

Ramadan

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 1 of 5]

Introduction

We all know there are 12 months in the year and the Qur'an says: "The number of months since the creation of earth and skies is 12 months in a year."¹ The only month which is mentioned by name in the Qur'an is the month of Ramadan:

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ

The month of Ramadan in which the Qur'an was revealed² . . .” There is no mention in the Qur'an of Moharram, or Safar, or Rabi'al Awwal, or Rabi'at Thani or any of the other months. Ramadan is the only month mentioned and that is because of the importance of the event that took place during that month: the revelation of the Qur'an. Also, this is the *only* Qur'anic verse which talks about the obligation of fasting during the month of Ramadan. I am going to talk about Ramadan the entire month, *insha'allah*,³ and I would like to allocate the last ten or fifteen minutes for question-and-answer. Someone may ask a question about fasting that may answer our concerns.

Why is that month called Ramadan? Linguistically

speaking, the word *ramadan*, they say, originated from the word *ar-ramad* meaning "the strong heat". You know, at the time of the Prophet, peace be upon him, when they used to barbecue the meat they would put it on stones, and the heat of the sun was so great it would barbecue the meat. They called this *al qadeed* – the dry meat. Imagine, when you are fasting during the month of Ramadan and it is that hot. Truly, you are fulfilling the goal of fasting.

How did fasting come to be practiced? Let us dwell on the role of Islam which puts every act of worship in its proper place. We hear certain terminologies used in Islamic Fiqh⁴ such as *fard*, *wajib*, *sunnah mu'akkadah*, *sunnah ghayr-mu'akkadah*, *mubah*, *haram*, and so on. The *fard* are four and they are considered to be the fundamentals of Islam: prayer,⁵ fasting, zakah,⁶ and the pilgrimage.⁷ These are obligatory actions or *fard*. How do we identify the *fard*? What will tell us these actions are *fard*? These actions are mentioned in the Qur'an in a form of language indicating that they are

¹ 9:36

² 2:185

³ If God so wills

⁴ Jurisprudence

⁵ *Salah* : the five prayers of Fajr, Zuhr, 'Asr, Maghrib and 'Isha

⁶ The poor-due [2.5% of net income]

⁷ The Hajj

obligatory.

In the English language, a word is either in the past tense, or in the present tense. In Arabic language, we have three: present tense – *mudari'*, past tense – *maadi*, and imperative – *amr*. For example, in the case of the word “eat” we say *ya'kul* (he eats) – present tense. *Akala* (he ate) – past tense. *Kul*: *kul* means, “I order you to eat” – imperative.

The Qur'an says: *aqeemus-salah* – imperative form – and it means “Establish prayer”. That is an order. Anything coming in the form of an order in the Qur'an falls in the category of *fard* – you *have* to do it; it is an essential part of the faith. Another example of such an order is *aatuz-zakah* which means “Give the *zakah*”. But, in the Qur'an, there are other words which signify an order.

Some of the Muslims, nowadays, who try to evade the obligation of fasting will say: “Show me, in the Qur'an, where it is ordered that I should fast.” With respect to the obligation of fasting there is no verse in the Qur'an which says, *Sumū*⁸ as it says *aqeemus-salah*. But there is a science in Islam known as *'Ilm usū-lul Fiqh* – The Science of the Origin of Jurisprudence; that type of science will talk about these things. It tells us that a *fard* does not always come in the form of an imperative order, but it comes in some other forms as well. An obligation, or *fard*, in the Qur'an sometimes even comes in a passive voice such as in the case of fasting. [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The English translation is:]

“O, you who believe! Fasting (الصِّيَامُ) has been prescribed (كُتِبَ) for you as it was prescribed for those before you...” If we translate it literally, it means “Fasting is written (كُتِبَ) for you as it was written for those before you.” *Kutiba* is an Arabic word in the passive voice and it means “To prescribe, or to make it a written law”, while *kataba* is the active voice. The Qur'an did not say: “*katabal-Lahu 'laykumus-siyam*,”⁹ but, to give it more assurance and more power, it was put in the passive voice so as to mean that it *already* has been done – has already been prescribed for you; it has taken place already. It means, start it immediately. So this is another form of an order in the Qur'an. This same terminology is used in another verse in the Qur'an which is related to the Jews and the Torah and it

talks about *qisas*¹⁰: “We have prescribed (وَكُنْتُمْ) for them in the Torah an eye for an eye, an ear for an ear...”¹¹

The obligation of *hajj* in the Qur'an came in yet another form of an order. With regard to *hajj*, the Qur'an does not say *hujju*¹² but, it says, وَلِلَّهِ عَلَى النَّاسِ حِجُّ الْبَيْتِ¹³.

Hujju is the imperative, while *hijju* (حِجٌّ) is the noun meaning “pilgrimage to” (the House of God). When it is put in this form, it means that it has become a *debt*. It is more, or, stronger than *hujju*. It has become an obligation, a debt around the neck of the people, to be paid to God by going there once in a lifetime, if one can afford it.

In the Qur'an, three verses came in the form of *kutib* – prescription – and all three end by the same words:

لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ .

They are in Chapter Al Baqarah number 178, 180, and 183. The first verse is related to the crime of killing, the second one is related to *waseeyah* or will, and the third one is related to fasting. [Imam quotes Arabic verses. The English translation is:]

“O, you who have attained to faith! Fasting is ordained for you as it was ordained for those before you, so you might remain conscious of God (لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ): fasting during a certain number of days (أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ). But whoever of you is ill, or on a journey, shall fast instead for the same number of other days; and in such cases it is incumbent upon those who can afford it to make sacrifice by feeding a needy person. And whoever does more good than he is bound to do does so unto himself thereby; for to fast is to do good unto yourselves – if you but knew it. It was the month of Ramadan in which the Qur'an was first bestowed from on high as a guidance unto man and a self-evident proof of that guidance, and as the standard by which to discern the true from the false. Hence, whoever of you lives to see this month shall fast throughout it; but he that is ill, or on a journey, shall fast instead for the same number of other days. God wills that you

¹⁰ Just retribution

¹¹ 5:45

¹² Imperative form: “perform *hajj*”

¹³ 3: 97

⁸ Imperative: “Fast”

⁹ Which would mean “God has prescribed for you”

shall have ease, and does not will you to suffer hardship; but He desires that you complete the number of days required, and that you extol God for His having guided you aright, and that you render your thanks unto Him” [2:183-185].

“Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed to those before you.” It means that fasting is not limited to the Muslims only; but fasting was imposed upon the people who came before Islam. In the original message as revealed to Jesus and Moses, fasting was prescribed, but, at the present time, there is a difference in our fasting and in the fasting in Christianity and Judaism, although the source is one and the same and the obligation is one and the same. In Islam, fasting is abstention from everything, but in Christianity they fast from certain foods only – food which has a soul like beef, fish, chicken etc.; they can eat anything else which has no soul. But the Qur’an informs us that the religion of Muhammad, of Moses, of Jesus, of Nuh,¹⁴ and of Ibrahim¹⁵ was one and the same. This is mentioned in Chapter Ash-Shurah.¹⁶ There should be, therefore, no difference between one faith and the other, and if there is any conflict between one faith and the other, at our present time, it is the work of human beings and God has no part in it because He is not supposed to be in conflict with Himself.

You know, the Muslims, let me concede, even in the 20th century, are characterized by something that distinguishes them from the others. Let me cite some examples. The Muslims, at the present time, fast in the month of Ramadan and abstain from all food and drink from the time of dawn till sunset. We find that the Qur’an says, “. . . And eat and drink until you can distinguish between the white thread and the black thread at the time of dawn; then complete your fast until the night appears. . . .”¹⁷ The Qur’an said this more than 1400 years ago and that is exactly what we are practicing nowadays, and there is no power on earth to change or modify it, to make allowances for environmental conditions, or for age. In the case of prayer, our prayer, as Muslims, consists of standing up, bowing, prostrating, and sitting down, and with every action we are reciting something from the Qur’an or we are pronouncing some type of *du’a* or supplication, and there is no authority on earth that has the power to change or modify that

prayer. As a result, the prayer we are performing today is exactly the same as was performed 1400 years ago at the time of the Prophet Muhammad. If we come to the other faiths, we find that some sort of modification has occurred over the centuries. The prayer in Christianity was supposed to be consisting of standing and bowing and prostrating exactly like ours. The prayer (*salah*) was recommended to Jesus. According to the Qur’an, Jesus said, “. . . He has enjoined upon me prayer (*salah*) and charity –

أَوْصَانِي بِالصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ¹⁸.

The same recommendation was given to Moses when he saw the fire in the Sinai desert. God said to Moses:

إِنِّي أَنَا اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدْنِي وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ

لذِكْرِي

“Verily, I – I alone – am your God; there is no deity save Me. Hence, worship me alone, and be constant in prayer (*salah*), so as to remember Me.”¹⁹ So the prayer in Christianity and Judaism is supposed to be similar to the prayer in Islam. But some modification has taken place nowadays. The prayer in Christianity, at present, has become a combination of hymns, music, and singing and that is their prayer. It is the same with Judaism: they utilize the music; they utilize certain hymns or songs in the synagogue. I remember when we had a group of priests here, one day, and they looked around the mosque and said to me, “Where is your organ? Where is the piano?”

I said: “We don’t have a piano.”

They said: “You don’t have music at all?”

I said: “No.”

They asked “Why?”

I said: “Because Jesus had no piano!”

It is as simple as that. The music has *nothing* to do with the prayer. We cannot modify, we cannot say that we are living in America so we have to make our prayer fit the environment in which we are living, or, our fasting should fit the environment in which we are living, since there is no Muslim on earth who has the authority to do that.

“Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you,” means that the Christians and the Jews have an obligation of fasting. Where is that obligation nowadays?

¹⁴ Noah

¹⁵ Abraham

¹⁶ Chapter 42 of the Qur’an

¹⁷ 2:187

¹⁸

¹⁹ 20:14

Gone with the wind. It is forgotten nowadays. According to the Bible of Matthew, the Christians are supposed to fast forty days every year. In my lifetime, and maybe, in some of yours also, we came to this country to find the Catholics did not eat meat on Fridays – that was a sort of fasting. They used to eat fish on Friday. In the 1960s, the Pope in Rome issued a new legislation – a new papal decree – allowing the consumption of meat on Friday. So, as easy as that, everything is changed. If eating fish, and not meat, on Friday was a law of God, there is no authority under God – including the Pope – that could change that law.

Among the Christians of today, we find there is a difference between the Christians living in the East and the Christians living in the West. The followers of Jesus living in the East are still performing the obligation of fasting for forty days every year, and they are practicing that tradition. For the western Christians, the obligation of fasting is nearly extinct; it is no longer practiced except, maybe, by few people, and there are some, few, orthodox Jews who still fast also. That is the type of change which has occurred in these religions. This kind of modification is not found in Islam because we take Islam from the source – the Qur’an – and no human being has the authority to change the Qur’an.

Definition of Fasting in Islam

The word *sawm* in Arabic means “abstention”. Linguistically, the word *sawm* means “To stop doing something”. Every abstention, linguistically, could be called *sawm* or fasting. When Sayyidna Maryam²⁰ delivered her son, as a fatherless

son, she was very apprehensive about facing her people. If the people were to ask her wherefrom she brought her baby, how was she going to answer? So, God advised her to vow a fast from talking. The Qur’an states: “And if thou shouldst see any human being, convey this unto him: ‘Behold, abstinence from speech have I vowed unto the Most Gracious: hence, I may not speak today to any mortal.’” That is called fasting in the linguistic sense.

In Islamic law or *Shari’ah*, fasting has a special definition. Islamic Law defines the obligation of fasting as the abstention from everything that is swallowed via the throat, and from the desires of this life, from the time of dawn till sunset every day during the month of Ramadan. From *dawn* to sunset. Dawn means two hours before sunrise. A lot of people, including Muslims, mistakenly say fasting is from “sunrise to sunset” or “from sun-up to sundown.” That is wrong. We have to be very careful what we say. Fasting is supposed to be from dawn until sunset and dawn is two hours before sunrise. So, if you abstain from eating at sunrise, you are not fasting; you missed the day. A lot of newspapers, writing about the start of Ramadan, used to write that fasting was between sunrise to sunset, or sun-up to sundown. However, this year,²¹ when the reporter from *The Blade*²² contacted me, I told him that I wanted him to qualify the word “dawn” by writing in parenthesis after it “two hours before sunrise” so they will not play with these words. The Qur’anic verse which legislated this says: “Eat and drink until you can distinguish between the white and the black thread due to the light of the dawn (*al-Fajr*)” [2:187].

²⁰ A title of respect for Mary, mother of Jesus

²¹ 1991

²² The Toledo newspaper

Ramadan

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[Part 2 of 5]

Number of days of Fasting

Astronomy in the Qur'an

According to the Bible of Matthew, Christians are required to fast forty days every year. For Muslims the number of days is not specified. All the Qur'an says is that you should fast the *month* of Ramadan. Regarding the number of days, it says only أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ which means, "days which are numbered", or, "countable days". The phrase أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ if I were to try to explain it fully, with all its ramifications, will touch upon nearly every known science on earth.

أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ: See the precision of the Qur'an!

Ramadan is a lunar month, so it is either 29 days or 30 days. The Qur'an did not tell us to fast 29 days or 30 days, but it says to fast for أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ meaning the days which are calculable. Why did it not say 30 days or 29 days? That is because it is the word of the Most Knower who knows the past, the present, and the future, and He put it in a language which can be correctly interpreted every time. One year Ramadan will be 29 days, another year Ramadan will be 30 days. So if the Qur'an had fixed it at 30 days, then some years it would be wrong. If it had fixed it at 29 days, it would be

wrong in some other year. And that can never happen because God is the All-Knowing and can never be wrong. Personally, I understand from the mode of expression that it is an indication that, at some future time, there will be a science that will enable us to know if Ramadan will be 29 days or 30 days, and it is expressed in that way just to inspire us to utilize our brain and our knowledge. It indicates that the words are the words of the One who knows the secrets of this universe because He is the one who created it. He created that universe and all the planets, including the sun and the moon, to function according to fixed laws of calculation. He harnessed everything in the sky, and everything in and on the earth, for the service of man. The stars – we have a Qur'anic verse that says, "They are signs, and they are a guide for human beings."²³ Before the invention of radar, and before the invention of all these new technologies, how did people travel in the desert? Night or day, they never missed their way. They followed the stars! These stars are harnessed for the service of human beings; they keep their positions constant. Imagine, if they changed their orbits and moved their positions all the time; human beings would be confused.

So what is that law of God that makes Ramadan

²³ 16:16

either 29 days or 30 days? It is the law laid down by God that the moon must orbit around the earth. If you look at the moon, you find that every night it is in a slightly different position from the previous night, until, at the end of the month, it will be back where it started. This is known in the astronomy of Islam as *manazilul-qamar* or the "locations of the moon in the universe". It is mentioned in *Sura Yā-Sīn*.²⁴

Many people say, "O, I have seen on television that the new moon will be born on such-and-such day." Yes, but it depends upon the time when that new moon is born, whether it will, or will not, qualify as a new moon, in the context of Islamic Law. In the summer, the day is very long, so there is a chance that the moon will be born, but it cannot be seen, since it may rise at 12 o'clock noon, and set at 5:00 PM, while the sun may set at 7:00 PM. So the moon sets before the sun sets, and you cannot see it. According to scientists, the moon circles around the earth once every 29 days, 6 hours, and 46 minutes. Two months will be approximately 58 days and 13½ hours. The next new moon, another month later, adds an additional six hours and 46 minutes to the time before the moon sets, ensuring that it will have a life of 18 or 19 hours which is long enough for the crescent moon to be seen in the evening sky. Then this month will be 30 days. That is how the lunar month is either 29 days or 30 days. It is based upon these blocks of six hours and 46 minutes; when they are added up, they can make a difference of one day. Considering that the Qur'an was revealed 1400 years ago, the term **أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ** makes more scientific sense today than it did at the time of the Prophet. When the ulama of Islam explained the term

أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ they did not explain it in this²⁵ way, but they said **أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ** means that "the number of days during which you have to fast is very small compared to the number of days in the year and that the days of fasting are very few, so don't miss them."

So when you see a new moon noted on the calendar, or the birth of a new moon announced on the television, don't take it for granted, because Islamic terminology is different from American terminology. For example, the day starts, in our normal life here, at 12 o'clock midnight. As soon as it is

midnight, plus one minute, they say the time is one minute AM. But the Qur'an says, "Eat and drink until you can distinguish between the white and the black thread due to the light of the dawn²⁶ and then fast until sunset..." So, our day starts from the time of *fajr*, not from 12 o'clock midnight.

When the Qur'an says "countable days" we, as Muslims, read the verse, but we don't go deep into it to know exactly what it means, and why it was stated in this way, and what are the secrets behind such a statement. If the Muslim mind were a scientific mind, and, if it tried to discover the secrets behind these verses, then, he would have to look into things beyond the month of Ramadan. He would take the month of Ramadan, being countable days, as a starting point, and proceed from there because the universe and all the planets, including the sun and the moon, which God created, are functioning according to fixed laws created by God. It is mentioned in Chapter *Yā-Sīn* that it is prohibited for the moon or the sun to interfere with the orbit of the other, each one having its own orbit. In Chapter *Ar-Rahman*²⁷ it says, "The moon and the sun are going according to a fixed law of calculation." Chapter *Al-Isra*²⁸ states: "And We have established the night and the day as two symbols. . .so that you might seek thy Sustainer's bounty and be able to calculate the years. . ." ²⁹ It becomes obvious, from these verses, that the Qur'an is inviting man to look into the universe around him and try to discover its secrets which will give us a small glimpse into the power and the greatness of Allah. The Muslims, in ancient times, who reflected on these Qur'anic verses, went on to make inventions and to discover scientific and mathematical laws because the origin of astronomy and calculation is in the Qur'an. Based on these verses, Muslim scholars established the science of astronomy and the whole world learned it from the Muslims. But, today, we ourselves are ignoring it; we are not using the science of astronomy anymore. The American people used the science of astronomy and the science of calculation to land precisely on the moon, while we stopped using calculations ourselves. We still insist on seeing the moon with the naked eye. Not only that, we even say, if you see it with the help of a magnifying glass (i.e., a telescope) it will not be acceptable. There are some people who say that. And there

²⁶ Al-fajr

²⁷ Chapter 55 of the Qur'an

²⁸ Chapter 17 of the Qur'an

²⁹ 17:12

²⁴ Chapter 36 of the Qur'an

²⁵ As explained above by Imam

are some people who consider the telescope “the equipment of *Shaytān*”.³⁰ *There are some people who say that!* As a result we are divided into groups, and the description which God gave us in the Qur'an, *Ummatun Wāhida*,³¹ is no longer in existence. Some Muslims fast on Thursday, some start fasting on Friday, and some on Saturday. Why? That is because all of us are chiefs, and all of us give fatwas,³² regardless of whether we know or not. The Jews have a lunar calendar exactly like ours.³³ They celebrate Yom Kippur on the same day everywhere on earth. How do they agree on that? They calculate. But we, the Muslims, cannot agree on our Eid, or on our Ramadan.

With regard to fasting, there are two notable items related to Time:

- 1) *Yawm*, or day, is understood to be the time of the sunlight hours.
- 2) Fasting is to be performed in the month of Ramadan – a lunar month.

These two items, related to time, will show us that there is wisdom and justice in that, because it brings equality among the Muslims in the obligation of fasting, wherever they are located and living on this earth.

So we come back again to أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ – the countable days – of the month of Ramadan during which we are supposed to fast. *Ayyām* is the plural of *yawm*. The Qur'an is talking to us human beings on earth. The Arabic word *yawm* is translated into English as “a day”. The Arabic language is richer than the English language because “day” in Arabic can mean *an-nahaar* or *al-layl*. *An-nahaar* is the period of the day when the sun is up. *Al-layl* is the period of the day when there is darkness. In the English language, you don't find a special term or name for *an-nahaar*, and so we translate the word *an-nahaar* into English as “day” but that does not convey the full meaning of the word. Normally the “day” in our own understanding is 24 hours. In Arabic the word “day” (*yawm*) could mean the 24 hours that we normally talk about, which includes the light and the dark, or it could mean only the time during which there is light. Based on this definition, we find

that, on this earth, the day has different characteristics not only from one locality to another, but, also, from one season to another in the same locality: sometimes it is long and sometimes it is short in the same locality. In some localities, the day is six months and the night in six months as at the North Pole or the South Pole. What about the “day” of the moon? How long is the day of the moon? The day on the moon will never be 24 hours; it could be months. How long is the “day” of the planet Venus? It will be longer – could be years. How long is the day of Mars and Uranus? This brings us again to the point that, whatever we acquire of knowledge, however much we know, we will never reach the depths of all the secrets in the Qur'an. The advancement of knowledge and the new discoveries, throughout history, are enabling ever-new and fresh meanings for these Qur'anic verses.

The Qur'an says, [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The English translation is:] “...And, behold, in thy Sustainer's sight a day is like a thousand years of your reckoning.”³⁴ Another verse says: “In a day the length whereof is like fifty thousand years...”³⁵ Those are descriptions of “day” at the time of, or, after the Day of Judgment. No one knows what these verses mean. We can explain them in metaphorical language if we say that it will *appear* to us like that. You know, when you are waiting for a plane in the airport for three hours, you think three hours are like three days! They are very long because you are waiting. But, such Qur'anic verses came also as a challenge. They are a challenge to the human mind that, no matter how much knowledge we acquire, we still do not know many things. There is a very nice Qur'anic story in this respect.

Syyedna Musa³⁶ thought of himself as a very learned man. So, God put him to a test and sent him to a prophet named, as they say, though the name is not mentioned in the Qur'an, Al Khidr,³⁷ to teach him more. On reading Chapter Al Kahf, you find that there is some sort of dialogue between Moses and Al Khidr, where Al Khidr advised Moses on three different occasions, about things Moses didn't know. While Al Khidr and Musa were in the boat, a little bird came to drink from the sea. Al Khidr said to Moses:

“Did you see that bird?”

³⁰ The devil

³¹ One Nation

³² Religious verdicts

³³ Not quite. They invented a 13th month for their calendar so that their holidays do not fall outside the last four months of the solar year.

³⁴ 22:47

³⁵ 70:4

³⁶ The Prophet Moses

³⁷ It means, “The Green One”

Moses said, "Yes."

He asked: "What did he do?"

Moses replied: "He drank from the sea."

He asked: "Did that drink affect the sea in any way; did it make the water less?"

Moses replied: "No."

Al Khidr said to him: "My knowledge and your knowledge, in comparison with the knowledge of God, is like that bird drinking from the sea."

The Qur'an talks about *an-nahaar* and *al-layl*. [Imam quotes:]

وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ دَائِبِينَ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ
الَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ

And God has made the sun and the moon, both of them constant upon their courses (دَائِبِينَ), subservient to His laws,

so that they may be of use to you; and has made the night (al-layl) and the day (an-nahaar) subservient to His laws, so that

they may be of use to you."³⁸ That word دَائِبِينَ means,

"moving continuously": each one has its own orbit and is following that orbit precisely and it is not permitted for them to interfere with the orbit of the other. They just follow precisely the law God has created for them. That is called in the Arabic language *dha-i-bain musthamir-rain* meaning, "continuously circling in a precise way". That is what makes the calculation possible.

I have to bring your attention to something here, because nowadays, lots of fatwas are issued, and the people who issue them, support them by Qur'anic verses and sunnah, and, as a result, there are some people who believe in them. [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The English translation is:]

"We have made the night (al-layl) for rest and sleeping, and We have made the day (an-nahaar) for you to earn your living."³⁹ I heard from someone, who just returned from Lebanon last week, that there are some people in Lebanon these days who are against working the third shift (11pm to 7am) declaring it harām⁴⁰ in Islam, because it goes against that verse of the Qur'an. This is a new fatwa! It means all the people over here working the night shift in Cooper

Tire,⁴¹ are going to hell! That is the type of thinking of some people, and some of them are living here in Toledo and propagating the Islamic faith. Someone else, who just came back from Lebanon, told me that the shaykhs⁴² there issued a fatwa declaring that if a woman leans against a door it is harām. Why? That is because the noun "door" is, grammatically, masculine gender in the Arabic language. It makes you laugh and it makes you cry. The time has come for us to use our brain. Not everything mentioned in books is correct. The only correct book is the Book of God. This Book, this Qur'an is a science; it is a language; it is an art. See how, in the church, they sing hymns alongside music, while, when we read the Qur'an, we read it with no music, but *its music is built in*. When someone recites the Qur'an, we listen; we listen attentively and we feel satisfaction from that recitation, although there is no music with it, because the music is built into the words and the letters of the Qur'an itself. This Book (the Qur'an) was revealed for a challenge: it is a challenge to the human mind that however much we may know of knowledge, or science, or the Qur'an, we are still ignorant, and our interpretation of the Qur'an today could be changed tomorrow, because the Qur'anic verses are like clay that can be shaped in many ways. I wonder how the ulama of Islam, 1000 years ago, used to understand these Qur'anic verses related to the sun, the moon, the orbits, the thunder, the rain – all these things that are scientifically explained nowadays. They had their own understanding, and, as a result, not every book of tafseer⁴³ we read can be taken for granted. We read one book, two books, three books, ten books and... and see what those people are saying, and then we have to think for ourselves, in terms of our contemporary lives, because the Qur'an is the revelation of the One who knows the past, the present and future, and He made it to suit every time.

So the days are calculable. What about the years? They are calculable also. The sun circles around the earth in 365 days and six hours. This means, that every four years, there will be 366 days in the year. It is calculable. And the Qur'an said it. You can read it in Chapter Ar-Rahman:

حِسَابًا. الشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ بِحُسْبَانٍ. *Hisaab!*⁴⁴ Calculation.

³⁸ 14:33

³⁹ 78:11

⁴⁰ Prohibited, unlawful

⁴¹ Factory located approximately half hour south of Toledo

⁴² The religious leaders in the mosques

⁴³ Qur'anic exegesis

⁴⁴ Arabic for "arithmetic" or "mathematics"

Mathematics. *Yā'ni*,⁴⁵ it is possible to calculate the movement of the sun, and the moon, and the earth. It is a science. But many of our Muslim brothers nowadays don't believe in calculation. They count money! But they don't like to count or calculate the days and the months.

The first imam who came to Toledo from Al Azhar was Imam Khadr. He appeared to be very fast in his prayer. *Allah yarhamu*⁴⁶, Hajj 'Ulwaan, came to him and said:

"*Yā*⁴⁷ Shaykh Khadr, you are very fast in your prayer. I don't get to finish reciting *Al-Fatihah* and I find you are going for *ruku'a*."⁴⁸ Shaykh Khadr answered:

"*Ya* Hajj 'Ulwaan, if you recited *Fatihah* only, you will keep up with me, but it looks like you are reciting *Fatihah* and counting your money at the same time!"

The people call me from time to time to say: "How come the *Monitor*⁴⁹ is late this month? We don't have the prayer timetable!" But why do you need the prayer timetable? Go out and put a stick in the ground and you will know when it is 'Asr⁵⁰ time, and get the black and the white threads to find the time of *Fajr*.⁵¹ But we don't do these things, although this is Islam – this is how the Prophet used to do. Instead, we are using the astronomical calculations: we want the timetable made by *Mr. Khattab Computer*. You know, give me any spot on earth for which you would like the prayer timetable and I can get it for you. All I need is the longitude and the latitude of that place on earth, and I can get that from the public library of Perrysburg. Then, I feed that information into the computer, and, in thirty seconds, it will give you the timings for the five daily prayers for 365 days of the year. Thirty seconds – exactly. That is what science can do. And when I compare the timetable for Toledo from my computer with the timetable I received from Egypt, I don't find any difference. So, we look

into that timetable and we look at a watch and say *Zuhr*⁵² is here or 'Asr is here. When it comes to Ramadan, we are able to calculate and know when Ramadan begins, but the people don't accept it. I don't know why.⁵³ If any one is interested in Ramadan, or Eid-ul-Fitr⁵⁴, or Eid-ul-Adha⁵⁵, fifty years from now, I am ready to give it to you after the prayer, with just a push of a key of my computer – the year 2050! But we don't want this. We have to see the moon with the eye because the Prophet said, "Fast when you see⁵⁶ it." Ah! I'm seeing it but on the computer; that is *ru'ya*. Without my eyes, I cannot see the screen of my computer. And without my brain. . . . You know, even if I see the moon, but I don't have a brain, I cannot know that this is the moon, so I have to use both my brain and my eyes to "see" the moon. That computer is a brain that can calculate, faster than any human being, when the moon will appear in the year 2050.

So, we calculate some things, but when it comes to Ramadan, we don't believe in calculation. It sometimes makes one wonder and laugh at our behavior; it's a criticism of the faith: we pray according to the astronomical tables, but we refuse to fast according to the same.

"Fast when you have seen (*ru'ya*) the moon." The Prophet said that for his time and his people. At that time, they did not have the technology of watches or computers; they did not have any of these things. So, he said to them, just look for the moon, and if there is a cloud in the sky, complete the month of Sha'ban⁵⁷ 30 days. But, today, even if there are clouds in the sky, I will not be prevented from seeing the moon, because I can take an F-16 and go above the clouds and see the moon. Nothing will stop me in my way. Does it mean that the hadith of the Prophet was wrong? *No!* The hadith of the Prophet was said for a specific time, but we try to apply it *literally* to every time, and by this we make fools of ourselves.

The term *ru'ya* is mentioned in the Qur'an many times, and not always in the sense of "seeing with your eyes".

For example: "يَا أَبَتِ إِنِّي رَأَيْتُ أَحَدَ عَشَرَ كَوْكَبًا" . . . Thus spoke Joseph unto his father: 'O my father! I did see eleven stars and the sun and the moon: I saw them prostrate

⁴⁵ An Arabic expression which has no equivalent in English and means, loosely, "I mean" or, "you know" or, "in other words" depending on the context.

⁴⁶ May God have mercy on him – an expression in Arabic used when mentioning the name of any deceased person

⁴⁷ O Shaykh Khadr

⁴⁸ Bowing. *Fatihah* is recited while standing up, followed by bowing

⁴⁹ The bimonthly magazine of the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo

⁵⁰ The third of the five daily obligatory prayers

⁵¹ The dawn prayer. It is time for this prayer when there is just enough light at dawn to be able to distinguish between a white and a black thread

⁵² Noon prayer

⁵³ Imam states this softly and with bewilderment

⁵⁴ The day which marks the end of Ramadan

⁵⁵ The 10th of Dhul-Hijjah, marking the end of the Hajj

⁵⁶ *ru'ya* means "see it"

⁵⁷ The month before Ramadan

themselves before me!" *Ru'ya*, here, means seeing something while asleep, as in a dream.

أَلَمْ تَرَ means "did you see". The word "see", in our normal understanding, means to see with your eyes, but the Qur'an says to Muhammad:

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِأَصْحَابِ الْفِيلِ

Did you see how your Lord dealt with the Companions of the Elephant?"⁵⁸ Surely, it does not mean that Muhammad saw with his eyes. How could he see what God had done to the Army of the Elephants when he was not even born at the time? But the Qur'an intended to say to Muhammad: Didn't it come to your knowledge through history, or science, about what happened when the People of the Elephant came to destroy the Ka'bah⁵⁹ and God destroyed them? This type of "seeing" is called *al-baseera* in Arabic: you can have knowledge through inspiration, or you can gain knowledge from reading books and histories of the past, or by reading books of science, so you begin to "see" – or comprehend – how the earth rotates and how the day and the night alternate. This is called *ru'ya 'ilmiyyah*.⁶⁰ Muhammad was able to "see" what God did to the Army of the Elephant only after the revelation came to him. There are many other examples of this in the Qur'an:

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الْمَلَإِ مِنْ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مُوسَى

"Did you see those elders of the children of Israel, after the time of Moses, how they said unto a prophet of theirs, 'Raise up a king for us, and we shall fight in God's cause?'"⁶¹ This verse is referring to a time approximately eleven centuries before Jesus.

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِي حَاجَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ

that man⁶² who argued with Abraham about his Sustainer, simply because God had granted him kingship?"⁶³

"Didn't they see (أَلَمْ يَرَوْا) how many a generation

We have destroyed before their time, and that those that have perished will never return to them?"⁶⁴

What the Qur'an means in all of the above verses is *ru'ya 'ilmiyyah* – seeing and understanding through knowledge. So, with regard to the hadith "Fast when you have seen (*ru'ya*) the moon", indeed, the Prophet meant literally seeing the moon with your eyes, because the science of calculation and astronomy did not exist at that time. But, nowadays, why don't we take *ru'ya 'ilmiyyah* (the science and knowledge of astronomy) to calculate the start of Ramadan, and facilitate our lives? Why do we limit ourselves to *ru'ya* in the meaning of seeing by the naked eye only? And don't forget, there was one year, here, when the moon was sighted by some people wearing glasses, and some other people opposed it and said, "This is not *ru'ya* because the Prophet never had glasses." See how "precise" we are?

Let us utilize our science, *Ilm al-Falaq*,⁶⁵ which is enough for Muslims to identify their months through calculation to reach a decision.

Dr. Jabarin⁶⁶ just returned from the Arab countries. He was in Jordan. He asked me today what time we will break our fast here, and I said about 8:15 or 8:16 tonight. He said, "O, we used to break our fast there at 6:15." That shows you the justice of Islam. Imagine if God had imposed upon us to fast the month of July, or the month of August, based upon the solar calendar. That would mean the Muslims in Brazil and Argentina would be enjoying fasting in a good time every year, throughout their lives, because, when it is summer here it is winter there, while the people in Saudi Arabia, and here, will be experiencing difficulty every year, throughout their lives. So, it is out of the mercy of God that the obligation of fasting was imposed upon Muslims during the month of Ramadan which is a lunar month.

There is a difference of eleven days between the solar calendar year and the lunar calendar year. Because of this, Ramadan comes early by about eleven days every year, and will come full circle in the same month every 33 years. If you are living in a locality where the day is very long, a time will come when you will experience the shortest days of the year. I have fasted Ramadan in the city of Edmonton, just eight hours a day. We used to have *suhūr*⁶⁷ at 7 o'clock in the morning. Now, in July, when we came here,⁶⁸ we paid for that, because we were

⁵⁸ 105:1

⁵⁹ The House of God (in Makkah)

⁶⁰ Seeing, or comprehending, through knowledge

⁶¹ 2:246

⁶² The reference is to King Nimrod

⁶³ 2:258

⁶⁴ 36:31

⁶⁵ The science of calculation

⁶⁶ The president of the Islamic Center: 1979-1992

⁶⁷ Pre-dawn meal in the month of Ramadan

⁶⁸ Toledo, Ohio

fasting 17 hours every day. When we think over this, truly, we realize the mercy of God, and the justice of Islam, in that this obligation will not be difficult on some people, and easy on others, just because they are living in different localities. Everyone will have his share of the difficult months, and of the easy months, because of the rotation of the month of Ramadan, and that is establishing justice among the Muslims wherever they are living.

About 2000 miles north of the city of Edmonton, Canada, there are areas where the sun is shining for six months, and the night lasts for six months. How should those people fast? The people in such locations fast according to the nearest city to them which has Muslims, and which has regular alternation of days and nights. So, they used to call Edmonton and ask me how they should fast. That is because their area is extraordinary in that there is either no day, or, no night, for six months at a time. But if the time is reasonable, in other words,

there is an alternation of day and night, then you have to abide by that time wherever you are living, because the Qur'anic verse limited it: "Eat and drink until you can distinguish the white from the black thread" which means that you start fasting before daybreak, and continue to fast throughout the day until sunset.

"Eat and drink until you can distinguish between the white and the black thread due to the light of the dawn." Is there anyone here who relies on that observation nowadays? When you want to stop eating, do you get two threads – a white one and a black one – and look at them? Nobody does that. We just look at the calendar to see what time is *Fajr*, and what time is *imsak* or abstention, and we look into the Japanese technology, and we come to the decision to stop eating at a particular time. But when we want to start Ramadan, we have to see the moon with our eye – the calendar will not work. See how we contradict ourselves?

Ramadan

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 3 of 5]

Who Is Obligated To Fast? Who Is Exempted From Fasting?

In answer to the first question: every Muslim, adult, and sane: these are the three conditions; if these three conditions are met, then, he or she should fast. What about children? It is not obligatory on them because the first condition is to be adult. But, here is a point that we have to examine in our lives. Normally, the children try to imitate the elders. Sociologists have a theory that says, the young always try to imitate the old, the poor try to imitate the rich, and the low-class try to imitate the high-class. Imagine, in California, some of our Muslim ladies imitate the actresses, even in their manner of dress, because they think the actresses are high-class. So, children imitate the elders: when they find that their parents are fasting they want to fast, too. They ask their parents to wake them up for *subhūr*. There are some parents who don't wake up their 12- or 13-year old children for *subhūr*, because they don't want them to fast lest they become dehydrated. Some parents don't like their kids to fast because they think they will starve to death. So, they don't wake them up. The kid cries a little bit in the morning, and then forgets about it. In fact, it is our duty to encourage them, because if those children get used to the obligation of fasting at that age it will be part of their life when they are adults. Just as we train our children from seven years of age to pray, we should train them,

also, to fast. As the Arabic proverb says, "When you teach the child in his childhood, it will be like engraving on a stone." It will last. So children should be encouraged to practice fasting.

There is another point worthy of mentioning: books of Islamic jurisprudence tell us that the obligation of fasting is imposed upon Muslims, the inference being that if a person is not Muslim, then there is no obligation to fast. In this respect, there are some interesting things happening, nowadays, in the United States. There are a number of mosques, the foremost being the Washington Mosque,⁶⁹ which is the most well known mosque in that area, that don't allow non-Muslim women who want to know about Islam, to enter the mosque. Why? They say, "Who knows if that lady is clean or not."⁷⁰ What is your business if she is clean or not; she is not Muslim, and following Islam is not obligatory upon her. You cannot impose Islam upon non-Muslims. In Islamic terminology, they are *hum ghayro mukallafoon*.⁷¹ So if a person is not Muslim, fasting is not imposed upon him or her; if he or she is underage, fasting is not imposed upon him or her, or, if he or she is

⁶⁹ Built in 1958

⁷⁰ Meaning, whether she is menstruating or not. Muslims are not allowed to enter the prayer room during menstruation

⁷¹ They are *not* responsible

insane, fasting is not imposed upon him or her.

There are two other exceptions to fasting, and I am going to tell you about my personal opinion with respect to these two cases. My personal opinion could be right, could be wrong; but, that is the way I believe, and that's the way I feel. The two exceptions from fasting concern the sick person and the traveler.

The traveler and the sick person are exempted from fasting in the month of Ramadan on condition that they will make up for that number of days after the month of Ramadan. Considering the reasons for why the sick person and the traveler are exempted from fasting during the month of Ramadan, we find that it is to make it easy for them: [Imam quotes:] "...but he that is ill, or on a journey, shall fast instead for the same number of other days. God wills that you shall have ease, and does not will you to suffer hardship..."⁷²

Our brothers – some philosophers of nowadays – quote a Qur'anic verse and justify that a Muslim can break his fast and give a ransom instead. [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:] "...But whoever of you is ill, or on a journey, shall fast instead for the same number of other days. For those who can do it with hardship, is a ransom: the feeding of one that is indigent..."⁷³ The Qur'an, in fact, says this. But we have to account for something else: is there any other verse dealing with the same topic? The Qur'an was revealed over a period of 23 years and there are things that were legitimized in stages, and things which were prohibited in stages. The Qur'anic verse [2:184] came at the start: if someone is able to fast but with difficulty he could break his fast and feed a poor person for every day that he missed in the month of Ramadan. But verse number 2:185 was revealed after verse 184 and it states, "...Hence, whosoever of you lives to see this month shall fast throughout it..." *It is in the form of an order.* You cannot take an isolated Qur'anic verse [such as verse 184 above] and say this is what the Qur'an says; we have to consider the Qur'an in its totality.

Exemption for Travel

There is unanimous agreement among Muslims that a traveler could postpone his or her fasting till after Ramadan. However, where we disagree is, "What constitutes travel?" It is the same

as the theory of *riba*.⁷⁴ Every Muslim says *riba* is haram;⁷⁵ there are no two Muslims differing on this point, but *what is riba?* It is here that we have all the differences in opinion. Some people call the interest of the bank *riba*. I don't call that *riba*. Why? Because *riba* signifies a practice with an element of exploitation inherent in it and which is, therefore, prohibited because of that. Today, if you deposit money in the bank in a savings account, are you exploiting the bank if you take five percent from them in interest? That is the point on which you have to use your mind and think. There is no doubt, and no argument, that *riba* is haram, but is there any element of exploitation in the matter of taking interest from the bank?

If you are traveling, you could postpone your fasting because the Qur'an mentioned it frankly and clearly. But what is traveling? Is going to Detroit traveling [about 65 miles away]? Is going to California traveling? Is going to the Middle East, nowadays, traveling? If I take a spaceship I will be in the Middle East in one hour and a half, and that same space ship circles around the earth once every three hours; can that be called traveling? These are the differences between the time of the Prophet and the old ulama of Islam, and our present time, and, here, the Muslim mind should work and should find the meanings of the Qur'anic verses for the 20th-century. We are always saying Islam is applicable in every time and every place; this is brought out very clearly in the case of the traveler's fasting.

When the Qur'an talks about the means of transportation, it says, "... The mules, the horses, and the donkeys are your means of transportation as well as an ornament for you. But God will yet create as means of transportation what you don't know." Look at that verse! It is like clay – you shape it in every time and age, according to what is known and available as means of transportation – "God will yet create what you don't know." How do you suppose the Muslims interpreted this at the time of the Prophet? They had only donkeys, and horses, and mules. Today we can say that the verse means God will create other means of transportation like the bicycle, motorcycle, the train, then the plane, then the spaceship. All of this will enter into the meaning of the final part of that verse. That is why we, Muslims, should use our minds and not look into the old books every time we face a problem. We should use our

⁷² 2:185

⁷³ 2:184

⁷⁴ Usury

⁷⁵ Prohibited, unlawful

reason and minds in conjunction with the old books to arrive at a conclusion that will be suitable to our time and place.

The opinion of Muslim scholars regarding what constitutes travel is very, very wide. Some say *anything* that can be called travel will allow you to break your fast. If we look into our old books of Fiqh⁷⁶ we find that when Imam Abu Haneefa⁷⁷ was asked how long a distance must be covered to qualify as travel, he said “85 km”. Eighty-five kilometers means about 62 miles. In other words, if you go from Toledo to Detroit you are at liberty not to fast that day. In the “*madhab*”⁷⁸ of Khattab”, which is new and modern, even traveling to New York does not warrant breaking your fast. Why? Because, nowadays, you drive in an air-conditioned car with Michael Jackson songs blaring on the car radio and you are enjoying the interstate highways. So, *why should I not fast?* I am sure that for people living in New York, driving from east to west across New York is more than 62 miles and, according to what is written in those old books, they should be exempt from fasting. The same would apply to people living in Toronto and Chicago. Does it mean that, if I am living in the east of that city, and I am working on the west of that city, and I travel everyday to my work, that I can forego fasting during the month of Ramadan? And if you add the miles you drive to and from work – round trip – I am sure you will be eligible to break your fast if you are living in Perrysburg and you are working in West Toledo! Here is a point, which needs fresh thinking from the Muslims. Our problem, as Muslims, is that we look into these old, old books and try to apply them as they are. As if Imam Abu Haneefa or Shafi’i or Maliki or Hambali⁷⁹ made their opinions for the rest of life until the Day of Judgment. Those people, when they issued fatwas, used to say “This is what we know, if you find better than that, do it. If you find any better verdict than mine follow it.” But we are glued to these ideas until now.

Imam Abu Haneefa gave his verdict on a certain basis, and that basis was the available means of transportation at that time. Riding a camel, or a horse, or a donkey for 85 km under the heat of the sun of Arabia is extremely debilitating. By the

time they arrived, they were broken in body and spirit. But today, in Saudi Arabia, the asphalted roads are smooth as silk, and the gas is very cheap, so everybody is driving a car 20 meters long, nicely air-conditioned, and the seats are – I don’t know what they call it – you feel...you feel you are in Paradise! So if you drive between Jeddah and Makkah, are you not going to fast? That is nonsense. You could travel 3000 miles between New York and California in a jet, and that will not affect you in any way. You don’t feel any difficulty. Here, I say to you, *ijtihad*⁸⁰ in Islam was meant to be practiced after the Prophet until the Day of Judgment.

Personally, the way I look at this idea of traveling, I look at the essence of the necessity which permitted the fast to be postponed. The essence of that necessity was the degree of difficulty involved in traveling. But, in my personal opinion, which could be right or wrong, it is left up to the religiosity of the person to decide for himself what constitutes difficulty in traveling. It is a relationship between man and God, and it is up to the person himself. If it is truly difficult for you, do not fast on your day of travel. If not, keep your fast, because you can never make up for a day in the month of Ramadan by making up for missed days in other months, and that is why the Qur’anic verse ended by saying that if you fast it will be better for you, if you know the value of fasting during that month.

If the journey will pose a real difficulty for me, then I’ll break my fast. Say, for example, if I am traveling “with the day”⁸¹ in a plane, and I start from Lebanon, or Egypt, or Syria, at the start of the day, and when I reach Toledo the sun will still be up while I have already gone 20 hours or more without food and drink, then, here, I say there will be some difficulties. But if you can travel that distance without difficulty, then why do you have to break your fast? Why should you lose one day in the month of Ramadan when the Qur’anic verse says, if you fast, it is better for you if you but knew what the value of fasting is in the month of Ramadan? So that decision is left to the religiosity of the individual.

It is very interesting to know how the different ulama of Islam explained this issue. I was reading a book of *Al-madhab-il Ja’fari*⁸² about Ramadan. And I found that there are things in *Al-madhab-il Ja’fari* which are *completely different* from

⁷⁶ Islamic jurisprudence

⁷⁷ Born 80AH and founder of the Hanafi School of Thought in Islam

⁷⁸ School of thought

⁷⁹ Four great scholars of Islam who founded the four main schools of thought and which are named after them

⁸⁰ A sincere effort to make an educated, enlightened and informed opinion explaining an issue related to Islam

⁸¹ Meaning traveling east to west

⁸² Imam Ja’far was born 85 AH. Founder of the Shi’i madhab

the understanding of *Sunni madhab*.⁸³ Say, for example, if you are traveling to Detroit, that is considered travel which entitles you to break your fast, but if you travel *before* noon you *have* to break your fast, while if you travel *after* noon, then it is optional, and you could continue fasting.

We had a funeral here, and I invited, Allah *yarhamu*, Shaykh Chirri,⁸⁴ to come and attend the funeral. He asked, "What time is the funeral?" I told him it was at eleven o'clock A.M. He said "Couldn't you delay it until one o'clock?" I asked him why? He said, "Because if I come before noon, I have to break my fast, but if I come after noon I need not to." And, at that time, it struck me as strange, until that little book of *Al-madhab-il Ja'fari* came across my desk, and it talked about that. It means that this has been the practice since right after the Prophet, from the time of Iman Ja'far as-Sadiq. Imam Abu Haneefah was the student of Iman Ja'far. How is it that the student did not follow his teacher and had a different opinion? Imam Abu Yusuf was a student of Imam Abu Haneefah, and he has expressed opinions that differ from those of Abu Haneefa. See the freedom in Islam? Even the student can come and say to his professor, "I disagree with you, no; I think it should be that way." Why? Because it is an area of *ijtehad*. The Prophet said: "Anyone who thinks and makes his own *ijtehad*, and he comes to the correct conclusion, will be rewarded twice, but, if he made a mistake, and arrived at the wrong conclusion, he will be rewarded once." So he is not a loser. And that is an invitation to the Muslims *to use their brain!* If even the students disagreed with their professors when it came to religion, then it means everyone has his own thinking, and it is left for the religiosity of each person to follow Abu Haneefah, follow Ja'far, Shafi'i, and so on. It is open. And some people ask the question, "Can I follow some practices from every *madhab*?"⁸⁵ Yes! Take the easiest from every *madhab*. The responsibility is not on you; those people laid down the legislation, and they are *rewarded* for that.

There are some people who travel during Ramadan especially, for no other reason, than just not to fast, especially if Ramadan is in July. They would like to do away with it. That's

true. Someone said to another, in the Gulf area,⁸⁶ that Ramadan will start next week, and the other responded, "*Wallahi*"⁸⁷ I'll cut it into pieces by traveling." There are some people who travel to London, England, especially in the month of Ramadan so they will not have to fast. As if they are tricking Allah. There is no deceiving Allah.

Exemption Due to Sickness

With regard to the sick person, all Muslims agree that the sick person is supposed to postpone fasting till he recovers. But what is "sickness"? What is the definition of "sickness"? That's the question which requires thinking. If someone has a headache, and he needs to take two aspirin and a cup of tea, should he take it?

It is not your place to make a judgment that you are sick today, so you will break your fast. I don't charge commission from the Muslim doctors, and this is not a pitch for them, but when it comes to fasting, Islam requires certain conditions to be met. In the case of sickness, we throw the burden on the doctors, as Imam Abu Haneefah said. Imam Abu Haneefah said that the physician who gives the verdict that you have to break your fast, otherwise it will be harmful to your health, must have the following qualifications: "*Tabeeb, Muslim, hādhiq, mahir, 'adil*" meaning the physician must be Muslim, adult, sane, clever in his profession, and a man of justice.

The physician of the sick person should be a Muslim. Of course, if you go to Peter he will say you are starving yourself to death, but if you go to Dr. Ahmad, or Ali, or Ibrahim, he knows what is the meaning of fasting in Ramadan, so he will not say that. He will evaluate truly if it is a must that you break your fast or not. He knows that this is a worship which is repeated only once a year, so he will not give you advice that is not in your best interest. The physician should not only be a Muslim, but, also, must be just and qualified in his profession. Not every Muslim is just, and there are lots of Muslims who do not fast. He must be clever in his profession, meaning that he did not steal the diploma of medicine from somewhere. You know, there are some people who pay for that diploma nowadays. If these conditions are met by the physician, and he says, if you fast it will affect your health, then you are exempted from fasting. That Qur'anic verse, which

⁸³ Ja'fari (Shi'i) and Sunni are different schools of thought in Islam

⁸⁴ Imam Muhammad Jawad Chirri, of the Islamic Center of America, in Detroit. He would be required to travel from Detroit to Toledo about 65 miles

⁸⁵ School of thought

⁸⁶ The Emirates

⁸⁷ By God

allows these exemptions, states, in the end: “If you fast, it is better for you, if only you knew the value of fasting in the month of Ramadan.”

If the sickness is temporary, the person makes up for missed fasts after Ramadan. But if the person is terminally ill, or, if his sickness is permanent and will not be cured for the rest of his life, even if he will live for 20 years, and he is taking medicine regularly and cannot miss it, then he, or she, is entirely exempted from the obligation of fasting. And here, the ransom is applicable: the feeding of the poor.

For every fast missed, you are supposed to feed a poor person for one day. People always ask me, “How much money to give; how do you calculate this?” Doctor Mansoor⁸⁸ asked me once about how much to pay. The Qur’an says, the middle – “the average of what you are feeding your family”. In fact, it is very hard [for me] to calculate it. You yourself can calculate it better than me, because you know what you eat at home, and you know what is the average cost of what you feed your children. I don’t know. So estimate it yourself, but don’t wait for a sale at McDonald’s for 99 cents, and then count it on that basis. We take the average of what we do at home. So you are the best one who can calculate what to feed them.

This is a very nice point to observe here: in all the

Muslim countries nowadays, and what they call the Third World, people are talking about one thing: the food security. This, too, has a reference in the Qur’an. That little *Sura Quraysh* says, “The One who has given them food against hunger, and made them safe from danger.” See, hunger is mentioned before fear or security against danger. The United States, now, when it wants to punish human beings, punishes them by withholding food – boycotting them – not giving them wheat.⁸⁹ Gorbachev⁹⁰ is now threatening Lithuania by stopping the food. Islam says if you cannot fast pay a ransom. What is the ransom? It is feeding a poor person for each day of Ramadan. That will show us the value Islam attaches to food. If we, the Muslims, combine these verses and obligations, and realize the true meaning of security against hunger, I think it will change the life of the entire Muslim world, but, we just read the Qur’an for the sake of reading it, and we don’t ponder the meanings of the verses in it.

[The English translation of *Sura Quraysh* alluded to above, is:]

“So that the Quraysh might remain secure, secure in their winter and summer journeys. Let them, therefore, worship the Sustainer of this Temple,⁹¹ who has given them food against hunger, and made them safe from danger” [Sura 106].

⁸⁸ A pediatrician in the audience

⁸⁹ And now the United States is trying to control the food supply of the whole world by persuading farmers to plant genetically modified corn and wheat

⁹⁰ The last president of the USSR before its breakup

⁹¹ The Ka’bah

Ramadan

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 4 of 5]

The Benefits and the Objectives of Fasting

Fasting, commonly understood to mean abstention from food and drink, is not the core, or the essence of Ramadan. The *importance* of fasting during the month of Ramadan is the *sharing* – sharing with the community and the society; it is the *unity* that makes the difference: all Muslims, in every corner of the earth, are sharing one action at the same time, starting Ramadan at the same time, celebrating Eid and marking the end of Ramadan at the same time. That is what is important.

Every obligation in Islam is a means towards an end; it is not an aim or a goal, in and of itself. From the Qur'an we know that the function of the prayer is "To enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong." So what is the function of fasting? The Qur'anic verse, which imposes the obligation of fasting upon Muslims, ends by stating the goal to be achieved as a result of fulfilling the obligation of fasting: **لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ**.⁹²

لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ. This sentence has been variously translated into English: "that you may fear God", "that you may learn to fight yourself", "that you may learn how to struggle against your desires", "that you may learn self restraint", "that you may learn to deny yourself". That is because *taqwa* is a very pliable word that can be rendered into a variety of interpretations. In fact, the Arabic expression encompasses *more than all* these interpretations, because the word "taqwa", in Arabic, is very wide. It's a very inclusive term. The term *taqwa* is adapted from *muttaqi*. The one who is following *taqwa* is called *muttaqi*. The description of the *muttaqi* is mentioned in Chapter Al Baqarah: "Those who believe in the Unseen, and establish prayer, and of what We have given them they pay their God dues, and those who believe what was revealed to you,⁹³ and what was revealed to the messengers before you, and above all that, they are sure that the Day of Judgment and accountability is coming."⁹⁴ All these are the

⁹² That you may learn *taqwa*

⁹³ Muhammad

⁹⁴ 2:2-5

qualities of the muttaqi. So the Qur'anic verse for fasting ends with **لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ** and it means: you should fast so that you will be muttaqi, in the meaning that all these qualities will develop in you.

The benefits accruing to an individual from fasting include physical, psychological and spiritual. Fasting will greatly increase your self-esteem. We feel this benefit from fasting much more over here than the Muslims in the Muslim countries. Here, some Muslims feel a little bit shy when it is time for lunch, saying that they don't like to tell their non-Muslim friends and acquaintances that they are not eating, or that they are fasting. *No!* This attitude is wrong. You ought to be proud of being Muslim, of identifying with Islam, and you ought to turn that question of fasting into a talk about Islam, and let them see the beauty of it. So when they say to you, "Why don't you eat?"

Say: "I'm fasting!"

"Are you starving yourself?"

Say: "No! Whenever you go to your doctor, he/she will never tell you that you are dying because you don't eat; you are sick because you stuff yourself! You eat too much. You are never sick because you are hungry, but, on the contrary, you are sick because you eat too much."

In the month of Ramadan, when you are in the company of your non-Muslim friends and coworkers, and somebody offers you a cup of coffee, and you say, "Sorry, I am fasting", they say, "Fasting? What does that mean?" Here in America, the people think fasting is just starving the self voluntarily. But, in fact, if you are attending school, working in a company, or in the hospital, when lunchtime rolls around, all the people are eating and you are not; then you feel proud of your religion; you feel proud that you are obedient to your God, that you are fighting yourself and building your identity as a Muslim among the non-Muslims. Sometimes, you find Muslims smoking during Ramadan, and when you ask them, "Aren't you fasting?" they say, "No." Why? They say, "You know, in my company the people will be eating their lunch, and I look stupid not eating. I don't need it. We have to share with the people. I feel ashamed." That is called, in psychology, an inferiority complex. In the same manner, when one is at a wedding, and there is whisky and screwdriver – I told you about the screwdriver joke before – and the people are drinking [alcohol], there are some Muslims who feel ashamed because they are not drinking like the others. When someone

offers them a drink and tells them to take a little bit, assuring them that it will not affect them, that they will be able to drive their car back home, and there will be no problem, then he gets dragged into it. If he stands fast, and holds fast to his principles, then, that is called *al-i'tizāz bin nafṣ* or self esteem: it indicates that this man is proud of his faith and is firm on his principles. The people will respect him because he has principles. The people may be happy with you if you share with them, but deep down in their hearts, they disrespect you because you are going against your faith. The people working in the mines, north of the Arctic Circle, where the day is six months and the night is six months, are still following their faith; they fast by the watch, and they are proud of their fasting, and they are proud of being Muslim. That is called *Jihad an-Nafs*.⁹⁵ The obligation of fasting helps us to build our identity wherever we are.

Every obligation in Islam has benefits in this world, as well as benefits in the Hereafter. For example, if you pray your five daily prayers, you will stand up 35 times a day, you will bow 35 times, you will prostrate 70 times, and you will sit down 18 times a day. All that movement is not for the Hereafter; it is to flex your body and that is the benefit of it in this world; you will not have rheumatism in the joints if you are practicing that every day. It is the same with fasting. Here, in America, people eat three meals a day, and snacks and potato chips all night while watching TV. Fasting gives a holiday to your digestive system; it helps you keep the stomach relaxed a little bit.

When the prayer time comes, you have to pray because something is pushing you; you have the feeling that you are accountable before God; you have the feeling that you owe God something; you feel that you are missing something and so you have to do it. That feeling, in itself, is filling a vacuum in a human being. It is the same with fasting. In this society in which we are living, the people are staunch believers in materialism, and because the people have nothing to give them hope in something else, all types of problems emerge. Fifty percent of the people occupying beds in the hospitals are not sick. What is their sickness? It is a vacuum in the heart. That vacuum leads to what? Depression and anxiety, headaches, family troubles, and so on. Then, they end up as drug addicts, and drink alcohol to forget their problems. The obligation of fasting will fill that vacuum in the heart. Why?

⁹⁵ Struggling against your own desires

Because you are doing it voluntarily. You feel there is an obligation upon you, and fulfilling that obligation results in a feeling which fills the vacuum.

Hadith qudsi is different from *hadith nabawi*. A *hadith nabawi* is a saying of the Prophet, of which the words, contents, and meaning are those of the Prophet himself, but a *hadith qudsi* is a hadith in which the contents, the words, and the meaning are from God, but the utterance is that of the Prophet. There is a *hadith qudsi* which says, “All the deeds of the child of Adam are for himself, except fasting. I have selected fasting to be for Me, and I am going to reward him for it.” There are many types of *‘ibadaat* or worshipping. For example, prayers (*salah*), fasting, *zakah*,⁹⁶ pilgrimage are all *‘ibadaat*. Why did God select the fasting to be especially for Him and not the prayer, or *zakah*, or the pilgrimage? The implication is that a human being could do all the other *‘ibadaat* just to show off. Someone goes to the mosque regularly to pray so the people will say, “Oh, Mr. Khattab is a very pious man; he never misses a prayer.” He is showing the people that he is a righteous man – a very good Muslim – while inside, in his heart, the situation could be different. Some people come to the mosque saying they came for prayer, while they are coming to conduct their own business, or coming just to socialize with others. People come for a variety of reasons. It is a showing off. Same with *zakah*: when someone pays *zakah*, it could be that he is looking for recognition: Oh, Mr. So-and-So is a very, very generous man; he paid the mosque this amount, and built that building for the poor. So, it is possible to give *zakah* just to show off, and not truly from the heart. Hajj could be from the heart or it could be just for acquiring the title. Some times you say “*ta‘ala ya Muhammad*”⁹⁷ and he tells you, “Say ‘Haj’, *ya akhi*,⁹⁸ I paid two thousand dollars to get that title.” It has happened in many places. I remember one man in my village whom we used to call *‘Um Sayyed*.⁹⁹ He went to Hajj. After he came back, someone went to him and said, “Uncle Sayyed...” He intercepted, “*Uncle?* What’s that uncle? I traveled by sea for five days to Jeddah, and it took me one month riding a camel between Makkah and Madinah, and now you call me ‘Uncle’?

Uncle! There is no ‘Haj’?” So Hajj could be truly from the heart or it could be for other reasons. When it comes to fasting, there is no showing off in it, because truly, if a man is fasting, then, he is fasting for no other reason except for Allah, because you could enter a room, eat, drink, enjoy yourself, and when you go out, say to the people “I am fasting, *Alhamdulillah!*”¹⁰⁰ But, if you are truly fasting, you are fasting from your heart because you believe that this is an obligation, and it has to be performed. And that is why the *ulama*¹⁰¹ of Islam say God selected fasting for Himself, because it is the only *‘ibadah* or worship in which there is no way to show off.

The psychological benefit of fasting is that it teaches man to fight himself. The food is in front of you; you are hungry; it is one hour before *Maghrib*¹⁰², and your stomach is growling, while the Mrs. is preparing *kubbi*, and *fatayar*, *qamaradin*¹⁰³ and all those other things, which we don’t eat, normally, the rest of the year, eh? And, you are just looking at these things, but you cannot extend your hand. In the normal circumstances, as soon as the food comes, you are hungry, and you will attack it right away. But, during that month, there is an element which will forbid you from doing the same, and that is the meaning of *لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ*. You are fighting your desires.

Another example is the person who smokes – lighting one cigarette from another all day – but during that month he gives up that practice. That is fighting your desires, and that is called *jihad*. You know, here in America, they translate the word *jihad* as “holy war”. There is no such thing in Islam known as “holy war”. *Holy War* – if you would like to use that terminology – is *the war against yourself* called *Jihad an-Nafs*. If you conquer your desires, if you achieve victory against yourself, you will achieve victory anywhere you are. That is why the Prophet, peace be upon him, when he came from one of the *ghazawaat*¹⁰⁴ he said: “We came back from the smaller *jihad* to the bigger one.” He meant that fighting in the battlefield was the smaller *jihad*, and the bigger *jihad* is the *Jihad an-Nafs* – fighting yourself – so that you may learn self-restraint. So, learning and practicing *Jihad an-Nafs* is one of the

⁹⁶ The poor due (2.5% of net income)

⁹⁷ “Come here, O Muhammad”

⁹⁸ “Say Haj Muhammad, O Brother.” A person who performs the Hajj can be referred to by the title Hajj

⁹⁹ Uncle Sayyed

¹⁰⁰ Praise be to Allah

¹⁰¹ Scholars

¹⁰² Sunset, at which time the fast ends

¹⁰³ Names of foods, all of which Imam liked very much

¹⁰⁴ Battles

benefits of fasting. It teaches you how to be patient. The *Maghrib* is 8:00 P.M. and you are used to eating at 2:00 P.M. but you are waiting – patiently. Patience is very important. Patience is a concept, in Islam, which is utilized in every sphere, and you learn this through the obligation of fasting. This reminds me of the Lebanese guy whose wife told him at 2:30 A.M. to take her to the hospital, because she was going to deliver. He said to her: “You woman, you were patient for nine months, can’t you wait till the morning?”

Fasting teaches Muslims a sense of what hunger feels like, and what poor people feel all year round. So when someone is asked to donate to the poor and the needy, it will hit home, because he knows what it means to be needy, to be poor, to be hungry, because he has tasted the consequences of such dire circumstances during the month of Ramadan. And that will urge him to act on another one of the five pillars of Islam which is *zakah* – the poor due. That is how all the obligations of Islam are interconnected with each other.

When I was in primary school in Egypt, King Farooq was still in power. And, as you know, King Farooq was a very, very hearty eater. We used to read in the newspaper that his doctor concentrated the vitamins and all the nutrition of one sheep in one cup, and that he drank it. And, as a result, he was like an ox. One day, his prime minister went to him and told him about the poverty of the people: “Your Majesty, can’t we find something to help those people – they are very poor?” He said, “What is the meaning of poor? What do you mean by poor?” The prime minister told him that they didn’t have any bread to eat. So the king said, “Then let them eat cookies.” This was mentioned in the newspapers in Egypt in the 40’s – and this will tell you how old I am!¹⁰⁵ It means that the king had never tasted hunger, because he did not know that the cookies and the bread are made from the same flour, which the people didn’t have.

Back home, as you know, the people are not diet conscious; they don’t care. A lady, or a man, will weigh 500 pounds and they couldn’t care less. On the contrary, they consider obesity a sign of strength – the fatter you are, the stronger you are. Here, the ladies are measuring themselves by the measuring tape. Eh? And the men, when they go to the store to buy a suit, they are very conscious, also, about what size to buy. So they put themselves on diet – the men and the

ladies – and they go on a weight reduction program. Show me one street in Toledo where there is no Vic Tanny or Weight Watcher franchise. And, as soon as they leave the program, they gain back all the weight.

Always, as you know, people complain about having an upset stomach. And that is because they over-eat, not because they are hungry. Especially in this country, where people eat three meals a day, and between the two meals they have a little snack, between the two snacks they have coffee and donuts; and, at night, they sit before the TV and eat potato chips and peanuts, and they are working 24 hours a day very hard [eating]! There are some Muslims who say that when Ramadan comes, they put on weight. That’s possible. But, while the conventional wisdom is that you lose weight during the month of Ramadan, some people put on weight. Why? Because they fast during the day, and at sunset, fill their stomach with all the things that they, normally, never ate before. In Ramadan, in every house, the people are making special food. Eh! Everyone is saving for Ramadan,¹⁰⁶ especially the sweets. You know, even the people who come for *Taraweeh*¹⁰⁷ here, will not come tonight if there are no sweets in the kitchen! If a person normally eats one or two items for dinner, during Ramadan he will be eating 3, 4, 5, 6 or 7 items, sometimes, so by the time he tastes every item, his stomach is exploding! We end up with our stomach bulging three inches over the belt, and when we pray *Taraweeh* we cannot make *ruku’ a* or *sujood*.¹⁰⁸ But, the obligation of fasting came for certain reasons. Ramadan is not about just being thirsty and hungry during the day, and then feasting on everything at the time of *Maghrib*. That is not the goal of Ramadan. The function of Ramadan is to feel the hunger during the day, and during the night, also. We have to follow the hadith¹⁰⁹ of the Prophet, peace be upon him: “We are the people who don’t eat until we feel hungry, and when we eat, we don’t satisfy our hunger,” meaning that we leave the table while we can eat more. Tell me about that myself! When I have the sweets in front of me, I get crazy.¹¹⁰ But, if we truly

¹⁰⁶ Imam states with an audible sigh

¹⁰⁷ Special prayers offered at night in the month of Ramadan

¹⁰⁸ Bowing and prostration

¹⁰⁹ Saying/recommendation

¹¹⁰ Imam’s love of sweets was well known, so the faithful group that came for *Taraweeh* every year, would bring numerous desserts, and because of Imam’s obvious enjoyment of them, and his warm and friendly personality, it would make that

¹⁰⁵ Imam states this in a suddenly subdued voice while looking around at the audience, resulting in a burst of laughter.

The Benefits and the Objectives of Fasting

want to benefit from fasting, we have to combine it with the saying of the Prophet; that is part of true Islam which the Prophet, peace be upon him, followed, but we don't emulate that. We have to abide by the true Islam if we are to fulfill the function of Ramadan. Then, you will be the healthiest person, you will have no file with any physician, and you will save your money in the process.

And, if we faithfully fulfill the objectives of Ramadan, we won't need the diet programs, and we won't need the spa, because the month of Ramadan could do the job of the Vic

Tanny and the Weight Watchers. Don't forget that we have a lot of our people paying 300, and 500, and 1000 dollars to go to the spa every day and to swim and to enjoy life. Why? To try and reduce their weight. And maybe they are not fasting, or, at least, they are not fasting the way it should be. There are some people who gain weight during the month of Ramadan and then they blame it on Islam. Don't blame it on Islam; blame it on yourself. Follow that hadith, and be assured you will be in good shape.

Ramadan

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 5 of 5]

The Different Types of Fasting Questions and Answers

Questions have been raised about making up for days missed in Ramadan, and the *siyam of kaffara*.¹¹¹ Several people have asked me about other kinds of fasting that are not obligatory, and the days or times in the Islamic calendar when such fasting is undertaken. Can we fast anytime we want? Someone asked about *Layla-tul-Qadr*¹¹² and how Muslims everywhere on earth celebrate that night, and what is the true opinion of Islam with regard to Layla-tul-Qadr? Many people asked what is permissible, and what is prohibited for us to do while we are fasting? Some people could not pay *sadaqa al-Fitr*¹¹³ during the month of Ramadan, or before the Eid prayer, so they asked, "Is it possible to pay it after Ramadan?" And finally, there is a question related to the daily prayer; I have heard it from many people: if one is fasting, but does not pray, is, then, one's fasting right? So, what is the opinion of Islam in this respect? These are questions which I'll deal with, and answer one by one, today.

Fasting could be obligatory, or, it could be voluntary.

Normally, when we talk about fasting, our minds associate it with the month of Ramadan, but Ramadan is not the only time we fast. The month of Ramadan, as everybody knows, is the obligatory month of fasting. But, there are some other fasts that are not obligatory, but become so, under certain circumstances. In other words, it is not an obligation, but we make it an obligation upon ourselves – known as *an-nathr*. *An-nathr* means you vow to do something, if something happens: you have a little child who is sick, and you make a vow to fast three days if God cures the child. If that kid is cured from his sickness, then you *have* to fast; it has become an obligation, exactly like Ramadan to fast those three days.

Sawm-ul-qadaa' or making up for the missed days of the month of Ramadan. This is obligatory.

How does one miss fasting in the month of Ramadan? As I told you before, Islam permits a Muslim to break his/her fast during the month of Ramadan if he is sick or traveling. The Muslim woman in her menstrual cycle is exempted from fasting during the month of Ramadan, but she has to make up for that number of days after the month of Ramadan. If someone woke up early in the morning and it was still dark, he had his *suhur* meal, but then discovered that it

¹¹¹ Fasting for the expiation of a sin

¹¹² The night of the 27th of Ramadan

¹¹³ Obligatory donation for the poor at the conclusion of Ramadan, to be paid, preferably, as early as possible in Ramadan, but, definitely, before the Eid prayer

was fajr time, then, in this situation, Islam requires completion of the fast for that day, but counts it as a missed day to be made up later. The same logic is applicable if it is dark due to clouds and he ate before maghrib, thinking that the sun has set. This is referred to as *Sawm-ul-qadaa'*.

Some questions were asked with regard to *Sawm-ul-qadaa'*: Is it necessary to fast missed days immediately after Eid, or, could they be delayed one month, or two months, or three months, or whatever, for the ease and convenience of the individual? Do I have to fast these days consecutively, or can I separate them and fast one day each week, or each month? With regard to the first question, Islam recommends fasting the missed days of Ramadan as soon as possible, though you could delay it. But it is preferable to fast them as soon as possible. The reasoning of the Muslim scholars, in this respect, is that no one can guarantee his life. You may die and you have that debt around your neck. Fasting consecutive days, or with a break in between doesn't matter. You could fast successive days, or you could separate them and fast one day every week, or one day every month; it doesn't make any difference as long as you pay what you owe.

Sawm-ul-kaffara.

What is *kaffara*? The word "kaffara" is taken from the verb *ka-fa-ra* or the infinitive *takfeer*. *Takfeer ad-dhunūb* means, "Erasing of the sins". If someone makes a mistake, there are some situations in which he can expiate that sin by fasting a certain number of days. That is why it is called *kaffara* because it "takfeer ad-dhunūb" – meaning, "it erases the sins". And this is taken from the Qur'anic verse [Imam quotes verse] and the saying of the Prophet: "Follow the sin with a good action; the good will erase the sin." [The English translation of the Qur'anic verse is:]

"And be constant in praying at the beginning and the end of the day, as well as during the early watches of the night: for, verily, good deeds drive away evil deeds: this is a reminder to all who bear God in mind" [11: 114].

There are certain sins for which Islam legislates that, if you do them, you can either fast, or you can pay a ransom to expiate those sins. One of those sins is *al-qatl al-khata'*.¹¹⁴ Suppose someone is hunting a bird, and it happens that, at the time, there was a person in the vicinity, and he was shot dead accidentally. That is called *al-qatl al-khata'*. Killing by mistake

¹¹⁴ Killing a human being by mistake

requires a ransom. The ransom consists of two parts: a ransom for the family of the person killed, and a ransom for the breaking of the rules of God. The right of the family of the killed person is called, in Islam, *ad-diyah*. This is practiced in Saudi Arabia to this day. They give 100 camels to the family. This figure is from the time of the Prophet because at that time the *diyyah* was 100 camels. When the Egyptian army was in Kuwait, at the time of the first Gulf War,¹¹⁵ it lost 20,000 soldiers to landmines, because they were sent to clean the minefields. The government of Kuwait paid every Egyptian family the *diyyah*: the ransom, for each soldier who died for their sake, was twenty thousand American dollars. That was the price of a soul according to them. So the idea of *diyyah* is still practiced until now, but they estimate for it according to the time of the Prophet.¹¹⁶

The right of God is different, and it is either emancipating a slave, but if he doesn't find a slave to set free, then he has to fast two *successive* months. If he will interrupt the sequence for no good reason, then he has to start the 60 days anew.

*Kaffāra-tul yameen.*¹¹⁷ The Qur'an says: [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The English translation is:]

"God will not take you to task for oaths which you may have uttered without thought (*yameen laghū*), but He will take you to task for oaths which you have sworn in earnest (*yameen mun'aqidah*). Thus, the breaking of an oath must be atoned for by feeding ten needy persons with more or less the same food as you are wont to give to your own families, or by clothing them, or by freeing a human being from bondage; and he who has not the wherewithal shall fast for three days instead. This shall be the atonement for your oaths whenever you have sworn and broken them. But be mindful of your oaths! Thus God makes clear unto you His messages, so that you might have cause to be grateful" [5:89].

The Qur'anic verse divides the *yameen* or the oath into two types: *yameen laghū* and *yameen mun'aqidah* as it is known in Islamic Fiqh. *Laghū* means the word, or words, that are on the tip of the tongue of some people. For example,

¹¹⁵ The war between Iraq and Iran in 1991

¹¹⁶ A good, well-trained camel in the Middle East costs \$5000.00 today. An ordinary camel, which is not the best, yet not the pits, but in the middle, costs \$850.00. Therefore, \$20,000.00 today will fetch you only 23 camels.

¹¹⁷ Expiation for a false oath

some people when they talk, they say *wa-Allahi*¹¹⁸ with every sentence: “*wa-Allahi* I did this, *wa-Allahi* I did that, *wa-Allahi* I am not going to do that” – everything is linked with *wa-Allahi*. This is considered *yameen laghū* – something which he does not mean. It is a habit. It is exactly like someone who talks in English and with every sentence he says, “you see”, “you understand”, repeating it hundreds of times. So that is considered like *laghū* – it is a habit; it is not intended. As a result, you are not responsible for that type of *yameen* because you don’t intend it. The other type of *yameen* is *al-yameen al-mun‘aqidah*, which the Qur’an refers to as “deliberate” or “intentional” – you are *intending*, you *mean* what you say. In this situation, you are making the oath or the *yameen* falsely, and with a bad intention, so as to confirm or prove something to your audience. That is the *yameen* which needs the *kaffara*.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ By God

¹¹⁹ I disagree, Imam. According to my understanding *al-yameen al-mun‘aqidah* is the oath which you make deliberately, intentionally and sincerely. But, later, because of changed circumstances, you sincerely regret your oath, and do not want to carry it out. There are two examples of this in the Qur’an: 1. Sura Sād Verse 44: [And finally We told him:] “Now take in thy hand a small bunch of grass, and strike therewith, and thou wilt not break thine oath!” – for, verily, how excellent a servant of Ours, who, behold, would always turn unto Us.” The reference is to the Prophet Ayub. More details regarding this story are found in the Bible.

In the words of the Bible (The Book of Job ii, 9), at the time of his seemingly hopeless suffering Job’s wife reproached her husband for persevering in his faith: “Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die.” According to the classic Qur’an-commentators, Job swore that, if God would restore him to health, he would punish her for her blasphemy with a hundred stripes. But when he did recover, he bitterly regretted his hasty oath, for he realized that his wife’s “blasphemy” had been an outcome of her love and pity for him; and thereupon he was told in a revelation that he could fulfill his vow in a symbolic manner by striking her *once* with “a bunch of grass containing a hundred blades or more.” The other option would be to expiate for his oath by fasting three days. 2. Sura at-Tahrīm Verse 2: “God has already enjoined upon you, O believers, the breaking and expiation of such of your oaths as may run counter to what is right and just: for, God is your Lord Supreme, and He alone is all-knowing, truly wise.” This verse is in reference to the Prophet’s oath “All my wives are *harām* for me.” It means he divorced them. The following is Asad’s commentary:

This is the purely human aspect of the Prophet, illustrating how he, in a very emotional situation, took an oath intentionally and

What is the *kaffara*? One of three options: first, you have to feed ten poor people, or to clothe them. If you cannot, set a slave free – an option in the olden times to emancipate the slaves and thereby abolish slavery. If there is no slave to set free, then, fast three days. The Qur’anic verse did not say to fast the three days successively, and, as a result, the choice is left to you.

The first recommendation is to feed the poor. What to feed them? The Qur’anic verse says “the middle – the average of what you are feeding your family”. So, just because you are going to feed some poor people, don’t give them a piece of bread and cheese. No. You have to feed them “the average of what you feed your family.” There are some people who are supposed to feed the poor during the month of Ramadan because they cannot fast for medical reasons. So they have to pay that ransom. And always they ask me how much money to give. There is a new restaurant here called the *Ranch* that has an all-you-can-eat fixed price buffet as long as you don’t carry a doggie bag out. You can estimate on that basis because you have given the guy the option to eat as much as he likes and whatever he likes. If that costs \$5.00 then multiply it by lunch and dinner equals \$10 a day, multiplied by 30 days, or 29 days in Ramadan. That’s about \$300; that will pay for your fasting. And don’t ask me again! Take it that way and organize it your own way – it is a relationship between you and God – and if you would like to be on the safe side, give that poor guy \$300, and give me \$300 as *zakah* for the mosque and that will do the job!

There is a point to note here. Suppose that I make *yameen* by the Qur’an: “*wal Qur’an Al-Karīm* I didn’t do that.” And, you know, among the Muslims, this is quite a common thing, to make an oath by the Qur’an. But this is not *yameen*; it is as if you didn’t say anything. The Qur’an is not *yameen* in

sincerely, but none-the-less wrongfully because in the first verse [of Sura Tahrim] God Himself states: “O Prophet! Why dost thou ...impose [on thyself] a prohibition of something that God has made lawful to thee?” His mistake was pointed out to him and this would constitute a situation where he would have to break his oath and expiate for it: “God has already enjoined upon you O believers the breaking and expiation of such of your oaths as may run counter to what is right and just.” Furthermore a hadith of the Prophet states: “If anyone takes a solemn oath [that he will do or refrain from doing such-and-such thing] and thereupon realizes that something else would be a more righteous course, then let him do that which is more righteous, and let him break his oath and then atone for it.”

Islamic Law. Some people will make an oath by the Prophet. That also is not yameen and it has no ransom or kaffara – right or wrong. People make yameen by every shaykh and every “saint” buried in a grave somewhere on earth, but these are not yameens. There are some people who even swear by the grave of their father, and some people swear by their children. None of this has any significance in Islam; it is not yameen. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: “If you mean to swear, swear by God, or” – to express it in the contemporary English language – “shut up!” So, the yameen by God is the only one that you are accountable for and it requires a ransom.

Another sin for which the kaffara can be offered is called *ad-dhihā*. *Ad-dhihā* was the practice of the pre-Islamic Arabs of saying to their wives, “You are prohibited to me as the back of my mother.” It was a form of divorce. In that situation, the man could not go back to his wife before paying the kaffara. The Qur’an says, “As for those who would separate themselves from their wives by saying ‘Thou art unlawful to me as my mother,’ and thereafter would go back on what they have said, their atonement shall be the freeing of a human being from bondage before the couple may touch one another again. . . . However, he who does not have the wherewithal shall fast instead for two consecutive months before the couple may touch one another again; and he who is unable to do it shall feed sixty needy ones. . . .” Just as in the case of killing by mistake, the kaffara for *ad-dhihā* is fasting for sixty successive days. Why is it that you don’t find praying 100 *rak’ats*, or going to Hajj, as an option for kaffara? Why was fasting selected especially to be kaffara? What is the wisdom behind that? The ulama say, because fasting is a kind of worship that shapes the behavior of a man. It teaches him how to control himself, how to face hardship, how to deny himself, how to fight his desires. The person who cannot control his tongue is lacking in all these things and for that reason the *sawm* or fasting is the proper kaffara for him.

This brings us to the next question: What are the other types of *sawm* outside of Ramadan?

Sawm-ut-tatawwa’. This is the category of voluntary fasting. The Prophet, peace be upon him, used to observe some voluntary fasts. The following are examples of some voluntary fasts observed by the Prophet, peace be upon him:

- 1) Fasting the first three days of the month of Rajab.
- 2) Fasting three days in the middle of Sha’bān.
- 3) Fasting from the beginning of Dhul-Hijjah through

the day of Arafat, although, fasting on the day of Arafat is prohibited for the pilgrims.

- 4) We read in the Qur’an that the four months of Dhul Qada, Hijjah, al-Muharram, and Rajab are called *al-ashhur-ul-hurum* – the prohibited/sacred months. Fighting is prohibited in these months. Voluntary fasting can be undertaken in these sacred months, also.
- 5) We hear always about *sawm as-sittah al-beedh* – the six white days. As soon as *Eid-ul-Fitr*¹²⁰ ends, you find some people fasting on the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh of Shawwal. These are called “the six white days”. This is sunnah. The Prophet used to fast them some years, and not fast them other years. But the ulama of Islam differ among themselves about what these six days are. Some people start them immediately after Eid. Others say they were called the “white days” because these days are the six days when the moon will be shining during the month so they must be the 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th and 17th. There is no clear consensus regarding *as-sittah al-beedh* and *al-ayyam al-beedh*.

You find many ahadith with respect to the *sawm as-sittah al-beedh*. I don’t know if they are correct or not, and if they are strong or weak. One of them is: “If you fast Ramadan, and follow it with the six from Shawwal, then your sins will be forgiven.” In my view, even if the Prophet said that, he meant just to encourage the people to do that good deed. It does not mean that all the year round you do everything possible against Islam, and then, just because of fasting six days after Ramadan, all your record will be cleansed or erased. The Prophet said it to make it lovable to the people to do that voluntary good deed.

- 6) *Al-ayyam al-beedh*, on the other hand, means, “The white days”, and this is another time for voluntary fasting. These are the 13th, 14th and 15th of each month because the moon is full and shining bright.
- 7) Fasting Monday and Thursday of every week, also, is sunnah. The Prophet used to do that sometimes, and not at other times.
- 8) *‘Ashūrā’* (the tenth of Moharram). *‘Ashūrā’* is an example of tradition and religion being confused

¹²⁰ The day of celebration marking the end of the month of Ramadan

with each other. You know, in Egypt, I have even seen families visit their married daughters during the night of 'Āshūrā', bringing them gifts and food: traditions.

What really is 'Āshūrā'? Most commonly, it is thought of as being the occasion of the killing of Imam Al Hussein. But, in Islam, 'Āshūrā' does not signify this occasion, because 'Āshūrā' existed at the time of the Prophet, while there was no Hussein¹²¹ at that time. Hussein was a kid. The Prophet, peace be upon him, upon coming to Madinah, found the Jews fasting on the 10th of Muharram. So, he asked why they were fasting. They said, "This is the Day on which God saved Moses from Pharaoh." We know the story when Pharaoh followed Moses with his army, and Moses hit the sea with his stick and a road was opened for him in the sea. That was the 10th of Muharram which is 'Āshūrā'. And, as a result, the Jews in Arabia used to fast that day. The Prophet then uttered his famous saying: "Moses is more important to us than to them, so let us fast." Since then, the Muslims started to fast the day of 'Āshūrā'. It was just a coincidence that Imam Al Hussein was killed on the 10th of Muharram. As a result, confusion between religion and tradition has reigned in the Muslim world so that people mistakenly associate 'Āshūrā' with Imam Al Hussein, although, in Islam, 'Āshūrā' is known as the Day of Moses, and it is an event that predates the advent of Islam. The Prophet, peace upon him, used to fast that day. As a result, it has become a sunnah.

- 9) Fasting the first three days of each month. That was done by the Prophet sometimes, so it has become a sunnah.
- 10) The day of 'Ārafāt, which is the ninth day of Dhul Hijjah. It is sunnah to fast on this day if you are not performing the Pilgrimage.

You may have heard about *Siyam ad-Dahr* (fasting continuously). That was a tradition before the Prophet, practiced at the time of Sayyidna Dawūd.¹²² But that is a very harsh thing to do, so nobody does that nowadays.

Can we fast any time we want? Outside the month of Ramadan, can we fast any day we want? No. There are days when fasting is prohibited, and it is a sin to fast. These days are Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha, because these are the days which you are supposed to celebrate, and to eat. Those who didn't come here last night missed a big occasion: the number of

sweets here outnumbered the rak'ats of the Taraweeh!

It is prohibited to fast during *Ayyam al-tashreeq*. *Ayyam al-tashreeq* are the three days after Eid-ul-Adha, during which the pilgrims throw stones at the three pillars in Mina (*rami-al-jamaraat*).

The ulama maintain that you are not supposed to fast on Friday alone, and you are not supposed to fast on Saturday alone. Friday, because it is the weekly Eid of the Muslims, and Saturday because the Jews give importance to that day, so if you fast Saturday then there is a perception of identification with them. At least this is what the ulama said.

Yawm ul-Shakk.¹²³ On the 29th of Sha'ban,¹²⁴ the people say let us look for the moon of Ramadan. The 30th of Sha'ban is called *yawm ul-shakk*, because it is not certain if this is the 30th of Sha'ban or the start of Ramadan. In this specific matter, everyone has an opinion. In the Shi'i madhab, they emphasize that you should fast *yawm ul-shakk*, to be on the safe side, because *maybe* it is the first of Ramadan. The madhab of Imam Abu Haneefah considers fasting *yawm ul-shakk* haram. So this is a matter of *ijtehad*.¹²⁵ There is no clear-cut rule for it.

Some ulama mention, in some of the Fiqh books, that fasting by a woman outside of the month of Ramadan is haram unless her husband gives her permission. Personally, I am not sure of the validity of this, and I say *if* this is correct then, at least, it should be mutual: if we say, also, that fasting by the man outside of Ramadan is haram, unless he has permission from his wife, then I'll accept it. But, if it is one-sided only, I cannot swallow it. The reason behind that claim of theirs is that, they say, the man has a right towards his wife. If she is fasting, he could not get his right. And I could say, in the same manner, that a woman has a right towards her husband; if he is fasting, she will not get her right. So there must be mutuality, because we are always talking about Islam making equality between the two sexes. But, if you read some of the Fiqh books, you will find this one-sided opinion; and it is up to you – if you have trouble with your wife and you would like to take advantage of this one-sided opinion against her – then help yourself. But when you come to my fatwa, I'll support your wife. I know that this is *ijtehad*. There is no clear-cut direction in this matter

¹²³ The day of suspicion

¹²⁴ The month before Ramadan

¹²⁵ A sincere effort to make an educated, enlightened and informed opinion explaining an issue related to Islam

¹²¹ The grandson of the Prophet

¹²² The Prophet David

and, as a result, I give my opinion.

Wisaal-us-sawm is the practice of fasting, for example, for two continuous days, without breaking the fast at maghrib, and without having *subhūr* for the next day. That is called *wisaal-us-sawm*, and that, too, is prohibited.

What is permissible for us to do when we are fasting, and what is not?

This is a question many people ask: “Is submerging in water, while you are fasting, prohibited? In Egypt, for example, especially when Ramadan is in July, some people, driven by their thirst, go to the River Nile, and submerge themselves in the water to cool off. Other people say to them, “No, no, no, no, not good, it will corrupt you fasting.” Or, someone would like to take a shower instead, and they say to him that that would spoil his fasting. Nothing of the sort. That is *al-mubah*¹²⁶ and it will not affect your fasting.

When you make *wudū*¹²⁷ during the month of Ramadan, some people say, don’t rinse your mouth or your nose because that will ease the thirst. That also is not correct. You can rinse your mouth and rinse your nose as much as you can, before prayer, and after prayer, and at any time, and this will not affect your fast in any way. Likewise, instilling eye drops, or in the case of women, applying *kohl*¹²⁸ will not affect one’s fasting.

A lot of people ask about the injections. Will it affect fasting? The answer is, no, it does not affect fasting; and there are opinions of great *ulama* in this respect. They say that no matter whether the injection is under the skin, or even in the vein –even if it is a sort of feeding – it will not affect your

fasting. And when you ask them how, especially regarding intravenous feeding, they say, “Because it does not go through the natural way which is through the throat, so it will not affect your fasting.”

There is a question people sometimes ask regarding taking a shower under the following circumstances: if a man and a woman meet each other like a husband and wife during the night of Ramadan, or if a woman was in her menstrual cycle, and the blood stopped before *fajr*,¹²⁹ and she is supposed to fast that day, does she have to have a shower *before fajr*? The answer is, no. She could stay all day, or he could stay all day, without showering and their fasting is okay. The only thing is that they cannot pray without a *ghusl*.¹³⁰

Layla-tul-Qadr – that is another problem. People engage in doing things prohibited by Islam, all year long, and when *Layla-tul-Qadr* – the 27th of Ramadan – comes around, they spend the night praying, reading the Qur’an, eating baklava, and they think *that* will abolish all their past wrongdoings. That is not correct. And because there is a lot of controversy about *Layla-tul-Qadr*; its exact date, the value of it, and the meaning of the Qur’anic verses describing it, I would like to postpone it to next week.

[Next week. Imam states:] We answered some of the questions which were asked concerning the month of fasting, but there are a few points left to elaborate on, and I don’t know what you prefer: today is Easter; should I continue with those questions, or should we just have a talk about Easter? [Somebody from the audience suggested Easter and, therefore, the other questions went unanswered.]

¹²⁶ A jurisprudential term meaning, possible to do/okay to do

¹²⁷ Mandatory ablutions prior to offering the five ritual prayers

¹²⁸ Akin to mascara

¹²⁹ Dawn

¹³⁰ Shower which is mandatory under the circumstances mentioned: sexual relations and end of menstruation