

Signs of Piety

Friday Sermon Presented by

Dr Mahmud Abul-Huda Al Husaini

Al 'Adiliyya Mosque, Aleppo, 12\9\2008

Last week, we recited the Exalted Allah's words: "**O ye who believe! fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may {learn} self restraint**" (Al Baqarah, 183), and recognized that fasting is one of the causes of piety. This text led us to remember the other causes of piety mentioned in the Book of the Exalted Allah.

Today, and after we have passed the first ten days of Ramadan, I see that we had better make this blessed hour a time of self-reckoning. Is it possible that the merchant trades in one third of his work without making any review of his accounts?

Our Lord, Exalted He is, makes piety the wisdom of fasting. "**O ye who believe! fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may {learn} self restraint**". Are there any signs of piety according to which we can have self-reckoning? Is the fruit of fasting manifest in us or not, or we fast and perform night prayers without availing ourselves of the results of these practices?

In the Holy Qur'an, there is an answer for every question. I have calculated six signs of piety in the Book of the Exalted Allah in which one can find the answer to this question.

Since the fruit of fasting is piety, as is stated in the Holy Qur'an, and as I have fasted this great month, does piety appear in me or not?

If the fruit of fasting appears in me, praise and thanks are due to my Lord. But if they do not, I still have the opportunity to avail myself of in the remaining part of this month to make the truth of fasting and praying be verified in me.

You had better subject yourself to this evaluation so that the accountability of the self be practical. These signs are as the following:

1- A Feeling of Change within the Heart, the content and purport of which is more glorification of the religion of Allah.

The Exalted Allah said:

Such {is his state}, and Whoever glorifies the rituals of Allah, Such {honor} should come truly From piety of the heart (Al Haj, 32).

The majority of exegetes unanimously agreed that the meaning of the 'rituals of Allah' referred to in this verse is the religion of Allah.

You used to glorify the law put by man as well as the religion of Allah, but after fasting you find that glorifying the religion of Allah has become superior to any other glorification whatsoever.

You used to glorify religion in addition to the world, but you have seen that, after fasting, you glorify the religion of Allah in a way that is far superior to that of the world.

You used to glorify your children, your family, your friend..., but after you have been admitted to the school of fasting, you find that your heart glorifies the religion of Allah, Exalted He is, far greater than any other glorification of any other object.

What is the meaning of issue? Is it mere mottoes or is it a practical process?

On the levels of treatment, worship, and every behavior, there is direction related to this worship or this treatment in the religion of the Exalted Allah. There are instructions in the treatment of the wife, the treatment of the child, dealing with people in business transactions, dealing with the ruler and the ruled. There are instructions on the level of sociology or economics, on the level of politics or personal law or personal affairs. In all these cases, you find guidance in the religion of Allah.

When you find in your heart reaction that implies glorification towards this direction, then the first sign will have appeared in you, but if you consider this direction of the Exalted Allah equal to what you hear people say, then this first sign of piety will be missing in you.

2-A Feeling of Preference to the Welfare of the Hereafter rather than that of this World.

The Exalted Allah said:

What is the life of this world but play and amusement? but best is the home in the Hereafter, for those who are righteous. Will ye not then understand (Al An'am, 32).

This verse indicates the fact that the righteous is in a state in which he perceives the goodness of the Hereafter and

prefers it to that of this world. Within his heart, he feels the goodness that awaits him in the Hereafter that is incomparable, whatsoever, with the temporary gain of the present life that is available, for this life is a place of test and trial during which you might be lucky and fortunate, or you might not be so. It is a passage that leads to the Hereafter. Religion disciplines our state while we are passing through this world and directs it, but it does not make this world our final goal while we are travelling on this journey.

The story of the magicians of Pharaoh is an example that should be repeated by anyone who wants to test the piety in his heart, because it is a practical real story, not knitted by imagination. It is a real story we read in the Exalted Allah's words: "**the magicians were thrown down to prostration**" (Taha, 70).

Pharaoh possessed all the luxuries of life, and promised the magicians to give them everything of these luxuries, but they were able to see the radiant truth presented by Moses (PBUH) by the permission of Allah.

It is the truth that refers to the fact: 'there is no lord but Allah'.

The truth that says: 'There is no great but Allah'.

All the universe is a tool in the Hand of Allah. Pharaoh and all that he possessed are mere tools of the Ability of the Exalted Allah. This is a fact that the captives of habit and the materialists miss.

In the Exalted Allah's words, '**the magicians were thrown down to prostration**', the truth of piety is manifest. Is our

prostration in the night prayer similar to that of the magician who were thrown down to prostration?

they said, We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses. {Pharaoh} said: 'believe ye in him before I give you permission?' (Taha, 70-71).

Pharaoh is a highwayman who wanted to make his permission a means of cutting the way between the slave and his Lord, whereas everything acts by the permission of the One, Exalted He is.

Oh Pharaoh, you and all the property you possess, as well as the permission you assume to give, are in the Hand of the Exalted Allah, and are included in the optional system of this world.

surely this must be your leader, Who has taught you magic! (Taha, 71).

Here, the magicians were faced by a false charge directed to them unjustly. It is, 'what appeared to you is included in your magic'.

Afterwards, terrifying followed. Preventing bestowal is not enough as punishment. It goes beyond that to reach threatening of bodily injury. It is even more than that. It is not only a threat of cutting the benefit. It surpasses it to reach threatening of cutting the limbs:

Be sure I will cut off your hands and feet on opposite sides (Taha, 71).

This is the method the butchers use. So do a lot of rulers who are mere figures, but in their reality, they are butchers who slaughter their nations and lie to them. When the Exalted Allah created man, he made the ruler equal to the ruled, whether they are of a high status or of

a low one, whether they are old or small. All are mere slaves of the Exalted Allah, but man becomes a tyrant when he finds that he has the power of being able to dispose with the material.

and I will have you crucified on trunks of palm trees
(Taha, 71).

It is the threat of torturing and exemplary punishment.

Pharaoh threatened to remove, destroy and crush the cage of the body.

So shall ye know for certain, which of us can give the more severe and the more Lasting punishment (Taha, 71).

Who is going to be everlasting?

'I am going to remove you from existence and I shall stay permanently...Are you able to torture me? I have the capability of torturing you.'

Thus, this is the attitude of the one who is cut from sound insight; the ignorant who is deprived of seeing nothing but this world.

Oh Pharaoh, we shall see how it is but few days, and you will be drowned in the sea.

Who are you!?

Do you believe yourself to be dominating everything because you are deceived by the material?

Haven't you learnt a lesson from the tyrants that preceded you?

Who are you?

Oh man, if you are more knowledgeable than the others, then you are put to the test because of your knowledge. So remember that you are a slave to Allah when you think of it.

If you have authority, wealth or children, remember that these are all trusts put in your hand by the Exalted Allah, and you are one of Allah's slaves tested with what He has bestowed on you.

If you are bestowed the favors of having children, authority or high status, you should know that you are put to test. If you are wealthy, do not have the illusion that you are above the poor; if you are learned, do not have the illusion that you are above the unlearned. Certainly not, for the Exalted Allah tested each one of you with something, and the result will be revealed on the Hereafter when all people stand and the Exalted Allah says: " **Whose is the dominion today?**". At that time, there will be no difference between the wealthy and the poor, or the ruler and the ruled. They will all be equal.

But what did the magicians of Pharaoh say after hearing threat and menacing?

Herein the truth is revealed: "**But best is the home in the Hereafter, for those who are righteous**" (Al An'am, 32).

This is the choice you are required to take at every moment. You have to ask yourself in every situation and every occasion: 'Is this attitude I assume better for me in the Hereafter, or it is harmful for me in the Hereafter and beneficial for me in this life?

This is the question that presents you the second sign of piety.

The magicians passed the test successfully. They said:

"never shall we regard thee as more than the Clear Signs that have Come to us; or than Him Who created us" (Taha, 72).

They swore by Allah that they would not prefer Pharaoh and his wealth to the truth that appeared to them. Herein appears the truth of piety, and herein are the pious manifest.

May the Mercy of Allah be upon Abil 'Ala' Al Ma'arri who said in a poem of his:

Ignorant is the one who, when his aspirations are displayed to him

And he becomes more interested in them,

he is not considered steadfast.

His aspirations make him deviate from the right path. Consequently he does not become steadfast on the right method.

Then the magicians said:

so decree whatever thou desirest to decree: for thou canst only decree (touching) the life of this world (Taha, 72).

The truth of piety is revealed in such attitude.

Thus, **"What is the life of this world but play and amusement?** (it is a reality that is seen by the pious), **"But best is the home in the Hereafter, for those who are righteous. Will ye not then understand (Al An'am, 32).**

When the finger of the Prophet (PBUH) was wounded on the Day of Al Khandaq (the ditch), he recited some poetic lines by Abdullah Ibn Rowaha, the honored Companion. He said:

**You are a mere wounded finger,
That is inflicted in the cause of Allah**

The believer who is desirous to be acquainted with the truth of piety should be promoted to such a level and say to his body: 'Oh body, you are a mere a vehicle with which I travel to the Hereafter, and my final goal is the life in the Hereafter and the satisfaction of the Exalted Allah.

"What is the life of this world but play and amusement? But best is the home in the Hereafter, for those who are righteous. Will ye not then understand".

The magicians said:

"for thou canst only decree (touching) the life of this world.

For us, we have believed in our Lord; may he forgive us our faults, and the magic to which Thou didst compel us: for Allah is best And most abiding (Taha, 70-73).

3-A Feeling of Tranquility and Safety:

The people of gnosis (MBUTH) said: **"the Gnostic has peace of mind"**.

Peace of mind is a state in which the believer's heart becomes void of any confusion. Consequently, he feels tranquility and safety, even if he is destroyed from the outside. The Exalted Allah said:

O ye Children of Adam! whenever there come to you Messengers from amongst you, rehearsing My Signs unto you- those who are righteous and mend {their lives}- on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve (Al A'raf, 35).

They live in a state of delight with their Lord, and inwardly, they feel tranquility and serenity.

Certainly, because they care only for their Lord, so their Lord cares for them in return. Consequently, they become His saints. Haven't you read the Exalted Allah's description of these saints in the Holy Book when He said: **"Saints shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve. Those who believe and {constantly} guard against evil" ?** (Yunus, 62-63).

This inner feeling of tranquility is the result of their trust in the Exalted Allah, their confidence in Allah, their dependence on Allah, and their reliance on Allah.

In the biography of the saint Ibrahim Ibn Al Adham (MBOH) I read that once when he was praying, a great lion came and sat beside him. When he finished his prayer, he saw the lion sitting beside him growling, but Ibrahim was not affected from the inside. He said to the beast:

"If you are ordered to do something to us, go ahead to achieve what you are ordered to do, otherwise go away, you, wicked".

"If you are ordered to do something to us", i.e., if the Exalted Allah sent you to execute His order so that I depart from this world to the second one, hurry up and save me from the responsibility of the test that causes me great trouble and self-struggle.

Go ahead to achieve what you are ordered to do. Why should you wait?

Otherwise, go away, you, wicked.

The beast bent its head, turned its back and ran away.

It is the peace of mind supported by the Exalted Allah.

It is the state of inner tranquility that is unknown to the people who are inwardly upset because of their materialism.

Certainly, this happened at the time of the Companions of the Messenger of the Exalted Allah (PBUH). Once when Safina, the *Mawla* (a follower under the patronage) of the Messenger of Allah was lost in the desert, he saw a lion. He came near it and said: "Guide me to the way, for I have got lost". The lion walked before Safina and showed him the way.

Once a lion stopped in the way of people to attack them. Ibn Omar (ABPWH) came and removed it from their way.

Thus, **the first sign** is glorifying the religion of Allah.

The second sign is the feeling of inner tranquility and serenity as a result of depending on Allah, and relying on His Great Ability and the Great Status of His Divine Majesty.

4-Absence of the Feeling of Fear that the Enemy is Able to Inflict Harm.

This is a delicate issue. If we understand that inflicting harm on the believers' wealth and body by the enemy is everything, we will have not understood the issue. But when we understand it as we do with the story of

Pharaoh's magicians, we realize that Pharaoh was unable to harm them.

The exact explanation of the text I am going to present is ambiguous, because in this verse, the Exalted Allah said: **"But if ye are constant and do right, not the least harm will their cunning do to you"** (Al Imran, 120).

Your religion will persist however your enemies plot against it.

However hard the enemies try to be superior to the Ability of Allah, they will fail.

The enemies of Islam will fail however hard they try to be superior to the Ability of Allah.

Their aim will not be achieved however hard they try to make Islam equal to other religions. The Exalted Allah does not make Islam equal to any other religions. He said: **"To Allah, religion is Islam"** (Imran, 19). He also said:

If anyone desires a religion other than Islam never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost {all spiritual good} (Al Imran, 85).

However hard the enemies of Islam try to reverse truths, they will not achieve their aim.

They might affect bodies and wealth:

Be sure We shall test you with something of fear (i.e., the outward fear only), "and hunger, some loss in goods or lives or the fruits but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere (Al Baqarah, 155).

This is the law of the Exalted Allah, but the harm that is the final result will not be at the hands of the enemies of Islam. Was Pharaoh able to harm the magicians? Definitely not.

The magicians were killed, and Pharaoh was drowned, but the magicians were the winners and became dwellers of Paradise at the Exalted Allah, whereas Pharaoh went to the lowest bottom of Hell.

The fourth sign presents more clarification than the third one, because in the third sign, there is general security as well as settlement, but in the fourth one there is reference to what might make the believer's heart upset by the rancor of the enemy.

5-Hasty Return to Allah when One Commits a Sin:

The Exalted Allah said:

Those who fear Allah, when a thought of evil from Satan assaults them, bring Allah to remembrance, when lo they see {the right}. (Al A'raf, 201).

Do not persist in faults.... Do not persist in disobedience.

If your self overcomes you for a moment, remember Allah and return to Him. Fall prostrate at His threshold in submission weeping, repentant, prostrating, and address your Lord saying: 'Oh my Lord, I have returned to you'.

Those who fear Allah, when a thought of evil from Satan assaults them, bring Allah to remembrance, when lo they see {the right}.

They do not go on committing faults, because the infallible are only the Messengers of Allah. But the believers might sin for a moment as a result of some reason, but they

hastily repent their sins and return to their Lord, and realize the truth of their glorification of the religion of the Exalted Allah mentioned in the first sign.

6- Heaven and Earth React with the Pious by Sending Blessings to them.

After being steadfast in piety, the believer finds that he is privileged by the blessings of heaven and earth. This is indicated in the Exalted Allah's statement: **"If the people of the towns had but believe and feared Allah, we should indeed have opened out to them (all kinds of) blessing"** (In Arabic, the definite article is used differently from that in English, i.e., when 'blessing' is used without a definite article, it means that each one gets a special kind of blessings), **"from heaven and earth"** (Al A'raf, 96). The believers receive plenty of blessings, both from heaven and earth.

The Hadith narrated by Imam Muslim in his Sahih, from the Prophet (PBUH) asserts this fact. The Prophet (PBUH) said:

"Once there was a man on an open space of land; while there, he heard a sound coming from a cloud saying: Water the garden of so-and-so. Then the cloud moved toward another direction to pour its water onto a stony area, {a space of land covered with black stones}. This water was wholly absorbed by a loophole (a path inside a crack in the land within which the water of the torrent flows). The man followed the water, and found a man working in his garden directing the water by his iron shovel; he asked him: O slave of Allah! what is your name? He replied: So-and-so, the same name heard from the cloud, and asked; O slave of Allah! Why do you ask

about my name? The man said: I heard a sound, coming from the cloud the water of which is this, saying: Water the garden of so-and-so, which is your name. So what do you do in this garden? He said: Since you have said this, {I'll tell you} I see into what comes out of it and spend its third as a charity, eat a third together with my family, and return a third back into it."

The above mentioned tale related by our Master, the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) presents a practical explanation of how heaven and earth react with the believer.

This is one of the examples, the purport of which is not exclusive. It is rather intended to present an example.

Finally, let us recount the six signs so that we remember them, and by which we measure our fasting. Will the results of our fasting that are the signs of piety appear, or we only stop eating and drinking while we are away from the truth of piety that dwells in the heart?

The Prophet (PBUH) said: "**Piety is here... . Piety is here... . Piety is here**", pointing out to his breast.

The signs of piety are:

1-Feeling of glorification of the religion of the Exalted Allah that surpasses any other glorification.

2-Preference of the welfare of the Hereafter to that of this life.

3-Existence of the feeling of tranquility, and serenity in the heart.

4-Feeling of security that guards against the cunning of the enemy.

5-Hasty return to the Exalted Allah at the moment of committing a sin.

6-Reaction of heaven and earth with the pious that may appear, as I said formerly, in many examples. Sometimes you witness it by your own eyes as a sign that makes you be tranquil and steadfast on the method of piety and the method of the month of Ramadan in which the Qur'an was revealed.

Some brethren talked about the relationship between the Qur'an and Ramadan as a relationship between the faster and reciting the Qur'an. The relationship between Ramadan and the Qur'an depends rather on three factors mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and applied by the Messenger of Allah (PBUH). They are: sanctifying the believers, and instructing them in Scripture and Wisdom.

This is the relationship with the Qur'an. When you realize such a relationship, your communication will be sound. It is connecting Ramadan with the Qur'an. But if you make the relationship between the Qur'an and Ramadan mere recital of the verses, as is the case with people today, it will be an unsuccessful experience.

The relationship with the Qur'an is recital, followed by knowledge, then purification. If you experience such a relationship then your relationship with the Qur'an in Ramadan will be healthy and sound, but if this does not happen, you share the hypocrites their bad qualities, i.e., their reading of the Holy Qur'an does not go beyond their throats.

Finally, remember this verse because it is closely related to the signs of piety: **"fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may {learn} self restraint"**.

Allahum..., guide us to You favorably, and make us from those who listen to wisdom and follow the best of it.

I say my words and ask Allah's forgiveness.