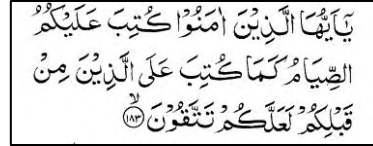


Id-ul-Fitr Khutba, 19 August 2012

by Zahid Aziz

at the Lahore Ahmadiyya U.K. Centre, Darus Salaam, London

“O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil.” — 2:183



Let us take a look at the teachings of the Biblical prophets about fasting.

After Jesus had fasted for forty days and forty nights, he explained the purpose of fasting to the devil, in a vision, as follows:

“It is written that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew, 4:4).

Here Jesus was quoting Moses who had taught the same principle when declaring the commandments of God to his people, the Israelites (Deuteronomy, 8:3).

Again, immediately after teaching his followers the famous Lord’s prayer, Jesus instructed them as follows:

“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. ... But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father...” (Matthew, 6:16–18)

This shows that fasting was a *fundamental practice* taught in the Bible, and also that the purpose and spirit of fasting is mentioned in it: That fasting should make us realize the importance of obeying “every word”, i.e. every

commandment of God, because that is what gives us spiritual life, and that fasting is to be done sincerely, to attain nearness to God and not to impress any person.

God also reminded the followers of the Bible of the real purpose of fasting through a prophet of the Israelites, known as Isaiah, who is also accepted by Muslims as a prophet. In this revelation to Isaiah, God first mentions a complaint by people who had fasted:

“ ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you (O Lord) have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ ”

God answers their complaint as follows:

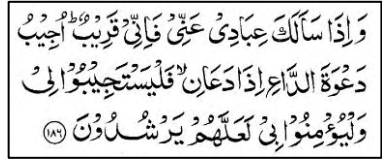
“Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

“ Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?

“ Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. ” — Isaiah, 58:3–10

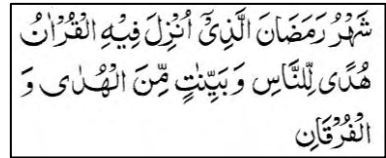
The closing words are similar to this verse of the Holy Quran about fasting:

“And when My servants ask you concerning Me, surely I am near. I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he calls on Me, so they should hear My call and believe in Me that they may walk in the right way.” — 2:186



An important point made in the Quran in connection with Ramadan is this:

“The month of Ramadan is that in which the Quran was revealed, a guidance to people [or mankind] and clear proofs of the guidance and the Criterion.” — 2:185



The month of Ramadan was chosen by Allah for fasting because the revelation of the Quran began in that month, and as stated in the Bible as quoted above, man needs more than food to live, he needs the words that come from the mouth of God. So in this month a Muslim neglects physical food and concentrates on the spiritual food provided by the Quran. This verse explains to us what are the functions of the Quran, from which we are meant to derive benefit. It shows us that the lesson we must learn from fasting is to treat the Quran as “a guidance to mankind, and clear proofs of the guidance, and the Criterion”.

A guidance for mankind: The Quran is called here a guidance for mankind rather than just a guidance for believers or Muslims. This makes it our duty to present this guidance to the entire world. The man in modern times who was most anxious to do this was the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Just when he was founding this Movement, and had very few followers or resources, he wrote the following in reference to Europe and America in 1891:

“If my people help me heart and soul [by people he means the general Muslim community] I wish to prepare a commentary of the Holy Quran which should be sent to them [Europe and America] after it has been rendered into the English language. I cannot refrain from stating clearly that this is my work, and that no one else can do it as well as I, or he who is an offshoot of mine and thus is included in me.” (*Izala Auham*, p. 773)

Despite the fact that he had no means at that time of producing a translation, he is prophesying that this work has been specially assigned to him, and no one else shall do it as well as he, or one who is his own offshoot or branch. That prophecy could only have come from God the Most High.

Some years after he wrote this, he was granted this offshoot when Maulana Muhammad Ali joined his Movement. Even so, the thought of starting this translation did not occur till shortly after Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad passed away, and the Maulana began the work in 1909. He had not yet completed it, when he was faced with a devastating event that could have put an end to the whole project. This was the split in the Ahmadiyya Movement in 1914. Without going into details here, what it meant was that Maulana Muhammad Ali had to bid farewell to an established and functioning organisation and come to Lahore to build a new body from scratch, starting with no finances, staff, building or organisation. Despite this adversity, the Lahore Ahmadiyya Anjuman was founded and Maulana Muhammad Ali completed his translation and commentary, and it was published from here in England in 1917. It could only have been accomplished through Divine help.

And it is a sign of Divine acceptance that even now, after so many English translations of the Quran have appeared over the years, the greatness and uniqueness of the Maulana’s translation is still acknowledged. Recently a well-known American Muslim, and spiritual leader, Hamza Yusuf, recorded a talk actually to refute and attack certain beliefs which are wrongly associated with

the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement. The Founder did not hold those beliefs but Hamza Yusuf innocently does not know this. Anyhow, despite the topic of his talk, he began it with some introductory comments, from which I quote below:

1. Maulana Muhammad Ali was a solid scholar of Islam.
2. His English translation of the Quran is the best in my estimation.
3. He did some of the best work of refuting Christian attacks on Islam that I have seen.
4. Many Muslims “borrowed heavily” from his original work, without acknowledgement, “even though it is very clear where they took it from”.
5. Pickthall’s translation was “highly influenced by Maulana Muhammad Ali’s.” Pickthall then influenced later translators.
6. Therefore Maulana Muhammad Ali has “definitely made his impact on the English speaking Muslim community whether they realise it or not”.
7. “I wish the best for him. He seemed like a very devout Muslim.”

Despite the stern opposition to the Ahmadiyya Movement, and despite the strong bias against this translation due to having been done by an Ahmadi, it has earned tributes such as the above, that it is the best translation, and it influenced all later translators. Hazrat Mirza sahib’s words: “I cannot refrain from stating clearly that this is my work, and that no one else can do it as well as I, or he who is an offshoot of mine and thus is included in me” proved true.

A community insignificant in size and resources, under attack from all directions, produced and published a translation and commentary that could not be equalled by the scholars of hundreds of millions of Muslims possessing vast resources, so vast that their organisations can afford to distribute their translations free of charge in any number. *This, by the grace of Allah, is your community.*

What was the main quality of this work which made it so successful and renowned in the world? Leaving aside the great dedication, devotion and nightly prayers of the translator, it was due to the two factors about the Quran mentioned in the verse above — that the Quran, “a guidance to people [or mankind]”, is “clear proofs of the guidance and the Criterion (*furqan*)”. In his commentary, Maulana Muhammad Ali sought proofs of the truth of the Quran from within the Quran and he treated the Quran as the criterion or differentiator between right and wrong beliefs.

Regarding the first point, it was Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad who laid down the principle that the arguments, reasons and evidence for any doctrine which is taught in the Quran are also to be found in the Quran. Following this principle, Maulana Muhammad Ali in his commentary has treated the Quran as a complete, self-contained and consistent book. He has given prominence to what the Quran itself says and how it explains itself. In the classical commentaries of the Quran, the commentators had filled them with elaborate stories brought in from external sources to explain certain references in the Quran, and in explaining most verses they related them to the occasion of their revelation and thus limited their application. It is as if the Quran itself was thrown in the background.

Of course, we need information from external sources in understanding many passages in the Quran, and these sources are primarily Hadith books, reports from the life of the Holy Prophet, and explanations given by his companions and scholars of the early generations. However, these sources can only be used to fill in details, to complete the picture, and to provide illustrations of what the Quran is teaching. Such material cannot be used to contradict the Quran and to give interpretations which violate the principles laid down in it.

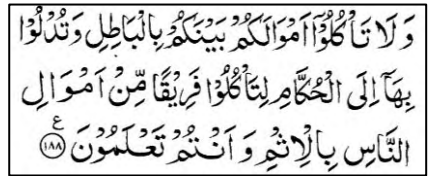
Secondly, the Quran contains the criteria or standard for distinguishing between right and wrong beliefs. So in many controversial issues which arise as to what are the correct teachings of Islam, for example, issues relating to

Islam's attitude towards other religions, jihad, tolerance, freedom of religion, rights of women, the Quran is the determining factor. Once we have found the right teachings from the Quran, they cannot be overturned or superseded by anything outside it, including Hadith reports and classical commentaries.

Ramadan is a commemoration, not only of the start of the revelation of the Quran to the world, but also of its three qualities mentioned above: "a guidance to mankind, and clear proofs of the guidance, and the Criterion". The lives of the servants of the Quran, such as Maulana Muhammad Ali, were thus in themselves one long Ramadan and one long *lailat-ul-qadr*.

The third point to which I want to draw your attention is in this verse, which is the last verse about fasting in Ramadan:

"And do not swallow up your property among yourselves by false means, nor seek to gain access thereby to the judges, so that you may swallow up a part of the property of people wrongfully while you know." — 2:188



What is meant by swallowing up "your property among yourselves" (*amwala-kum baina-kum*) falsely? How can you swallow up your own property falsely? Please note that Muslims here are addressed as a community. By "your property" is meant the entire property of a nation, just as people say about their country: "this is our land". If you misappropriate someone else's property or money, or in particular if you misappropriate something from the national or government funds, you are taking your own money, i.e. your own country's property, falsely. The words "among yourselves" indicate that the verse is referring to people colluding with each other in the use of false means, and that it is being done on a large scale. This refers to situations where such activity becomes a way of life in a society, for example as bribery is in many countries,

so that money is circulating, going from one person to the next, as a bribe or ill-gotten gain at every step.

By “your property” could also be meant the property in your charge. So if a group of people, such as a government or other institution, holds wealth on other people’s behalf, they should not “swallow it up among themselves by false means”.

Another example is gambling. The wealth of all the gamblers, which might well be lawfully possessed by each one before he gambles, is then, by means of their gambling, redistributed among the same people, some of them winning and others losing. That is swallowing up your property among yourselves by false means.

Then the verse mentions the malpractice of bribing the authorities to induce and influence them to hand over other people’s property to you unjustly.

During the fast, a person gives up and avoids, for a period of time, the use of his own food and drink, which belongs to him legally and morally, and which he has every legal and moral right to consume. Thus he learns, or should learn, that in real life he must refrain from wrongfully taking anything which belongs to someone else. In fact, far from doing this, he should learn to voluntarily give up some of what he possesses and some of his rights for the benefit of others and of society in general. And that is the basis of human civilization.

Eid Mubarak to you all!

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