

*Qhutbah, Insha Allah, Friday, November 14, 2003*

*Alhamdu lillah, wa ash hadu ala ila ha ill lallah*

*Bismillah hir Rahman nir Rahim*

Ramadan is the month that entails intensive self discipline and self control. Most importantly, it is the month in which the entire Quran was revealed in a single blessed night for universal guidance. [17:106] A Quran that we have released slowly, in order for you to read it to the people over a long period, although we sent it down all at once. The Quran is the ultimate, the perfect and the faultless guidance from God transmitted to us through the agencies of Gabriel and Mohammed. It is the grandest gift – the last and immaculate message to humankind. The essence of Ramadan is abstinence and restraint in compliance with the Command of the Creator not only in external forms but in attitude and behaviour as well. Ramadan demands the highest degree of commitment and is designed to achieve physical, moral and spiritual reconstruction as well as self purification.

Just like in Salat, all relatively healthy people have to fast. Ramadan has a great leveling influence – no matter how rich or poor, influential or subservient, high or low all stand on the same terms of human equality. No submitter in any case is superior to the other either on account of social status or because of wealth, race or colour differences, but only on the basis of righteousness. [7:26] O children of Adam, we have provided you with garments to cover your bodies, as well as for luxury. But the best garment is the garment of righteousness. These are some of GOD's signs, that they may take heed.

Ramadan is an exacting procedure performed for a month every year to earn the pleasure of God and this renews faith. This annual exercise consciously and voluntarily practised uplifts the soul. Except for salat, no better course of training can be devised to cleanse evils. [2:183] O you who believe, fasting is decreed for you, as it was decreed for those before you, that you may attain salvation. When collectively undertaken this serves to cleanse society and increases the quality of compassion in the community as a whole. It should have a lasting effect on character and conduct. Those who themselves experience the pangs of hunger and thirst become better aware of their fellow beings' plight. It inculcates a discernment of hardships which the destitute and the needy face. This feeling is aroused in all those whether affluent or deprived, young or old who observe fasting. It is a very high attainment of moral exercise.

This month gives believers an opportunity to practice unity, self discipline, austerity, solidarity, harmony and endeavour which is so vital for spiritual rejuvenation and moral rearmament and also for the material well being. You need discipline to have strength for action.

Some people believe that fasting is generally observed as a period of mourning. This is certainly not true. The Quran makes it an instrument of moral, spiritual and physical regulation of the highest order. God says the act of fasting is a blessing and not a

calamity. [2:185] Ramadan is the month during which the Quran was revealed, providing guidance for the people, clear teachings, and the statute book. Those of you who witness this month shall fast therein. Those who are ill or traveling may substitute the same number of other days. GOD wishes for you convenience, not hardship, that you may fulfill your obligations, and to glorify GOD for guiding you, and to express your appreciation.

Compliance with this Divine Injunction fosters the sense of willing obedience to God's commands which is a sign of firm and true faith. It forcefully brings forth the feeling that a believer has to serve only One Master and One Law – the Law of his Creator. The real intention underlying the restraints and restrictions that fasting implies is total submission to the will of God. What does the word submission mean – it means obedience, compliance, capitulation, surrender, acquiescence, giving in, deference, consent and assent. By abstaining from what God forbids and obeying whatever He commands, believers reaffirm through performance what they profess.

The word for piety in the Quran is “taqwa” which means the guarding of self against evil. It is not an easy task as the way of life we pass through is scattered with barbed undergrowth of base desires, sensuality and temptations of all kinds. To pass through this path without getting stuck or led astray is a test of piety. [90:11] He should choose the difficult path. However, God says in [65:4]....Anyone who reverences GOD, He makes everything easy for him.

God has enjoined fasting to enable us overcome these obstacles and attain righteousness that only the fear of God can create and sustain. If one merely follows the outward regulations that govern fasting without imbibing its main spirit then we do not get anything out of it except the pangs of hunger and thirst.

Piety is the quintessence of fasting – it is a vibrant energy that builds up your faith, devotion, conviction, conduct and character. By reaffirming the Omnipresence, Omnipotence and Omniscience of God, this belief inculcates accountability at every step of life now and in the Hereafter. Those who consider the gains and pleasures of this worldly life as temporary and keep the Day of Judgment in mind are moved by spiritual and moral motivations. Such a moral code is strengthened by worship of which “fasting” is a so called pillar. When we fulfill the requirements of fasting with all true intention, we will be rewarded by God in His infinite Mercy.

We must eat in order to survive. Eating is certainly not sinful from the spiritual point of view. Heaviness and obesity are harmful for spiritual life: the Bible tells us that God warned Israel on their way to the Land of Canaan: "Israel, Israel! Thou goest to the land that floweth with milk and honey. Beware, Israel, lest thou become heavy and forget thy God.

Fasting in Ramadan is voluntary undertaken. It is nor a prescribed imposition from a physician. In the hypothalamus part of the brain there is a center called the ‘lipostat’ which control the body mass. When severe and rapid weight loss is achieved by

starvation diet, the center does not recognize this as normal and, therefore re-programs itself to cause weight gain rapidly once the person goes off the starvation diet. So the only effective way of losing weight is slow, self-controlled and gradually weight loss by modifying our behavior and the attitude about eating while eliminating excess food. However, we do so not for losing weight or any medical benefit, but because God ordained so.

The fasting of Muslim in Ramadan is actually an exercise in self discipline. For those who are heavy smokers or nibble food constantly or drink coffee every hour, it is a good way to break the habit, hoping that the effect will continue after the month is over. *Seyyam* in Arabic means abstaining; in Islam it means abstaining from things that break the fast, from dawn until sunset, having first made the intention (*niyyet*) to fast.

Merely refraining from eating from dawn to sunset does not constitute real fasting in Islam. It enables us to guard ourselves against evils and inculcates a spirit of piety among us. Since the time of Abraham, people have been fasting for their moral elevation. We learn to tide over all the ups and downs of life.

I have a small list of quotes from the Old Testament which prove that the people who came before Christ knew exactly what fasting was though it may have been in a perhaps different manner. There are also many quotes from the New Testament which, God willing, I leave for next year's annual Ramadan qhutbah.

Daniel 9:34 "And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with *fasting*, and sackcloth, and ashes: And I prayed unto the Lord God, and made my confession...

Deuteronomy 9:9, 18 ". . . 40 nights, I neither did eat bread nor drink water."

Ezra 10:6 "Ezra . . . did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned . . ."

Esther 4:16 "Go, gather together all the Jews . . . and *fast* ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day . . ."

Acts 9:9 ". . . and neither did eat nor drink"

Acts 27:33 ". . . This is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued *fasting*, having taken nothing."

I Samuel 7:5-6 "And Samuel said, Gather all Israel ... and they gathered .. and *fasted* ..."

Ezra 8:21-23 "Then I proclaimed a *fast* ... So we fasted and besought our God ..."

Nehemiah 9:1-3 " ... the children of Israel were assembled with *fasting* ..."

Joel 2:15-16 "... sanctify a *fast*, call a solemn assembly; gather the people ..."

Jonah 3:5-10 "the people ... proclaimed a *fast* ... from the greatest of them even to the least"

After this month ends, there is a festival in the Muslim world called Eid-ul-Fitr in which their heartfelt gratitude and unbounded joy is expressed on the completion of the prescribed fasting days. On this day, Muslims give what they consider as obligatory – fitra – a quantity of grain or a certain sum of money. We have a reference in the Quran which is the dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh. [20:59] He said, "Your appointed time shall be the day of festivities (Eida). Let us all meet in the forenoon." We do not have to commemorate the birth or death of a dead person no matter how great, neither a martyr nor a saint nor do we have to commemorate a victory marking a turning point like the Battles of Badr, Uhud or Hunayn.

Rather, we should bow and prostrate our heads in gratitude to our Creator in His having given us the strength to fulfill His Commandment and our religious obligations. We should learn the lesson that real happiness arises from performing one's duty and making sacrifices for a noble and high objective.

The religion of Submission does not demand or in any way recommend revelry on the so called Eid. This is a creation of society just like Christmas and Easter which really has no true basis in the Gospels.

It would be better for us on this day to remember those amongst us who are afflicted with poverty, ignorance, disease and other misfortunes. We could make this a day of enhanced charity. How about greater implementation, dedication and devotion to Quranic study?

The month of Ramadan brings with it innumerable blessings. We have to perform our sacred duty to follow the Final Testament and to behave towards others in the same manner as God behaves towards all His creations. In the widest sense of the word this duty is to love and forbear and to work incessantly and selflessly for the greater good of all humankind.

May God make us worthy to receive His Grace, Mercy and innumerable blessings. Let us praise, exalt, extol and magnify God now and forever.