

1. The New Moon:

“Don’t enter houses by their backs but by their doors”

2. Eid and the importance of Sunnah of the Holy Prophet

3. Eating spiritual food, and eating “the lawful and good”

Eid-ul-Fitr Khutba (sermon), Wednesday, 5 June 2019

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After reciting the preliminaries, I now read the following verse of the Holy Quran:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْآهِلَةِ قُلْ هِيَ مَوَاقِيتُ لِلنَّاسِ وَالْحَجِّ ۗ وَلَيْسَ الْبِرُّ بِأَنْ تَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ
ظُهُورِهَا وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنِ اتَّقَىٰ ۗ وَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا ۗ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

“They ask you about the new moons. Say: They are times appointed for people, and (for) the pilgrimage. And it is not righteousness that you enter houses by their backs, but he is righteous who keeps his duty. And go into houses by their doors; and keep your duty to Allah, that you may be successful.” (2:189)

This verse of the Quran occurs immediately after the verses relating to fasting in Ramadan. And before the beginning of Ramadan and before its end, Muslims do indeed widely ask “about the new moons”. Here we are told that these new moons are a way of determining time for people, and determining also the time of the Pilgrimage.

The words which follow are: “And it is not righteousness that you enter houses by their backs, but he is righteous who keeps his duty. And go into houses by their doors”. An explanation of these given is that there was a superstitious custom among pre-Islamic Arabs that if one of them went out of his house for some important purpose and failed to achieve it, then when he returned home he would not enter it through the door, but by going around the back, jumping over the back wall or through a window at the back, and kept on doing it for some time. There were other occasions as well when a person would not enter his house by its door.

Commentators of the Quran have always realised that this statement must have some general meaning for Muslims as well, rather than being only directed

against a pre-Islamic Arab superstition which has no meaning for Muslims. So they say that entering your house stands for how you undertake some task or duty, especially a religious duty which you undertake to attain righteousness. This verse teaches that whatever aim you are trying to achieve, you should use the proper way that is provided for achieving it, and not try to go around the proper way.

But the question remains: what is the connection of this with new moons? Modern circumstances, of the past twenty or thirty years, provide a connection. There are Muslim countries, and religious authorities, who believe that righteousness, or adhering to Islam, requires that to start and end the month of Ramadan the new moon must be sighted by some person with his eyes. There is nothing wrong or objectionable in this. But what is being done, again and again, is that these authorities determine and decide *many days before* when the new month should begin. But they pretend to wait till the evening before and then announce that as the new moon has been sighted, the new month will begin on the next day. They make that announcement regardless of whether anyone sighted the moon or not and even when it was impossible to any person to have sighted it.

In this case, the meaning of entering the house by its door means that if you have declared a standard or method as the one to use then you should apply the very same! Entering it by the back means that you circumvent your own established standard, your own door. The alternative is to explain to people the standard you are *really* applying, why you are adopting this method, and its benefits and convenience. In other words, you educate people. Entering by the back is when circumstances force you to use a new method, but you pretend before people that you are still following what they believe to be the Islamic method. This pretence is out of fear of antagonising people or because you think that reforming people is too hard.

The next point I wish to deal with is that while fasting in Ramadan is covered in detail in the Quran, there is no mention whatsoever in the Quran of Eid-ul-Fitr or celebrating after the end of Ramadan. The Quran in verses 2:183 to 188 explains the purpose of fasting, which month to fast in, that the fast is a daily fast from dawn to sunset, who is allowed to not fast in Ramadan and what they should do instead of fasting, the close connection of fasting with prayer, the practice of *i'tikaf*, and how violating the rights of other people is against the spirit of fasting. But the Quran never at all mentions any aspect of Eid whatsoever, or even its existence!

Muslims learnt about Eid-ul-Fitr, and what to do on it, from the practice of the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. He established this festival and its main features, and Muslims acted accordingly in his lifetime and afterwards. Then, a couple of centuries later, when Muslim scholars compiled books of his sayings and practices, they included in them details of Eid-ul-Fitr as taught by the Holy Prophet. This shows that the religion of Islam is based not only on the Quran but also on the practice of the Holy Prophet. Some Muslims say that they believe only in the Quran and that nothing outside it can be an obligatory part of the teachings of Islam. Just think that this means that they have to undergo all the rigours of fasting for a month, but they cannot celebrate after it! Whether there are any such Muslims who *actually* refuse to celebrate Eid because it is not in the Quran, I don't know, but if there are any, they must be quite miserable today. But there are many who glibly say: "We only believe in the Quran", without thinking of its consequences.

Could it be that Allah did not mention Eid in the Quran, but established it through the Holy Prophet, because He wanted to point out, in a way that could not be denied by anyone, that the practice of the Holy Prophet is an essential constituent of the religion of Islam.

It is clearly stated in the Quran that the religion of Islam is not only derived from the Quran but also from the practice, sayings, work and example of the Holy Prophet. His mission for his followers is described as follows:

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ

That is to say, he "recites to them (his people) His messages and purifies them, and teaches them the Book and the Wisdom" (62:2).

"Recites to them His messages" is to deliver the revelation of the Quran to people. "Purifies them" refers to the purity attained by his Companions merely by keeping company with him. This continues even after him by Muslims keeping the company of the righteous of their community in all ages. A prophet or a holy man or saint in Islam radiates a purifying influence around him by his spiritual power, and this influence penetrates the hearts of those around him. Then the Holy Prophet's function is also said to be to teach his followers "the Book and the Wisdom". This means that he explains to them the teachings of the Quran, shows them how to act on it in practice and makes them understand the wisdom underlying it. And that

knowledge too, which he imparted to his followers, was intimated to the Holy Prophet by Allah through a form of Divine inspiration. For example, the words of the call to prayer, the *Azan*, and the *Iqamah*, are not in the Quran, but were revealed to the Holy Prophet in a dream, and a similar dream was seen by two of his Companions, and all of them saw it independently of one another.

The Quran tells Muslims to obey Allah *and* the Messenger in more than twenty verses in words such as *أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ*. It also says: “Whoever obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys Allah” (4:80), and “obey the Messenger, so that mercy may be shown to you” (24:56). We all know the famous verse, 33:21, that the Messenger of Allah is an excellent exemplar for all Muslims. The Holy Prophet was also told by Allah to declare to people: “If you love Allah, follow me: Allah will love you, and grant you protection from your sins” (3:31).

So, in matters of worship especially, the Holy Prophet’s example and illustration, apart from his words, are all a part and parcel of Islam and incumbent on Muslims to follow. And Muslims from the beginning of Islam have been following his example in practice for all to see, and passing them down to the next generation. Of course, there are other matters in which the Holy Prophet, when he did something, he acted according to his personal inclination or because of the circumstances of his time and country. Those are not binding on us, but still have lessons for us.

Our Eid is not mentioned in the Quran. But an Eid is mentioned in the Quran which was called for by Jesus. The Quran relates its story as follows:

“When the disciples said: Jesus, son of Mary, is your Lord able to send down food to us from heaven? He said: Keep your duty to Allah if you are believers. They said: We desire to eat of it, and that our hearts should be satisfied, and that we may know that you have indeed spoken truth to us, and that we may be witnesses of it.” (5:112–113)

They wanted Jesus to get God to supply them miraculously with food from heaven. Then they would be satisfied that he was indeed a true one sent by God.

It seems to me that this request for food from heaven has a parallel with the Muslims sitting expecting a Messiah and a Mahdi sent by God to come to them, who, as they believe, will make them rulers of the earth and bring them great wealth of the world. Muslims who rejected Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad have always

argued that if he was the true Messiah and Mahdi he would have restored their worldly rule. If he brought to them the fruits of political power, they would eat those fruits and their hearts would be satisfied that he was the true Messiah and Mahdi. But his message to them was also as Jesus here told them: “Keep your duty to Allah if you are believers.” That is the only way to success.

The problem here is that if God were to send them food in a miraculous way, they would be satisfied for a while that Jesus is true, but then after some time they would ask for the same miracle again! They would say, if God could do it once, He can do it again, and again. Also, if God gave those people this sign through Jesus, what happens after Jesus is gone? It won't serve as a sign to any future generation who didn't see that sign. That is why Jesus told them: “Keep your duty to Allah if you are believers.” That's the only way to become closer to God, by acting on His commandments. The story in the Quran continues:

“Jesus, son of Mary, said: O Allah, our Lord, send down to us food from heaven which should be to us an ever-recurring happiness (an Eid) to the first of us and the last of us, and a sign from You, and give us sustenance and You are the Best of the sustainers.” (5:114)

Although Jesus was praying on his followers' insistence, for what food was he praying? According to the Gospels, once some people pursued Jesus in the hope that he would show the miracle of bringing them food miraculously, but he told them: “Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life” (John, 6:27). When Jesus was once offered food to eat, he replied: “My food is to do the will of Him Who sent me, and to accomplish His work” (John, 4:34). Then there is his famous saying: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” (Matthew, 4:4)

In view of this, Jesus could *not* have been praying for physical food for his followers, especially as according to the Quran, he had replied to his followers' request by saying: “Keep your duty to Allah if you are believers.” Also he prays that the food becomes a permanent festival, or Eid, for his followers of all times. So it can't be for physical food appearing by miracle till the end of world. The reply of God as given in the Quran was as follows:

“Surely I will send it down to you, but whoever disbelieves (or is ungrateful) afterwards from among you, I will punish him with a punishment with which I will not punish anyone among the nations.” (5:115)

Although Jesus had only spiritual food in mind in his prayer, actual history shows that God granted his followers material prosperity as well. But the condition imposed by God is that if they now don't live up to their claim that if they saw this sign they would believe in God, then a great punishment would befall them.

The Lord's prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread”, the most important prayer of the Christian religion, is a permanent reminder of this incident from the Quran. His followers are repeating this prayer of Jesus as taught to them in the Gospels. In the above verse of the Quran, God is replying to this prayer, saying: I will give you your daily bread in unimaginable, abundant measure; but now you have to take my spiritual bread as well, otherwise, you are ungrateful, and if you are happy only with the physical bread, this will lead to your destruction like no one else faced destruction in history before.

So it is the duty of Muslims, especially in the stage in history when Christian nations, or nations of Christian origin, have more than the bread they need, to present to them the spiritual bread that is in the Quran. Today we ourselves are celebrating an Eid to commemorate that during Ramadan we have been spiritually nourished by the Quran which is the true food from heaven that God has sent us.

Finally, during the month of Ramadan, we learn how to avoid wrongdoing and to do good by fasting, that is, by *not* eating and drinking. But according to the Quran we can also learn the same lessons by eating and drinking. A verse in the Quran says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ كُلُوا مِمَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا ۚ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ نَعَمٌ وَعَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ ﴿٢١٨﴾

“O people, eat the lawful and good things from what is in the earth, and do not follow the footsteps of the devil.” (2:168)

Can we avoid following the footsteps of the devil by carrying out this command in the *physical and literal sense* of eating lawful and good things? If someone only consumed vegetarian or vegan food brought from an organic farm, they can be sure that it was both “lawful”, that is *halal*, and of course “good” (*tayyib*) in the sense of being good for you. But will that guard them against following the footsteps of the

devil? This clearly shows that by eating “the lawful and good things” here is really meant lawful and good *behaviour*. Only then can we resist the devil. The word *tayyib* used here for “good”, although applied mostly to good things of various kinds in the Quran, is also applied to good humans. For example, it says in 24:26:

وَالطَّيِّبَاتُ لِلطَّيِّبِينَ وَالطَّيِّبُونَ لِلطَّيِّبَاتِ

Some translate this as meaning that “good women are for good men, and good men are for good women”, and could also mean “good deeds are for good people, and good people are for good deeds”. The Quran also speaks of a *tayyib* life:

“Whoever does good, whether male or female, and is a believer, We shall certainly make him live a good life (فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيٰوةً طَيِّبَةً), and We shall certainly give them their reward for the best of what they did.” (16:97)

And it speaks of those who keep their duty as dying in a *tayyib* state: الَّذِينَ تَتَوَفَّيْهُمْ أَلْمَلٰٓئِكَةُ طَيِّبٰٓتٍ, “whom angels cause to die while they are in a good state” (16:32).

Therefore, after resuming eating, if our behaviour corresponds to how we should be eating, that is to say, we lead lives of *lawful and good, halal and tayyib*, behaviour, then we will continue to resist the devil and our eating will be as spiritually beneficial as refraining from eating during Ramadan.

Eid Mubarak to you all!

بَارَكَ اللهُ لَنَا وَتَكْرَمَ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعَنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ،
إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ-

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