

FASTING IS A LESSON OF DISCIPLINE

Friday Sermon by Dr Mahmud Abul-Huda Al Husaini

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The legislation of fasting is ordained in every Heavenly religion. Every instruction or guidance sent by the Exalted Allah is accompanied by the order of fasting. The Exalted Allah said:

"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, v. 183).

The Last Ummah is not singled out from the previous nations concerning this legislation and this obligation.

So what is the secret of the great difference in rules and legislations among them?

Why does the obligation of fasting is ordained in all Heavenly missions?

While fasting in Ramadan, we have to ask ourselves the previously mentioned question so that we can go beyond behavior and practice to understand the purpose and wisdom of this ritual. Man is the only creature who is not guided by his exterior. He is rather guided by his interior. If we fast without understanding the secrets of fasting and its purposes, our fasting would be a mere habit we are used to, a habit received from our ancestors and forefathers.

By nature, the soul is inclined to disorder and attaining whatever it desires and wishes. When man is in control of himself, he becomes more atrocious and more misguided

than animals, because he has what the animals do not have. In addition, he can employ all his energies and aptitudes for the service of himself. The present state of the world we live in now is an evident proof of what we are going to mention now. Why has the hand stretched from beyond the oceans to steal the petrol of our Islamic world?

Why are the indulgent in luxury, the people who do not suffer hunger and thirst, greedy of the provision of the hungry?

Why do those who migrated to a land and settled in it after killing its inhabitants, seek the plundering of the wealth of the poor and the land of the weak?

It is the chaos of the souls that we suffer from in our Islamic world after we have been satisfied with ignorance, idleness, backwardness and subservience. All that is caused by the anarchy of the souls. Consequently, the avaricious people become greedy of our wealth.

Thus man, with every thing he has, i.e., the soul, the heart, the mind, the spirit and the body, should have an edifying and taming element to teach him discipline and order after his being in a state of confusion and anarchy. Accordingly, the legislation of fasting is ordained in every Heavenly religion.

The Exalted Allah said:

"Ramadan is the (month) in which was sent down the Quran as a guide to mankind, also clear

(Signs) for guidance and judgment (between right and wrong), (Al Baqarah, v. 185).

When the believers are ready to fast in the month of Ramadan and are guided to do that, their souls become purified by their fasting, and when their souls become in agreement with the order of the Exalted Allah, they become ready to listen to the details of the evidences of the Holy Qur'an.

How many the times are when the orators of Friday sermons say, "Do that, and do not do that". Why aren't we influenced by their speech, and why don't our states change thereby?

It is because we need guidance. We begin the journey in the way of guidance, but we stop after two steps. We all oblige ourselves with the night prayer (Tarawih), and we all stay at home at breakfast. These are the steps that make us nearer to the state of commitment to discipline, but sorrowfully, we stop after few steps.

Certainly, we are raised by these steps, but we do not reach the required stage produced by guidance, which is adherence to the evidences of the Holy Qur'an, and applying the details of their laws as manifested in the Holy Qur'an.

In this great season, we feel a state of spirituality and closeness to the Exalted Allah; we feel a sublimity that we haven't had before, but our bodies and our behavior are still closely related to the material.

Certainly, the month of Ramadan is unlike the other months, for it is the season of particularity with all the meanings the word bears, but we do not employ this

guidance properly to change it into a state of commitment and discipline on our part, especially when we have already got this readiness in this honored month.

"Ramadan is the (month) in which was sent down the Quran". The Holy Qur'an was revealed in a month in which the souls become ready to listen to it. When souls fast, they become purified. As a result, they become ready for application and discipline, so the Exalted Allah makes clear and details the Islamic laws in the Holy Qur'an.

the Quran {is} as a guide to mankind, also {in it there are} clear (Signs) for guidance and judgment (between right and wrong)". The Exalted Allah said: "Do that and don't do that". He gives details of how man should behave on all levels without any exceptions.

Read the following verse as an example in the great Holy Qur'an:

"Take not with Allah another object of worship; or thou (O man) will sit in disgrace and destitution".

The starting point of your felicity is monotheism, i.e., to turn to the One God, otherwise you will live in distraction, attracted by multi-sides, not knowing which one to follow.

"Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but him", i.e., your Lord ordained that your behavioral worship should be directed only to Him.

"And that ye be kind to parents". The Exalted Allah then begins to enter into the social behavior of man and his relationships to discipline them.

"Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them the word 'oh', nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor".

I tried once to know the connotation of the word 'oh' in this respect. I found that it is the first word that stirs a noise in a still atmosphere. The Exalted Allah does not use the word 'clatter', nor does he use an expression that refers to a great noise, but He uses a word that indicates the beginning of noise according to the language of letters. When one becomes old, the slightest noise bothers him.

"Whether one or both of them attain old age": When one becomes old, one psychologically changes, for he is no more patient as he used to be in his youth.

"Whether one or both of them". Here is an explicit answer to those who stipulates that the married couple should be near to one another in age. Certainly not, for the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), the legislator, married 'Aisha (GBH) when he was fifty. This law, set by the Exalted Allah, contains much wisdom. The ignorant lied when they wanted to reverse truths and depicted the character of the Prophet (PBUH) as violent and lustful.

Oh, Messenger of Allah, I sacrifice myself for you. The people who tried to offend your Excellency are liars.

The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) married Khadija who was fifteen years older than him. He married 'Aisha who was younger than him, but this does not mean that the

married couple are prohibited to be of the same age, for he (PBUH) also married Sawdah who was as old as him.

This is the large legislation that covers all levels of man's behavior, and presents wide range of opportunities for him to discipline his behavior.

Freedom is not as the black lightheaded in the White House calls. She believes that the meaning of freedom is stealing the others' wealth, and libertinism. The concept of real freedom is unlike that. It is when man has freedom from himself and makes it disciplined and organized.

This is the type of our freedom by which we fight those thieves who lie to mankind. It is we who are the owners of freedom. Our motto is: "**There is no compulsion in religion**". It is we who carry the flag of freedom, but we do not trade in false mottoes.

"**Out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility**", i.e., be tender to your parents, not as a tyrant condescending to be merciful to them, but out of mercy. That is, when you tame your heart and refine your self to be characterized by mercy, mercy produces humbleness on your part to your parents.

"**and say: my Lord bestow on them thy mercy even as they cherished me in childhood**". Make this statement your invocation in every prayer you perform, and ask the Exalted Allah to have mercy on them, for He will inspire your children to do the same for you in your life and after your death.

"**Your Lord knows best what is in your hearts**" There is no pretension in this case for the Exalted Allah is All-

Knowing. See how the Qur'anic address fathoms the depth of man.

"if ye do deeds of righteousness, verily he is most forgiving to those who turn to him again and again (in true penitence)". This verse presents one of the laws, then it is supported by the control of the Exalted Allah so that we can understand that our religion is not a law that deals with the exterior of man only. It rather builds up man's interior. Consequently, reformation of the exterior is produced.

"And render to the kindred their due rights". The Exalted Allah moves on to another law teaching man to be committed and disciplined not only in his treatment of parents, but also to relatives and kin.

"as (also) to those in want". Those in want may be poorer than the poor and higher in rank than them, a matter which is still disputed among the men of knowledge.

"and to the wayfarer". He is the rich man who is a stranger cut from his country. Thus, if there is an American, a Chinese, or a European who is unable to get his money from his country, we have to give him money from the fund of Zakat even if he were rich.

This is our Islam. We call do not kill the American or the European. Instead, we give him money in case he is cut from his money and his country.

This is our Islam and this is our discipline if we adhere to our Islam.

"but squander not (your wealth) in the manner of a spendthrift". I.e., do not be a spendthrift, for wasting money is a kind of absurdity.

"Verily spendthrifts are brothers of the evil ones; and the evil one is to his Lord (himself) ungrateful". The opposite of ungratefulness is thanking the Exalted Allah by employing the favor of wealth in what it is originally set for by the Exalted Allah.

See how the Exalted Allah presents the supporters of His laws gradually presenting them among His rules. First He addresses the believers advising them to have constant awareness of Allah. Then He addresses their supreme leader and their inspector who is in charge of directing their behavior.

"And even if thou hast to turn away from them in pursuit of the mercy from thy Lord which thou dost expect, yet speak to them a word of easy kindness".

In this verse, there is instruction to the one in whose hands the control of the people's affairs are. It is to say to him: "Treat people with ease, forgive their errors, and guide them to goodness in a lovely way". In this way the ruler changes from the tyrant Nemrud and Pharaoh into a proselytizer and a tender mother.

This is an example of discipline.

"Make not thy hand tied (like a niggard's) to thy neck". In this verse, the Exalted Allah turns into a another rule: "Be ware of miserliness".

"nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach", i.e., do not be spendthrift and waster of money.

"so that thou become blameworthy and destitute . Verily thy Lord doth provide sustenance in abundance for whom he pleases, and he provides in a just measure. For he doth know and regard all his servants". When you feel unwilling to give charity, remember that He, Exalted He be, provides you with wealth, so you stretch your hand in giving the poor, and if you are in a state of wasting money, remember too that He is able to make you poor, so in both cases you become disciplined.

These are the supporters in this address. They are samples of evidences and guidance directed to man who has begun the season of proofs, the season of Ramadan.

"Kill not your children for fear of want", i.e., do not call for birth control to accumulate wealth. It is a trend that has become a substitute for development.

We have frequently shared in symposiums, the motto of which was "control your childbirth". We said to them: "Our problem is not in childbirth. It is rather in development". We fail in development, in education, in teaching and in securing employment, so we say. "control childbirth".

If we were apt for responsibility, we would say: "Whoever brings a waste land to life, he would be its owner". Consequently, our children would find work and wealth.

If only we could understand that in Islam the ownership of the land belongs to the Exalted Allah, alone, and

whoever is able to bring a waste land to life by agriculture, trade or industry, he would have the right of owning it. Only then we would seek growing of population.

The problem is that we do not deal with the criteria that are set by the Exalted Allah and discipline man's life in a just way. This fair law does not exist in the law put by man.

"we shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you", i.e., children are the cause of your being supplied with provision. **"Verily the killing of them is a great sin".**

"Nor come nigh to adultery: for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil, opening the road (to other evils)", Adultery disperses families.

"Nor take life which Allah has made sacred except for just cause". Islam calls for peace. Certainly, we kill whoever comes to our country to kill us, and it is a just killing, but we never have aggression against the others:

"To those against whom War is made, permission is given to fight" (Al Haj, v. 39). The Exalted Allah said that they were given permission to fight the aggressors who waged war against them, and not fight the others for no reason.

"And if anyone is slain wrongfully, we have given his heir authority (to demand Visas or to forgive): but let him not exceed bounds in the matter of taking life; for he is helped (by the Law). Come not nigh to the orphan's property except to improve it, until he

attains the age of full strength", i.e., there is reference to financial honesty.

"and fulfill (every) engagement, for (every) engagement will be enquired into (on the day of reckoning). The Muslims are usually punctual for their engagements, and do not have trickery or deception.

"Give full measure when ye measure, and weigh with a balance that is straight: that is the most fitting and the most advantageous in the final determination". Here is a reference to justice in trade.

"And pursue not that of which thou hast no knowledge", i.e., do not transgress the limits of your knowledge. Agree with the true knowledge you have, confess your ignorance of something you know nothing about, and do not pretend to know something you know nothing about.

"for every act of hearing, or of seeing or of (feeling in) the heart will be enquired into (on the day of reckoning". This rule cancels curiosity and directs man to be interested in his own affairs instead of being curious about the others' affairs. It is a rule that reforms man and saves his time by making him uninterested in the others' affairs. Man is ordered to be interested in the others only when he is in charge of them and is responsible for them.

"Nor walk on the earth with insolence", i.e., be humble.

"for thou cannot rend the earth asunder, nor reach the mountains in height. Of all such things the evil is hateful in the sight of thy Lord. There are among the

(precepts of) wisdom, which thy Lord has revealed to thee" (Al Isra', vs. 22-39).

This is a sample. Oh the Ummah of the beloved, Mohammad (PBUH), what about our behavior before these evidences and proofs after we have fasted and have been exposed to guidance?

What about their evidences and guidance?

What about the evidences and proofs that show us the starting points that we should begin with in our behavior?

What about the details of guidance that direct us to discipline?

When our fasting results in a discipline according to these criteria based on the law of the Exalted Allah of which a sample is presented above, we will have acquired the wisdom of Ramadan. But if we feel pleased with our last meal before day break and our breakfast; if we shake lamps, and make this month mere customs and tents of Ramadan, we will be like the one who is guided, but he cancels his guidance on the same day.

What is required is to have a guidance accumulated daily so that when we reach the last ten days of Ramadan, this accumulated guidance becomes deterrent to us from confusion, and our behavior becomes disciplined and organized, when we do that,

the Exalted Allah cannot but free our necks from fire after our behavior is disciplined, and this is the aim of legislation.

Freeing the necks from fire takes place in the last ten days of Ramadan because it is proportionate with the accumulated guidance that presents commitment and discipline to the Law of Allah.

Oh brethren, our pretensions are plenty and our rituals are plenty, but we are required to raise ourselves to the level of the behavior.

When remembering of the Exalted Allah, prayer and fasting do not present application in our behavior, all these are considered mere habits, and our worship would be a frail faded worship void of life.

Allāhum..., 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.