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# JUMU'AH LECTURE: FASTING ON 'ĀSHURĀ'



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## FASTING ON ‘ĀSHURĀ’

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ نَحْمَدُهُ وَنَسْتَعِينُهُ وَنَسْتَغْفِرُهُ وَنُؤْمِنُ بِهِ وَنَتَوَكَّلُ عَلَيْهِ وَنَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ شُرُورِ أَنْفُسِنَا وَمِنْ سَيِّئَاتِ أَعْمَالِنَا مَنْ يَهْدِهِ اللَّهُ فَلَا مُضِلَّ لَهُ وَمَنْ يَضَلِّهِ فَلَا هَادِيَ لَهُ وَنَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ وَنَشْهَدُ أَنَّ سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدَهُ وَرَسُولَهُ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَأَصْحَابِهِ وَبَارَكَ وَسَلَّمَ تَسْلِيمًا كَثِيرًا أَمَّا بَعْدُ فَأَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ إِنَّ عِدَّةَ الشُّهُورِ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ اثْنَا عَشَرَ شَهْرًا فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ يَوْمَ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ مِنْهَا أَرْبَعَةٌ حُرْمٌ

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

All praise belongs to Allah, Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe. He who fashioned all things, apportioned them, and awarded them merit and virtue.

It is through the infinite wisdom of Allah ﷻ that he has awarded special virtue to certain lands, places, times and acts. From all lands, the land of Arabia is most blessed, from all cities the birth place of the Nabī ﷺ—Makkah—is most blessed. From all the days of the week it is the day of Friday that is most blessed, and from all the nights it is the Night of Qadr that has the most virtue and is most blessed. Similarly, Allah states in the noble Qur’ān:

إِنَّ عِدَّةَ الشُّهُورِ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ اثْنَا عَشَرَ شَهْرًا فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ يَوْمَ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ مِنْهَا أَرْبَعَةٌ حُرْمٌ

*Indeed, the number of months with Allah is twelve [lunar] months in the register of Allah [from] the day He created the heavens and the earth; of these, four are sacred. [Tawbah: 36]*

These four sacred months are: Rajab, Dhu al-Qa’dah, Dhū al-Ḥijjah, and Muḥarram. The fourth of these months is the month of Muḥarram, which is known as *Shahr Allāh* (Allah’s month).

Abū Hurayrah رضي الله عنه reported, “The best fast after the month of Ramadan is fasting in the month of Allah, al-Muharram.” [*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*: 1163]

It also is reported in *Sunan al-Nasā’ī*, “The best fast after the fast of Ramaḍān is the fast of Muḥarram and the best fast of this month is the fast of ‘Āshurā’.”

Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنه said, “I never saw the Messenger of Allah ﷺ so keen to fast any day and give it priority over any other than this day, the day of ‘Āshurā’, and this month, meaning Ramaḍān.” [*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 1867]

The virtue of fasting on the day of ‘Āshurā’ has been narrated by more than 22 Ṣaḥābah and their narrations can be found in the six books of Ḥadīth: *Bukhārī*, *Muslim*, *Tirmidhī*, *Nasā’ī*, *Abū Dāwūd*, and *Ībn Mājah*. As well as in the *Musnad* of Imām Aḥmad, *Mu’jam* of al-Ṭabarānī and many other books as well.

It is mentioned in *Ihyā* of Imām al-Ghazzālī that the reason for this virtue is that it is the beginning of a new year and it is best to begin it with a fast.

One of our failures, which is a result of lack of insight is that we fail to derive the full blessings of our ‘ibādāt. We may perform the requirements of a particular act thereby earn reward for doing so, yet we still do not reap its full benefit. For example, during Qurbānī or ‘Īd al-Aḍḥā many have slaughtered but few have truly sacrificed. During Qurbānī we re-enact the devotion of Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, but while we may slaughter as he did, fulfilling what is incumbent upon us, we are yet to sacrifice in the same manner as Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام.

When Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام set out to fulfil the command of Allah, he was ordered to sacrifice his son, he was ordered to sacrifice that which he held most dear in Allah’s name. It was solely through the mercy of Allah that a ram from

paradise was sent down instead. When we slaughter we too should remember this sacrifice and as we place that knife on the animals throat and recite *Bismillahi Allāh Akbar* we should envisage us sacrificing all that we hold dear: our children, our wealth and all we own for Allah’s sake. We are as yet to sacrifice what we hold dear for the cause of Allah.

Similarly, many perform the *rites* of Ḥājj but few have fulfilled the *right* of Ḥājj, in other words we carry out the actions but not ponder over the significance of our actions. How many have performed ṭawāf around the Ka’bah which is symbolic that our lives will revolve around Allah, but only to continue living our lives revolving around the material world. How many of us have pelted the Shayṭān at Ḥajj but failed to expel him from our lives, only to embrace him when returning back home.

Thus, we can understand that we are absolved of our obligation with the physical completion of the act according to its stipulated laws, but the inner objective—which is a special virtue, a treat if you will, tasted by those with foresight and by those who truly submit to the will of Allah and His Rasūl—requires deliberation and sincere submission to will of Allah.

The same is found in the fast of ‘Āshurā’. Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنه said: The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم came to Madīnah and saw the Jews fasting on the day of ‘Āshurā’ and enquired why they were fasting.

They said, “This is a righteous day, it is the day when Allah saved the Children of Israel from their enemies, so Mūsā fasted on this day.”

The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said:

انا احق بموسى منكم

We have more right to Musa than you.

so he fasted on that day and commanded [the Muslims] to fast on that day.” [al-Bukhārī, 1865]

It was also reported that the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم used to fast on ‘Āshurā’ in Makkah, before he migrated to Madīnah. When he migrated to Madīnah, he found the Jews celebrating this day, so he asked them why, and they replied as described in the Ḥadīth quoted.

The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم thus ordered the fast of this day, mentioning great virtue for it:

يكفر السنة الماضية

It is expiation for the year that went before. [Muslim, 1976]

A clean slate, nothing in the bad pile. Imagine the traffic department scrapping all your fines if you fasted on this day, who wouldn’t strive to attain this virtue.

But along with this instruction there is a deeper objective as well, which Rasūlullāh صلى الله عليه وسلم has repeatedly hinted at in various other narrations on many occasions. It can be understood from the words of Rasūlullāh mentioned thereafter:

صوموا يوم عاشوراء و خالفوا فيه اليهود

Fast on the Day of ‘Āshurā’ but oppose the Jews in doing so. Fast a day before it or a day after it as well. [Musnad Ahmad, # 2155]

Imagine, even in an act of worship, something meritorious and praiseworthy in the sight of Allah, the Nabī of Allah ﷺ did not want his ummah to imitate the Jews and Christians. There were many other similar instances like this as well, where the Prophet ﷺ disliked that the Muslims mimic the practices of the disbelievers.

When the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions wished to have a call that would summon the people for prayer, some gave suggestions of ringing a bell or lighting a fire which were all rejected by the Prophet ﷺ because it was the way of the disbelievers. These all teach us the same lesson that the Nabī ﷺ abhorred any resemblance to the Jews who are:

مغضوب عليهم

Those who incurred the wrath of Allah.

And the Christians who are:

الضالين

Those who are misguided.

But sadly today we have forgotten this profound lesson left by our beloved Nabī ﷺ. We have changed the rules, we desire to be like them, we dress like them, look like them—abandoning the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ in his dressing and appearance—and we even act like them. Yet we know that Nabī ﷺ has said:

من تشبه بقوم فهو منهم

Whoever imitates a nation is of that nation.

There was a time when Muslims prided themselves in following the Sunnah. During the conquest of Persia, the Persian general invited the Ṣaḥābah to a reconciliatory negotiation. During the negotiations some food was brought before them and they began to partake. Amongst them was the esteemed Ṣaḥābī, Sayyidunā Ma'qil ibn Yasār رضي الله عنه. While eating a morsel fell from his hands to the ground. The teaching of our Nabī ﷺ is that the morsel should be picked up, cleaned or dusted off, and then eaten; which Sayyidunā Ma'qil رضي الله عنه immediately did. Some of his companions urged him not to do so, as this might degrade them in the eyes of the Persians who were the Super Power of that age. However, Sayyidunā Ma'qil رضي الله عنه reprimanded them saying,

I will not abandon what I heard from the Prophet ﷺ because of these non-believers.

And he then went on to act in accordance with the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ.<sup>1</sup> Such were the Ṣaḥābah, they understood that respect and honour lay in following the Sunnah of our Nabī ﷺ. We on the other hand feel embarrassed, and have discarded the Sunnah of the Best of Mankind to please those who will never be pleased with us until we become exactly like them and believe in what they believe. Allah سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى has said:

وَلَنْ تَرْضَىٰ عَنْكَ الْيَهُودُ وَلَا النَّصَارَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَتَّبِعَ مِلَّتَهُمْ

*And never will the Jews or the Christians approve of you until you follow their religion. [Baqarah: 120]*

We, however, venerate, imitate and replicate them. Nudity is welcomed ḥijāb is shunned. Modesty is belittled while

<sup>1</sup> Sunan al-Dārimī, # 2029.

shamelessness is praised. We pride ourselves in resembling the pop stars and other actors, yet do not find the same pride in resembling the Nabī ﷺ. Verily Allah tells the believers:

قُلْ إِنَّ هُدَى اللَّهِ هُوَ الْهُدَىٰ وَلَئِنِ اتَّبَعْتَ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ بَعْدَ الَّذِي جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِن وَّالِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ

Say, “Indeed, the guidance of Allah is the [only] guidance.” If you were to follow their desires after what has come to you of knowledge, you would have against Allah no protector or helper. [Baqarah: 120]

So with the new year let us take these lessons which the Prophet ﷺ has imparted to us, let us take heed and reap full benefit from this month. Let us begin the new year with fasting, and keeping the fast of ‘Āshurā’. Not forgetting, the words of the Prophet ﷺ:

خالفوا فيه اليهود

Oppose the Jews.

Let our year begin with pledging ourselves to Allah, vowing to uphold and imitate the Sunnah of our Nabī ﷺ and distance ourselves from and oppose the practices, habits, morals and acts of the disbelievers, whom our Nabī ﷺ refused to imitate even in acts of worship.

May Allah guide us all.