

BETWEEN SELF-INDULGENCE AND BENEVOLENCE

With the Last sermon of Ramadan, and no doubt, Ramadan's sermons are all lessons derived from the Holy Qur'an that was sent in this month, the believer's gain would be equal to the amount of benefit he has got from this Holy Book. The gain we may get is the result of our frequent recital of the Holy Qur'an in this month. This is something praiseworthy, but what is greater in benefit will be our reaction to the Holy Qur'an, our meditation upon its meanings, and our obliging ourselves to be disciplined by it which will be the result of our obeying and carrying out its instructions.

I'd like to have this new lesson on one of the meanings of this luminous Book. The benefits we get from this Great Book is that it gives us guidance, and explains to us its meaning by itself. The first interpreter of the Holy Qur'an is the Holy Qur'an itself. Sometimes it explains its meanings through the context that surrounds the word, at another time through juxtaposition by presenting two pictures apparently identical where the meaning in the first picture completely agrees with that of the second, so there is similarity in the construction of language, as well as correspondence in the connotative meaning.

Whoever investigates the language of the Holy Qur'an finds a lot of meanings. But today I'll refer to one of them only. The Holy Qur'an usually uses the technique of presenting two foils. It mentions day with night, belief with disbelief, light corresponds with darkness in obvious context. But the Holy Qur'an mentions a linguistic construction that is repeated only for one time, in two

different Surahs where two corresponding ideas are mentioned. One verse is contrasted with another, not a word with a word. Such a contrast can be detected only when one reads the whole Holy Qur'an. This correspondence, mentioned only once, drew my attention. It is a verse in Surat Al Thariyat that corresponds with another in Surat Al Waqi'a. The construction in both verses draws your attention to what the Exalted Allah said. In Al Thariyat, He said: "lo! aforetime they were benevolent" (v. 16), and in Al Waqi'a; "**Lo! aforetime they were self-indulgent**" (v. 45).

The repetition of the expression: "**Lo! aforetime they were**" is repeated only once in the Holy Qur'an, namely in Al Thariyat and Al Waqi'a. This concordance in the two constructions that leads to the contrast of the two words: benevolent and self-indulgent people, drew my attention.

I began searching for correspondence and opposites in the Holy Qur'an. Linguistically speaking, good doing is supposed to be contrasted with wrong doing, but in His Great Book, the Exalted Allah presents to us a result that we cannot understand by mere repeated reading of the verses. When He said: "lo! aforetime they were benevolent", He referred to the pious.

The fruit that we should gain from Raman is piety:

"O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you, that ye may ward off evil" (Al Baqarah, v. 183).

As this is the last day of Ramadan, it is our chance to wait

for the fruit.

In Surat Al Thariyat, the Exalted Allah said: "the benevolent". They are the believers who are verified by piety in this life, and fasting is one of the causes of piety. It is necessary to taste the meaning of piety in this last day of Ramadan. The fruit of piety is a Garden that is as wide as heavens and earth.

"Lo! those who keep from evil will **dwell** amid gardens and water springs. Taking that which their Lord giveth them" (Al Thariyat, v. 15). They will be given the Exalted Allah's favors out of His generosity and bounty and He will release them from Hell Fire.

Then the Exalted Allah gives details of the behavior of pious people after He describes them and refers to their rank:

"lo! aforetime they were benevolent. They used to sleep but little of the night. And ere the dawning of each day would seek forgiveness. And in their wealth the beggar the outcast had due share" (Al Thariyat, vs. 15-19).

The Exalted Allah summarizes their description in saying: "the good doers", but He also gives details of their behavior before that, by presenting vocabularies implying the meaning of benevolence, as their hearts are consolidated with spirituality that makes them

return to the Exalted Allah in sincere repentance and give charity to the poor.

"aforetime they were benevolent", they were benevolent, outwardly and inwardly.

The outward benevolence is to be promoted to a level higher than justice in treatment, for under this level, there is injustice, and above it there is benevolence. If you oppress the others, you are then under the level of justice, but if you transcend justice in your treatment of the others, you reach a level higher than justice which is the apparent benevolence, i.e., the benevolence of treatment.

The inward benevolence is to be conscious of your close tie with the Exalted Allah while you worship Him: **"To worship Allah as if you saw Him"**, and in another version: **"To fear Allah as if you saw Him"**.

When the believer joins the outward and inward benevolence, he is promoted to a level higher than justice, and becomes far away from injustice. He will have got inward benevolence through which he will be a true monotheist when he stands on the ground of servitude to the Exalted Allah, and he will gain something that accompanies this benevolence. It is: **"They used to sleep but little of the night"**.

Oh, beloveds of our Master, Muhammad (PBUH), do you know the secret of the night?

The night is the cause of building up body and soul. Whoever does his utmost effort and is hardworking in turning to the Exalted Allah in the night, his inward world will be prosperous, and this will result in his closeness to

the Exalted Allah. Whoever is hardworking in the day, obeying the instructions of the Exalted Allah – building up the land, learning and teaching, doing good deeds and treatment – will be close to the Exalted Allah.

Building up the body in the day is achieved by good treatment of the others and good work obeying the law of the Exalted Allah; and building up of the soul in the night is achieved by honest and sincere turning to the Exalted Allah when the believer does not share anybody in his relationship with his Lord. Thus the night is the means of building up the interior.

The believers described in the above mentioned verses had outward and inward benevolence. They used to build up their interior investing the peculiarity of the night, the time of building up the souls.

When night comes to an end, and the beginning of dawn approaches, they meditate upon their work during their night and find it inadequate because the Exalted Allah deserves more and more worship. Since the Exalted Allah created His angels, some have ever been kneeling in worship, others have ever been prostrating in worship to Allah. On the Day of Judgment, the Exalted Allah will order them to raise their heads and see His Beauty. Once they see His beauty, they will say:

"Oh Allah, we haven't worshipped You quite enough".

This is the state of the one who performs the night prayer, the one who builds up his soul. When night is about to end, the believer sits for a while asking his Lord's forgiveness, because he has not worshipped Him quite

enough. He would feel that all the night prayer he has performed is nothing. He would feel that he has not advanced a step in his night worship. On the contrary, he feels that he is negligent and needs to ask Allah's forgiveness, so he sits repenting before the night ends:

"And ere the dawning of each day would seek forgiveness.

When the day begins, he assumes the social responsibility and forgets about his individuality. In the night, he builds up his interior, and this results in his assuming social responsibility quite perfectly in the day. He does not begin his day with carelessness. On the contrary, he begins it with taking into consideration the right of the neighbor, the need of the poor, and sees that his role in society is to make himself a good example of the one who obliges himself with servitude to the Exalted Allah. Therefore, the Exalted Allah Describes such people as "And in their wealth the beggar the outcast had due share".

On the other hand, the description of the opposite group (we seek refuge in the Exalted Allah from being one of them) is summarized by the word 'self-indulgence' that is contrasted with 'benevolence' in Surat Al Thariyat. Describing them, the Exalted Allah said:

"And those on the left hand: What of those on the left hand? In scorching wind and scalding water, and shadows of black smoke. Lo! aforetime they were self-indulgent" (Al Waqi'a, vs. 41-45).

The meaning of 'self-indulgence' is missing from the minds of people, for the prevalent common meaning among people of this word is the state of luxury that man enjoys. But this is a misunderstanding of the word, for enjoying the Exalted Allah's favors with thanking Him is a praiseworthy trait.

"Say: Who hath forbidden the adornment of Allah which He hath brought forth for His bondmen, and the good things of His providing? Say it is for those who believed" (Al 'Araf, v. 32).

The Exalted Allah forbid. He never prevents His servants from enjoying His favors which He bestows on them.

Thus, what is the state of indulgence that is contrasted with benevolence and that leads to Hell?

In such a case, we have to appeal to the language of the Arabs because the Holy Qur'an necessarily has the connotative and denotative meanings of its words derived from the Arabic language.

The self-indulgent is the one who becomes ungrateful to the Exalted Allah after getting His favors. He becomes careless, arrogant, and thankless when he lives in luxury. Self-indulgence is a state of anarchy and indifference. It is a state of being obsessed by pleasure and of becoming its slave. He becomes the slave of his own whim. The Exalted Allah gives us His favors to be His servants. Thus, whoever worships his own whim at luxury is self-indulgent.

After the above mentioned explanation, picture and meaning have become clear enough, for the Exalted Allah has favored us with money, with health, with security, with

delicious food, and makes our clothes available. He favors us with our Master, Muhammad (PBUH), with the lights of the Honored Holy Qur'an, and with the great seasons of welfare during which the believers rush in groups and individually to the houses of Allah to perform the night prayer, and in this month, we have the favor of having joined meal at fasting:

"If ye would count the bounty of Allah ye cannot reckon it" (Ibrahim, v. 34).

If all the above mentioned causes us to remember the Exalted Allah and turn to Him in repentance, and if all the favors bestowed on us remind us of the Benefactor, and raise us to a state of responsibility towards ourselves and towards the others, then we are not considered self-indulgent. But if we exploit the favors of the Exalted Allah to satisfy our own desires, forgetting our servitudes to the Him, then we are considered self-indulgent.

You are going to get out of Ramadan and begin the days of the festival. Will the festival be full of self-indulgence, or it will be a festival of self-discipline?

Shall we get out of Ramadan to begin a new year of disobedience to the orders of the Exalted Allah, or we shall get out of the Ramadan to a state of discipline and obligation?

You have to choose one of the two states, and one of the two alternatives, either:

"lo! aforetime they were benevolent", or

"Lo! aforetime they were self-indulgent"

The Exalted Allah said:

"And when would destroy a town, We send commandment to its folk who live at ease, and afterward they commit abomination therein, and so the word (of doom) has effect for it, and We annihilate it with complete annihilation" (Al Isra', v. 16).

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.