

FRIDAY SERMON

08 April 2022

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أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ ۖ فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَّرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ ۗ وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ طَعَامُ مِسْكِينٍ ۖ فَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَهُ ۚ وَأَنْتُمْ صُومُوا خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

This year, unfortunately because of the bad weather and non-visibility of the moon, we started fasting, here in Mauritius, on Monday last. As such, there is a possibility that we might fast only for 28 days instead of the usual 29 or 30 days that is usually expected.

In the time of Hazrat Masih Maood (as), it is reported that a friend from Sialkot enquired from the Promised Messiah^{as}, “The moon was not sighted here on Tuesday and instead, was sighted on Wednesday [while Ramadan had already begun on Wednesday]. So, we observed the first fast on Thursday. What are we to do now?” The Promised Messiah^{as} replied:

“After the month of Ramadan, observe an additional fast, in exchange to the one that has been missed.” (*Al Badr*, 31 October 1907, p.7). So, its not a big deal. If we have missed one day of fasting, we will have to replace it after Eid.

The blessed verse that I have just read is the second one of the Ruku in Sura Al Baqarah where the instructions concerning fasting in the blessed month of Ramadan are mentioned. Its translation is as follows:

“*The prescribed fasting is for a fixed number of days, but whoso among you is sick or is on a journey shall fast the same number of other days; and for those who are able to fast only with great difficulty is an expiation — the feeding of a poor man. And whoso performs a good work with willing obedience, it is better for him. And fasting is good for you, if you only knew*” (2:185)

These fasts have been prescribed for all adult Muslims (man and woman) for either 29 or 30 days as per a clear saying of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw). Since these fasts were prescribed, Muslims around the world have been fasting with great enthusiasm and great determination. Each year, out of twelve lunar months, one is dedicated to Fasting. However, if someone is sick or is on a journey, he should replace the fast when he regains his health or when he finishes his travel. People who can only fast with great difficulty are given an expiation, that is to feed a poor person. If they feel like willingly doing good beyond what is prescribed, it is better for them. And Allah tells us that there is much good in fasting if only we try to learn about those benefits. These days, research is being done about the benefits of fasting and conferences are held where experts in medicine come to explain how

they are using fasting to improve people's health. This proves that the words of Allah are full of wisdom and they merit our full attention and our full adherence to them whether we understand their wisdom or not.

Now, I would like to share with you some extracts from a booklet written by Imam Ghazali (1058-1111). It has been translated as "the book of fasting" and can be read on the net. It is one of several sets of books that he wrote about Islam. He said:

"Know that there are three levels of fasting: the fasting of the common faithful [people], the fasting of the elect, and the fasting of the elect of the elect. The fasting of the common faithful [people] consists in keeping the stomach and private parts from satisfying their desires. The fasting of the elect consists in keeping the hearing, sight, tongue, hands, feet, and all other members of the body free from sin. The fasting of the elect of the elect [involves] the heart; [it consists of] fasting from worldly concerns and mundane thoughts and completely refraining from [focusing on] anything other than God. This fast is broken by thinking about anything other than God and the last day, [that is, by] thinking about anything in this world except what supports the din, and what is provision for the hereafter and not this world. In fact, the people of the heart say, "Anyone whose concern during the day turns into pondering over what he will break his fast with [at sunset] is committing a sin," for this shows how little trust he has in God's generosity (*fadl*), and how little certainty he has that his provision is guaranteed? This is the level of fasting of the prophets, the veracious, and those who are near God. We will not dwell on trying to describe this, other than to say that its deepest meaning is to focus our entire aspiration on God, to turn away from what is other than God, glory be to Him, and to be completely enveloped by the meaning of His words Say, "God [revealed it]" Then leave them in their [empty] discourse, amusing themselves [6:91]. As for the fasting of elect, which is the fasting of the righteous (*salihin*), this consists in keeping the members of the body away from sin and [it] is accomplished through six practices.

The first [practice] is to lower the gaze and refrain from letting one's vision extend to anything blameworthy or disapproved of, or [to extend] to anything that preoccupies and distracts the heart from the remembrance of God. As the Prophet said, "the gaze is one of the poisoned arrows of Iblis [Satan], may God curse him. Anyone who refrains from gazing [at something] out of the fear of God, God will give [them] faith whose sweetness [that a person will] find in his heart."

And Jabir conveyed from Anas that the Messenger of God said, "Five things will break the fast of a fasting person: lying, backbiting, slander, making a false oath, and gazing at something with lust."

The second [practice] is to guard the tongue from babbling, lying, backbiting, slander, obscenity, pettiness, disputation, and ostentation. Instead, it should be silent or occupied with the invocation of God, glory be to Him, and the recitation of the Quran. Such is the tongue's fasting.

According to Bishr b. al-Harith. Sufyan [al-Thawri] said, backbiting annuls the fast.' And Layth related that Mujahid said, "Two kinds of behavior ruin the fast backbiting and lying." [Concerning the same subject], the Prophet said "Fasting is a shield, so if one of you is fasting, let him refrain from obscenities and foolishness, and should he encounter someone who wishes to fight with him or be verbally abusive, let him say, only, I am fasting!"

It is related in a tradition that during the lifetime of the Messenger of God there were two women who were fasting and felt such hunger and thirst by the end of the day that they were about to die. So, they sent a message to the Messenger of God asking his permission to break the fast. In response, he sent them a large bowl and said, "Tell them to vomit into this what they have eaten. To the amazement of the onlookers, one of them vomited fresh blood and flesh that filled half the bowl and the other did the same until it was completely filled. The Prophet then said, "These two fasted from what God makes lawful for them, but broke their fast on what God most high forbade them: They sat down together to backbite people, and this is some of their flesh which they ate."

The third [practice] is to keep the ears from listening to anything reprehensible, for anything that is forbidden to say is forbidden to hear. Thus, God made listening to lies equal to devouring illicit gains with His words, [They are] avid listeners to falsehood, devourers of [what is] unlawful [5:42]. And also, "Why do the rabbis and religious scholars not forbid them from saying what is sinful and devouring what is unlawful?" [5:63]. To be silent in the presence of backbiting is also forbidden, for as He says elsewhere ...Indeed, you would then be like them [4:140] Thus the Prophet said, "The backbiter and the one who listens to him are partners in sin."

The fourth [practice] is to guard the rest of the members of the body—the hands and the feet—from sin and from things that are disapproved of and to keep the stomach from what is questionable at the moment of breaking the fast. It is meaningless to fast by refraining from what is lawful, only to break the fast with what is forbidden. This is like building a castle and destroying a town. Lawful food harms by quantity, not by content, and fasting is meant to reduce that quantity. Someone who avoids a large dose of medicine because it might do him harm but then takes a small dose of poison in its place, is truly a fool. While forbidden food is a poison that is deadly to [ones] din, lawful food is a remedy that works in small doses but harms in large ones. So, the purpose of fasting is to reduce its quantity. The Prophet (saw) said, "How many of those who fast gains nothing from their fast except hunger and thirst". This was said to refer to those who break their fasts with what is forbidden, or who refrain from lawful food but break their fast with people's flesh by backbiting, which is forbidden. It was also said that it refers to anyone who does not guard the members of his body from sins.

The fifth [practice] is to not eat so much, at the time of breaking the fast—even though the food is lawful—that his stomach becomes completely full, for no vessel angers God more than a stomach that is filled, even with lawful food. How can fasting serve to overcome Gods foe and subdue a person's appetites if, when breaking the fast, a person makes up

whatever he missed in the afternoon or perhaps even adds to it a variety of foods? It has become a custom to store up all sorts of foods for Ramadan, such that, in that month, people eat what they do not eat in other months. Yet it is clear that the goal of fasting is to become empty and to break the desires in order to strengthen piety in the soul. If the stomach is deprived of food all day until the evening, such that its appetite is stimulated and its cravings grow stronger, and then it is fed all manner of delicacies to repletion, its sensual pleasure is only increased and this leads to passions that were not there before. The spirit and mystery of fasting [involves] weakening the physical energy that Satan uses to turn people towards evil, and this weakening cannot be achieved except by reducing [the intake of food]. This means that someone should eat whatever he normally eats at night when not fasting. If he combines what he eats at noon with what he eats at night, he will derive no benefit from his fast. Indeed, among the manners related to fasting [is] not to sleep too much during the day—so that he can feel hunger and thirst, experience physical weakness, and thereby cleanse his heart. At night some amount of that weakening should remain with him, so that night worship (*tahajjud*) and litanies are easier for him. In this way maybe even, Satan will cease to hover round his heart and he will behold the dominions of the heavens.

The “night of power” refers to the night during which some part of these heavenly dominions were revealed, and this is what is meant by the words of God most high, “Indeed, We sent the Quran down during the night of power” [97:1], but he who places a feedbag between his heart and his breast is veiled, and simply emptying the stomach is not enough to lift the veil, as long as he does not also cease to aspire after anything but God. This, in fact, is the whole goal, but it begins with reducing the intake of food.”

There is another extract remaining. We will read it incha Allah next time. May Allah help us to fast in such a way that we achieve the true objective of fasting incha Allah. Ameen.