

UTILIZING THE GREAT  
OPPORTUNITY  
OF SHAHRU RAMADHAN

## بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the All-Beneficent, the All-Merciful

### UTILIZING THE GREAT OPPORTUNITY OF SHAHRU RAMADHAN

1- The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny), informs us that Satan is locked in the Holy month of Ramadhan. In his well-known sermon before the Holy month of Ramadhan he is reported to have said:

أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ... وَالشَّيَاطِينُ مَغْلُوبَةٌ فَاسْأَلُوا رَبَّكُمْ أَنْ لَا يُسَلِّطَهَا عَلَيْكُمْ

O People....and **the Satans are shackled**, and hence ask Your Lord not to allow him overpower you. [Shaykh al-Saduq, *al-Amaali*, p. 155]

What is the actual meaning of this? Does it resemble a material scenario where Satan and his army have been chained, and thus cannot attack the fasting ones, or does it have another implication? Having studied the traditions on this subject, scholars of authority say that it is the **hunger** of fasting in the Holy month of Ramadhan that hampers Satan from penetrating into the human being. Imam 'Ali (peace be upon him) is reported to have said:

إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَيَجْرِي مِنْ ابْنِ آدَمَ مَجْرَى الدَّمِّ، فَضَيِّقُوا مَجَارِيَهُ بِالْجُوعِ

Surely Satan flows in the son of Adam the way the blood flows. Therefore **block his channels through hunger**. [Ibn Abi Jumhoor, *'Awaali al-La'aali*, v.1, p. 273]

The evil inviting self of the human being (*al-nafs al-ammara bi al-su'*), which is other than Satan, is also hampered through **hunger**. Imam 'Ali (peace be upon him) is reported to have said:

نِعْمَ الْعَوْنِ عَلَى أَسْرِ النَّفْسِ وَكَسْرِ عَادَتِهَا التَّجْوَعُ

How excellent a helper **is hunger** in taking the soul as captive and breaking its habit!. [Al-Waasiti, *'Uyun al-Hikam wa al-Mawaa'iz*, p. 494]

It must be realized, however, that despite fasting, one may blemish his soul with sin and disobedience because of having developed traits in the past that act as generators of sin. If these traits are not effaced from one's being, the danger of sin is always there. Perhaps the phrase in the first quotation "...and hence ask Your Lord not to allow him overpower you" is a hint towards this reality.

In conclusion, fasting is an element that facilitates one to easily disobey Satan and the

Evil-inviting self, but cannot immediately uproot the traits one has developed over the year(s). Therefore, despite fasting, we must desperately seek Divine help to be emancipated from the evil traits we have developed over the years.

The Insightful scholars believe that fasting detaches one from the realm of matter and attaches one to the realm of spirit. If our dining tables encourage variety of foods when breaking our fasts, we would always remain distant from the aspired aim of “*detachment from the material world*”. It should be remembered, however, that between detachment (*zuhd*) and abandonment (*tark*) there is a great difference. Whereas the former does not encourage one to abandon food but to regulate one’s intake, the latter encourages one to refrain from food.

Imam al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) is reported to have said:

لِلصَّائِمِ فَرَحَتَانِ فَرَحَةٌ عِنْدَ إِفْطَارِهِ وَفَرَحَةٌ عِنْدَ لِقَاءِ رَبِّهِ

The fasting one has two moments of happiness: (a) When breaking his fast, and (b) **when meeting his Lord**. [Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, v.4, p. 65]

We must try to analyze our situation: Do we experience both these moments? When we break our fast, are we happy because Allah enabled us to fast that day or due to relief from the distress of hunger through the tasty food that we have prepared for ourselves? And principally, does our fasting enable us tear the veils and meet our Lord and thereby attain happiness? If not, then we should revisit the method of our fasting.

2- If we analyze the various supplications of the Holy Month of Ramadhan, we would realize that one of the most fundamental things we ask from Allah is “freedom of my neck from the Hell Fire” (*Fikaaka raqabati min al-naar*).

In the daily supplication of the Holy month of Ramadhan, we recite:

فِيَا ذَا الْمَنِّ وَلَا يَمَنُّ عَلَيْكَ مَنْ عَلَيَّ بِفِكَائِكَ رَقَبَتِي مِنَ النَّارِ...

O the Benefactor upon Whom favor is not bestowed, favor me by **releasing my neck from the Hell Fire**...[Shaykh ‘Abbas Qummi, *Mafatih al-Jinan*, p. 311]

And during the nights of Qadr, we recite the following famous supplication when we open the Holy Qur'an:

...أَنْ تَجْعَلَنِي مِنْ عِتْقَائِكَ مِنَ النَّارِ

...that you make me from among **those whom you have freed from Hell Fire**. [Shaykh ‘Abbas Qummi, *Mafatih al-Jinan*, pp. 398-399]

In these supplications we do not ask for emancipation from Hell Fire when the Day of Judgment is realized. We rather ask for immediate emancipation. This is because in reality according to Divine Revelation, traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt and the inner visions of the insightful scholars, the sinful are entangled in Hell Fire while they still reside in

the material realm. Qiyaama is a higher plane of their lower existence. The material cover of their body hampers them from beholding this reality. Therefore it is correct to say *Munna 'alayya bi fikaaki raqabati min al-naar..* (favor me by releasing my neck from the Hell Fire...)

So important is this particular need that Sayyid al-Saajidin (peace be upon him) in his supplication of 'Arafa, is reported to have expressed as follows:

يَا مُوَلَايَ حَاجَتِي الَّتِي إِنْ أُعْطِيتِهَا لَمْ يَضُرُّنِي مَا مَنَعْتَنِي وَإِنْ مَنَعْتِنِيهَا لَمْ يَنْفَعْنِي مَا أُعْطِيتَنِي، فَكَأَنَّكَ رَقَبَتِي مِنَ النَّارِ.

O my Master, my need which if You bestow on me, whatever You deprive me would not harm me, and if You deprive me, whatever You give me would not benefit me, is **liberation of my neck from the Hell-Fire**. [Imam al-Sajjad (peace be upon him), al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya [Abtahi Print], p. 345]

Some concerned people ask: How can we decipher that our wish has been fulfilled and we are free from Hell Fire? There are two yardsticks that can relatively unravel one's state:

- We must observe whether after seeking forgiveness from Allah, we are still inclined to our previous sins and misdeeds or not. If we tangibly experience that we despise them and even refrain from imagining them, we must understand that we have attained a particular station of emancipation and freedom.
- We must observe whether we still experience *attachment* to the material pleasures of the world. If we employ the material necessities merely as "means" to achieve the fundamental goal of Allah's proximity then we should give glad tidings of emancipation to ourselves. If not, then we must understand that we still are suffering in the higher plane of existence.

3- Many of us struggle to complete reading the entire Holy Qur'an in this month of Qur'an. This is undoubtedly laudable, and must never be discouraged. However, completing only a part of it "with understanding and contemplation" is a step towards the fundamental aim behind its revelation, which is guidance. Hence, we must struggle to read the Qur'an with translation and commentary, individually or in groups, so that we can really benefit from the banquet of Qur'an.

4. The relation between matter and spirit, body and soul, and the corporeal and the celestial realms is not easy to understand for all. The Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), however, had in-depth knowledge of the relation, and hence were able to advise their followers what is good or what is evil for them in different occasions. According to a tradition, if a person breaks his fast with warm water, his sins would be erased. Imam al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) is reported to have said:

إِذَا أَفْطَرَ الرَّجُلُ عَلَى الْمَاءِ الْفَاتِرِ نَقَّى كَبِدَهُ وَغَسَلَ الذُّنُوبَ مِنَ الْقَلْبِ وَقَوَّى الْبَصَرَ  
وَالْحَدَقَ

When a person breaks his fast with lukewarm water, it cleans his liver, **washes away his sins from the heart**, and strengthens one's eyesight and eye-pupil. [Al-Kulayni, Al-Kafi, v.4, p. 152, tr. 2].

And since in this month we struggle that our sins are erased, we should grab such an opportunity instead of questioning the relation between the warm water and the forgiveness of sins.

5- Scholars of Insight inform us that the Holy Month of Ramadhan is a month of attaining Allah's Attributes (*al-Asmaa al-Ilaahiyya*). One of the supplications where we constantly ask Allah to enable us attain His beautiful Attributes is Du'a al-Bahaa' which is also called Du'a al-Sahar. This supplication is recited at Sahar time of the Holy Month of Ramadhan. It begins with "*Allahumma inni as'aluka min bahaa'ika bi abhaahu...*" (*O Allah, indeed I ask you for the most effulgent of Your Effulgence...*) Those who understand how important this supplication is, should never even think of missing it. Despite its brevity, it contains a world of meaning. The late mystic scholar Imam Khumayni has written an in-depth exegesis of the Du'a, but due to its technical notes, it is difficult for those who are not familiar with theoretical gnosis to understand it.

6- Do not afford to allow yourself to sleep in the well-known three nights of destiny and greatness (19, 21, and 23<sup>rd</sup>). Scholars of insight inform us that even if one does not engage in supplication in these nights, just being awake also has its secret and advantage. This emphasis is augmented for the 23<sup>rd</sup> night, and hence one must struggle to be awake the whole night. And since seeking knowledge this night is highly recommended, a lesson or study circle of one hour pertaining to any important subject of religion is essential. If one is deprived of that, listening to a cassette or reading a book would also be a laudable step. Hence we must make a point to learn something that night. Secondly, we observe that there are some specific needs that the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) have taught us to seek in these nights. We must make a point that we ask for these needs. One of the most important need that we should ask is that Allah enables us employ the world as a means for the Hereafter and not a goal in itself. If this is realized than the human being would undoubtedly begin his spiritual journey towards Divine proximity.

7- There is a well-known tradition that says "*Irham turham*" (have mercy, and you be enveloped with Divine Mercy). In this Holy month we should forgive and FORGET. Instead of maintaining one's rancor against another due to the latter's dealings, one must clear his account with him by forgiving him totally and praying for his spiritual upliftment too. The advantage is with the forgiver. This is because:

- Having even a speck of rancor and hatred for another will not permit one to enter the Heaven.
- If one forgives his believing brother or sister, Allah would not overlook this. In moments of desperation and seeking Help, he would be respectfully assisted by the Merciful.

8- Struggle as much as you can “to invite” and think very less of “being invited” in this Holy month. The effects of inviting your near ones, friends, as well as the poor or middle class are extremely tremendous. We must not take this lightly at all. In addition, our emphasis must be that they should break their fast at the host’s place. It should not be that they break their fasts with some bighting at home and then they eat dinner at the host’s place. All these have secrets which the likes of me and you are oblivious of, but the guardians of religion have assisted us by their directions of light.

9- In our traditions the two fundamental actions of the month of Ramadhan is *Siyaam* (fasting) and *Qiyaam* (standing in prayer). Many of us stress on *Siyaam*, but very less think about *Qiyaam*. We think that *qiyaam* (standing during the night in prayer) is restricted to *Laylat al-Qadr*. This is incorrect. Every night of the Holy Month of Ramadhan is a night of *Qiyaam*. Hence those who have to meet responsibilities the next day should plan to wake up at *sahar* time, perform their *salat al-layl* (which is an extension of *qiyaam*) and then take a light *sahri* and get ready for their day. One of the ways of getting rid of the accursed Satan according to Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin (peace be upon him) is engaging in abundant worship. However, abundance without knowledge would not reap the desired benefit. One must at least know the meaning of what one is reciting. The more the knowledge and understanding of one’s worship the better one’s worship.

10- Remember that that which is important after holy month of Ramadhan is “to retain” what one has struggled to attain. Habits like praying *salat al-layl*, recitation and study of the Holy Qur’an, inviting others to a banquet, being open-handed, etc. should be retained even after the Holy month of Ramadhan. If one is able to achieve that then one has really benefitted from the Holy Month of Ramadhan.

11- We must struggle to get more close and intimate with our 12<sup>th</sup> Holy Imam (may Allah hasten his noble reappearance). Reciting *Du’a al-Iftitah* with meaning can surely make us attain this intimacy. We should realize that whatever benefit, whether physical or spiritual that we receive during the day and night, is through his light, which is united with the Muhammadan light. Some scholars advise that one must struggle to be in the state of prayer at the real time of *Sahar* (before *fajr*), because the 12<sup>th</sup> Holy Imam (may Allah hasten his noble reappearance) stands in prayer at the same time. And certainly his *du’as* envelops the praying ones.

12- Imam al-Husayn (peace be upon him) has a unique station near Allah. And his

ziyara is highly recommended in Laylat al-Qadr. We should be extremely greedy in reciting his ziyara, thinking over it, and trying to change ourselves. His ziyara, we must understand, teaches us to be a selfless and burning spirit that yearns to meet the Beloved. It is a school of individual and social reform. Hence, when we address Imam al-Husayn (peace be upon him) we should express our loyalty to him and seek unity with his thoughts, actions, and goals. Perhaps the reason why Husayn has painted the moments of entire our lives, is to remind us that our goal is to be "al-Husayn". Hence our ziyara should resemble raging fires that burn us away or dissolve us into the Essence of al-Husayn (peace be upon him).

13- Many of us have never read or even looked at the two excellent supplications of Imam Zayn al-Abidin (peace be upon him): (a) Supplication no. 44 of al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya which welcomes the Holy month of Ramadhan and (b) Supplication no. 45 of al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya which bids farewell to the Holy Month of Ramadhan. If we would like to *organize ourselves* this month, then these two supplications have tremendous information. Hence overlooking them would be truly reprehensible on the part of one who aspires to progress this month.

14- Have we ever spoken to Allah for Allah? Do we really know how beautiful Allah is? Do we really know why can only He be the Beloved? Most of our supplications are mere transactions. O Allah, give me this and that, O Allah, by Your Mercy, solve this problem of mine; O Allah, by Your power, assist me to realize this and that; Have we ever asked Allah for Allah? Have we ever said O Allah, enable me to get close to You and increase the love that I have for You, and make me independent of other than You? The following beautiful expression is attributed to Imam al-Husayn (peace be upon him) in his well-known supplication of 'Arafa:

مَاذَا وَجَدَ مَنْ فَقَدَكَ وَمَا الَّذِي فَقَدَ مَنْ وَجَدَكَ

What has he found who has lost You, **and what he has lost, who has found You.**[Shaykh 'Abbas Qummi, *Mafatih al-Jinan*, Sup.of 'Arafa, pp. 456-480]

Let us train ourselves this month to ask Allah for Allah. Let us tell Him that we love Him, we need Him, we want to witness Him. He is our Ultimate End!