

A Brief Advice to My Brothers in Correctional Facilities Before Ramadhaan

All praise is due to Allaah Alone. We praise Him, seek His help, and ask His forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allaah from the evil of our souls, and the bad consequences of our deeds. Whomsoever Allaah guides, there is none who can misguide him, and whoever He misguides, there is none who can guide him. I bear witness that there is nothing worthy of worship except for Allaah; and He is alone having no partners. And I bear witness that Muhammad, may Allaah's praise and salutations be upon him and his family, is His worshipper, and Messenger.

My dear brothers in Islaam, know that Allaah informs us in the Qur'aan about the goal and purpose of Ramadhaan, which is a pillar of Islaam. He says what means, ***"Oh you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, in order that you may attain taqwa."*** - (Surat al-Baqarah: 183)

When we want to understand what any verse of the Qur'aan means we should turn to the scholars to understand its correct meaning, just as the Companions turned to the Messenger of Allaah to explain the Qur'aan to them in both his words and his actions. In explaining this verse Sheikh as-Sa'adee, who was one of the noble scholars of our century who was very knowledgeable in the explanation of the Qur'aan, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said,

*"In this Allaah, the Most High informs us of that which He has blessed His worshipers with. By this meaning that He blessed them by obligating them to fast, just as He obligated it upon the believers of the previous nations to whom prophets were sent. Additionally that within this obligation there are commands and guidelines which are for the overall greater benefit of human being in every age and time, within it there is the invigoration and enlivening of this Muslim Ummah, as it is necessary and suitable that the Muslims compete with others in completing good works and deeds, and rushing towards the best of characteristics and practices....
...Likewise He informs us that this obligation is not some weighty command which is specific only to this Ummah. After this Allaah, the Most High mentions His wisdom and purpose in legislating fasting as He states: **(in order that you may attain taqwa.)** As indeed fasting is one of the greatest causes for attaining taqwa, as it contains the surrender and yielding to the command of Allaah along with the distancing and turning away from what He has prohibited."* (Tayseer al-Kareem ar-Rahmaan fee Tafseer Kalaam al-Manaan of 'Abdur-Rahmaan Ibn Naasir as-Sa'adee, Surat al-Baqarah)

There are so many benefits found within this statement and I advise my brothers to consider and contemplate and write them down, but one of the most important is that Ramadhaan is for our own good. It is really for you personally, because it can lead you towards success in this world and the next- if undertaken in conformance to the Sunnah inwardly and outwardly. The sheikh also reminded us of the very much related overall general goal of increasing ourselves in Taqwa through fasting. But what is the Taqwa mentioned in the verse? Talq Ibn Habeeb, may Allaah have mercy upon him, who was one of those early scholars of Islaam in the second generation coming after the Companions from the city of Basra. He was one of those who learned Islaam directly from the Companions of the Prophet, someone who narrated directly from Ibn 'Abbas and Jaabir ibn 'Abdullah, and others, when asked he gave this comprehensive definition of taqwa saying:
"Taqwa is that you act in obedience to Allaah, upon a light from Him, hoping for His mercy, and taqwa is leaving acts of disobedience to Allaah, Upon a light from him, out of fear of Him.." (This is narrated by Imaam al-Bayhaqee in Zuhd al-Kabeer #319, and Hilyaat al-Awleeyah, 10/244). Take note that he mentioned two aspects of taqwa, both what you do as well as what you turn away from.

The well-known scholar Ibn al-Jawzee, may Allaah have mercy upon him, explains why we need the opportunity to correct and reform ourselves that Ramadhaan brings us to increase ourselves in taqwa. He said, *“Know, may Allaah grant you success, that the soul has a natural propensity to love its desires as we previously explained the harm and damage that this leads to. Therefore it required due to this, struggling against it and opposing it , as when it is not retrained or held back from its desires, it is set upon and attacked by thoughts regarding seeking and obtaining what it desires and longs for. Otherwise it becomes accustomed to the presence of corrupt ideas, greedy wants, strange wishes and desires, especially if it is strengthened by youthfulness which is often only a type of foolishness, and it extends this youthfulness support to his ability towards obtaining of what is desired.”* (From The Dispraise of Desires, by Ibn Jawzee page 36)

This leads us to what one of the early scholars Sufyaan ath-Thawree, may Allaah have mercy upon him, is reported to have said, something which we all know to be true. He said, *“I have not found a more difficult thing to work with or handle other than myself, as sometimes it is for me and what is good for me, with other times it works against me and against what is good for me.”* (Narrated in Hilyat al-Awliyaa, vol. 7 page 5)

When we turn back to the guidance of our Prophet we find that there is an essential authentic narration related to new beginnings and taking advantage of the opportunities to turn towards success after making mistakes and errors. It is a narration judged by the scholars of the hadeeth sciences through the centuries to be authentic, including one the greatest scholars of hadeeth in our century Sheikh al-Albaanee, may Allaah have mercy upon him. This hadeeth is found in the hadeeth collection al-Musnad al-Bazaar and one of the hadeeth collections of at-Tabaraanee, as well as in some of the books containing the life histories of the Companions of the Messenger of Allaah. It has been preserved and transmitted just as the religion as a whole has been preserved and transmitted if we chose to benefit from the tremendous blessing that has reached us.

In this narration, on the authority of Abu Taweel Shatab, who said that he came to the messenger of Allaah, may Allaah praise and salutations be upon him and said to him, **“Do you believe that a man that done every kind of wrongdoing and sin, such that there is not any sin that he did not engage in, that he did not turn away from any desire, or any craving except he went towards it, can such a person like this repent from that?”** The Prophet then asked him, **“Have you embraced Islaam?”** He replied. **“As for me, then indeed I bear witness that there is no one worthy of worship except Allaah alone, having no partners, and that indeed you are His messenger.”** Then the Messenger of Allaah said, **“Yes, if you now do good deeds, and turn away from evil actions and wrongdoing, then Allaah will turn those evil actions you committed into good deeds, all of them.”** He asked the Prophet, **“Even my deceptions and acts of immorality?”**. The Messenger responded, **“Yes even those.”** Allaahu akbar, so this month provides us with another chance to start again, to get our program in order, to wipe the slate clean, to establish good habits and break bad ones, and move toward what is true success for us as Muslims.

The noble scholar Sheikh Muhammad Baazmool, may Allaah preserve him, who is one of the younger scholars of our age, known for striving to spread knowledge of the Sunnah offered a related advice which he mentioned on his website. It is a short advice but one that each one of us should pay careful attention to. He said:

“To be successful, by Allaah’s permission, do the following:

- 1. Understand what your mistake or error was*
- 2. Fully acknowledge your mistake do not arrogantly deny it nor stubbornly refuse to admit it*
- 3. Do not slip into making the same mistake again. Learn a benefit from having fallen into it the first time such that you are aware of it and do not fall back into it again. Failure is not having made a mistake, but true failure is repeating the mistake again. As is mentioned in the noble authentic hadeeth narration. **“The believer is not bitten from the same hole twice.”***

4. Praise Allaah for having guided to you the truth, and having granted you success to be one who accepted the truth, and supplicate to Him for assistance and help acting according to that truth.

5. Lastly, understand the merit or goodness of the person who guided you towards understanding your error or indicated to you your mistake and thank him for showing you what is correct. As indeed, ***“The one who is not thankful to the people is not thankful to Allaah.”*** (end of his words)

So I advise myself first and then you to really understand the incredible opportunity you have in front of you, with the coming month of Ramadhaan, despite the hardships of your situation and what you can't do. There is, without question, so much good in Ramadhaan and outside of Ramadhaan that you can do to please Allaah and be successful in His sight as a Muslim. It is narrated that for the six months before Ramadhaan the early Muslims prayed to Allaah to let them reach Ramadhaan, and then for the months after Ramadhaan they kept praying that Allaah accept their efforts they did in Ramadhaan. So must ask ourselves do we see it as a burden as many people do or a blessing and opportunity as the first Muslims did??

The eminent scholar Imaam Sheikh 'Abdul-'Azeez Ibn Baaz, may Allaah have mercy upon him, gave an answer that reflected his great knowledge of and adherence of the Sunnah, when asked about welcoming the month of Ramadhaan. He said,

“I do not know of any specific way of welcoming Ramadhaan, but the Muslim should welcome it with joy and happiness and thanking Allaah for enabling him to reach Ramadhaan, for He has enabled him to be among the living who can compete in doing righteous deeds. Reaching Ramadhaan is a tremendous blessing from Allaah. As such, the Prophet, may the praise and salutations of Allaah be upon him, used to give his companions the glad tidings of the arrival of Ramadhaan and explain its virtues, and explain the great reward that Allaah has prepared for those who fast and who spend the night in prayer. It is prescribed for the Muslim to welcome this blessed month with sincere repentance and preparations to fast and pray the night prayer, with a sound intention and sincere resolve.” [Collection of Rulings and Various Statements of Sheikh Ibn Baaz, vol. 15, page 9]

What excellent advice that is! I close this brief reminder with a statement from an early scholar well known for self-rectification, Al-Hasan al-Basree, may Allaah have mercy upon him, who said,

“May Allaah have mercy upon the worshiper of Allaah who stops and examines what is important to him, meaning his priorities, if they are for the sake of Allaah then he continues and precedes forward upon them, and if they are for other than the sake of Allaah then he blocks them and obstructs them.” [Quoted by Ibn-Qayyim in Madaarij as-Saalikeen]

So as we each prepare to enter this blessed month let us lastly also remind ourselves of the statement of Maalik Ibn Dinar, may Allaah have mercy upon him, about self-assessment and self-accounting who said,

“May Allaah have mercy upon the worshiper of Allaah who first says to himself, ‘Aren't you the one who did such and such? And you the one involved with this matter and that?’ Then he criticizes himself for that, and then he struggles to take control of himself due to that, and then he forces himself to follow the guidance of the Book of Allaah, the Most High. Such that it, meaning the Qur'aan becomes a commander and leader for him.” [I'telaal al-Quloob Of Kharaa'etee]

Whatever I have been correct in, in this reminder is, from the mercy of Allaah alone, and the mistakes and shortcomings within it are my own or from Shaytaan, the accursed.

May Allaah make this Ramadhaan and every Ramadhaan, a means for each of us giving leadership of our lives to the Qur'aan and everything it calls to of the worship of Allaah without any partners or associates, and adherence to the Sunnah.

Written by Abu Sukhailah Khalil Ibn-Abelahyi
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