

Eid-ul-Fitr Khutba

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يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

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

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَىٰ وَالْفُرْقَانِ ۚ فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ ...

“The month of Ramadan is that in which the Quran was revealed, a guidance to mankind and clear proofs of the guidance and the Criterion. So whoever of you is present in the month, he shall fast in it...”, ch. 2, opening of v. 185

Today is *Eid-ul-Fitr*. It means the festival of the breaking of the fast. Of course, we had been breaking the fast every day during the month of Ramadan at *iftār* time. But even during those night hours when we were not fasting physically we were still in a state of fasting in a spiritual sense. And just as the effect of the fast of the day continued into the hours after *iftār*, similarly we hope that the effect of the fasting during the whole month of Ramadan will continue after this big festival of breaking the fast.

There have been many studies on the subject of ‘fasting and feasting’ because feasting is related to fasting. They have considered the question whether a feast should come after a period of fasting or if it should be the other way round: that you have a feast or festival first because you are then going to fast. On health grounds, it has generally been concluded that fasting should come before feasting. This is on the broad basis that if you hold the feast before the period of fasting, you are forcing yourself to over-eat. If the feast is after the fasting then the body is in the state to replenish its depleted resources, and also, having got used to fasting, people will not feel inclined to over-indulge. From a religious point of view, we may also say that

feasting after fasting means that the celebration will be in a moderate and measured way because of the self-control developed by fasting.

This festival of *Eid-ul-Fitr* is not held to commemorate some historical event, such as a war or battle, or any famous person's birth or death. Every year it marks the end of fasting, a personal achievement for each Muslim, in perhaps their own individual ways. It is not *Eid-ul-Fitr* but actually Ramadaan which marks a famous event, and that was the beginning of the revelation of the Holy Quran to the Holy Prophet Muhammad. To mark that, we do, on a smaller scale, what the great founders of religion did before they received the Word of God for the first time. They made strenuous and severe spiritual exertions through fasting and prayer. We know this about Moses, Jesus and the Holy Prophet Muhammad who are the greatest of the prophets accepted by Muslims. Moses left his followers to go up to a mountain to be in solitude with God for forty days and forty nights, fasting, and there he received the law of the Israelites from God. Fourteen centuries later, Jesus appeared as a prophet of the Israelites and following the tradition of Moses he fasted forty days and forty nights before beginning his ministry. To explain the purpose of fasting, Jesus quoted from the already existing Israelite scriptures and said: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'." (Matthew, 4:4).

Six centuries later, the Holy Prophet Muhammad, before being appointed by God to his mission as God's messenger, sought solitude in the cave of Hira to ponder on the purpose of life and how people could be reformed from their evil deeds. Here he prayed and fasted, and his fasting was much harsher and more prolonged than our fasting in Ramadan. These exertions raised him to the spiritual heights which made him capable of receiving the word of God, and thus the revelation of the Quran began. It was many years later that the verses relating to fasting in Ramadan were revealed to the Holy Prophet, sometime after his arrival at Madinah. Before these were revealed, the Holy Prophet saw in Madinah that the Jews fasted on a certain day every year in commemoration of the day when God liberated them from the Pharaoh, and Moses

had fasted on that day. Learning of this, he said to the Jews: “We have more right to commemorate Moses than you.” And he ordered Muslims to fast on that day as well.

In previous *khutbas* I have also mentioned Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism who lived 500 years before Jesus. He was born a prince and on growing up he wanted to discover the purpose of life, and find out the ways of moral and spiritual improvement of man. He went to a forest and subjected his body to hardship and deprivation which included very severe fasting. As a result, Buddha became emaciated and extremely weak. Then he realized that in such a state of weakness he was unable to do anything. He learnt from this experience that you have to follow the path of moderation and not extreme deprivation. He called this the ‘Middle Way’. He became a ‘Buddha’, which means the enlightened one, and he started preaching to people. There is a recent book by a psychotherapist on fasting, and the author writes about this as follows: “The Buddha spoke highly of fasting and said that during his fasts ‘my soul becomes brighter, my spirit more alive in wisdom and truth’. ... some historians believe that the Buddha’s fasting experience was the spiritual vehicle for his enlightenment.”

Moses and Jesus are, as everyone knows, mentioned in the Quran and Muslims believe in them as prophets. Buddha is not explicitly mentioned in the Quran, but if we apply the principles that are taught in the Quran it becomes obvious from his life and experiences that he must have been a prophet of God, regardless of how his teachings were later presented by his followers. The Quran tells us that prophets had been sent by God to all nations before the Holy Prophet Muhammad appeared and it also says that there were prophets in addition to those who are mentioned in the Quran.

Why do we, in our Movement in particular, mention the fasting of the great founders of religions? The reason is that the Quran itself says that fasting was prescribed for the nations and religions before Islam. We also see that, even before the Holy Prophet received revelation ordering Muslims to fast in Ramadan, he fasted and told Muslims to fast when he saw the followers of previous religions doing so. This justifies us in enquiring what was the purpose of fasting in previous religions. We

accept something from the previous scriptures under the condition that it conforms to the Quran, it is consistent with the Quran and not in conflict with it. In this way we learn from the histories and traditions of earlier religions.

For example, we read in the Bible:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”

(Proverbs, 3:5–6; NIV translation)

The Quran says:

“And whoever keeps his duty to Allah, He ordains a way out for him, and gives him sustenance from where he does not imagine. And whoever trusts in Allah, He is sufficient for him. Surely Allah attains His purpose. Allah indeed has appointed a measure for everything.” (65:2–3)

The ideas expressed in the Bible and the Quran in the passages quoted above are the same.

This is just as we study Islamic literature compiled and written during the history of Islam, including Hadith collections. What we read in that literature are explanations of the Quran, with further details, and different interpretations. We accept them under the same principle, that they should not conflict with the Quran itself. While all this literature was compiled by sincere and well-meaning scholars and holy persons of Islam, they were fallible human beings who could make a mistake, draw a wrong conclusion or give a ruling which was reasonable in their time and age but does not suit the present circumstances.

However, there is another aspect to bear in mind as regards the previous scriptures and religions. The Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, has laid great stress on a study of other religions. The reason for this was his belief that in this age we need to lay stress on the teaching of Islam that God had sent prophets and books to all nations, before the coming of the Holy Prophet Muhammad,

and that their religions *originated* from God and not man. He wanted to have a dialogue and discussion between Islam and other religions. And if it became necessary due to the attitude of the preachers of other religions, then to have a vigorous debate with them as well. From his youth, long before he founded the Ahmadiyya Movement, he studied other religions, not only Islam. Later in 1902, when he started a monthly English magazine of the Ahmadiyya Movement, under the editorship of Maulana Muhammad Ali, the title chosen for it was the *Review of Religions*. He realised that in the modern age, which had already begun in the late 1800s due to what we now call ‘globalisation’, Muslims will have interaction with other religions, and in fact religions as such will have interaction with each other, much more than ever before. So when Muslims present Islam to others, they need to have knowledge of the religions of those people. It is absolutely essential. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad also realised, and proclaimed it strongly, that those times are now past when wars were fought on the basis of religion and one nation fought one another because of difference in religion. The time had now come for followers of various religions to discuss and explain their religions to each other, and, if it became necessary to cross swords, then do it only on paper.

In the second verse that I recited at the beginning the Quran calls itself three things: “a guidance to mankind and clear proofs of the guidance and the Criterion”. As to the first point, it is a guidance for mankind هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ rather than a guidance only 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. Through his teaching and inspiration, Maulana Muhammad Ali took up this work and produced an English translation of the Quran, with detailed commentary, which was first printed and published right here in England in 1917. At that time there was no other English translation of the Quran by a Muslim available to Western countries. Later on, with changing times and circumstances, it was revised by Maulana Muhammad Ali and that is available in print and electronic form up to today.

Secondly, the Quran is called here as being “clear proofs of the guidance”. It means, again as stressed by the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, that the Quran gives arguments, reasons and evidence in support of any teachings that it asks us to follow. Take fasting. The Quran does not only require us to fast, but it gives the reasons for fasting. These are clearly stated as being that: we may learn to guard against our wrong and bad desires, we may acquire nearness to God, we may be motivated to feed the poor, and we may refrain from usurping and unlawfully taking the property and rights of others people. Thirdly, the Quran is called the *furqān* or Criterion. It contains the criteria or standard for distinguishing between right and wrong beliefs. There are many important issues on which Muslims have made mistakes, and as a result they have caused harm to themselves and to the reputation of Islam, by not taking the Quran as the Criterion. Instead, in many matters they have been following certain ideas not traceable to the Quran but which developed in the later history of Islam, or they have been adhering to cultural practices which are often in conflict with the Quran. The most important of these issues are: Islam’s attitude towards other religions, the meaning of jihad, freedom of religion, rights of women, and tolerance of differences among Muslims themselves. All these can be settled and resolved by treating the Quran as the standard and not placing later Islamic sources as being above it. This is the position and status accorded to the Quran by the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement in all its literature.

Let us pray that after Ramadan we are thankful to Allah for giving us the opportunity to reform ourselves, and to re-dedicate ourselves to acquiring knowledge of His revelation, the Quran, which He sent for all mankind, and which our elders in this Movement tried to propagate in the world. Let us be thankful for the blessing of food and other physical necessities and comforts He has provided us with, and resolve to use them within the proper limits, remembering our duty to provide the same to those people who are deprived of them — *Ameen*.
