

July 30, 2010

Khutbah



Title: [Fasting: Holding Back and Lifting Up](#)

DVD title: Ramadan: the Meaning of Sawm/Fasting
Restrain and Go Beyond

Opening duas.

Again, I greet you, Salaam aleikum. On these last days of the month of Shaban and as we prepare for Ramadan, I want to remind us all today about the *sawm*. Of course, we remember the sweet days that will be coming in Ramadan; and the presentation, *inshā'a-Llāh*, in Charlottesville will be on the Laylatul Qadr. Allah (swt) prepares us in Qur'an. He says in Suratu-l-Qadr:

Truly We sent down on the Night of Destiny. And what will make you understand the Night of Destiny? The Night of Destiny is better than a thousand months. In it, the angels and the Spirit descend, by the permission of their Lord, bearing with them all the Orders. Peace, until the coming of the dawn.

I want to remind us that we prepare for that day (Laylatu-l-Qadr). There are beautiful meanings in the word of *sawm*. Translated, of course, in English it is fasting. But in the original Arabic, it carries a two-fold meaning, and two seemingly opposing definitions combined into a single word. *Sawm* as described in Qur'an and the Hadith, simultaneously fulfill both of these definitions.

The primary meaning is to hold back, to refrain, self-restraint, to abstain from. There is a further meaning, and it seems to be an opposite meaning, but it is not. It means to rise beyond and to go beyond previous limitations, or previous limits. So on the one hand you have to abstain, and in that holding back, you rise to a higher state, beyond your previous limitations. For example, you can say that there is a limitation was that I couldn't find peace of mind. But you restrain, and you rise and find peace of mind in this fasting. This month of Ramadan is a time in which we hold our physical compulsions and desires and instincts under some kind of strict conscious control. Together with the outer, we want to restrain certain types of thoughts. Our mental state needs to be under our control, not running wild, so to speak.

Along with that, one or two of us that may have a mood every once in a while, maybe one or two of us that may have a desire, we want to restrain on those. Of course, most of you have no moods or desires. Just in case you might have a mood or a desire, this too has to be restrained during this month.

But we submit ourselves, our *nafs* in this case, and our custom patterns of life to a higher standard, to a higher template, one that we don't think we are going to be able to live twelve months out of the year. But this month, I want to raise myself up to a higher standard. I want to hold myself up to a higher standard—not out of fear, not out of worry, not out of guilt. We want to come to the point where we choose to hold ourselves to a higher standard. We submit our *nafs* and our accomplished patterns of life to this standard, and it gives rise to a higher regimen. It gives us the ability for more self-restraint, in the body, in the mind, in the psyche—spiritually also. Correspondingly, we seek an intensive occasion of the life of our spirit, the refinement of our *rūh*. This *rūh* is very important to understand. In its lowest form, we call this *rūh*, *nafs*. But as we rise, it becomes the pure *rūh*. So we want to hold ourselves to a standard that gives rise.

We can use the analogy of making bread, for example. We put the yeast in the bread and the bread rises, and then it is baked. Well, the fasting is like the yeast. It increases us. During the interval of the time that we call the daylight, what is normally *halal* during the day time becomes *haram* during the day time—*forbidden*. What nourishes the physical body, we abstain from. We have made our *niyyat*; we are going to fast, so it is no longer permissible to eat. What was permissible to eat up until Ramadān, now becomes not permissible. But it is based on our choice. It is based on the fact that we have to make a *niyyat* for the month and we have to make a *niyyat* for the day . It is not sufficient to make the *niyyat* for the month. We have to remember to make the *niyyat* for the day also.

Whatever nourishes the physical body, then only nourishes the physical body at a certain time. As for the *nafs*, it undertakes a psychic, spiritual fast also, from anger and backbiting, from gossip and negativity and harshness towards others, from greed and all those negative qualities that reach us at other times of the year. It keeps it from reaching us in any manner through our senses toward that which is disallowed. When we are unable to fast from the food for physical health reasons, as some of you are, nothing keeps you from fasting from the other things. In fact, it should be increased, because you think, “Ah, I cannot fast from the food because of my health, but I should put a lot of attention on these other aspects of my life.

All those inclinations that strengthen the *nafs*, all those inclinations which allow it to inject itself with enthusiasm and strength and vigor and attachment to the worldly life, to the flux of, the in and out of the worldly life are proscribed and denied expression. The doorway is closed, just like, we are told analogously during Ramadan, that the door to hell is closed, the *bab* (door) to Jahanam is closed. We can also say that to the hellish things of our life, of backbiting and greed, anger and everything, we need to close that door. Allah (swt) closes the door to hell. We have to close the door to our *nafs ammāra*.

We have to remember that and realize that that is our responsibility. It is not just to stop eating. We have to close the door.

So we can look at this month of Sha'ban as checking the door and seeing whether it can easily be closed, and putting some oil in the door, making sure that we can close it during Ramadan. If you fast the month of Shaban, you are closing the door early. That is the other nice thing. We are closing that door early. Then you get two months, or a month and a half, or a month and two days, or a month or whatever it is that that door is closed. So the material form and the impulses of the material through the *nafs* are reigned in during the fasting. It is not a bad analogy to think about training a wild horse and how to break a wild horse. The horse has been running wild. You have not had time to ride it. It has been months and months and months since you rode the horse, and it has been freely running and eating the grass and eating the trees. The horse is beautiful and you love the horse, but you cannot ride it because the horse has gotten a little wild. You have to re-train the horse. So we rein in the horse and we train it—hopefully, *inshā'a-llāh*, a natural horse training. Natural horse training is you are very humble and you take the role of the leader. You don't try to break the horse. You speak the language of the horse. You bow down like this and the horse comes to you. You are kind to the horse, but the horse knows who the leader is.

That is how you have to treat your *nafs*. If you try to break your *nafs*, it resists. If you train the *nafs*, it gives in. It submits, because it is always looking for guidance. The *nafs* is like a horse that wants to be trained. Horses want to be trained because they are created to be servants of human kind. They like running wild, of course, but they also want to be trained. We know, those of us who have trained horses to some degree, we know that this is the truth. They love it. They love the interaction with human beings. So our self also wants to find itself in the higher self of the *rūh*. All the things that give strength, vigor and life to the body, and to the *nafs*, are now controlled. Some are terminated for a period of time during the day. The attachment that we have to them, we

realize, is reduced. The attachment is reduced and weakened. It is like you clear the land. The land lies fallow, then you till it up and you can grow your crops better.

By penetrating to the very root of our attachment, to the most fundamental layer, to the very seat of our creature connection to this world—food, water, relationship, physical relationship and all of these—we overturn their power over us. It is sort of the tulip revolution. It is sort of like the, it should be a very democratic process. We vote it out. This time of year, every year, there is an election, and we elect for one month a new leader. It is a very democratic process. We choose and we accept. We turn over the dominion of the lower self, and we arrive at a state or a position where we are, for a time, in control and we have subdued. Now if we can continue that with *dhikr*, if we continue that with *muraqabah*, if we continue that with *tafakkur*, if we continue that with *himmah*, if we continue that with *muhabbat*, if we continue that with ‘*adl*, if we continue that with *sabr*, etc., well, that becomes your state.

The onset of the darkness of the night is representative of something also. You remember that what we used to do during the day now becomes *haram*. Now night comes. And what it is, is the pure potential waiting to emerge into existence. The night is like the beginning of creation. At night, we have our *iftar*; we break our fast. During the night, now, we can make *taraweeh*. We can recreate our life for the next day. We can recreate our strength for the next day and for the rest of the month. We find out, “Oh, the first three days are hard. But you know, it is not so hard after three or four days of fasting.” So you feel bad. It should be harder. It is becoming easier, because our state can change and we can see how wonderful that is. We see how we were locked into three meals a day, and four snacks a day, and a bag of potato chips, and this cup of coffee at this time, and a cup of tea at that time. You realize that none of that is “me.” I am none of that. I have become habituated to that.

Over the course of Ramadan, when the days merge into the nights, and the nights merge into the days, the moon makes its journey across the sky. Every day the moon is rising and setting and growing and growing, and waxing and waning. Just as the moon goes through different phases, we go through different phases throughout the month. The person who undertakes this fast, the physical one and the mental and heart one, with complete sincerity and with sincere intensity, one approaches a state of spiritual readiness. Readiness for what? Readiness to unveil, to lift the *hijab*, to unveil who we really are, to unveil where we really are, to unveil what we really are, to unveil where, what, how, when we should be the better person we can be.

Until the last ten nights of the month of Ramadan, there arrives the possibility of the profound inner re-making of the self, and unfolding of one's potential, to witness the Laylatu-l-Qadr. What can convey to you what is Laylatu-l-Qadr? Allah (swt) says, **“That night is better than a 1,000 months.”** Not a thousand days, a thousand months. How much is a thousand months? A hundred years would be 1,200 months. A thousand months is just shy of hundred years. Think about what that means. At what age do you start to fast? If you start to fast at 12, it is just about a 1,000 months. How this is calculated, *mā'sha-Llāh*.

During the day, we break ourselves down, in a sense, just as if you pull apart all the molecules and all the atoms. You know there was a theory some years ago. I used to propound this theory also. We look at it in homeopathic medicine, and some of the mystics think about this theory. Many of you who have been with me for years will remember that the idea of radionics. When you pull the atoms apart, and release them, they come back in alignment. If you have some dis-ease and you could somehow pull the atomic structure of your body back, its natural inclination is to come back to a healthy state and re-align itself, the DNA. This will be proven over the years to be true. Somewhere along the line, in the next twenty or fifty years, someone will develop an instrument that will be able to pull the DNA apart and let it go, and the person will be

healed of most of their diseases. Mark my words, it will happen. Because it is the way Allah created—in balance and harmony, *mīzān*.

During the day we break ourselves down, and fast from what we think sustains our existence; and it does, of course, on a physical level. We submit this clay, this dirt that has become human being, this clay form to be broken, remixed, and remade and kneaded and worked over. We remove ourselves from the material subsistence and we turn towards prayers and we turn to our spiritual subsistence from Allah (swt). We make *tafakkur, muraqabah*; we pray and make *du'ā*. We prepare ourselves every night to be reformed. In English, we have the word ‘reformed.’ When something has become distorted, we reform it. We used to send bad kids to reform school, so they would become better. We take a body every night and we reform it. We prepare ourselves to be reshaped and reformed.

The onset of the darkness of night is represented of the pure potential waiting to emerge into existence. Out of the darkness came creation. Out of the nothingness of the blackness came creation. By the will of Allah (swt) waiting for the command and the decree, **“Kun faya kun, be and it became.”** It became form. The angels and the spirit descend by the command of their Lord with every decree. We turn ourselves into this clay, waiting the shaping of the command of the night, especially the night of Laytal-l-Qadr. There we anticipate the descent from the *malakut*, to the *nasut* and *jabarut*. We understand that everything collects at that moment. This is the time, not just when Qur’an comes, but this is the time that we are created by Allah (swt). That is the night we are preparing for: **Peace until the breaking of the dawn.**

So *sawm*/fasting fulfills its meanings: to hold back from. To abstain pertains to the restraint engendered through the fast—physical, mental, emotional. To rise beyond pertains to the results that Allah (swt) bestows upon those who seek out the fast with

sincerity, and perform it with sincerity. The fast is at once holding back and, *inshā'a-Llāh*, lifting up. *Asalaam aleikum*.

Closing duas

You know in this second *khutbah*, I would like to mention a few points for us to remember for this month and the months to come and especially today to remember why we are here and why we founded this institution. I think it is very important to know Allah is without any limits. Every step of the journey can be more beautiful and more awe inspiring and more marvelous than the previous one if our intention is to understand that. When Divine Love inhabits the heart, takes root in the heart—Allah says, “***You find Me in the heart of the mu'min,***” in the heart of the believer—when Divine Love inhabits the heart, nothing appears difficult and everyone profits by everything that happens when that Divine Love is in the heart. So thankfully, that comes from the fact that love erases the veil that separates us from the reality. Reality is Allah.

As this veil becomes thinner and thinner, one experiences a profound joy that emanates from this proximity with Allah (swt), and one is invaded by the perception of beauty. Defects and ugliness are not in things. Defects and ugliness are not in people, but in the impurity of our vision, in the impurity of our minds. We see the reflections of our prejudice and our bigotry and our fears. The more the soul is peaceful and the more our soul is perfect and pure, the more it will become disposed to see in all people that *tajalli*, that luminescent manifestation. Everything has its beauty, and only the unpolished heart and only the unpolished mind of the disciple renders things ugly.

We should remember to try to love all people, no matter who they are, no matter what their religion, no matter what their race, no matter what their nationality is. Everyone is where Allah (swt) meant them to be. It is not appropriate for us to judge where Allah has placed anyone. Wisdom comes from this and wisdom is in the heart. The one who wants

to find water has to dig a well. The deeper you dig, the more abundant the water. If you stop digging, the water will not exceed the initial level that you attain. If you dig the well deep, you shouldn't believe or say that all the water has reached to the highest level. The deeper you dig, the more water you have. So you have to continue to dig for your whole life so that the wellspring of peace and tolerance, love and understanding comes to us, *inshā'a-LLāh*. I just want to remind all of us of that. *Asalaam aleikum*.