

## Ramadan and Quranic guidance

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Excerpt:

*In his talk, the Maulana explains the unique relationship between Ramadan (the month in which fasting is ordained upon believers) and the Quran, as a result of which a believer is required to dedicate the month of Ramadan for the study of the Quran. Ramadan helps create the perfect environment where free from all forms of distraction (including the bare minimum necessities like food and water), a believer can concentrate on studying the Quran. Observing fasts in the month of Ramadan therefore, becomes a source of inculcating piety (taqwa) and gratefulness (shukr) within a believer, as he strives to discover guidance (rushd) through the Quran. Explaining guidance (rushd), the Maulana points out how both positive and negative instances in life are actually a means to test man by gauging his reaction under different situations. Man's ability to mete out positive reaction even under negative circumstances determines how successful he was in receiving guidance from the Quran.*

*The lesson:*

*Ramadan gives an opportunity to the believer to save himself from all forms of distraction and read the Quran in a focussed manner to derive guidance from it. A month spent in a concentrated manner is the bare minimum; in reality, man is required to stay focussed throughout the year and contemplate over the verses of the Quran!*

## Introduction

Today is Ramadan 8, 1433. I had earlier explained the unique relationship between Ramadan and Quran which necessitates that a believer dedicates the month of Ramadan for the study of the Quran. The purpose of the month of Ramadan is to save oneself from distraction, avoiding even the bare necessities in order to focus oneself completely towards the study of the Quran. The following verses in the Quran outline the detailed commandments pertaining to Ramadan:

**Believers, fasting has been prescribed for you, just as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard yourselves against evil. (2:183)**

**so that you may be grateful to Him. (2:185)**

**so that they may be rightly guided. (2:186)**

From the above verses, it becomes clear that observing fasts in the month of Ramadan is to develop piety (*taqwa*), gratefulness (*shukr*) and seek guidance (*rushd*). Today I will discuss the third aspect, which pertains to seeking guidance (*rushd*).

*Lallahum yarshadun* refers to discovering and realizing guidance (not to following guidance). That is, a believer strives to discover guidance through the Quran during the month of Ramadan.

## Quran: Book of guidance

The Quran is often referred to as a holy book. While this arouses a sense of respect (*ehtram*) towards the book, respect however becomes the sole point of attention and as a result, Quran is kept enwrapped in cloth, upon the highest shelf in the house. In fact, people become so sensitive that an act of disrespect (or *behurmati*) of the Quran leads to violence. There is often news in media to report such occurrences. What such Muslims fail to understand is that ‘*behurmati* or disrespect’ is a false notion; it has no relation with Islam.

Quran is a book of guidance, meant for attaining *rushd*, especially so in the month of Ramadan. In this month, believers are required to focus singularly on studying the Quran so as to receive guidance from it.

### **Deriving guidance from the Quran**

The Quran begins with the following verse

**In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.**

Man wants to work in this world and then he apprehends the problems and issues that he may face so man must begin his work by reflecting on the above verse of the Quran. According to a Hadith, the work which does not commence with this verse, will not be successful. This is neither mysterious nor a matter of ill-wishing. It means that when man begins his work with this thought in mind, he realizes that he shall undertake to work in the world of a God who is Compassionate and Merciful. This thought fosters conviction, belief and strengthens his resolve to succeed. This is the wisdom behind this verse. Quran therefore cannot be understood referring to it as a holy book; it is in fact a book of wisdom.

The next verse in the Quran reads

**All praise is due to God, the Lord of the Universe the Beneficent, the Merciful. (1:2)**

In a world where man finds himself grappling with varied problems, the above verse makes him take into account the blessings which God has indiscriminately showered on mankind. Compared to the blessings he has already, the existing problem appears inconsequential to man. This realisation removes all frustrations from his life. Losses therefore are no longer such for in spite of them, man never loses the feeling that his greatest asset, i.e. God, is still with him.

Reading the Quran again and again has made me realise a unique feature about the Book: Quran wants to build a positive mindset in man. It does not want man to forsake positive thinking at any cost.

I understood this better when I read about a recent research undertaken at a University of America where the researchers have concluded that man absorbs information better by closing eyes. In the context of this finding, I remembered the following verse of the Quran

**As for man, when his Lord tests him, through honor and blessings. (89:15)**

Man experiences two sets of circumstances in this world: sometimes he gains and at other times, he loses. Both situations are meant to gauge man's reaction under different circumstances from the purpose of putting him to test. If the individual starts to boast upon achieving and acts negatively upon losing, he has failed the test. In other words, whether he achieves or loses, man must consider both the situations as a matter of test (*ibtilah*) and maintain the same positive response. This is because man can neither win nor lose in this world. This mindset will inculcate eternal positivity in man. I remembered the following Hadith

**Allah farmate hain, Jab mein apne bandon ko ibtilah mein dalta hun uski do aankhon ke bare mein, aur phir woh sabr kar leta hai toh uske badle mein usko jannat deta hun.**

*[God says, When I afflict a believer with respect to his two most beloved things (meaning his eyes), and he endures it patiently, I grant him paradise in return.] (Mishkat)*

This Hadith therefore does not refer to blindness as a deprivation but as a test; if such a person remains patient, God would reward him with paradise. This made me realize that patience means positive thinking. If a person cannot see and he exercises patience, he is opting for a positive course of action. The research conducted by the American university corroborates the above Hadith and brings to fore that being blind is not a deprivation, rather it means that a different ability has developed more in such a person! This is the message of the Quran: that, no loss should be looked at as loss because every loss is actually a gain (*har mehrumi ke saath ek yaft hai, har khone ke andar ek paana hai!*). This Quranic concept, of there being a find in every loss, is a revolutionary concept. Earlier man used to refer to people as being lame, deaf, blind, dumb or 'disabled' but now they are called, 'differently abled'.

Hence, because every deprivation is actually a find, man must not fret over the loss. He should not resort to complains or negative thinking, rather he should focus on discovering the new ability. Let me give some more examples in support of this idea.

### **Examples**

Louis Braille was a Frenchman who invented the Braille, a system of reading and writing used by people who are visually impaired. Blinded in childhood himself, Braille was determined to fashion a system of reading and writing that could bridge the critical gap in communication between the sighted and the blind. He worked tirelessly and developed a system of communication with sighted people, using patterns of dots.

Another example is that of Hellen Keller, the prolific American author, activist, and the first deafblind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree. A member of the Socialist Party of America and the Industrial Workers of the World, she campaigned for several causes. During her lifetime, she received many honors in recognition of her accomplishments including the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Keller is a powerful example of how determination, hard work, and imagination can allow an individual to triumph over adversity.

Stephen Hawking is known for his work regarding black holes and his several popular science books. He suffers from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a motor neuron disease which leads to paralysis and muscular atrophy. In a sense, Hawking's disease helped him become the noted scientist he is today. Before the diagnosis, Stephen Hawking hadn't always focused on his studies. But after the sudden realization that he might not even live long enough to earn his Ph.D., Hawking is said to have poured himself into his work and research.

These examples made me realise that the Quran carried a clue to this wisdom since the time it was revealed. Today, we have a research and living instances that corroborate this teaching of the Quran.

## **Givers prevail in the society**

Let us reflect on the following verse of the Quran

**The scum is cast away, but whatever is of use to man remains behind. (13:17)**

The principle for achieving success in this world is to prove yourself to be useful to others. The individual who fails to benefit others has no place in this world. In other words, the system of nature is such that givers, prevail. Reaching a high position in the society is an act of becoming a giver. Such a person never takes anything from others. His role is always positive, beneficent.

On the contrary, demanding rights makes one a taker and those who adopt this policy, fail to achieve their goals. In other words, he who does not have anything to give to this world, does not receive either. That is, in order to get something from this world, you must become a giver, first. For example, if a community realizes that it is not getting its due share in society, it should not resort to complaining or blaming others. Rather, it should introspect and re-assess its approach; it should understand that failure is the price of failing to be a giver community. Blaming others for conspiring is baseless and such thinking has no place in the world of God. The correct approach is to identify the reason of failure and charter a course of improvement. This principle allows you to overcome negative thinking by making you realize that you are the cause and there is no one else that can be blamed for your failure. This mindset, on one hand develops an unceasing positive attitude and on the other, provides the right line of action and a starting point. Both, a right starting point and the correct line of action are most important to attain success in life. Considering Quran to be a holy book is therefore an underestimation; in reality, it is a book of wisdom!

## Guidance from the Quran

According to a verse in the Quran

**He lets many go astray through it, and guides many by it. (2:26)**

This is a peculiar verse and invites man to think profoundly because any one can be led astray. I will give you an example to illustrate how the same book becomes the source of providing guidance and of letting people go astray.

An educated non Muslim was given the English translation of the Quran. After some days, he returned the Quran saying that he could not read it because he was not comfortable reading about Hell and Hellfire. The approach adopted by this man was not correct. If he would have reflected sincerely, he would have realized that this book had become an eye-opener for him; it introduced him to a grave reality that he was until then unaware about. But he chose to not read it and returned the book. If he would have followed the other way, Quran would have become a book of guidance for him, which would have made him aware of what will come to pass after death.

The other example is of an educated man who when he first read the English translation of the Quran, read it over and over again. When we met, he told me that he had never subscribed to religious fundamentalism and endorsed a liberal mindset. He also had a keen interest to study religions and during the course of his study, had realized that in other religions, salvation was based on certain external factors. For example, among Jews, birth determined salvation; only those who are born in Jewish household were entitled to get entry into paradise. But no one can control the family or household that he or she is born in. If accidentally he is born in Jewish family, he will be in paradise else if he is born anywhere else, he will not receive salvation. This idea did not appeal his mind because it relied heavily on probability of birth.

Likewise, Christianity held that Jesus was crucified on the cross and died with the sins of those who believe in him (atonement). In this concept, there was little clarity on how a person could be made to bear the punishment for the sins of others.

When he read the Quran, he discovered that salvation is purely a matter of making oneself deserving for paradise. Quran reinforced the idea multiple times that only those who strive to develop within themselves traits of a paradisiacal personality will be inhabited in paradise. He said that as a child, he used to dream of becoming an officer in the Indian Administrative Services (IAS). He worked hard for 25 years after which he became an IAS officer. He used to think that while 25 years of preparation were required for becoming an IAS officer, no preparation was required to gain entry into paradise. But when he read the Quran, he realized that the same formula, which was applicable to prepare for civil services, applied in the context of paradise. Quran seeks to guide man to inculcate traits that would make him a deserving candidate for paradise.

Through the same Quran, therefore one person drew guidance the other drew a wrong interpretation. At this point, am reminded of the following verse of the Quran

**This is a Blessed Book which We sent down to you [Muhammad], for people to ponder over its messages and for those with understanding to take heed. (38:29)**

### **Contemplating over the Quran**

Quran can be understood by contemplating and reflecting (*tadabbur*) upon its verses. But man's preoccupations (job, business, family) keep him distracted and he is unable to concentrate and think. Let me give an example. I went to meet an acquaintance to discuss a topic from the Quran. Our discussion was interrupted by his child who came running into his arms and the father became engaged in pampering the child. Our conversation had ended abruptly. I did not discuss further and returned home.

In the month of Ramadan, therefore, under a special programme a believer is given an opportunity to save himself from all forms of distraction and read the Quran in a focussed manner. This is very important because if man is living in distraction and he reads the Quran as such, he will not obtain any lesson. A month spent in a concentrated manner is the bare minimum; in reality, man is required to stay focussed throughout the year and contemplate over the verse of the Quran!



## Whispers with God

According to a Hadith

**Momin ko aise lamhaat pesh aane chahiye jin mein wo Khuda se sargoshi kare [A believer should have moments of whisper with his Lord] (Musnad Ahmad)**

This Hadith made me realize that when a true seeker studies and reflects on the verses of the Quran and the Creation Plan of God, he discovers a living, personal God, who is the benefactor of the entire universe and is the most praiseworthy.

According to a verse of the Quran

**When My servants ask you about Me, say that I am near. I respond to the call of one who calls, whenever he calls to Me: let them, then respond to Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be rightly guided. (2:186)**

This discovery that God is so near that man lives in His presence, all the time is an overwhelming experience! The believer thus begins to whisper with God! According to the Quran,

**We created man ... and are closer to him than his jugular vein. (50:16)**

A believer must seek this level of discovery; this is the starting point. It is therefore important that he undertakes the study of the Quran with single focused concentration. If he has limited opportunities, then during the last ten days, he should seclude himself and dedicatedly study the Quran.

Realizing the proximity of the Creator is not a simple thing! It arouses a tempest within a believer to think that even if he speaks in the heart, God will hear him. He is then reminded of the Day when he shall face his Lord. No one would have the power to run away from their fate; even those who run away would reach God in the end. Will make the believer engage in whispers with God, every moment of the year!

Thinking about the blessings of God, another verse came to my mind

**Our Lord, grant us good in this world as well as good in the world to come, and protect us from the torment of the Fire. (2:201)**

God has already granted the good (*hasasna*) to man in this world – his existence, the life support system, the solar system, fruits from trees, grains from land, vegetables from ground and countless such blessings have been bestowed upon man. What then is the context of this prayer (*dua*) when God has already provisioned for this world? I realized that through this prayer, man was being taught a greater prayer that, *O God! Just as you bestowed upon us the good (hasasna) of this world, we entreat you to bestow the good (hasasna) in the world to come!*

Whispering to God is not a mysterious activity. When man is conscious of being in the presence of God at all times, he starts talking (whispering) to God. I let out a prayer of thanksgiving for God because had it not been for His blessings, I could not have lived in this world. He provisioned everything necessary for our survival and beyond, from sunlight, to gravity, water, food, fruits and vegetables, the list is countless.

Thinking about this, I remembered the following Hadith according to which God says

**Main aadmi ke gumaan ke sath hun to woh mere bare mein achca guman kare**

*[I am with the belief of man; so, let him be hopeful of Me.] (Bukhari)*

I prayed thus, *Oh God! Am hopeful of Your mercy. You have granted me the good (hasana) in this world and I hope that You would grant me the good (hasana) in afterlife as well!*

Discovery of God with his attributes and the realization of being in His presence, results in whispers with God. Everything becomes a point of reference and presence of God is felt everywhere.

## Conclusion

There are two aspects of Ramadan. One is *minimum* Ramadan (where once a year, the believer focuses on the study of the Quran and it becomes a point of reference for remembering God). The other is *maximum* Ramadan (where the pattern adopted during minimum Ramadan continues throughout the year!)

The discovery of a personal and living God, is an overwhelming experience for man. This realization begins a conversation (whisper) between man and ever-present God.

A show was being telecasted on television where renowned persons were invited to speak on a grand stage. This made me recall the following verse of the Quran

**The God-conscious will find themselves...in the seat of truth with an all-powerful sovereign. (54:54-55)**

The above verse made me realize that the seat on falsehood (*wakade kizb*) is not lasting. The seat of truth in the hereafter would be eternal, where God would invite the best people from amongst the mankind to address all. I prayed thus

*Oh God, please choose me to be amongst those who would occupy the eternal seat of truth!*

May God give us the ability to discover and realize God and be counted amongst those who would found *rushd* (guidance) and be selected to inhabit God's neighborhood!