Ramadan: A Time for Repentance, Prayers and Salutation

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Ramazan, The Month of Glory' is almost upon us, and all too soon it will be over. 'Ramadan' is' derived from the root word 'Ramad' which indicates 'heat', and this is perhaps why in one of his traditions our holy Prophet SA has said that: "Ramadan burns the sins and shortcomings, as fire burns wood!" With regard to this month the Holy Quran states in Chap. 2:185, that "whosoever of you witnesses this month, he/she shall fast therein, and glorify Allah for His guiding you; and [that you may] be thankful to Him".

In the earlier verses of the same chapter, 183-184 it also states: "O you who believe, fasting has been ordained unto you as it was ordained unto those before you, for a fixed number of days, so that you may guard yourself against evil … but whosoever amongst you is sick or on a journey, [shall fast] an equal number of days (later)", and the verse ends with the advice that: "….

that you fast is better for you if you know"! Our observing the fasts during this month is indeed such a great act of worship that once when our Sixth Imam AS was asked by one of his followers as to why the penalty for missing a fast 'without reason' was so great, in comparison to the other missed obligatory acts? [Like for instance, if a prayer was missed, it could be offered later, or zakaat missed could be given out later; while for a missed fast one is required to either keep 60 fasts for each fast missed without reason, or feed sixty poor persons, or liberate a slave!] The Imam AS answered:

"So that by looking at the severity of its penalty you can gauge the eminence and height of this great 'ibadat' [act of worship]!" In another tradition from our Holy Masumeen AS, Imam Mohammad Baqir AS has stated: "Whoever fasts during the days of Ramadan, stands up for prayers in parts of its nights, controls the carnal desires and emotions, puts a rein on the tongue, keeps the eyes lowered, and does not injure the feelings of others, will become free from all sins, as if a new born on the day of its birth!"

For a muslim this month should signify the triumph of the spiritual and good in his nature over the base and evil of his human make-up. Imam Jafer-e-Sadiq AS has said: "The day of your fast should not be like other days. When you fast, all of your senses: eyes, ears, tongue; hands and feet must fast with you. So also has Imam Zainul Abideen AS taught us to pray that "We may not lend our ears to any vain speech, direct our eyes towards any amusement, or stretch our hands towards anything forbidden, nor step with our feet towards anything prohibited, and

that nothing may fill our bellies but what Allah has made lawful, and our tongues may not utter anything except what He has permitted ….”

In a lengthy sermon regarding the importance of this month, the Holy Prophet SA has extolled its virtues by stating that this is the month on which Allah SWT has bestowed honour and distinction more than on any other month. This is the month in which fasts have been made obligatory on a Muslim. It is a month full of Allah’s Grace and Blessings, in which the doors of His Mercy are wide open and the doors of His Wrath are closed. A Muslim is therefore invited and encouraged to repeatedly ask pardon for the past mistakes, and make “Isteghfaar” (repent) and “Tawbah” (seek forgiveness) constantly during this month for the sins committed earlier. This is also the chosen month in which the Quran was revealed; the Quran which is referred to as the “Guidance for Mankind which clearly distinguishes between the Right and Wrong”! According to our Prophet SA the reading of a single verse of the Quran in this month carries the same reward as reading the entire Quran in other months! In one of his many invocations, the Holy fourth Imam AS has also taught us to pray: “….enlighten my mind with Thy book, and remove from me the burden of sin because of my reading it!” It is therefore highly recommended that we should try and undertake a diligent reading (with meaning) of the Quran during this month, more than in any other.

Another great distinction of this month is that one of its nights has been designated by Allah SWT as “The Night of Power or Destiny” – “Lail-a-tul Qadr”, the night in which the Holy Quran was revealed in its entirety. [“Surely We revealed it on the Night of Qadr”, Chap 97:1]. This is a night in which our prayers and invocations are given due consideration, and are answered by Allah SWT; and our worship in this night is considered to be better than that of a thousand months! In the same Chapter 97, Allah SWT further states: “And what will make you comprehend what the Grand Night is? This Grand Night of Qadr is better than a thousand months! The angels and spirits descend in it by the permission of their Lord, with [decrees] of all affairs. Peace! it is, till the breaking of dawn!” Chap 97:2-5.

Our Ullemah (religious scholars) are all unanimous in their opinion that verse 4 of this chapter bears witness to the existence of Our Living Imam AS, [AF]; because it speaks about the angels and spirits in the present tense, and not in the past, i.e. it does not say that they ‘descended’ that particular year in that one night alone, using a past tense, but rather in the present tense: “ that they continue to descend even now”! It is thus the belief of all momins that the angels descend on this night year after year upon the Living Imam of Our Age in this ‘Night of Destiny’, and present before him all that has been ordained by Allah SWT for every incident or occurrence big or small (‘Min Kulley Amrin’) which are going to take place during the course of

the year, and that the destiny of every human being regarding the allocation of their portion of 'Rizqh', children, sickness, health and wealth etc., will be also be decided in this night, and approved by the Imam of Our Age.

In this connection our Prophet SA has emphatically stated: "Do invoke Allah so that He may forgive your sins. Raise your hands in 'Salaat' as it is the best time for asking for His Mercy. When you invoke Him at such times, your prayers are answered by Him, and when you call Him He responds!" In another tradition the Prophet SA has said: "Allah forgives everyone who repents and prays in the Night of "Lailatul Qadr", except the following four kinds of persons:

1. Who is always under intoxication,
2. With whom his parents are displeased,
3. Who does not behave mercifully with relatives, and
4. Who is a magician!

The Night of Destiny or Lailatul Qadr has not been identified as any one night in particular, but rather, we have been asked to 'search for it' during the 'odd' nights in the last ten days of the month of Ramazan! It is thus that the believers in their ardent 'search' for this night, go through the rituals of the recommended forms of prayers and worship starting from the 19th night of Ramazan through to the 27th night!

While on the subject of 'Lailatul Qadr', Islamic literature records several very beautiful parallels between the Lailaltul Qadr and the Ahlul Bait AS, i.e. the progeny of the Prophet SAW that illustrate the unique position which they, the holy Ahlul Bait AS have been granted by Allah SWT. It is stated in the commentary of the renowned compilation known as "Durre Manthur" that: "The term Lailatul Qadr stands for the Holy Prophet SA and his progeny." Elsewhere in other literatures it is mentioned that the Lailatul Qadr also alludes to the night preceding the 'Day of Ashoora' in Kerbala in the year 61 Hijra, when Imam Husain AS and his loyal band of companions were engrossed in the worship of Allah SWT all night, eagerly waiting for, and anticipating their own martyrdom on the next day in the path of Allah SWT by following the footsteps of their immaculate and infallible leader Imam Husain AS in his sacrifice of defending "Truth over Falsehood'.

The combined 'Ibadat' of these martyrs offered with the purity of their intentions on that one night was better than the thousand months of rule of the Ummayyad dynasty which had opposed them!

Another very interesting tradition which is recorded along these lines, is that during the time of Imam Jafer Sadiq AS, a person approached him and questioned as to whether the tradition that the Prophet SA had said that: "The sun did not shine on anyone more truthful than Abuzar"

was true? [Abuzar RA was a noted companion of the Prophet SA]. The Imam AS replied: “That indeed is true”.

The person then asked: “In that case, what is the position of the Prophet of Allah, Ali, Hasan and Husain AS?” The Imam AS countered with his own question: “How many months out of the twelve months of the year are considered sacred in Islam?” The person answered: “Four”. The Imam AS asked: “Is Ramazan one of them?” The man replied: “No”.

To this the Imam AS responded: “Yet there is ONE NIGHT in the month of Ramazan which alone is better than a thousand months! Similarly, just as the one night of Qadr cannot be compared with any of those entire four months, similarly the Prophet SA and his holy Ahlul Bait cannot be compared with anyone else no matter how elevated their positions might be!” In other words, ‘they are in a class by themselves’! The erudite nature of this reply clearly illustrates the pristine position of the noble household and shows that it could only have come from a divinely gifted Imam AS, may our lives be sacrificed for him!

The ‘Fazayel’ [honours] for the month of Ramazan are many, and in order for us to benefit from its blessings to the optimum, Allah SWT in His mercy, has preceded this month with two other chosen months, the month of ‘Rajjab’ which He has called His own, followed by the month of ‘Shabaan’ which He has designated as the month of His Prophet SA, each progressively more exalted than the other; and instructed us to observe the sanctity due to these months as well, by making excessive ‘isteghfaar’ in the former,

and abundant ‘salwaat’ and ‘durood’ in the latter, so that when the month of Ramazan finally arrives upon us, we have been gently but diligently ‘prepared’ to have a softened heart and a receptive mind at a level of mentality which is ready to accept and absorb the many spiritual benefits that are associated with the arrival of the blessed days and sanctified nights of the month of Ramazan! [In order to get the best introduction to the ‘nobility’ of this month, and to start mentally preparing ourselves to the correct ‘state of mind’ so that we may do full justice, and gain the maximum benefits of this month of mercy, it is highly recommended that we read the two great supplications [duas] shown to us by our Holy Fourth Imam AS: i.e. his ‘Dua Upon Citing the Hilal and Arrival of Ramazan’ and the ‘Dua Bidding Farewell To The Month Of Ramazan’ before the actual start of Ramazan! Recitation of these duas builds up a sense of anticipation within us for a proper welcome of this glorious month of Allah SWT; greeting it and receiving it much as a noble and long awaited guest, who gives us the utmost pleasure upon arrival, and leaves us with a sense of deprival upon its withdrawal!

These duas can be found in the compilation known as the ‘Sahifa-e-Kamila’ or ‘Sahifa-e-Sajjadia’, also known as the ‘Zuboor-e-Aale-Mohammad AS’ or ‘The Psalms of Ahlul Bait’, and

a sincere reading of these duas is guaranteed to Inshallah instill the right spirit within us to observe the rights and rites of this month as they aught to be observed!]

The holy Prophet SA has said that if we truly fast as has been ordained, then every breath that we take assumes the reward of a 'tasbih' [rosary] and our sleep the reward of worship … and he also adds: "Verily, the person who does not receive the mercy and benevolence of Allah [in this month] is indeed very unfortunate!" He further states: "Whoever recites 'Salwaat and salaam on me and my family repeatedly [in this month], Allah will keep the scales of his good deeds heavy on the Day of Judgement!"

Lastly, when we see the 'multiplication of rewards' for any good deed or act of charity performed during this month, the thought does cross our mind as to what could be the height of reward and 'Ajr' Imam Ali AS attained, when he not only achieved his martyrdom in this glorious month, in a condition of fasting during the days designated as the "Days of Lailatul Qadr"! It is small wonder then that our noble Imam AS himself cried out in relief when he received the fatal blow which lead to his martyrdom: "By The Lord of Kaaba, I have succeeded!"

In conclusion, we recount a prediction by Imam Ali AS regarding the months of Ramazans to come in the future towards the end of time or the 'Aqhir Zamana' [which perhaps is already upon us? !] The Imam AS states: "A time will come when evil will be extensively prevalent. At that time the crescent (of Ramazan) will appear unusually bigger just as if it were two nights old; and at times it will not even be seen and will be so hidden that people will not fast on the first of Ramazan, and on account of not seeing the crescent they will fast on the Eid Day. Then, save yourselves in those times, for Allah will punish people at that time due to their negligence. Indeed in those days sudden deaths will be current amongst people, death will attack people so quickly that a person who is sound and healthy in the morning will be in his grave by evening! He will be absolutely alright in the evening but will be a corpse in the morning; so in such a time it is incumbent to keep ready their last will and testament before the coming of the trouble, and offer their prayers early in the right time because there is always a fear that perhaps death may overtake them suddenly.

Then whoever from you reaches such a generation should not sleep at night but with 'Taharat' [Wudu] and remain in 'Taharat' all the times!"

May Allah SWT grant us the good sense and guidance to make the most of the blessings that are associated with Ramazan, and may we truly be conscious of our shortcomings and invoke the mercy of our Almighty Lord to grant us pardon, and to forgive those of our near and dear ones that are alive, and more importantly those that have gone away from us and can now only

look up to us to send them the bouquets of ‘duas’ and prayers for the raising of their positions in Aqhirat.

And since Ramazan is also the time for sharing and caring, let us follow the lead shown by our noble Prophet SA and his esteemed household, in giving away in charity what is truly dear to us, and constantly keep our house open for the feeding of the poor and the needy in the name of our Merciful Lord, Ameen!

NOTE: The quotations of the hadiths and verses of the Quran have been ‘paraphrased’ by me for the sake of brevity, while I have endeavoured to keep the gist of its meaning to the best of my understanding.}