

Sweetness in Siyaam (Fasting)

As the middle of Ramadhaan passes, some lose the flavour and pleasure of fasting. Some already lost it, some never had it, and there is few who had it and will continue to have it until the end of Ramadhaan. May Allah allow us to be among those few. There are different types of fasting and the type of fast that we want is the fast that comes with pleasure – not just any ordinary fast. We want to attain pleasure while we are fasting, we want to attain coolness of the eyes in fasting, and we want to be ecstatic that we are fasting.

Look at the verse in the Qur'an:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿البقرة: ١٨٣﴾

O you who believe! Observing As-Sawm (the fasting) is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become Al-Muttaqoon (the pious). (Surat al-Baqarah: 183)

O you who believe, fasting has been prescribed upon you. Why? To achieve Taqwa. You do not see anywhere in the verse a direct order that you need to find pleasure and coolness of the eyes in fasting. You do not see that in the verse. Why? Masses of the Ummah may not attain pleasure in fasting or Salah, but it is the exceptional few who do. We want to be among the few who do.

When Allah subhaanahu wa ta'aala talks about Salah, He mentions the purpose of Salah.

...إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ... ﴿العنكبوت: ٤٥﴾

Verily, As-Salat (the prayer) prevents from Al-Fahshaa' (i.e. great sins of every kind, unlawful sexual intercourse, etc) and Al-Munkar (i.e. disbelief, polytheism, and every kind of evil wicked deed, etc). (Surat al-Ankaboot: 45)

The purpose of prayer is to sway one from Fahshaa' which is major sins, and Munkar which is disbelief and polytheism (Shirk). The Prophet sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam said that prayer was coolness of his eyes and ultimate pleasure to him.

وَجُعِلَتْ قُرَّةُ عَيْنِي فِي الصَّلَاةِ

What I am trying to get at is that Allah stated in the Qur'an the purpose of fasting as Taqwa, and the purpose of Salah as deterring one from sins and disbelief. Those are purposes and characteristics everyone must achieve in those worships, over the course of time. Everyone must attain Taqwa and refrain from major sins and disbelief. That is for everyone, but there is a higher level than that for the special ones. There is an internal higher level than that – it has deep meanings and goals, and it is for the super special ones.

It is just like your faith as a whole – your faith as a whole has levels. You start off with Islam, above that is Imaan, and the third category above all those is Ihsaan. The high level of fasting is when you are enjoying and having pleasure in your fast (attaining the coolness of the eyes), because it is for the sake of Allah. Only special people get this and it is a feeling only achieved when one fasts while feeling Allah is watching over him.

الإِحْسَانُ أَنْ تَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ كَأَنَّكَ تَرَاهُ

Ihsaan is to worship Allah as if you see Him.

The Prophet sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam goes to at-Taa'if – a mountain so difficult to climb, the Sahaabah died climbing it. When he reaches to the top of the mountain, they pelt him with stones all the way down to the valley. He bleeds (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam), he is tired and he is in deep agony, yet look at his amazing and stunning words.

إِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ بِكَ عَلَيَّ غَضَبٌ فَلَا أُبَالِي

O Allah, if You are not mad at me, all that happened is nothing. Basically what he is saying is like ice cold water quenching the thirst of someone very thirsty. Yaa Subhan Allah, such beautiful, eloquent brightness from the brightness of revelation (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam).

Someone is going to say, are you trying to tell me we can have pleasure while being hungry? If it is for the sake of Allah, most definitely yes. Some seek pleasure in food and only in food, and they love that. That is a characteristic that Allah said the non-believers share with the cattle.

...وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يَتَمَتَّعُونَ وَيَأْكُلُونَ كَمَا تَأْكُلُ الْأَنْعَامُ... ﴿١٢﴾ محمد:

﴿١٢﴾

Those who disbelieve enjoy themselves and eat as cattle eat. (Surat Muhammad: 12)

Their lives roam around food – that is all it is about. To a believer, there are times when being hungry feels better and more satisfying than when you satisfy your hunger. Only some people can understand this – the pleasure, delight, enjoyment, thrill and aroma of fasting comes when you know you are serving Allah.

Look at the Hadith:

الصَّوْمُ لِي وَأَنَا أَجْزِي بِهِ ، يَدْعُ شَهْوَتَهُ وَأَكَلَهُ وَشُرْبَهُ مِنْ أَجْلِي

There are numerous Ahaadith Qudsiyyah where Allah is stressing to us that fasting is for Me – they leave this for Me. You have to understand you are doing this for Allah – in order to enjoy it, you have to understand you are doing it for Allah. That is the meaning of Imaan and Ihtisaab (the Hadith we talked about in the first Khaatirah). Not just fasting, but even the lashes of the whips and the stones that penetrate the flesh to the bones in the hot sun of Makkah – like what happened to Bilaal – become pleasurable knowing that they are for the sake of Allah.

Let me give you this example that will bring it home to you who are young, and this example is sufficient to show you the meaning of this whole Khaatirah. Someone has a wife and he goes to the store to buy her a gift. He runs from mall to mall and it is raining, it is snowing or it is in hot weather like we have today. He is trying to get the best gift possible at the best price – the one that best suits his wife. He wraps it and then he hands it to her. Of course, the same applies to a sister giving it to her husband. Then they sit back and watch them unwrap that present while they are happy, and the person who got it sits with delight and joy beyond that which words can even express, due to their extreme love and trying to please their spouse. They forgot about all the hardship. What hardship? Going shopping and walking to stores, sometimes having to work for weeks and months and years to pay for it. What made them forget about all that hardship, at the sight of their loved one opening that gift and getting happy? It is love for that person.

Another example to bring this closer to home is that of my mother, may Allah subhaanahu wa ta'aala raise her rank to Firdaws and all your mothers. She used to stand on her blessed feet cooking all day (especially in days like these days in Ramadhaan), preparing the most delicious meals you could eat. Most of the time it was for family, and sometimes it would be for hundreds of guests that we used to get. As with every day, she would wake up before Fajr for Qiyaam and then stand up in and around the kitchen all day long. May Allah subhaanahu wa ta'aala grant her Firdaws al-A'la for the pain she suffered and endured. Then at Maghrib after hours and hours and hours of work, we consume it within less than fifteen minutes. When she sees her husband, her daughters, her son, her grandkids and the guests eating, she gets overwhelmed with pleasure. Not once in the decades did we ever hear her say I have been standing on my feet for hours and hours preparing that meal. As she got older with that most extreme back pain that she used to have, never did she say I have been standing on my feet for hours and

hours and I am suffering. In fact, you could see the happiness on her face as she would push us to eat more. She forgot about all that suffering from when she was cooking – first and foremost for the Ajr, but after that for and because of her love to us.

That leads us to the understanding of this issue – attaining pleasure in fasting. When you give your taste buds and your stomach what it was created for (which is food and water), it feels pleasure. When you give your heart and soul what it was created for, then it will find pleasure. In order for you to feel pleasure in fasting, you need to satisfy your heart and your soul. How? You start off by asking yourself why am I fasting? To lose weight? Not going to work there. Because I have to fast? Well Inshaa Allah that is a reason Allah may accept your fast, but we aim higher than that. If you want the pleasure of fasting, you have to know you are fasting for Allah. You really have to believe that and comprehend your love for Him. You really have to let it register and sink in. Once you know that Allah loves for you to fast, you will be delighted that you are doing that which pleases Allah. If you love someone, you do that which they love and want you to do – that is the ultimate peak of showing genuine love.

Someone might say, are you saying Allah wants us to suffer? Allah wants you to be happy. What you gain in Ramadhaan of Taqwa, love and fear of Allah, Imaan and faith, regaining control over yourself and winning against fighting your desires – all that is nothing compared to what is called suffering in Ramadhaan, because in reality in Ramadhaan it is merely delaying the meals. How can it be suffering when if you go to the masses of the Muslims, they will say their favourite month is Ramadhaan. They always say Ramadhaan passed by so fast. They will say we delay our meals and we pray the night, but we cannot wait to see the next Ramadhaan.

Establish the complete Tawheed in fasting, the complete Tawheed in giving it all for the sake of Allah. We give it all for the sake of Allah and we give up everything for the sake of Allah, not just our food and water – our lives, wealth and honour. When you do that, you will feel ecstatic because you have given your heart and soul the food that they need. The more you love one, the more you want to please him and the more you seek means and avenues to try to please the one you love. On a normal occasion, dry lips and a growling stomach are annoying and at times painful, but when one knows he is serving Allah, it showers his heart with pleasure like that which the Prophet sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam said. As long as You are not mad at me, nothing matters.

The stomach is empty, but it gets full knowing that Allah is watching, knowing and seeing that he left desires just for His sake. One who loves Allah would not want it any other way. He endures hardship, yet he coats it with a head bowed down in humility asking Allah to accept, because if Allah accepts it then that thirst and hunger is nothing. Again, like what the Prophet sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam did at at-Taa’if. The lips are dry, the throat is thirsty, but the heart gets ecstatic knowing and awaiting the day you meet Allah subhaanahu wa ta’aala.

That is the meaning of the Hadith:

وَفَرَحَةٌ عِنْدَ لِقَاءِ رَبِّهِ

One who fasts will be overwhelmed with happiness when he meets Allah, because of the deed of fasting.

On The Judgment Day, there will be people who are drenched in their sweat from their sins (based on their level of sins). Some will have darkened faces.

يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ وُجُوهٌُ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهٌُ... ﴿آل عمران: ١٠٦﴾

On the Day (i.e. The Day of Resurrection) when some faces will become white and some faces will become black. (Surat Aali 'Imraan: 106)

Some people will be walking on their faces.

...وَنَحْشُرُهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ عَلَىٰ وُجُوهِهِمْ عُمِيَٰ وَبُكْمًا وَصُمًّا...

﴿الإسراء: ٩٧﴾

And We shall gather them together on the Day of Resurrection on their faces, blind, dumb and deaf. (Surat al-Israa': 97)

Some will be blind, even though in the life before they could see.

...وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَىٰ ﴿طه: ١٢٤﴾

We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Resurrection. (Surat Taha: 124)

Then comes those who fasted – they will be excited and overwhelmed with joy when they are meeting Allah. People are in terror and misery, yet those who fasted are bragging and they cannot wait to meet Allah because the Prophet sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam said:

وَفَرَحَةٌ عِنْدَ لِقَاءِ رَبِّهِ

Someone who has not smelled the life of Ihsaan with Allah (which means worshipping Allah as if you see Him) may hear this, clap one hand over another in shock and say you people are crazy. I understand fasting and I will do it because I have to, but you are telling me I can enjoy it? Not many can understand that, because thirst and hunger are on one side and delight and enjoyment are on

the other side. You are combining between opposites. It is like putting two negative magnets or two positive magnets next to each other – they will not stick.

Pleasure in worship is almost like a miracle – not many understand it and not many attain it. Only those who Allah blessed with the level of Ihsaan will understand it, comprehend it and apply it. Make your intention, your purpose and your aim the right cause – for Allah, and loving and pleasing Allah. Your aim here is your weapon, so march forth with your fasting and you will see delight and pleasure in your fasting.

We reach the high levels of Jannah Inshaa Allah Ta'aala through hardships in this world. Think about that and that will change it to joy. Imagine that the hardships of this life are means to gain you the high ranks of Firdaws. We aim for the highest and our aim is never for earthly and worldly gains. Whatever price you pay of hardship in this life, is nothing in comparison to what you are going to get. It is expensive, Jannah is not cheap – it costs a lot. The Prophet sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam said it:

أَلَا إِنَّ سُلْعَةَ اللَّهِ غَالِيَةٌ

The reward of Allah is precious.

After you fix your desire to Allah and to please Allah, there are more factors to help you attain pleasure in fasting. For example, when your stomach is growling, you want that drink and you are behind the closed doors. You are alone with the food and water a hand reach away, on days like these where they have been sending out the heat wave warnings. All that is near you, you are alone and you will not touch it. You become overwhelmed with joy knowing how powerful you are over your Nafs, and knowing I have some ammunition in my Du'aa now. I can say Yaa Allah I was alone and thirsty, no one knew and no one would have stopped me. I could have stopped at the restaurant on the way to Shaykh Ahmad's Halaqah and no one would have seen me or known – not my family or Shaykh Ahmad. O Allah, there were times when I was not that strong with my sin and I committed a sin, so grant me forgiveness. That is ammunition to the Du'aa. Yaa Allah, I was alone with water and ice – they were a hand reach away and I left it for Your sake, so grant me that interview, the job, the university, make the illness go away or whatever it may be. That is ammunition.

People will be terrorised on The Judgment Day. Hell is dragged to the land of The Judgment Day, because some people are thrown directly into it.

وَجِيءَ يَوْمَئِذٍ بِجَهَنَّمَ... ﴿الفجر: ٢٣﴾

And Hell will be brought near that Day. (Surat al-Fajr: 23)

The Messenger is shouting Yaa Rabbi Sallim Sallim (يا ربي سلم سلم) and there comes Hell. In Sahih Muslim, Ibn Mas'ood radhiallahu 'anhu said the Prophet sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam said Jahannam will be brought on that day with seventy thousand ropes, and each one has seventy thousand angels pulling it. You are going to hear the angels say Abdullah, Saalih, Jamaal. You are seventy years away from Jahannam, and then another seventy years away from Jahannam, and then another seventy years away from Jahannam. Do you know what those seventy years pushing you away from Jahannam are? Those are normal days that you fasted – every day you fasted takes you seventy years away from Jahannam. That is on a normal day and in Ramadhaan it is more. Other narrations say the distance between the sky and the earth. So seventy times thirty – they are going to push you twenty one hundred years away from Jahannam. That is just for one Ramadhaan, let alone all the extra non-obligatory fasts that you did. You are going to be thousands and thousands of years away from Jahannam. If you really contemplate it and do the Tafakkur (the Ibaadah we mentioned that is a neglected Ibaadah), tell me that does not bring joy and delight to your heart when you are fasting.

Contemplate these matters seriously and your thirst and hunger will become something you will enjoy. Tell me it does not energise your heart knowing people are crowded by Heaven, they are called to enter Jannah from the front yard of Heaven based on their deeds, and you get called to enter the door of Ar-Rayyaan (الريان). Ar-Rayyaan means the door that satisfies and quenches. You left a lot for the sake of Allah and now is the time that you are going to be satisfied – that is what Ar-Rayyaan means. When you sit and do Tafakkur in that – you contemplate it and imagine it as it is happening, tell me that does not bring joy to your Ibaadah. When you are in Jannah and people are stopping at level one, two and three, and you are going up and up, higher and higher because of your fasting, when you do Tafakkur and you imagine and analyse that, tell me that does not bring joy and coolness to your heart in fasting.