

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



Friday Sermon

Hazrat Khalifatullah Munir. A. Azim (atba)

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After greeting all his disciples (and all Muslims) worldwide with the greeting of peace Hazrat Khalifatullah (atba) read the Tashahhud, Ta'uz, Surah Al Fatiha, and then he delivered his sermon on:

Why Fasting ? The Virtues of Ramadan

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ

لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

Yaaa-'ayyu-hallaziina 'aamanuu kutiba 'alay-kumus-Siyaamu kamaa kutiba 'alal lazina min qablikum la-'alla-kum tatta-quun.

"O you who believe! fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may become righteous." (Al-Baqara 2 : 184)

Each year, for a month, more than a billion Muslim believers around the world fast between dawn and dusk. During these fasting hours, they are strictly prohibited from consuming any food, drink, or having intimate relationships between spouses, among other deprivations. Why?

First, what Ramadan fasting is not: it does not have the character of penance, as in other religions.

From the Muslim perspective, it enjoys with God an unparalleled grace with other acts of piety. It is an abstinence which concerns the body and the spirit and/or mind. Indeed, God has given us a brain, a marvellous mind in wonder; our body itself is a perpetual miracle. Our body, our ideas, our decisions are led by our spirit. The better the food of the spirit, the better our faculties and capacities of judgement, of evaluation, the better will be our initiatives. Fasting is thus perceived as total submission to God.

We will therefore discuss here the deprivation of food for the body, and its impact on our mental and emotional faculties, therefore on “the mind”.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD AND DRINK

It is certain that at some point in our lives, each of us may have thought that the only element really essential for human beings, for their survival, is food. Everything else is not as crucial to our own individual survival. And yet our own Creator, Allah, imposes on us precisely to deprive ourselves of these same necessities of food and drink during our waking hours, and this for a whole month. At first glance it seems contradictory, to say the least!

Indeed, all summary or superficial analyzes, lead to this reductive notion: contradiction?

A very interesting anecdote between a sage (a great personality in Islam whose name I don't recall for the time being) and his adviser. It's an anecdote that I read when I was very young, around 15 or 16 years old I think. So the counsellor is a telling example, among other things, of the importance of food.

When the sage asked for water, the counsellor said, *“O sage, O pious man, if this drink was refused to you, what would you give to get it?”*

“I would give all that I have,” he replied.

“O wise man [or pious man], if you could not eliminate this water from your body, what would you sacrifice to be able to do it?” the other continued to ask.

“I will give all that I have,” he replied again.

Then the counsellor said: *“How then, O wise man (pious man) can we rejoice in all that you have (all the riches) which is worth neither a few sips of water, nor a little urine?...”*

That [anecdote] put many things into perspective... However, it remains true that we need food. It is true that when we deprive ourselves of food over a somewhat extended period of time, our body panics, as if we had installed a complex security system or a sophisticated alarm. This same “alarm system” is usually manifested by hunger, thirst, and bad temper in general.

Indeed, nutritionists will tell us that a prolonged refusal of food can result in a loss of 30% of body weight. If this state of “non-nutrition” persists over time and the body loses 40% of its weight, then we die, of hunger, and in the first sense of the expression! And before death occurs, the cells of the body revolt and eat each other, causing extreme psychological disturbances.

Why has then Allah commanded believers to fast every day for 29 or 30 days? Is it a contradiction? Contradiction from God?

There would be a contradiction if we consider only one dimension of the human being, i.e. his body, alone. And that also in accordance with the materialist conception of the world. But as everyone knows, we are more than just a body. Because if the human being were reduced to a “simple” body, and the soul or spirit being an entity separate from the body, then it is necessary to be able to explain the pain that all experience at the death of a loved one, even if his corpse is still present, and his soul, alone, has left it! In fact, the contradictions are avoided by studying the obvious and hidden virtues of fasting.

THE VIRTUES OF RAMADAN

As a preliminary, it should be remembered that the prophet Muhammad (pbuh) prohibited continuing the fast without interruption. We must fast at the times and in the manner prescribed by our Creator and His messenger, and it is in this way that the believer will perceive its virtues.

First, God reminds the believer of his total dependence on His blessings, which He has bestowed on him. This contributes to forging a certain humility mixed with recognition. Then nothing can force compassion to the poor and hungry of the world better than sharing their experience of hunger and thirst. It is by experiencing what the hungry experiences in their quest for food, what the poor experience by working without the required amount of food, that the Muslim can conceive these notions, and will readily respond to the call of the next hungry and of the poor. In addition, the human body accumulates toxins during the year, through its diet. These accumulations are harmful to the health of the individual. Ramadan cleanses the body of these elements, and gives rest to our digestive organs.

There is also a unifying aspect specific to Ramadan. Indeed, rich or poor, white or black, all Muslims in the world or about two billions believers fast, at the same time of the year, in the same way. No exemption is possible (except illnesses or other serious reasons). It gives them [us] a certain feeling of unity in the same fervour and submission to the Supreme Creator.

Before tackling the next benefit which will be developed in detail, we should add, an unknown aspect of Ramadan.

After a long month of fasting and various deprivation (food, sleep, intimate relationships between spouses), many daily gestures that each [person] made mechanically, or the benefits that we took for granted, as if we were bound to have to all these, then take on a new consistency. There are new perceptions, because, there are new sensations as well. For example, a refreshing glass of water in a moment of great heat and the pleasant sensations it generates are perceived more finely by a body which had lost its habit; thus forging a regenerated appreciation of these elemental blessings of God. The same appreciation process is repeated for a simple breakfast, or daily meals, thus forcing the thought of Him who provided man with such infinite goodness with each first bite of food. And this feeling of gratitude touches even the thought of the most ungrateful believer. It's great wisdom from our Creator. The believer who pauses to reflect will find there, necessarily, a cause to thank. Humility lesson ... elaborated by our Creator!

Without claiming to review all the virtues of Ramadan in an exhaustive manner, finally, God, in His wisdom, wants everyone to experience the whole range of moods and sensations that occur during a fast, so as to help human beings to better control them. And this is extremely important because, as we will see, it deeply influences our relationships with our outside world, our fellow human being/ neighbour and ourselves. The key is mastering our emotions. If we analyze the structure of our personality, we mainly attribute four dimensions to it: the mind, the body, the emotions and the soul.

Our spiritual life is the result of an intense interaction between these different elements of the personality. It is therefore both their unifying link and their result.

During the month of Ramadan, God requires everyone to make a set of sacrifices. This set is made up of physical constraints, certainly, but also of emotional, mental and spiritual constraints, these four elements are inseparable and confirm its unique character in Ramadan.

We all know the flesh and its power over the mind through emotions. An emotion can make us shiver, an emotion can make us laugh, or cry, and affects our mood. It is therefore undeniable that every day our emotions influence our mind, and hence our life. And vice versa; our way of life and its adventures, the outside world, greatly influence our various emotions. There is therefore a complex and rapid interaction (in thousandths of a second) between our body, our emotions and our intellect. Emotions are however the most dangerous part of our personality, because it is the most vulnerable and the most volatile. Contrary to the mind, which reasons on facts; emotions are made up of abstract impressions: love, hate, joy, fear, envy. These different notions were acquired during our life, we learned envy or jealousy, we were not born with it. Our emotions are conditioned by pleasure and pain; they want to avoid the unpleasant, and seek comfort. And that gives them a formidable power over any human being... without them even being aware of it. We are rarely aware of their strength, and how much they affect lives. There are people who react only by and for emotions: these emotions govern their lives. So therefore, the superficial becomes dogma, and we lose the essence of faith.

The solution lies in Islam - no religion specifically deals with this peculiarity and weakness of human nature ... except Islam. No other religion, except Islam!

Islam is the only religion which not only offers, but imposes as one of the fundamental pillars of faith, a process of readjustment, rebalancing, of the body and its components. It's an annual adjustment opportunity... through the holy month of Ramadan.

Ramadan is for the believer, it was not instituted in honour of God. It's an incredible opportunity for man to rebalance his personality... despite the opposition of the body.

When the body recognizes our violation of its eating habit, it begins a well-orchestrated revolt. To get an idea of how ready the body and the emotions are to fight the Ramadan experience, it suffices to recall an experience that many of us have already had in our lives.

It has often happened to us, to be late when waking up in the morning, and to hurry up and then arrive on time, even forgetting to eat anything before leaving. Our intention was not to remain hungry or to fast for God, but simply to be on time. So taken up by our different responsibilities, we often forget to eat until late in the day, without the body even calling us to order. True?

However during Ramadan, from the first minutes of the day, the body makes sure that we are well aware of the internal conflict that is going to develop. And it sends us suggestions like this: a lost friend, who has never invited you, suddenly invites you to a restaurant, or, you are in business and good deals are often treated around a table, then you find yourselves being invited. There, you are embarrassed to say that you are fasting! Because your contact or client or friend will say, *"What are these old practices?"* So we are tempted to say to ourselves: *"After all, why not? The Quran allows me to catch up after Ramadan. So to be sociable, I will accept and replace this fasting day after Ramadan."*

But, your spirit says to you: *"Dear friend, I believe that you have already promised this day to God: no food, no drink, no cigarette, no vitamin, from sunrise to sunset. Will you then abandon Allah?"* And thus the spirit dominates the flesh and the emotions.

So therefore, God worked out Ramadan in His great wisdom to provide us with a period long enough to rebalance the biological, mental, emotional and spiritual dimensions of our personality.

So in these long processes of 29 to 30 days, the will and the spirit are strengthened. We remain constantly mobilized. We manage to control our emotions and confine them to their role. We gradually take over the reins of our life, the emotions no longer being the guiding vectors of our actions and our personality.

And after 29 or 30 days of this systematic self-discipline of strengthening our mind on the body, the believer is ready for a new year. We were thus able to rebalance the roles of each part of our personality. We didn't kill our emotions, we just put them in their place: they are fleeting impressions that can help us but should not control us. We will thus arrive at a discipline of controlling our emotional access (anger, fear, envy, etc.); discipline that will benefit us, no doubt, all year round. Resisting food in the name of spiritual values helps us all to transcend both the body and the emotions to rejuvenate and strengthen our resistance to temptation.

May the blessed days of Ramadan which come and return, bring peace, serenity, harmony and justice to the world. As does the voice of the muezzin, serene and melodious from the top of the minarets, when it lands on a people [of the world – a worldwide nation] prostrate in the waning sun, submitted only to the Lord of the worlds ... Utopia, you tell me? Perhaps, but even if such a wish has only the weight of a chimera in our chaotic present, it nevertheless retains all the value of its sincerity and the intensity of an ardent wish. But God knows better; our future and survival for all depends only on Him, because our devotion to Him, with sincerity and love will lead us to Salvation, both in this world and in the next. *Insha-Allah.*

With that, I wish you all, my Muslim brothers, sisters and children, and all of my dear disciples: **Ramadan Mubarak, Ramadan Kareem !**