflect on it. This story is available in many books. I have taken it from "Points to ponder" available on alislam.org.

Shiblī was a great saint. He came from an affluent family and was a governor under the king of Baghdad. He came to the capital for consultation concerning some issue. During the same days, a commander-in-chief had been sent to face an enemy who had defeated many armies previously. The commander defeated the enemy and won the lost lands back for the country. On his return, the commander was given a grand reception in Baghdad. The king summoned a special court to reward the commander. The king proposed that a robe of honor be given to the commander to recognize his services. Unfortunately, on his way back from the journey, he had

developed a runny nose, and he had also forgotten to bring his handkerchief with him. After the bestowal of the robe, according to the tradition, he was to respond saying, "I am grateful to you that you have been gracious to me, and my generations will be your servant because of these four yards of cloth." While the commander was getting ready for the speech, suddenly he sneezed, and had a nasal drip. If he had spoken with a runny nose, he might have been killed. He searched in confusion, and not finding the handkerchief, he sneakily cleaned his nose with a portion of the robe.

Unfortunately, the king saw the incident.

The king roared, "Take away his robe. He has disgraced our robe. He cleaned his nose with our gift."

As the king said this, Shiblī let out a shriek and started crying. As there was piety in the heart, there was righteousness in him; God had kept an opportunity for his guidance. When Shiblī let out a shriek, the king said,

"I am angry with the commander. Why are you crying?"

Shiblī stood up and said, "O King, I present my resignation."

The king said, "What is this untimely request? What has come over you, and why are you resigning?"

Shiblī said, "Oh King, I cannot carry out my responsibility."

The king said, "What is the matter?"

While weeping, Shiblī submitted, "This commander left this place two years ago. He was sent to a war which many great generals had lost. He was sent to an area which could not be retaken. He stayed away for two years. He went to the forests, mountains, and continuously fought with the enemy. He died every day, every morning, every evening. Every night his wife thought that she would wake up as a widow in the morning. Every morning, as she woke up, she thought that the evening will come and she will be a widow.

Every evening as his children went to sleep, they thought that they would wake up orphans. Every morning when they woke up, they imagined that they would be orphans by the evening. He conquered that country after a persistent sacrifice, and brought it back under your rule. In return you gave him a few yards of cloth, which did not have much value. Just because he was compelled to wipe off his nose with the robe, you became so angry with him. Then, how will I respond to that God who gave me a body which cannot be built by any king? Who has given me this robe and I am dirtying it for your sake. What answer will I give to my Lord?" Shiblī said this and left the court. But he was such a cruel and merciless person that when he went to a mosque and wanted to repent, everyone responded the same: "Get out of here. Can the repentance of a Devil be accepted?" He started visiting all of the places nearby but no one had the courage to accept his repentance. Finally he visited Junaid Baghdādī and told him of his improprieties and that he wanted to repent. "Can my repentance be accepted?" he asked. Junaid said, "Yes, but with a condition. First you will have to accept that condition." Shiblī said, "Tell me what it is, for I am ready to accept any condition."

Junaid said, "Go back to the city where you were the governor. Knock at every door and ask for their forgiveness. Ask for the forgiveness of the excesses you have committed."

Shiblī said, "I accept."

So, he went to the city. He knocked at every door.

When the people responded, he said, "I am Shiblī who was the governor here. I have made mistakes, and I have committed excesses against you. I ask for your forgiveness." The people said, "We forgive you." The seed of piety always grows and bears fruit. After he had passed by

a dozen or so homes, the news spread through the town like fire that the governor, who was known to be cruel, was going door to door today, and was asking for forgiveness. Spiritual fountains erupted out of people's hearts. They said, "Our Lord is so great that He provides opportunities for piety and repentance and righteousness even to such an aggressor."

So it passed, that Shiblī, following the instructions of Junaid, knocked door to door, bare-foot, but rather than having the doors opening with complaints and disenchantments, people came out weeping, saying, "Do not embarrass us, you are an honorable person to us. You are our spiritual leader. Do not embarrass us like this."

In short, Shiblī asked the whole town for forgiveness, and then he returned to Junaid. Junaid accepted his repentance and included him among his students.

Now, Shiblī is considered among the greatest saints of Islam."

The more you think about this incident the more you will understand what it really means to get Allah's pardon. If we have committed some lapses we need to make amends to be really forgiven. May Allah help each one amongst us to get such forgiveness incha Allah.