

by Imam Zafrullah Domun

By Allah's Grace the month of Ramadan is going on more or less smoothly for all of us here. Unfortunately, elsewhere in the world, many Muslims are facing several types of problems which are making their lives quite difficult, some of them consequently making others' lives difficult. By next Thursday we will be on our 20th day of fasting insha Allah and we hope that Allah will help each one amongst us and all Muslims as well to complete the last phase of fasting well. May each one amongst us fast with faith and hope and may we all have all our sins forgiven. May Allah grant us the opportunity to make plenty of *Istighfar* and *Tahlil* (saying *Laa ilaha Illallah*) and may we all savour the pleasure of fasting and may we all advance in our knowledge of Allah and in our fear and love of Him.

Some people take Ramadan to be a celebration of the Holy Quran. As you may recall Allah says in the Holy Quran: " *Shahro Ramadan allazi unzila fihil Qurano hodallinnaase wa bayyenaatin minal hoda wal furqan*" which we translate as " the month of ramadan is the month in which the Holy Quran was revealed as a guidance for mankind with clear proofs of guidance and discrimination". Hence, most fasting persons attempt to read the Holy Quran at least once in this blessed month. In addition, we see that in several mosques, it is read in *Tarawi* prayers at night and also in *Tahajjud* at dawn. Nowadays, thanks to satellite communications and the internet, prayers from Mecca can be followed live and it is indeed a spiritual delight to hear them. Whatever may be the other shortcomings of the Arabs, one should appreciate that they practice *qiyam al layl* in a most beautiful way when they stand up at night for *Tarawi* for about one and three quarters of an hour and *tahajjud* for about 45 minutes. For the record, there are about 2 million people reading *Esha* and *tarawih* in Mecca. It is indeed a spectacular sight. I encourage those who have not watched it to have a look. One cannot be indifferent to it. So the Holy Book is read around the world in *Tarawih* and there are many individuals who read it on their own in order to imbibe its teachings. In this way, Muslims do their best to honour the Holy Quran in this month and try to remind themselves of its content so that they might live their life in a way that is approved by Allah.

In addition, according to some reports, it is well known that the revelation of the Holy Quran started in 610 AD on the 24th of Ramadan. Every year, Hazrat Jibril visited the Holy Prophet (saw) and made him recite all the verses that had been revealed until then. This was a common practice during all the twenty-three years of his ministry. In his last Ramadan in 632 AD, Hazrat Jibril made him recite twice. So this confirms the verse which says that the Holy Quran was revealed in this month.

You will all recall that we fast for no other purpose than to become righteous. Now whoever tries to be righteous will easily see that it is not easy. It is a path that is strewn with thorns where we can get easily harmed. For us Ahmadi Muslims, Hazrat Masih Maood (as) has spoken lengthily about the subject of righteousness so that nobody is left in any doubt as to what it is, provided you read his writings. Since fasting has been prescribed for us so that we might become righteous, we will remind ourselves about what it means to be righteous.

When we fast, we have to abstain from food, drink and sex. Most Muslims are able to do this even if they sometimes have the urge to indulge in these prohibitions. Here in Mauritius, we do not have any problems with thirst or the need for food but in countries where they fast for 19 hours, hunger pangs and parched throats are quite acutely felt. I have read about some Muslims who fast 19 hours in the Netherlands and they relate how they are in a weak state in the last hours of the fast. Yet, they do not break it. In fact, almost no one breaks or cheats on their fast. They do so because they know that if they break the fast, they would not be obeying Allah. Their desire and their need to obey Allah makes it impossible for them to break the fast even if they are suffering because of it. I humbly believe that this is the take away message of Ramadan and it is through such a feeling that we inculcate righteousness in our daily living. This spirit of fasting should be carried on in all walks of life. We should all be aware that wherever we are Allah is watching over us and we cannot disobey Him. The following verses of the Holy Quran depict this very clearly. Allah says:

"And thou art not engaged in anything, and thou recitest not from Him any portion of the Qur'an, and you do no work, but We are witnesses of you when you are engrossed therein. And there is not hidden from thy Lord even an atom's weight in the

earth or in heaven. And there is nothing smaller than that or greater, but it is *recorded* in a clear Book."(10:62)

Allah is well aware of what we do and to develop righteousness in ourselves, we should know that He knows. When we have developed that consciousness in ourselves and we express regret through *istaghfaar*, then we will start acquiring righteousness. Hence, the practice of restraint that we are engaged in while we fast should roll over to the other days of the year when we are not fasting. Our fasting is a training, a sort of capacity-building which will help us do what Allah expects from us in the other days of the year. We need to learn this important lesson of Ramadan well if we want to succeed in the aim of our own life. Let us hope and pray that we will all remember this well and we will all strive to be an obedient servant of Allah.

There are several other verses of the Holy Quran that speak of this overall presence of Allah of which we should be aware but we will leave them for the time being.

In sufi literature, there is a tale that is told to illustrate this idea of being aware of Allah in all circumstances. A sufi master gave a dove to each of his students and told them to go in a place where no one will see them and slaughter the bird. Some went into caves, others went behind a big rock, others looked for secluded places and they all slaughtered their bird except the most beloved student. He brought back his dove alive because he said that he could not find a place where no one could see him. He said wherever he went Allah was seeing him and that is why he did not slaughter his dove. Then the master praised him in front of all the students and explained why he was the favorite because he understood the most fundamental truth of existence. Allah has everything in his purview. We need to develop such an awareness in ourselves.

Now I will share with you something that I read recently. A companion of the Holy Prophet (saw) offered prayers with him. The Holy Prophet (saw) said that this person is heaven-bound. Hadrat ‘Abdullah bin ‘Umar(ra) was curious about what deed on the part of that person had deserved God's Beneficence and so he went and stayed overnight with him and was shown great hospitality. Ibne ‘Umar (ra) said, "I offered 'Tahajjud' prayers while this person slept. I observed an obligatory fast the next day while he did not. I questioned him about his actions which entitled him to be heaven-bound. He answered: ‘As the Holy Prophet (saw) has told you about it you better enquire from him." Ibne ‘Umar (ra) went to the Holy Prophet (saw) and asked him. The Holy Prophet (saw) told him to go back and ask him about it with his permission. This

companion of the Holy Prophet (saw) said, "Firstly, I do not value worldly things. If I get them it is fine and if I do not get them it does not matter to me. Secondly, I do not have jealousy or bear rancour against anyone." Hadrat Ibne 'Umar (ra) admitted that most surely God had given him superiority over others. This is a prayer Allah has taught to believers. "Our Lord, forgive us and our brothers who preceded us in the faith, and leave not in our hearts any rancour against those who believe. Our Lord, You are indeed Compassionate, Merciful.(Al-Hashr 59:11)

This hadith teaches us that the purity of our heart is most important and we should do our best to purify it. This purification and this elimination can take years of discipline. The following story illustrates this point quite eloquently. This is a story told by no less a saint than Hazrat Muhy uddin Ibn Arabi. He says:

On our way I found a man living in a marsh in a place covered with rushes. I learned that he has lived there for thirty years in seclusion. I stayed with him for three days. He prayed day and night and did strange things. Every morning he went fishing and caught three fish. One he would let go, one was his meal for the whole day and one he gave to the poor.

As I was about to leave, he asked me where I was going. I told him " to Egypt". Tears came to his eyes."Oh" he said." My beloved master, my Shaikh, is in Egypt. Please go to him and give him my respects and greetings. Ask him to advise me what to do with myself in this world."

I was amazed. That man had abandoned this world and the worldly. It seemed to me that he did not need any advice about it.

When I went to Egypt, I found his Shaikh living in a palace in complete luxury and wealth. He appeared to be nothing more than a man of the world. When I told him the request from his dervish in Tunis he said " Go and tell him he should take the love of the world out of his heart." This also amazed me, coming from him.

On my return to Tunis, I found the secluded fisherman and told him what his master has said. He shed tears of blood." Woe is me! For thirty years I have separated myself from the world and spent my time in worship, but my heart still belongs to the world! While my master lives within the riches of the world, he hasn't a drop of it in his heart, neither its love nor its worries. Mohyuddin that is the difference between him and me !"(what the seeker needs page xiii).

So eliminating the love of the world from the heart is not a simple matter. It needs Allah's Grace together with plenty of effort on our part. It is only Allah who knows the state of people's heart and he knows who is of merit and who is not. May Allah help each one amongst us to use the discipline that Fasting imposes upon us to learn its essence and to feel the presence of Allah in every second that we live. This is what Allah seeks from us. May He help us all to achieve the standard that He expects from us *incha* Allah.