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The Treatise on Holy Ramadan

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In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate the Most Merciful

The month of Ramadan [is such a month] in which the Qur'an was revealed, as a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion [furqan]. (Q 2:185)²

First Subtlety

The fast of Holy³ Ramadan is among the first five pillars of Islam and also it is among the greatest of the symbols of Islam. Thus, the wisdoms in Holy Ramadan are related to the Divine provenance [*rububiyyah*] and the social and individual lives of human beings and the rectification of the soul and the thankfulness to the bounties of the Divine.⁴ Of the many instances of wisdom in fasting related to the provenance of God, one is as follows:

God made the face of the earth as a table of bounties and has listed all the bounties on this table in a way “beyond expectation”(Q 65:3). It is through this that He expresses the perfection of His provenance and shows His compassion and mercifulness. Human beings, due to the veil of heedlessness and the circle of the causes,⁵ do not see the truthfulness of the situation or they simply forget it. In Holy Ramadan, the people of faith suddenly turn into a disciplined army. When the sunset is near, they are waiting as invitees at the banquet of the Everlasting Sovereign, they are waiting for his command: “Please start.” This way they show an exposition of worshipfulness and they respond to that compassion, majesty, and encompassing mercy with a large, majestic, and disciplined prayer. I wonder if the human beings who do not join in such a lofty worship and such an honorable generosity deserve the name human beings.

Second Subtlety

Of the many instances of wisdom in Blessed Ramadan that are related to thankfulness for the bounties of God, one is as follows:

As it has been said in the *First Word*,⁶ when a vendor brings food from the kitchen of a king, it requires a price. While giving the vendor a tip thinking all those bounties are worthless and not knowing the one who bestows those bounties is the utmost level of ignorance. In the same way, God the Almighty has exhibited His unlimited, various bounties on the face of the earth for human beings and He asks for thankfulness for the price of those bounties. The apparent causes and owners of those bounties are like the vendors. We give a price to those vendors and are becoming indebted to them, to the extent that we present our respect and thankfulness more than they deserve. Whereas the Real Bestower of the bounties (al-Mun'im) deserves thankfulness for those bounties to an unlimited degree more deserving than those causes. Thus, to thank Him is to know that those bounties are directly from Him, to appreciate the value of those bounties and to feel a personal

² Nursi frequently uses Qur'anic verses in his writing. Where this is done, the verse reference will be given in parentheses in this way.

³ When describing Ramadan, Nursi usually uses the term “Serif (Sharif) Ramadan.” Sharif is variously translated in English, as holy, sacred, virtuous, honored, venerated, etc. I have chosen the use “holy” in this text as the closest word in English

⁴ Nursi states that there are many wisdoms to the month of Ramadan, but he will just be explaining nine of these fine points.

⁵ Nursi here is referring to cause and effect, for instance, when someone sees the sun and the benefits that come through the sun, that person forgets the Owner of the sun.

⁶ This is a reference to another of Nursi's writings which is called *The Words* that contains 33 *Words*.

need for those bounties. Thus, the fasting in Holy Ramadan is the key to a real, pure, majestic, and encompassing thankfulness. That is because at other times the majority of people who do not compulsorily feel hunger, they do not feel real hunger and therefore do not appreciate the value of those bounties. For a person who is full and especially if they are wealthy, the bountiful value of a dry piece of bread is not understood. Whereas in the time of breaking the fast, a believer's sense of taste testifies that that dry piece of bread is a Divine bounty of great value. Whether a king or a pauper, during Holy Ramadan, by understanding the value of those bounties, everyone becomes a reflection of a spiritual gratitude. While being prevented from eating during the day they also say: "These bounties are not my property. I am not free to eat them. They belong to someone else and are His bounties and I am awaiting His command." With these thoughts, the believer knows the bounties as the bounties and shows a spiritual gratitude.

With this form, fasting and its many dimensions, become a key to thankfulness which is the real duty of human beings.

Third Subtlety

Of the many wisdoms in fasting that are related to the social lives of human beings, one is as follows:

Human beings have been created at different levels with regard to their socioeconomic status. Because of this difference, God invites the rich to help the poor. The rich through the hunger of fasting fully feel the miserable and painful situation and hunger of the poor. If there is no fasting, the selfish rich would not understand how hunger and poverty are painful and how much the poor are in need of compassion. With this regard, compassion toward fellow human beings is the foundation of real thankfulness. Whoever an individual may be, they will always find someone poorer than themselves and are accountable with compassion toward this person. If there is no requirement to force one's soul to remain hungry, that person would be unable to give another person the help that they are required to give through compassion and even if they were able, they would not be able to do so fully as they would not have truly experienced hunger themselves.

Fourth Subtlety

Of the many wisdoms in fasting in Holy Ramadan that are related to the discipline of the soul, one is as follows:

The human soul wants to be free and unbound and regards itself that way. It even naturally desires to have an imaginary lordship and act as it wishes. It does not want to think that it is nurtured with unlimited bounties. Especially if it has wealth and power in this world and heedlessness has helped it, it wants to take to the bounties of God through raiding or theft and swallow the bounties like an animal. Thus, in Holy Ramadan, from the richest to the poorest, the human soul understands that it does not own, but is owned. It understands that if it is not commanded, it cannot do the most ordinary and simplest thing, it cannot even extend its hand for water. In this way, its imaginary lordship is broken, and it takes the attribute of worship and turns to thankfulness which is its real duty.

Fifth Subtlety

Of the many wisdoms in fasting in Holy Ramadan that are related to rectification of the morality of the soul and giving up its rebellious actions is as follows:

The human soul⁷ forgets itself due to heedlessness. It does not see and it does not want to see the boundless weakness, unlimited poverty, and great number of flaws that are found in its essence. Also, it does not think how weak it is and how exposed to decline it is and how it is targeted by calamities and how, being made of flesh and bones, it is easily broken. As if it were a body made of steel and considered itself eternal, it greedily attacks the world. With this strong greed and stinginess and powerful passion and love, it throws itself into the world, becoming connected to anything that gives it pleasure or benefit. It forgets its Creator, who has nurtured it with perfect compassion, and it does not think of the results of its life or the life of the afterlife and it is tumbled in bad moralities.

Thus, fasting in Holy Ramadan makes even the most heedless and rebellious feel their weakness, powerlessness, and poverty. Through hunger, they think of their stomachs and the needs of their stomachs, and remember how decayed their weak bodies are, and this way they understand how much they need mercy and compassion. If heedlessness has not corrupted their hearts, they give up the pharaohness of their souls and feel a desire to turn to the door of the Divine through their utmost weakness and poverty and they prepare to knock on the door of Divine mercy through the hands of spiritual gratitude.

Sixth Subtlety

Of the many wisdoms in fasting in Holy Ramadan that are related to the revelation of the Qur'an and Holy Ramadan being the most important time of its revelation, one is as follows:

Since the Wise Qur'an was revealed in the month of Ramadan, individuals will become in a holy state which prepares themselves for the revelation of the Qur'an and for welcoming the heavenly revelation by keeping themselves from base needs and stripping themselves from things that are unimportant and abstaining from food and drink and becoming like the state of angels and in one sense reading and listening to the Qur'an as if were newly revealed and to listen to those Divine addresses as if they were in the time of its revelation and as if they were listening to it from the Messenger of God (Peace and blessings be upon him) and even from the Angel Gabriel and even from the Eternal Speaker (al-Mutakallim al-Azali) Himself. Such an individual interprets it and helps others to listen to it and to some extent shows the wisdom of the revelation of the Qur'an.

Yes, in Holy Ramadan it is as if the entire world of Islam becomes like a mosque. Such a mosque in which millions of Hafiz⁸ at its corners make the people on the earth hear the Qur'an, that heavenly speech. Every Ramadan shows the verse: "The month of Ramadan in which the Qur'an was revealed" (2:185) in a luminous and bright way and it proves that Ramadan is the month of the Qur'an. The other members of this large community, some of them listen to the Hafiz with deep reverence and the others read it on their own.

In such a holy mosque that is in this situation, how ugly it is to get out of this luminous situation by following the lower soul's desires of eating and drinking. It is ugly and becomes the target of the disgust of that spiritual community. In the same way in Holy Ramadan, those who oppose the people of the fast become the target of spiritual disgust and an affront to the whole world of Islam.

⁷ In Islam, there are several levels of the soul, *al-nafs*. Here Nursi is speaking of the lowest level of the soul, which is often translated as the evil commanding soul, *al-nafs al-ammara* (see Q 12:53)

⁸ A hafiz (hafiza for a woman) literally means memorizer and is used as an honorary title for a person who has memorized the entire Qur'an and can and does recite it from the heart.

Seventh Subtlety

Of the many wisdoms in fasting in Holy Ramadan that are related to the gains of human beings who come to this world to farm and trade for the afterlife, one is as follows:

In Holy Ramadan the reward for good deeds is a thousand to one. As the text of the Hadith states, every letter of the Wise Qur'an has ten rewards and each counts as ten good deeds and each brings ten fruits in Paradise. In Holy Ramadan, every letter of the Qur'an is not ten rewards but a thousand, and the letters in verses such as the Throne Verse (Ayat al-Kursi, Q 2:255) are thousands, and on Fridays in Holy Ramadan the rewards are even more and on the Night of Honor (Laylat al-Qadr), each word is counted as thirty thousand rewards. Yes, every letter of the Wise Qur'an gives thirty thousand eternal fruits, it turns into the luminous Tree of Tuba,⁹ it earns for believers millions of those eternal fruits in Holy Ramadan. Thus, come and look at this holy, eternal, profitable trade and watch, think and understand how it is an unlimited loss for those who do not appreciate the value of its letters.

Thus, Holy Ramadan is as if it is a profitable exhibition and market for the trade of the afterlife and it is a very fertile land for the harvest of the afterlife and like the month of April in the spring is for the growth of good deeds. And it is like a bright and holy feast that the worship of human beings becomes an official parade before the majesty of the provenance of the Divine. Because of this, human beings have been commanded with fasting so that they get rid of the soul's animalistic needs and unimportant desires. It is as if they are temporarily leaving their animalistic nature and approaching an angelic state and entering into the trade of the afterlife and they become people of the afterlife and embodied spirits. Through fasting they become a kind of reflection of the Divine name, al-Samad (i.e. with al-sawm, fasting, they become a kind of reflection of the divine name al-Samad, the Self-Sufficient Master, Whom all creatures need, He neither eats nor drinks).

Yes, Holy Ramadan in this transient world, this ephemeral life, and short lifespan contains an eternal life and a long life of eternity and makes people earn that. Yes, one Ramadan could make people earn the fruits of eighty years of life. The proof of this is the Qur'an stating that the Night of Honor is more valuable than a thousand months of life [see Q 97:3]. This is sharp evidence of this mystery.

Yes, the luminous Night of Honor of the dark life of the world is Ramadan. Yes, as a king, either because of the accession to the throne or just to show reflections of the kingdom, may declare certain days to be festivals during his reign, he makes his honest subjects a reflection of his special bounties on those days, not through general laws, but through special bounties and direct connection to his presence and special courtship and extraordinary accomplishments that directly make his deserving subjects and honest people a reflection of his favor. In the same way, the Sovereign of everlasting to everlasting and the Majestic Owner of 18,000 worlds, has revealed in Holy Ramadan this Wise Qur'an that is His lofty command which addresses these 18,000 worlds. Surely, such wisdom requires that Ramadan becomes a special Divine feast, an exhibition of provenance, and a spiritual assembly.

Since Ramadan is a feast, surely the fast has to be commanded so that it will prevent human beings to a certain extent from base and animalistic tasks. As for the perfection of fasting, it is to make the other organs and material and spiritual senses such as the eyes, ears, heart, and thoughts, also fast just as the stomach does. That is, to prevent them from unlawful things and the things that are useless and to lead them to the worship that is special to each of them. For example, to make

⁹ A blessed tree in paradise

the tongue fast through avoiding lying, gossiping, and obscenities and that tongue should be kept busy reciting the Qur'an, remembrance of God (*dhikr*), exalting God (*tasbih*), asking for God's blessings (*salawat*) for the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessing be upon him), and seeking forgiveness for sin (*istighfar*). It is also to prevent the eyes from looking with lust, and the ears from hearing harmful things, and leading the eyes to take lessons and the ears to listen to truthful words and the Qur'an, and it is to make other organs fast too. As the stomach is the greatest factory, when, by fasting, it has stopped its activities, the other small helpers are made to follow it easily.

Eight Subtlety

Of the many wisdoms in fasting in Holy Ramadan that are related to the individual life of human beings, one is as follows:

For a human being fasting is a kind of the most important medicine, that is a physical and spiritual diet. It is a medical regimen to the extent that when a human being's soul eats and drinks as it pleases, it medically harms its physical life. In the same way when it partakes of some of everything it encounters not accounting for whether it is lawful or unlawful, it is as if that soul poisons its spiritual life. Rebelliously, that soul takes the reins in its hand and it becomes difficult for it to obey the heart and the spirit. As a result, human beings are unable to ride on it, instead it rides on human beings.

In Holy Ramadan through fasting, it becomes accommodated to a type of diet and tries to abstain from worldly things and learns to listen to the commands. Because it will not put food on top of food in the poor and weak stomach, it will not attract diseases that occur because food has not been digested. And through the command of fasting, it has abandoned that which is lawful, it obtains a capacity to listen to the Divine command that comes from reason and Islamic law about preventing the self from unlawful things and therefore it will try to not destroy its spiritual life.

Also, the vast majority of human beings many times suffer from hunger. It is hunger that trains human beings with discipline and endurance. Fasting in Holy Ramadan for fifteen hours, or for twenty-four hours without suhoor¹⁰ is an ascetic training for patience and endurance. In other words, the remedy for impatience and lack of endurance that makes calamities of human beings doubly harmful is fasting.

Also, there are many servants of the factory of the stomach and there are many human elements connected to it. If that factory does not stop working in a certain time of the day, the soul will make the factory's workers and those organs forget their prayer and it will busy itself so it brings them under its control. Furthermore, it will confuse other human elements with the smoke and noises of the machinery of that spiritual factory and it will attract their attention always to itself which will make them temporarily forget their lofty tasks. For this reason, traditionally many people of sainthood, in order to develop spiritually, have trained themselves to a regime of minimal eating and drinking.

But through the fasting in Holy Ramadan, the workers of that factory understand that they are not created for the factory only and other organs and senses enjoy angelic and spiritual amusements and look for them in Holy Ramadan instead of the base amusements of that factory. This is why in Holy Ramadan, the believers, based on their spiritual degrees, become reflections of various Divine lights and abundances and spiritual joys. In this blessed month, due to fasting, spiritual elements in human nature: heart, spirit, reason, and other subtleties have their own level of advancement and abundance. Despite the cry of the stomach, they innocently laugh.

¹⁰ Suhoor is the early, pre-dawn small meal eaten by Muslims in Ramadan.

Ninth Subtlety

Of the many wisdoms in fasting in Holy Ramadan that are related to the breaking of the imaginary lordship of the soul and by teaching its duty of worship and showing its weakness, one is as follows:

The soul does not want to know its Lord. Like Pharaoh, it wants itself to be the lord. That vein of thought remains in it despite the many punishments it receives. But that vein is broken through hunger. Thus, fasting in Holy Ramadan is a direct blow to the soul's pharaonic front that breaks it. It shows it its weakness, powerlessness, and poverty; it teaches it that it is a servant.

It is in the Hadith narrations: "Almighty God said to the soul, 'Who am I and who are you?' The soul responded, 'I am who I am, and You are who You are.' So God punished it and cast it into Hell, then asked it again. Again, it replied: 'I am who I am, and You are who You are.' Whatever punishment He applied; it did not give up its egoism. Then He punished it with hunger. That is, God made it hungry. And again He asked: 'Who am I and who are you?' And the soul responded, 'You are my Merciful Lord and I am your powerless servant.'"¹¹

O Allah! Send your blessings and peace to our master Muhammad, a blessing that will be compatible with Your pleasing and a blessing that would be fulfilling the rights that he deserves as much as the number of the reward for the letters of the Qur'an recited in the month of Ramadan, and peace be upon his Family and his Companions.

"Exalted is your Lord, the Lord of majesty, above what they describe. And peace be upon His messengers. And praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds." (Q 37:180-2) Amin.

¹¹ The hadith Nursi refers to here is not found in the main Hadith sources. It is found in a secondary source that is more narrative in nature called *Durrat al-Wa'izin (The Pearl of the Preachers)*.