

MAINTAINING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE QURAN

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After praising Almighty Allah and imploring our Lord to send His choicest Salutations and Blessings upon His Most Beloved, Prophet Muhammad (sawa) and his Purified Holy Household, I remind myself and all of you to eternally have within us the observance of Taqwa or being conscious of Almighty Allah in everything that we do.

Taqwa was a potential outcome of the Holy Month of fasting that left us last week when we once again returned to normal life.

However, even though life has returned to normal, this normality should not be one which is completely devoid of the spirit of Ramadaan and some of the key beautiful acts, attributes and institutions that we upheld in it.

PROPHET MUHAMMAD (SAWA)'S ADVICE TO IMAM ALI (A.S)

There is a fairly long but beautiful hadith recorded in the Collection of 40 Hadith of Imam Khomeini (r.a) which is titled "The Prophet's advice to Imam Ali".

Since this hadith is fairly lengthy, I just want to highlight a few issues mentioned in it for us to bear in mind and then to focus today's khutbah on one particular issue mentioned in this hadith as explained by Imam Khomeini.

"In an advice that the Prophet (sawa) gave to Imam 'Ali (a.s), he said, "O 'Ali, I exhort you concerning certain characteristics (khisal) which you must preserve in yourself (as a trust) from me."

Then Prophet Muhammad (sawa) mentions a list of these characteristics. Amongst this list he includes:

- truthfulness;
- piety (wara);
- fear of Allah (khushoo);
- weep abundantly out of fear (khushoo) of Allah;

- offer your property and blood for the sake of religion;
- following the sunnah with respect to salaah, fasting and sadaqah

And then the hadith expands on upholding nawafil salaah, especially tahajjud and upholding nawafil fast, etc.

We see that the hadith is encouraging the importance of preserving or protecting these noble attributes in yourself on the one hand and the performance of certain actions on the other hand. In other words it is not about having khushoo only at certain times like the Month of Ramadaan or certain moments during the Holy Month. It is about preserving or protecting these attributes in you at all times.

Then the hadith says something very relevant and crucial for us to consider, especially now that the Holy Month of Ramadaan has past and we have to wait another 11 months to hopefully see it again. So among the attributes that Imam Ali (a.s) is advised to preserve is this:

"Accustom yourself to reciting the Qur'an at all times (under all conditions)".

QURAN IS OUR LINK TO THE MONTH OF RAMADAAN

The great Holy Month of Ramadaan achieves its greatness due to the revelation of the Holy Quran in it. That much we are all familiar with.

But you may say that this revelation occurred over 1400 years ago, so what does this revelation in history have to do with us today? It has everything to do with us.

One of the beauties of this Holy Scripture that makes it unique is that it has not been revealed for 7th century Arabia but has been revealed to be relevant in every era.

But how does this work in reality? What is it that seems to happen that causes the Quran to be relevant to our era as if it was specifically revealed for us?

Yet 50 years down the line the next generation has the same feeling - that the Quran was specifically revealed for them?

FRESH LIGHT OF UNDERSTANDING GIVEN ON EACH NIGHT OF QADR

There's a narration from the 8th Imam Rida (a.s) which states:

"Verily a man asked Imam Saadiq (a.s), what is the situation with the Quran such that the more you study it, it becomes more fresh? He replied that it is because Allah did not make the Quran for one time and not for another time, or for one people and not another people. In every age the Quran is new and with every group of people the Quran is fresh until the Day of Judgement."

In other words the Quran is given to all generations in their time! And therefore it must be a living Book which visits every generation in THEIR own time and context.

So hold onto that thought.

Now in another well known hadith of Prophet Muhammad (sawa) (and similar wording in narrations from the Imams), he is reported to have said:

Spring season is not for everything but something which has life, like a tree which gets new life and freshness when the spring season starts. The whole land is revived after appearing partially dead for a while. The Quran also has a spring and its spring whereby it is revived and refreshed is the month of Ramadaan.

So I have narrated 2 ahadith in our effort to understand how the Quran practically becomes relevant in every era. Now I want to narrate a third hadith before we bring it all together.

With respect to the night of Qadr in the Holy Month of Ramadaan, someone asked the 6th Imam Saadiq (a.s) about the relationship between the Quran and Lailatul Qadr and whether Lailatul Qadr happened at one time in history or whether it repeats itself each year. Now we know the answer that Lailatul Qadr actually happens each year and is not a mere historic event that we celebrate. BUT the Imam (a.s) gave an amazing reply. He said: "If Lailatul Qadr is removed, then the Quran is removed/taken back".

A great scholar, Sheikh Ali Shomali, after putting these ahadith all together and trying to understand them holistically, he believes that though revelation of the Quran finished a long time ago with Prophet Muhammad (sawa), still on every Lailatul Qadr on an annual basis, it is as if the Quran is being given to us again as it is refreshed each year to make it current and not something of the past.

Formal revelation of the Quran ended a long time ago, but every year on the Night of Qadr we become inspired through a fresh and new understanding of Quran which is relevant to our time.

Every year on the night of Qadr, Almighty Allah again talks to us and sends us His light. And so if we now start to understand new things from this SAME Quran, it is not because we became more clever or the literal words of the Quran are different - but it's due to new understanding of those same words that is inspired to us every year to keep the same Quran new and fresh.

And that is how we see great commentators like Allamah Tabatabai explain concepts in the Quran for us which are mind blowing and profound and was not considered before by other commentators and then we think that it really is one of the ultimate Tafseers of Quran of all time, but then his students like Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli are reported to do Tafseer on certain verses of the Quran with an even deeper and more profound understanding.

Sometimes we spend thousands of dollars attending the top seminars on a particular subject of interest like the latest methods of doing medical procedures or the latest most effective marketing techniques, etc. But the reality is that most people, after being exposed to a fresh understanding of things, just go back to what they were doing and don't apply anything that they learnt to benefit from it.

And that is how many of us are towards the Quran. Having been inspired by fresh insight into the Quran on the night of Qadr, it now is critical for us to follow the advice of Prophet Mohammed (sawa) to Imam Ali (a.s):

"Accustom yourself to reciting the Qur'an at all times (under all conditions)".

DAILY PRACTISES IN MAINTAINING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE QURAN

So the very first important step is to actually recite the Quran each day. And just this practice causes us to achieve different stations of spiritual development.

"The Messenger of Allah (sawa) said: 'One who reads ten verses (of the Qur'an) on a night is not written as one of the negligent (ghafilun), and one who reads fifty verses is written amongst those who remember God (dhaakirun). One who reads a hundred verses is written amongst the obedient (qanitun)...."

And the hadith gives stations of up to 1000 verses.

And if one has this habit of reading Quran regularly while you are still in your youth, it will become part of your flesh and blood.

But one must read Quran each day....and what is our status if we read less than 10 verses each day as this is the minimum we should read just to avoid being counted among the oblivious....its not even a level where we achieved much spiritual development.

ETIQUETTE OF READING QURAN

After ensuring that we read the Quran each day, then comes the issue of the etiquette of reading Quran.

I found it rather sad to have observed that there's a practice in some places and even some mosques in Cape Town these days which is seen as a fashionable practice in the probable nights of Qadr and that is to read the whole Quran in Salatul Layl or Taraweeh or related nawafil salaah.

And I listened to some of the recordings where they literally recite one juz in 15 minutes so that they can reach their goal of reading the full Quran in 8 hours

Something even more dramatic that was narrated to me last year was that a Sheikh read 29 Juz in one rakaat and then the last juz in the remaining rakaats.

Is this the etiquette of reciting the Quran??

The Quran itself instructs us in Surah Muzzammil Verse 4:

"And recite the Quran with tartil".

What is tartil?

In the teachings of the Imams it is to read the Quran with medium pace, in a clear and distinct

manner so that our hearts become aroused by our recitation and our aim should not be to get to the end of the surah, or for that matter to finish the Quran.

It is recommended in a narration that one should recite the Qur'an in a good voice with a touch of sorrow. Imam Zainul Abideen (a.s) used to recite the Qur'an in such an attractive manner that those who passed by, like the water carriers, would stop and listen, and some were so much moved that they would pass out on listening to it.

And then part of the etiquette of reciting Quran is contemplation and pondering upon what is being recited.

So Imam Ali (a.s) says " ... And when they (i.e. the God fearing) come across a verse inspiring fear, they attend to it with their hearts and minds and it makes their flesh creep and their hearts quiver, as if they were hearing the roars of hell and its sighing and wailing. And when they come across a verse inspiring longing (for paradise), they contemplate it with craving and their souls advance towards it eagerly as if it were in front of their eyes".

And one other critical aspect of the etiquette of reciting Quran is to do so with sincerity. This may sound obvious, but in reality it's not the case with many, including supposed learned scholars.

Thus Prophet Muhammad (sawa) himself is reported to have said:
"One who recites the Qur'an to exploit people will arrive on the Day of Resurrection with a skeletal face on which there is no flesh."

SECOND KHUTBAH OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH QURAN IS ONE OF ABANDONMENT

After once more reminding myself and you about the attribute of Taqwa in our life, let's reflect on where we and the Muslim world are with respect to having received fresh inspiration and understanding of the Quran in the night of Qadr.

Did we access anything fresh this Ramadaan or have we actually abandoned the Quran?

The Messenger (sawa) is quoted in Surah Furqaan Verse 30 to make a complaint against us on the Day of Judgement as follows:

"And the Messenger will say (that Day): 'O my Lord! Verily my people treated this Qur'an with neglect."

Who neglected the Quran?

- yes the mushrikeen (polytheists) neglected the Quran
- yes humanity at large neglected the Quran
- but we Muslims also neglect the Quran by not reciting it, by not pondering over it, by using it to exploit others.

And more than that, by not seeking authentic understanding of the Quran.

After Prophet (sawa) makes this complaint, a reply will come:

"And indeed, We have made the Qur'an easy to remember. Then is there anyone who will receive admonition?"

"For everything there is a spring, and the spring of the Qur'an is the month of Ramadhan."

Why is its remembrance easy, and I am not just referring to memorisation - that's what all of us can do....I am referring to real remembrance of Quran instead of neglect and abandonment?

Its remembrance is easy as Allah has placed people among the followers of Prophet Muhammad (sawa) who would be given the special title of "Ahlul Thikr" i.e. "The People of Remembrance" and the easy task that we have when we do not know something is to follow the simple instruction of Quran:

"So ask the People of Remembrance if you do not know."(Surah Anbiyaa Verse 7).

Don't just ask anybody, rather ask the People of Remembrance if you do not know something. And this instruction appears more than once in the Quran. Ahlul Bait (a.s) are "Ahlul Thikr" or "People of Remembrance". And this is the great abandonment of Quran that we suffer from - abandonment of Ahlul Bait (a.s) in maintaining our relationship with the Quran.

CAPE ACCORD SETS THE RECORD STRAIGHT

This abandonment of the Quran has horrific results, one of which is that you become blind and lose your ability to think and will then come up with the most extraordinary arguments to rationalize your evil behaviour to make you feel that you are actually doing good.

We all familiar with the developments of some organizations pulling out of the Cape Accord in the last 10 days or so and the commentary that's been going around about it.

Just one amazing point in the commentary I would highlight is the fallacy that we have been practicing Islam peacefully for 350 years and though we had some disagreement here and there, we never had discord - it's the arrival of Shia in South Africa that brought the discord.

Really?? No discord for 350 years??

One of the executive members of the Cape Accord set the record straight this week on this very issue and I don't want to repeat the examples she gave to show the fallacy in this statement.

But my point is this, that the approach to the history of Islam is the very same in trying to say no there was no discord, all was good after the demise of Prophet Muhammad (sawa), people had disagreements but loved each other.

And these same people who are no more than a few who have a loud mouth, they literally gloat on the radio speaking about their supposed achievements. They claim victory for passing a fatwa of kufr against organizations linked to the Cape Accord and how quickly you saw SANZAF and the likes pull out. And then arrogantly say "we told you - nou gaan jy sien hoe die poppe dans".... Out of sheer blind hate they had NO consideration for the lives of tens of thousands of recipients of financial assistance - none whatsoever. If SANZAF did not pull out and their financial support was blocked and tens of thousands of beneficiaries had to suffer in the process, these fatwa producers would not blink an eye - and for them that is not discord!

However in the same breath I would like to recognize that a statement was issued earlier today on the MJC Facebook page that gives their perspective on the Cape Accord. We have not had time to properly read it but I would like to acknowledge two important positive statements in their statement:

- MJC's opposition to blanket Takfir of the Shiah

- MJC remains sincerely committed to mutual respect, tolerance, and social cohesion, and will unequivocally advocate against and denounce sectarianism, hate speech, violence and abuse.

DESTRUCTION OF JANNATUL BAQI ON 8 SHAWAAL

Today is also the 8th Shawaal and reminds us of one of the saddest incidents in our history of just less than 100 years ago when the shrines of the Imams of the Ahlul Bait (a.s), and the Pious Companions and the Martyrs and the shrines of the Mothers of the Believers was destroyed in Jannatul Baqi.

For those who abandoned the understanding of the Quran, though they recite it in beautiful voices, for them they took an issue which is purely related to Fiq and turned it into an issue of Aqeedah. The question of permissibility of building structures over graves is purely a Fiq issue and has nothing to do with Aqeedah.

But to rationalize their evil behaviour of trying to obliterate the memory of having any link to the great personalities in history, they make it an issue of shirk and justify their action by destroying our heritage.

We sincerely pray for the day very soon when the ummah will rebuild Jannatul Baqi and in different parts of the world today there are protests outside the Saudi Embassies.

SAUDI AGRESSION IN YEMEN CONTINUES

And these same people to this day for over 3 years have no issue to bombing and the destruction of the Muslims of Yemen under the disguise that the supposedly not Muslim. You all know Yemen is mainly populated with Zaidi Shia who do recognize the position of the khalifs, so what is the issue?? Yemen is a human catastrophe created by Saudi Arabia. Almost 14.5 million people have no access to clean drinking water. Famine and cholera is wiping this country out. But with all that loss, these barefoot soldiers have the spirit to continue to fight.

And in the last week we saw the fight for control of the Port of Hudaidah which is the life line of these poor people. May Almighty Allah bring victory to the people of Yemen and grant us the heart to also extend our assistance to this poor country just like we are keen to provide assistance to Syria.