

The month of Ramzaan and Quran

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Sunday, July 15, 2012

Excerpt:

In his talk, the Maulana urges each reader to read the entire Quran (during the month of Ramzaan), either in Arabic (if he knows the language) or in translation and strive to understand its message. In doing so, the reader would realize several aspects of the Quran and understand that it focuses on addressing the mind of an individual; ushering a system is not the concern of the Quran. The system-based approach prevalent amongst the modern-day Muslims is a muzahaat (imitation) of the beliefs propounded by secular and political parties.

The target of Islam is to intellectually develop a believer so that he is able to acknowledge his creator and reaches a stage of realization where he admits, 'All praise is due to God, the Lord of the Universe!' This discovery neither entails any confrontation nor violence; it follows a journey of reflection and contemplation.

In the month of Ramzaan, man is required to undertake intellectual aetkaaf where despite being embroiled in daily business, he strives to stay single focused in order to understand the message of the Quran and obtain guidance from it.

The lesson:

The significance of Ramzaan is of being an annual course, which requires a believer to realize the meaning entailed in the Book of God. Intellectual aetkaaf therefore is not meant for the month of Ramzaan alone; Ramzaan is only a training period. The real aim of this exercise is to develop detached thinking in man, that is, the ability to think in a detached manner despite being amidst diverse activities.

Introduction

The month of Ramzaan (fasting) is round the corner and it is expected that July 22 would be the first day of Ramzaan. Mentioning about Ramzaan, the Quran reads

The month of Ramzaan is the month when the Quran was sent down as guidance for mankind with clear proofs of guidance...whoever of you is present in that month, let him fast. (2:185)

Here, a question arises pertaining to the relation between Ramzaan and Quran. To know the answer, you must read the entire Quran once with the intention of knowing its message. You will find that Quran's emphasis is on addressing the mind of an individual; it makes no mention of establishing a system.

Unfortunately, Muslims all over the world are obsessed with the idea of an Islamic system and implementation of Islamic law. The media is flooded with articles which propagate this idea, on almost a daily basis. I would like to clarify that this edition of Islam has no connection with Quran. Whoever does not believe this should read the Quran one time only to learn what the focus of the Quran is. And the reader would without exception, realize that the sole emphasis of the Quran is on addressing the mind of an individual.

Quran's approach

Quran's approach is individual-based and not system-based. However, there exist several Muslim institutions that have establishment of Islamic law as their prime motto. The question is does Quran endorse this approach? The answer is no.

Let us understand how such a pattern of system-based thought developed amongst Muslims. It presents a clear example of muzahaat (imitation). Historically, this approach was adopted by secular parties. Unfortunately, the later-day Muslims imitated this approach and inducted this into their self-styled belief system. For instance, the origin of democracy is traced to France.

Rousseau a famous French thinker and propagator of democracy wrote a book, “*Social Contract*,” which starts with the following sentence, ‘*Man was born free but I see him in chains.*’ The chains in this context refer to political chains because the target of democracy from Day 1 is to change the political system.

Similarly, the philosophy of communism arose and it was well propagated throughout the world. The book that made this philosophy famous across the world was ‘*Communist Manifesto*’ the opening line of which reads, ‘*Laborers of world unite*’ and disintegrate the capitalist system. So, from day 1, the target of communism was to change the prevalent system.

Now, let us take a look at the first verse of the Quran,

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

Quran therefore does not aim at establishing a system; it seeks to address an individual, a mind. Only when a person thinks, reflects and contemplates, is he able to discover the glory of God. I was thinking about the following verse of the Quran,

It was God who raised the heavens with no visible supports (13:2)

I realized that the galaxy and the solar system, stars and planets were not supported on pillars, as man-made infrastructure is. Yet the planetary bodies are uniquely floating in space! Reflecting on this phenomenon created a sense of awe about the greatness of the Creator. Then I evaluated my abilities and remembered that many times I would pick up a glass of water and its lid would slip by. This made me think about the compelling system of control that exists in the universe. None of the countless planetary bodies slip past and fall on another (imagine if sun slips and falls off on earth, earth would be wiped out!). On one hand, the system of control in universe is so compelling and on the other hand is my being which fails to control the lid of a glass from slipping by! Thinking about creation and how God provisioned a self-sustaining mechanism to ensure man’s existence is a thrilling experience. When man realizes this, he cannot but say that *God is Great and all praise is for Him!*

But this is not the case with political or secular parties. For example, the slogan of Congress in pre-independence days was ‘Quit India’. They wanted to unite masses to confront British and oust them from India. But this was never the target of Islam. The target of Islam is to intellectually develop a believer so that he is able to acknowledge his creator and admits, ‘*All praise is due to God, the Lord of the Universe.*’ It must be realized that a crowd or a system cannot say this, it is only an individual who by way of his discovery and realization is able to admit this reality! This discovery neither entails any confrontation nor violence, it only entails, reflection and contemplation. In the month of Ramzaan therefore, you must cast yourself in the Quran to understand the scheme of God.

The month of Intellectual Aetkaaf

The month of Ramzaan is actually a month of *aetkaaf*. The form in which *aetkaaf* is performed in the last week of Ramzaan is actually a form of physical *aetkaaf*. In reality, the entire month of Ramzaan is a form of intellectual *aetkaaf*. We live in a society, amidst people and a whole host of activities. *Aetkaaf* seeks to retain the focus of mind on God despite being involved in daily activities.

Ramzaan does not seek to make man a hermit. It seeks to train man to undertake intellectual *aetkaaf* whereby despite being amidst diverse activities, he would learn to stay focused in terms of thinking. For example when the lid of the glass fell, it was a physical incident but I realized the glory of Creator from it, that God controls the whole world whereas I could not even control the lid of a glass. Man’s physical life therefore shall always be amidst a lot of activities. It is amidst these activities that man’s mind should stay focused on God and the hereafter.

Intellectual *aetkaaf* is not meant for the month of Ramzaan alone; Ramzaan is only a training period. The real aim of this exercise is to develop detached thinking in man, that is, the ability to think in a detached manner despite being amidst activities.

Each one of you must therefore read the Quran, atleast once to know its meaning and you will find out that the focus of every page is to address an individual mind. Only recitation or being a part of the *taraavi* (special prayers in which Quran is recited, organized at night during Ramzaan) does not suffice. The translation of the Quran should be read and reflected upon with the aim of understanding the meaning of the Quran. Here, am reminded of the following verse of the Quran

This is merely a reminder to all mankind; to everyone of you who wishes to tread the straight path. (81:27-28)

The above verse means that Quran is a book of guidance to anyone who wishes to follow the straight path. Quran is therefore addressing an individual mind and that too on the condition that the individual himself wants to tread the path of God. You must therefore in Ramzaan, read the Quran once to understand its message. It is not a matter of quantity but you must read the complete translation of the Quran during Ramzaan.

Islam seeks to address individual mind

The so-called Islamists who derive that Islam seeks to establish a system (*Nizam-e-adl* or system of justice) cannot cite one verse in the Quran which propagates this. For example, it is said that Quran's aim is to establish a system of justice. Where is this written in the Quran? Contrarily, Quran states

We sent down the Book and the Scales of Justice, so that men might act in all fairness. (57:25)

This verse does not say that *qist* (or justice) should be implemented or established on others. It means that each individual should be responsible for following the path of justice himself, that is, in his behavior, dealing, relationship, one should be following the path of justice. Nowhere in the Quran, is it written that Muslims should establish a system of justice.

I read an article yesterday that was written by a professor of psychology who used a word, '*Mind management.*' The Quran I thought is a book which teaches the art of mind management.

For example, according to a verse in the Quran,

Who forgive when they are angry. (42:37)

This is what management is all about. That when you are angry, you do not let it reach an extreme and prevent it from getting converted into violence. Studies in psychology show that at a time, man's mind cannot focus on two things. So, it is recommended that when you get a negative thought, you should instantly remember a positive item because your mind cannot simultaneously focus on both thoughts. This is what the Quran says, that though one is angry but because one focuses on controlling the anger, the focus shifts on positivity. This is the wisdom that Quran preaches.

According to another verse,

Reconciliation is best (4:128)

This verse is a negation of the policy of confrontation. Whether social or national, one should always try to find a conciliatory approach and try to resolve the issue peacefully. Even if the other person incites anger, a believer should unilaterally adjust in order to resolve the differences peacefully. Demonstrating this behavior is a matter of an individual mind. Even if the other person commits violence, a believer must adhere to peace. If the opposite party provokes, a believer should still maintain his calm. '*Nizam*' (or system) is only a beautiful world which has no meaning. In reality, it is an innovation and an act of imitating the philosophy of political parties. The more the Quran is read, the more clear the distinction becomes of its approach of addressing an individual mind

I received a phone call from Kashmir yesterday. A book authored by me, titled, '*Dawn over Kashmir*' was published some time back. In response to that book, an article was published in a local magazine. In the book, I have highlighted how Prophet Yusuf, instead of confronting with the unbeliever Hyksos king, accepted his administrative sovereignty and took over the charge of agriculture department. In the article, they have countered this by saying that Prophet Yusuf's example cannot apply because Jihad was not obligatory in his time and so he did not have the option to do Jihad. This is an absurd argument!

Where can they prove from that Jihad was not obligatory in the time of Prophet Yusuf? The instance of Prophet Yusuf is so important that an entire chapter is dedicated to it and referring to it, the Quran says

We recount to you the best of narratives. (12:3)

No other instance in the Quran is referred to as the best narrative. How can it be that the best narrative does not make a mention of the best action? Present day Muslims consider Jihad to be the best action. What will then be said about a story which is devoid of this best action, yet referred to as best in the Quran? Such an approach amounts to living in sheer falsehood. In the name of Islam, all the hue and cry is raised about something which is not even written in the Quran!

Understanding the Quran

Physical aetkaaf is also intellectual in nature. You cannot be sitting in the mosque and thinking and discussing worldly concerns. Therefore the real aspect of *aetkaaf* is intellectual, which is sought in all circumstances. It seeks to inculcate in man the ability to think with single minded concentration. When the Quran was revealed during the Ramzaan, it was made important that the month of Ramzaan is made special for training man to learn contemplation and reflection on the teachings of the Quran so that he can better understand its meaning.

When you read and reflect on the Quran to understand its meaning, you will be able to fathom unique meanings. For example, Quran emphasizes on praying (*namaaz* or *aqeem-us-salaat*) but does not talk about the form of prayer. It means that it is the spirit of namaaz which is of prime importance. In later times, namaaz was reduced to the status of being a *namaz-e-masail* (form based). The focus reversed and clerics started paying importance to form and not the spirit. Referring to the spirit sought at the time of namaaz, the Quran says

Those who are humble in their prayer. (23:2)

In the present-day version of Islam, *namaaz* is taught as a highly form based prayer but this was not what the Quran sought. The real focus of namaaz is to remind a believer of the glory of God and imbue the spirit deeply (*khushu*).

Unfortunately, the present-day Muslims lay such emphasis on form that they do not realize that it is actually the spirit of reading the namaaz that is of prime importance.

It is believed that Islam is a complete political system but this notion has no basis in the Quran. For example, constitution of a country clearly spells out the process of electing the head of the state. This is the first question of a political system but nowhere does the Quran make a mention of the process for electing a Caliph. People have formulated self-styled understanding of the Quran, which has no bearing with its real teachings. Therefore, I want that each one of you reads the entire Quran with single minded focus.

An Orientalist said that '*Quran has sound art, par excellence!*' I would say, *Quran has clarity par excellence*. If you read carefully, the translation alone will suffice for you to know what the Quran wants man to know. Quran has been revealed to inform man what he would face after death and not to tell him what system to formulate in this world!

System-based thinking is against the scheme of God and has no basis in the Quran. God has given freedom to man and his freedom cannot be abolished before doomsday. Neither can you abolish and nor would God abolish. Man tried to kill Jesus and John the Baptist but did God snatch away his freedom? Man broke the teeth of Prophet Muhammad and killed Umar, but his freedom was not retracted. Prophet Muhammad's grandson was killed, was freedom taken away? No, it was not. When freedom cannot be abolished then how can you save man from misusing the freedom because with freedom, comes the misuse of freedom.

The first case of misuse of freedom was when Cain, the son of Adam killed his brother, Abel. The misuse of freedom cannot be stopped and therefore it is not possible to make an ideal system in the society because someone will misuse the freedom and jeopardize the ideal system. According to God's scheme of things, until the Day of Judgment, the freedom of man shall remain so that the test continues. If in the examination hall, the hands of students are bound, can an examination be taken?

God created man for a test and as such man's freedom will not be restricted. Then there would be atleast that one person who would misuse his freedom to jeopardize the plan. So this very notion of formulating an ideal system is baseless and cannot be brought into being. Across the Muslim world, there are uprisings and revolts against injustice, people seeking to eradicate it, *fatwas* issued to condemn it but none of this has yielded any result.

It must be understood that because injustice is a result of misuse of freedom, it cannot be eradicated from the society. Instead, it is required that an individual stands on ideal and justice, the entire society or system cannot be made to stand on ideal. An Arab scholar wrote a book entitled, '*Social Justice in Islam*,' where he showed that the purpose of Islam is to bring about social justice in the world. But this is not possible because man will not stop misusing his freedom. Even the system established by Prophet was jeopardised because misuse of freedom was always possible.

I was thinking why Muslims worldwide live in the psyche of hatred and negative thinking. Where ever they live, they are disloyal to their country. I got a call from a Kashmiri student who said that he visited all over India and felt that 99% Muslims are not patriotic towards their country. This lack of patriotism is not only in India but everywhere in the world. This is because the present-day Muslims think that since there is no Islamic system, everything is falsehood. All Muslims therefore (outside of our mission) are either passive Talibans or active Talibans. All of them live in psyche of hatred. How will a heart full of hatred, love?

I visited America and during a talk said that the seven million Muslims who live in America lack patriotism and are there only to earn dollars. A senior Muslim stood up in that gathering and expressed his dissenting opinion. To substantiate, he made me meet a girl who was born and brought up in America. I asked her if she loved America. She said, yes. I asked her if she loved America even when it bombards Iraq and Afghanistan. She said, no. Why not was the question. I told her that as a loyal citizen she should believe that whatever her Government does is for her protection, then why is her heart not subscribing to America?

This was because she has been raised in an environment where negative talks were rampant. It is for this reason that Muslims are not able to feel patriotic about the country they live in. This is a disastrous evil. And when others complain about Muslims, they say they are being discriminated against. The complaints are justified and the blame for the present-day mindset of Muslims lies on those clerics and leaders who claimed that Islam is a complete system and must be ushered in to establish a system of justice. If the focus would have been on what the Quran preaches – to be fearful of God, strive for paradise and remember the day of judgment, a different personality would have come into being. All such negative movements create a different kind of person, one who is not what Quran seeks to make him.

Conclusion

The significance of Ramzaan is of an annual course, which requires a believer to realize the meaning entailed in the Book of God. Unfortunately, it is wrongly construed that recitation is enough. All Muslims recite the Quran in Ramzaan but it is of no use. God wants that every year, atleast for a month, man reads the Quran with singular focus and undergoes an intellectual *aetkaaf* to understand what the Quran wants of man.

From what I have realized, it is owing to this shift of focus from individual to system that all the positive values have got eroded from the mind of present-day Muslims. Their sole concern today, is to earn and live. When I go to Muslim gatherings, it seems that there is no one with whom a meaningful conversation can be struck. For example, I met a Muslim yesterday who said that when his children step out of the house, he and his wife remain stressed till they return thinking what may happen to them. I was shocked to hear this! It seemed as if they are surrounded by wolves who are waiting for the chance to pounce upon their children! I told him that his psyche was such because he did not consider other men as his brothers. This was a clear example of how his negative mindset disallows man to think positively.

The responsibility for developing such a negative mindset amongst Muslims lies on institutions and the post-printing press literature, which inculcated negativity to such an extent.

All the Muslim newspapers I receive are filled with negative items. Recently, a person perceived as being pro-Islamist took charge as the Prime Minister of Egypt. The President of Israel called to greet him but Egyptian Prime Minister refused to talk to him. This is against the example of the Prophet. Prophet Muhammad never denied or said no to meet his opponents, whenever they called him, he always went to meet them. There is not a single incident where the Prophet refused a meeting. Then, from where did Mr. Prime Minister derive his approach?

This is not about one person but the fact is that all Muslims live in the psyche of hatred and think that the world is conspiring against them. Their criterion is successful establishment of Islamic system and when that does not happen, they become devoid of well wishing, loyalty, love and patriotism. Whoever wants to validate this should spend time with Muslims anywhere (outside our mission) and they will get to know the veracity of this claim.

I pray that God saves all of us and Muslims throughout the world from negativity, which is a curse!

Question-Answers

Q1: Why do Muslim clerics not explain the concept of hereafter and highlight its importance?

A: This is a phenomenon of this era, which brought in its wake the new civilization. Present-day Muslim clerics only discuss politics. They do not talk about hereafter. When post colonialism, the Mughal, Ottoman and Spanish empires disintegrated one after the other, these events incited reactions amongst Muslims. I am not concerned about whose rule it is. According to the following verse of the Quran, rule is subject to change, always

We bring these days to men by turns (3:140)

Politics is therefore never a monopoly and should not become a concern. Clerics could not realize that rule in the world would keep changing but the real rule is of God, which shall remain. Instead they started reacting and could not understand that the political changes should be considered as is and not be bothered about.

Q2: How did you manage to save yourself from negativity?

A: This is a matter of developing one's art of thinking. Recently, I visited the Islamic centre of a large Islamic organization where I met certain Muslims who have been living there for the last forty years. Despite the huge infrastructure and support they had, this group of Muslims was busy complaining. I asked them that they have developed such an infrastructure in India and should be thankful, why complain? The reason is that they lacked the art of thinking. In Delhi alone, Muslims have big centers, institutions, mosques and seminaries. Irrespective of who ruled, Muslims always had an opportunity. Thinking about this should arouse feelings of gratefulness but the obstacle is that people do not know how to think.

Q3: Every person leads a life full of tension. What is its reason and how should a dayee help?

A: The present world is a testing ground for man. He has a tendency which was first demonstrated by Adam. Adam was the first man who was created and inhabited in paradise. He was asked to refrain from the Forbidden Tree. The tendency of man is to go after that which is prohibited for him. Adam too gave into his desire and as a result was ousted from paradise. The lesson is that if the focus of man goes on that one thing which he does not have and he remains ungrateful for all the other things that he has, it makes him thankless. Adam was in paradise and that was sufficient to be thankful. But the Forbidden Tree became his focus. This is the tendency of man. Whoever complains has even at that instance, many blessings that he partakes but is not thinking about it. Blessings are not only material, there is sun for man to see, life support system to sustain, legs to walk, body, house, society yet he focuses on that which he does not have. This is the test of man to find out how well can he control his desires. Because people are not able to exercise control, they succumb to negativity. There are 99 items which would make you positive and one which would make you negative but the focus shifts to latter. Man should know that he must learn to get over this tendency, whoever comes through will pass the test.

Q4: In context of the following verse of the Quran,

By the soul and how he formed it, then inspired it to understand what was right and wrong for it. (91:7-8)

Every soul has ability to recognize the goodness or badness so that it cannot say that it knew not on the Day of Judgement. Is there any verse which says that man has the ability to recognize the oneness of God?

A: Oneness of God is interwoven in nature and a proof is that science has been searching till date that what is that one law which governs everything. Scientists have also called it the *Single String Theory* because science is not convinced that there can be multiple forces controlling the universe. They are striving to find out the theory of everything. Man is desperate to reach wahadat (oneness) and researches like the God particle are directed in the same direction. At the time of Newton, it was said that four forces control the universe but today this idea stands discarded. Therefore, I think it is man's nature that gets reflected in his efforts to find that One force.

Q5: Why do people become negative with Tavassi bil haq (when they are exhorted to hold fast to Truth and steadfastness?)(103:3)

A: There are two types of people, one who live in their pride and the others who are seekers. A seeker would not be negative. He who is not a seeker lives in himself and when his ego is hurt, he reacts. Dawah work is a work of finding seekers. When such minds are addressed, they no longer remain negative.

Q6: If patriotism means loyalty towards define borders, is it not better to think of ourselves as global citizens to serve mankind?

A: This is a romantic idea, which was propounded by Karl Marx. He said that all the labourers of world are united against colonial powers. But when the Second World War took place, all the labourers supported their own country. This is most natural that where I have been brought up and raised, I would love that land more than any other. Global citizenship is therefore an unnatural concept.

Q7: In the struggle to establish a system, the desired personality could not come into being. Is it correct?

A: It is correct. Secular parties focus not on individuals but on external system. Muslims imitated this and started focusing on the system even though the focus of the Quran was the individual alone.

Q8: Islam teaches non confrontational approach which comes through leading a God-oriented life instead of a world-oriented life. Please advise.

A: God has bestowed on us countless blessings and Satan tries to take our focus away from these blessings. I saw a cleric leave behind half a glass of water, after drinking. He could do this because he did not realize what a blessing water is! Can all human beings come together to create a drop of water? No. Because man is not able to realize the bounties of God, he adopts such an approach.

Q9: Even highly successful Muslims are extremely negative in mind. Please comment.

A: Man can have all the things in the world but it is his tendency to not focus on what he has and pay attention to what he does not have. Adam's focus shifted on the one Tree that was forbidden for him even though he was allowed the entire paradise!

Q10: How can we become so magnanimous that we forgive everyone?

A: It is a matter of thinking; this is what determines your personality and actions. Your thinking process should be directed onto the right path.

Q11: Is it okay to say that the real worship of Ramzaan is to reflect on the Quran?

A: The crux of the Quran is Islamisation of man and not Islamisation of system. Everything else develops as a result. The focus of reading the Quran in Ramzaan is to Islamize our focus of thinking.

Q12: What happens to the dua done for those who are dead?

A: Prophet Noah prayed for his son, Prophet Ibrahim prayed for his father and Prophet Muhammad prayed for his grandfather but this did not change the fate any of these men. Paradise is an individual matter and one person's dua cannot make another earn entry into paradise. People do this dua only to feel better.