

July 16, 2010

Khutbah

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: Sha'bān: The Summons to Ramadān

DVD title: "O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed..."
Sha'bān: the Summons to Ramadān

Opening duas. *Asalaamu aleikum*. Allah (swt) in the Holy Qur'an reveals about the month of fasting in Suratu-l-Baqarah:

O you who securely believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, just as it was prescribed for those who came before you, in order that you might guard yourselves. (2:183)

Then in Suratu Maryam, Allah reminds us:

"Shake the trunk of the palm toward you, and it will drop ripe dates upon you. So eat and drink and cool your eyes, and if you see anyone from among the people say, 'I have made a vow to the Merciful to fast, so I cannot speak to anyone today.'" (19:25-26)

The subject is Ramadan, and as I spoke last night, Sha'bān. Sha'bān is an important month that carries forward the idea that Ramadān is not just a month of fasting, but in the case of the *āyat* in Suratu Maryam, the fasting is a healing. She was crying at the time. Allah tells her to have some dates, and to tell people she was fasting and not speaking to anyone. This is a means of healing and calming the mind and soul. The fact is, before we know it, Ramadān will be upon us, and we have a whole month now to prepare for Ramadān. We are all very busy: the gardens are coming in, visitors are here, people are in your homes. There is all that is happening, and the challenges and trials of day to day life; these are blessings to us, or they are excuses we are going to use.

We will use it as an excuse not to be prepared, or we will see it as a blessing and say, “If I can prepare myself amidst all of this, and fast 3 days, 6 days, or the last 10 days of this month (whatever it is), and make extra prayer, then my fast will be a much better fast this year than any other time.” So you have some writings on Sha’bān; a new book we put out for the talk. Remember to read it. Even just reading it will help you. Al Hasan Al Basri said, “*Whenever you read the saying, ‘O you who truly believe,’ you must listen very carefully and pay close attention to the words that follow those words. Those words are intended to alert you to either a command you have to obey, or a prohibition you must not infringe.*” Jafar Sadiq (ra), who is known as the Truthful One, who is number 6 of the 12 descendants of the Prophet (sal), and considered among the Shi’a as one of the Righteous Imams was celebrated for his knowledge of the Traditions. He was considered to be a master of esoteric sciences. He says, “*The summons has the delighted effect of dispelling the drudgery of obedient service and weary toil*”—meaning the summons for Ramadān.

So let’s take some time, today, tomorrow and throughout this month to look at the words themselves. We’ll begin now. “*Ya*” is the evocative particle word, the exclamation or interjection uttered by someone who is well acquainted, an *alim*, with the persons they are turning their attention to. We say, “Ya Allah.” In this case, it was being uttered by the One Who is All-Knowing. *Ayyuhā* is a connective element or pronoun referring to the recognized person or persons to whom we are calling, the person being addressed, as an intimate impact to the one who is calling. It conveys a sense of hint of some prior acquaintance, some long-standing friendship. Allah is saying, “O you who believe,” meaning those whom He loves, whom He has an intimate friendship with. He wants to draw our attention to what He is saying. He’s not calling to a stranger.

“*Aladhīna ‘āmanū*” is the plural form of who has a very unique significance of those who truly believe. It comes from *iman*, those who truly believe and who have real faith. “O

you who believe”— those who truly believe, My intimate close friends, those who truly believe and who have faith. According to the classical lexicographers, the primary meaning of *iman* is becoming true to the trust that Allah has confided in us, firmly believing in the heart that Allah has provided us with. It's not by profession of belief saying, "I believe." *Iman* in classical terms means accepting in the heart, not in the mind, belief. We say the believer is in the heart, not in the mind. There are many things you might question, but in the heart you know the truth.

The special significance of “*‘āmanū*” is the special relationship that is shared between the one who is summoned and the One Who is doing the summoning. It is as if He is saying, ‘O you who belong to Me (one who hears)! On account of this secret of his, He, Allah, is summoning those who are sincerely devoted with his conscience and with the essence of his being—*qurb*, his Love, near to Him, his seed of love.’”

This brings us to the word “*kutib*” which is saying that fasting is prescribed. It is imposed, incumbent upon us, obligatory for us, and our duty. He is reminding us: ‘I am calling you, My friends, My intimate and close friends. I have a special treat for you, a special deed for you.’ People call me up, “Ya Shaykh, can you make *du‘ā* for me on this?” Strangers don’t call me up on the phone—people here, who I know, and who know me—my intimate and my close friends. Allah is saying to His intimate and close friends, you and me, ‘My beloved ones, this is what I am calling you to do. It is incumbent upon you for all of you, what I am saying.’ It is necessary. This meaning is in the words, in the morphology and lexicography of these words. Abdul Qadir Jilani points out that the suffix “*kum*” is a plural pronoun indicating that more than two people are being addressed. He’s calling His Nation. It’s both you as an individual—you, you and you—and the *ummah*. He is calling to you and collectively.

If you wish to say in Arabic that you keep the fast through the daylight hours and spend the night awake observing prayer and vigil, you use the phrase, “I have fasted a fasting,

and stayed awake a staying awake.” In ordinary usage, the basic meaning is *siyam*, to resist, abstain, refrain, hold back, to withhold. There is a certain idiomatic expression that is used as an example: “the wind has fasted.” It can be used when the wind has calmed down or ceased to blow. Or [one may say] the horses have fasted, when the horses have come to a halt and have stopped to take a break on a journey. In referring to a man who remains silent, one may say, he has made a fast. You see how comprehensive this term is, and how comprehensively it reflects the month of fasting. There are many things to fast from in the month. We say, “Don’t say unkind words.” “Fast from food.” “You fast from certain other activities, normal activities during the day.” Many things. I have fasted from food. I have fasted from such and such a thing. So it is a very comprehensive word. It is not just “I am going to stop eating.” In Ramadān, the fast is kept by refraining from these activities. We know what they are.

From the very beginning of time, there has been fasting. The root of *sawm* has many implications. There are many relationships of these words that are all derivatives from the same root. We cease from things of the world and retreat into ourselves in remembrance of Allah, like in the *sama*, in the *hadra*. Another word related to sound is *sama*; we listen. Another implication of this fasting is you listen. So I am listening now. I hear in the distance Ramadān coming. I am preparing for Ramadān to come. I am preparing my body and preparing my mind and preparing my heart. On the authority of Harun, who told Abdu Malik, his grandfather, I heard once Abdullah abu Talib (ra) say,

I came to Allah’s Messenger one day at noon, when he was taking rest. I gave him the greeting of peace and he returned the greeting of peace. He returned my salutation and said, “O Ali, here is Jibreel offering the greeting of peace.” So I said, “Peace onto you and also onto him, O Messenger of Allah.” He said, “Come over here beside me.” So I came close beside him, whereupon he said, “O Ali, Jibreel is talking to you. He says you must fast that you must fast three days out of each month and the first day the reward of 10 thousand years will be

recorded in your favor. For the second day, the reward of 30 thousand years will be recorded in your favor and for the third day, the reward of 300 thousand years.” “O Messenger of Allah,” I said. “Is this reward for me in particular or is it for human kind in general?” “O Ali,” he replied, “Allah will not only bestow the reward upon you but upon all those who come after you, provided they perform the same good works that you do.” “O Messenger of Allah,” said I “which days of the month are in question?” In answer to my question, the Messenger of Allah (bless him and give him peace) told me, “There are these three known as the white days: the thirteenth, the fourteenth, and the fifteenth of the month.” I said to the Prophet, “Why do you call these the white days?” He told me the following story:

“When Allah (swt) evicted Adam (as) from the Garden of Paradise and sent him down to the earth, he was so scorched by the sun that his body had turned black as pitch. Jibreel came to him and said, “O Adam, do you want your skin to turn white?” Adam said that he would like that very much. Jibreel said, “In that case you must fast on the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth day of each month.” Hazrat Adam accepted that and he began fasting on the first of these days. As soon as he had done so, one third of his body turned white. He fasted on the second day and the second third of his body turned white. Then he fasted on the third day and after that, his whole body had turned white and this explains why they are called the white days.”

So based on a traditional account that we can accept as authentic, we know that Hazrat Adam (as) was one of those for whom fasting was prescribed. When Allah speaks of ‘those before you,’ He was referring also to the Jews and the Christians who have also formed the fasting, and our form of fasting on account of the close correspondence with them is relative. In fact, Allah did impose fasting for a month at Ramadan upon Christians as an obligatory rule. It proved to be very rigorous for them, because the lunar

month sometimes comes during times of extreme heat or extreme cold, like we are experiencing now with the heat. It would [also] be inconvenient with travel and work, so a consensus was reached between their religious scholars and political leaders on a proposal whereby they would fix the period of fasting in the spring. They also extended it by 10 days as a penance to atone for what they had done. There are a lot of historical comments on this subject. People agree or disagree. Hence, you get the 40 days in Lent. Also, it has been told to us that originally that the Jews also fasted one month.

Fasting as we see it is explained in many ways. In some form or another, Allah has given it to everyone. There are people who have asked for changes. There are people who have changed things under pretext. Generations have undermined the fast by saying, “I will fast from chocolate mint ice cream. I am going to do that only between two and three o’clock in the morning on Sundays in the spring.” In Islam, we have maintained Ramadān on the lunar calendar as He gave it to us. He made it incumbent on the Messenger (peace be upon him) and the true *mu’minun* to fast in this month, and other times as well, such as the Day of Ashura, the white days and nisfu Sha’bān, and the special days of each month. According to traditional reports, Umar (ra) was once overheard to say that the Prophet (sal) said, ***“I and my community are simple folk without much education. We do not make elaborate calculations for written records of the month. We go by what is visible.”***

To help us prepare for Ramadan, Allah (swt) has provided us this month of Sha’bān. A question was asked recently about Names of Allah (swt). Of course, I talk about that a lot. Ramadan is one of the Names of Allah (swt) and this is the month of fasting. We have passed through the month of Rajab, and Sha’bān is the month of preparation. So let us begin our Ramadan early this year, and extend our invitation to Ramadan, and do all the things that we should do before it comes. I would suggest that we all, before we pray, especially our night prayer, should extend a greeting to Ramadan. I hear the camel

hoofs coming through the desert. The news has been carried on the wind by the falcons, and by the breeze. In the night air, I hear the whisperers from afar, “You are coming.”

So we are going to clean our houses, clean our hearts and clean our minds during the month of Sha’bān. We are going to fast a little and be patient and be quiet to prepare for the coming of Ramadān. For those of you who find Ramadān difficult, or for physical reasons have found that you cannot fast, there are expiations. If you find it difficult, but you can fast, then you will find that the preparation will help you a lot. If you find you cannot fast, then you have many things you have to do in this month and in the next month so that you can fulfill the requirements of the fast by your words and your thoughts, your actions and your kindnesses, your generosity and your self-sacrifices. Stay near the *masjid*. Do the things you promised yourself you would do spiritually. Make up the prayers that you have missed, especially before Ramadān. If you missed any fasting days last year, [make them up]. This is the time, as we said, for *at-tazkiya*, the root of which, if you were at my talk last weekend, means to scorch, to sear, to heat up something in that we want to purify ourselves.

Inshā’a-llāh, this begins the beginning of the beginning, just like the fast of the fasting. We can begin our new fasting here ,by ending this year that has passed properly, *inshā’a-llāh*. *Salaam Aleikum*.