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by Imam Zafrullah Domun

As I said last week we will start speaking about the blessed month of Ramadan as from today. The fact is that the new moon will be born on Tuesday next 16<sup>th</sup> June at around 18h00. In all likelihood and weather permitting it will be visible on Wednesday and we will *incha* Allah start fasting on Thursday next. The time has come for us to thank Allah for giving us another opportunity to show our servanthood (*ubudiyyat*) to Him. It is only through His Grace that we get the opportunity to show that we are true to Him more than ever during this special and blessed month that He will help us to see soon. If we go back to the sermons that we have been giving about the third condition of *bay'at* we need to remind ourselves that Hazrat Masih Maood (as) expects us to regularly ask forgiveness for our sins and to remember the favours of Allah upon us and to be thankful and to praise Him. The month of Ramadan gives us the opportunity par excellence to practice almost all the conditions of our *bay'at* in a most excellent way. Since we are still away from the beginning of the blessed month by at least seven days we need to pray to Allah that He gives us plenty of opportunities to upgrade our devotions to Him during the coming month. I hope and pray that Allah gives to everyone a taste of being truly devoted to Him during the month of Ramadan and that this taste stays with you for as long as you may live *incha* Allah.

In the third condition of *bay'at* as I have said Hazrat Masih Maood (as) has counselled us to ask forgiveness for our sins every day. This is a habit that each one of us has to cultivate. There is no particular time for this purpose. It may be done during prayers especially whilst one is in prostration or even in *ruku*. It may be done after prayers. The number of times that you should ask forgiveness is not specified. We learn from the hadiths that the Holy Prophet Mohammad (saw) used to ask for forgiveness more than seventy times in a day. But he was the most innocent of human beings. We are sinners. Nay we are repeated sinners and hence we are in need of more asking of forgiveness than he did. There should be no exaggeration in the number of times. What is most important is the sincerity with which you repent and you regret your weaknesses and lapses. The Holy Prophet (saw) has told us that “he who repents of his sins is like one who has not sinned at all”. In addition he said that the month of Ramadan effaces our sins. There are many verses of the Holy Quran where Allah speaks about the need for us to ask forgiveness for our sins. One that comes to mind is what Hazrat Nuh (as) told his people:

“And I said, ‘Seek forgiveness of your Lord; for He is the Great Forgiver.  
‘He will send down rain for you in abundance, ‘And He will strengthen

you with wealth and *with* children, and He will give you gardens and He will give you rivers. (70:11-13)

In fact this *istighfar* is indeed something really great that Allah has given to the Muslim. Hazrat Masih Maood (as) says about it:

“Remember, the Muslims have been bestowed two things—one for obtaining strength and the other for the practical demonstration of the strength that has been obtained. *Istighfar* is for obtaining strength. It is also called seeking help. The *sufis* have said that as physical strength and power are fostered through exercise, in the same way *istighfar* is spiritual exercise. Through it, the soul obtains strength and the heart achieves steadfastness. He who desires strength should do *istighfar*. *Ghafara* literally means covering and suppressing. With *istighfar*, man tries to suppress and cover [those] emotions that keep him away from God. Thus, the only meaning of *istighfar* is that the poisonous elements that may well-nigh destroy a man may be overpowered, and one should give practical shape to the commandment of God by avoiding all obstructions. Remember that Almighty Allah has created two types of elements within human beings. One: the poisonous element, which is activated by Satan. Second: the remedial element. When someone is proud and considers himself to be worth something, and does not seek help from the remedial fountain, the poisonous element gains the upper hand. But when he considers himself unworthy and insignificant and feels within him the need for divine help, Allah creates a fountain for him that makes his soul flow. This is the meaning of *istighfar*, namely, to find this strength to overpower the poisonous element. (*Malfuzat*, new edition, vol. 1, pp. 348–349)

If one examines oneself it will easily become evident how what Hazrat Masih Maood (as) says is true. Whenever we try to reform ourselves by being negligent of Allah and not seeking strength from Him one will see that satanic whisperings easily overcome one. But when we sincerely read *istighfar* regularly and daily one sees that it is easier to avoid some common sins and we are not at all inclined to commit them. It is only through experience that we can understand these matters. So as long as we are not ready to practice what we are being told such experiences will be out of reach and we will not put great faith by these matters. The month of Ramadan will give to each one amongst us a rare opportunity to practice the recitation of *istighfar* among other things. One should try reciting it every day and observe its effects upon one’s soul. May Allah grant this opportunity to everyone *incha* Allah.

Concerning the last part of the third condition of bai'at, Hazrat Masih Maood (as) has told us that we should often remember the favours of Allah upon us and thank him and praise Him. In the Holy Quran there are two supplications that we need to learn by heart and repeat them often. They are as follows:

“And We have enjoined on man to be good to his parents. His mother bears him with pain, and brings him forth with pain. And the bearing of him and his weaning takes thirty months, till, when he attains his full maturity and reaches *the age of forty* years, he says, ‘My Lord, grant me *the power* that I may be grateful for Thy favour which Thou hast bestowed upon me and upon my parents, and that I may do such good works as may please Thee. And make my seed righteous for me. I do turn to Thee; and, truly, I am of those who submit *to Thee*.’”(46:16)

The other one is a prayer of Hazrat Suleiman (as) where he said:

“‘My Lord, grant me *the will and power* to be grateful for Thy favour which Thou hast bestowed upon me and upon my parents, and to do *such* good works as would please Thee, and admit me, by Thy mercy, among Thy righteous servants.’(27:20)

I have given the references so that it might be easy for our brothers and sisters to check them and learn them by heart and understand their meanings and recite them daily. It will help each one who does so to think about and reflect upon the favours that Allah has bestowed on each one amongst us. Unfortunately for us we become more conscious of a favour when we lose it. The secret of a good and contented and happy life is to count our blessings and accept our losses. Moreover we should cultivate the habit of appreciating whatever we have instead of wishing that it should have been different. Now let us hear from Hazrat Masih Maood (as) about this quality that we should instill in ourselves. He says:

“If someone ponders deeply, he would realise that all praises and good attributes belong to Allah the Almighty alone. No human or other creature deserves true praise and appreciation.

If one were to reflect without any tinge of selfishness, one would obviously discover that one who creates something, at a time when it did not exist nor was there any information about its existence, such a one should be worthy of praise.

And [such a one should also be worthy of praise] who created necessary means at a time when nothing existed, nor was there any information

available about the basic requirement for creation, sustenance, good health, and maintenance of existence.

And [such a one should also be worthy of praise] who had mercy on a creature that suffered great misfortune and who had relieved it from that misfortune. And [such a one should also be worthy of praise] who does not let the efforts of a hard worker go to waste and gives full reward to those who make the effort. Even though payment of due wages is a right of the labourer, someone who makes due payment can also be a benefactor. All of these are excellent traits that can make one worthy of praise and appreciation.

Now, ponder and you will recognise that all the praiseworthy attributes belong to Allah alone because He alone possesses all these attributes in perfection; and nobody else does.... In short, only Allah the Almighty is perfect in His being and worthy of praise in an excellent manner. In comparison to Him, no one deserves praise by virtue of its own being. If someone else deserves praise, it is only secondary in nature. This, too, is a Mercy of Allah the Almighty because even though He is One, without any partner, He has included others in those praises in a secondary sense.” (*Ro’idad-e-Jalsah Du’a’*, *Ruhani Khaza’in*, vol. 15, pp. 598–602)

He further said “

“If you desire that the angels should praise you in heaven, then endure beating and be joyful, hear abuse and be grateful, experience failure and do not cut asunder your relationship with God. You are the last Jama‘at of God, so practice virtue at its highest level. Anyone from among you who becomes slothful will be cast out of the Jama‘at like a foul thing and will die in sorrow without having caused any harm to God. I give you the good news that your God truly exists. All are His creatures, but He chooses the one who chooses Him. He comes to the one who goes to Him. He bestows honour upon the one who honours Him. So approach Him with straight hearts and pure tongues, eyes and ears so that He may accept you.” (*Kashti-e-Nuh*, *Ruhani Khaza’in*, vol. 19, p. 15)

So to develop the quality of thankfulness in us we should follow the following advice of the Holy Prophet Mohammad (saw) as well. Hadrat Mu‘adh Bin Jabal (ra) has related that the Holy Prophet (saw) held him by his hand and said, ‘Mu‘adh, I swear in the name of Allah! I do love you and counsel you that you should not miss supplicating after every *Salat* “*Allahoumma a’inni a’la zikreka wa shureka wa housne ibaadataka*” meaning “Allah, help me in remembering You, and being grateful to You

and worshipping You in the best manner.’ (*Sunano Abi Dawud, Kitab-ul-Witri, Babun fil-Istighfar*)

In another hadith we are told “Hadrat No‘man Bin Bashir (ra) narrates that the Holy Prophet(saw) said from his pulpit, ‘He who is not grateful for small favours cannot be grateful for the bigger ones. He who cannot be thankful to men cannot render thanks for the favours of Allah. To talk about the blessings of Allah the Almighty is thankfulness; not to mention them is ingratitude.’ (*Musnadu Ahmadabni Hanbal, vol. 4, p. 278, printed in Beirut*)

The teachings of Islam are the best teachings. Unfortunately to many it does not appear to be so. These days even born Muslims find fault with some of its teachings. But it is our belief that Allah knows best and He cares for our wellbeing and that is why He has given us the best teachings and His Prophet is the best exemplar. That is why we will succeed in our life when we are determined to follow Allah and His Prophet (saw). May Allah grant to each one amongst us the best opportunities to fast and to pray so that we may be counted amongst the best people who have ever lived on this earth in the sight of Allah *incha* Allah and we are an example of people who practice virtue. I say in the sight of Allah because He knows everything and therefore He is the only one that counts. Humans may be mistaken and usually they are. May Allah count us among His friends and may He enable us to scale spiritual heights. *Ameen.*